

The earlier advice on verbal delivery still applies. You, and not your slides, should be connecting with your audience.

Computer projections, if well done, can be helpful in some cases, for example when images are an important component of a presentation, or when presenters or members of the audience have trouble with the language or accent of presentation. Still, they are not an expectation and often cause more difficulties than they solve.

You are allowed to incorporate audience reaction into your presentation as you run it, and in a longer presentation you may want to engage the class actively in some kind of reaction to keep their attention (voting on a proposal, standing and saluting, attempting to repeat aloud words in an unfamiliar language, singing along, etc.). But remember that you are not being graded for what others do, and that it is easy to lose control of the timing when unscripted others are spontaneously responding. So be very clear on what role you give your audience in this case, and how you will open and close their participation.

STEP 8: Do the presentation

The first seven steps have all been planning and rehearsing. Actually performing is a minor part of a successful presentation.

It is entirely possible that you will be nervous. Remember, though, that your ideas are interesting, that you are prepared – and that your audience is on your side. Aim to finish on time, and to conclude firmly. And then...enjoy your moment of triumph. You have just completed a fine TOK presentation! You have surely also learned more about applying your critical skills to understanding knowledge in the world.

How to write a really good TOK essay

Unlike the topics for your class presentations, the possible topics for your TOK essay – called “prescribed titles” – come from the IB and will be given to you by your teacher. Two thirds of your final TOK mark for the Diploma Programme rests

on how well you can demonstrate the breadth and depth of your TOK learning through an essay in response to one of these titles.

Your essay will be evaluated according to criteria that emerge from the single summary question:

Does the student present an appropriate and cogent analysis of knowledge questions in discussing the title?⁷

The answer, if you plan well, will be “yes” – and the grade will reward you.

Treat your teacher as a valuable – and valued – resource. Although you can choose any title, you should consult with your teacher to make sure that you are clear on what each one actually means. When you have chosen your title and pulled your ideas roughly together, you are permitted to consult your teacher again for help to finalize a plan. Then, when you have a draft of your essay, you are permitted to ask for general written comments and advice – but not corrections or editing. After that one draft, you can ask your teacher only specific questions. The essay is yours and the thought has to be your own.

TOK essay: myth and fact

Myth: Every subject requires a different kind of essay.

Fact: Although there are some surface differences in approach, all IB subjects, the extended essay, and theory of knowledge demand some fundamental qualities in a good essay:

- a demonstrated understanding of the topic under discussion
- a demonstrated skill in analytical thinking in the form learned in the particular subject, applied in development of the topic
- a well-organized and clearly written presentation of the ideas, with control of overall argument
- honesty in not plagiarizing, and formalization of this principle by following accepted practices for footnotes and bibliography.

Gaining control of essay writing in any one part of your IB helps in all other parts.

⁷ Theory of knowledge guide. Page 44.

TOK essay assessment instrument

Does the student Present an appropriate and cogent analysis of knowledge questions in discussing the title?						
Aspect	Level 5 Excellent 9–10	Level 4 Very good 7–8	Level 3 Satisfactory 5–6	Level 2 Basic 3–4	Level 1 Elementary 1–2	Irrelevant 0
Typical characteristics						
Understanding knowledge questions	There is a <i>sustained focus on knowledge questions connected to the prescribed title—developed with investigation of different perspectives and linked effectively to areas of knowledge and/or ways of knowing.</i>	There is a <i>focus on knowledge questions connected to the prescribed title—develooped with acknowledgement of different perspectives and linked to areas of knowledge and/or ways of knowing.</i>	There is a <i>focus on some knowledge questions connected to the prescribed title—with some development and linking to areas of knowledge and /or ways of knowing.</i>	<i>Some knowledge questions that are connected to the prescribed title are considered, but the essay is largely descriptive, with superficial or limited links to areas of knowledge and/or ways of knowing.</i>	The essay is mainly irrelevant to the prescribed title—relevant points are <i>descriptive</i> .	The essay is not a response to one of the prescribed titles on the list for the current session.
Quality of analysis of knowledge questions	Arguments are <i>clear</i> , supported by <i>effective real-life examples</i> and are <i>effectively evaluated</i> ; counterclaims are <i>extensively explored</i> , implications are <i>drawn</i> .	Arguments are <i>clear</i> , supported by real-life examples and are <i>evaluated</i> ; counterclaims are explored.	<i>Some arguments</i> are <i>clear</i> and supported by examples ; some counterclaims are <i>identified</i> .	<i>Arguments</i> are <i>unclear</i> and/or <i>not supported</i> by effective examples .	Assertions are offered but are <i>not supported</i> .	
Some possible characteristics						
	Cogent Accomplished Discerning Individual Lucid Insightful	Pertinent Relevant Thoughtful Analytical Organized Credible	Typical Acceptable Mainstream Adequate Competent Predictable	Underdeveloped Basic Unbalanced Superficial Derivative Rudimentary	Ineffective Elementary Descriptive Incoherent Formless	

The TOK essay can be a great pleasure to write. It's your chance to show your own keen mind at work, truly engaged with significant questions of knowledge. It's your chance to demonstrate that you have thought about the huge range of ideas raised in TOK and are ready to speak about them in your own voice, taking your own perspective and being *aware* that you are doing so. These are sophisticated skills, but as you emerge from a TOK course thoughtfully followed, you are ready to demonstrate them. If you can do a fine TOK paper, you will have reason for immense satisfaction as you graduate with your IB diploma.

As we suggested for the presentation, think of the essay as a performance in which you demonstrate particular skills that will be evaluated according to particular criteria – rather like Olympics gymnastics, as you move confidently along a balance beam or control your stunts on the hand rings. Admittedly, you will not have an audience to give you thunderous applause nor a stadium of fans to cheer as you step onto the winner's podium. But if you can be clear about your goals in performance and meet them *as well as you can*, you will have achieved a private triumph. In the upcoming section, we will give you advice on setting these goals – and we encourage you to aim high. Go for gold!

STEP 1: Know what is expected

Read the instructions and re-read the assessment criteria. You will not be given a top evaluation for gymnastics if what you perform is ice skating – or even gymnastics with required routines left out. You will not be given a top evaluation for your essay either, if what you hand in does not fulfill the appropriate expectations.

- (a) First read over the criteria according to which your essay will be marked. Pay attention to the top descriptor to set in your mind the standard of excellence towards which you are aiming. You have to know what is required to get the gold.
- (b) Next, read closely the general instructions found at the top of the prescribed title list. These apply to all TOK essays, regardless of the title. These instructions tell you exactly what you are expected to do in your essay. (e.g. "Always justify your statements...")

- (c) Read the title you have chosen, paying attention to its particular instructions. What exactly are you being told to do?

STEP 2: Select a title from the IB list

Do not instantly seize upon a prescribed title that sounds appealing and plunge into it headlong. Often titles that at first glance seem easy are really the most difficult of all, so *really read* all six titles on the list. Remember that you may not change the title to something else that you *wish* you had been asked, but must respond exactly to what the IB has given.

Which two or three titles allow you to demonstrate *best* your understanding of TOK knowledge questions and your own skills of thinking critically? Of those, which ones *most*

What are the key words of instruction?

Identify any tasks the title asks you to undertake by paying attention to action words. If you are told to "assess" or "evaluate" a claim, then you are supposed to consider the arguments both for and against it, taking into account any ambiguities in interpreting it. Possible responses, for example, are:

- that the claim is justified in *these* ways or up to *this* point, but not justified in *those* ways or beyond *that* point. (Acknowledge the counter-claims, or what can be said *against* a point of view!)
- that whether or not the claim is justified depends on what is meant by one of its key words or concepts, so that if you understand the key word *this* way the claim is justified, but if you understand it *that* way it is not.
- that although some justification (such as the following...) can be offered for this point of view, the claim is really an oversimplification of a question which needs to be understood with awareness of the following complexities...

If you are asked "to what extent" a statement is justified – or whether a given statement is true – then you are still being asked to evaluate a knowledge claim. You will still respond with *the degree* to which you agree, and *the degree* to which (counter-claim!) you do not agree...or to which you see things otherwise.

Discussion Activity

Follow an argument

This activity is best done with pairs of students working together to compare understanding. If different pairs work on the same article, or on articles expressing contrary views, they could benefit from small group discussion as they compare work at the end.

Instructions for a single article

- Find an article that puts forward an argument on an issue that is relevant to your own life or your community. Newspaper editorials, opinion columns, or blogs are likely places to find views expressed.
- Look for the article's central argument – its main point or thesis. It is often in a sentence at the end of the first paragraph.
- Trace the overall sequence of ideas in support of its central point from beginning to end, looking for its main points and supporting points. Main points are often placed in the opening sentence of each paragraph (its topic sentence). What is the *line of reasoning* that holds all the parts together?
- Look for any counter-arguments, points that acknowledge what could be said from a contrasting perspective. These could be raised for serious consideration or seemingly stated only in order that the writer can present and dismiss them.
- Try to identify any implicit assumptions – that is, unstated ideas that contribute to the overall argument.
- Notice any examples that the writer uses to illustrate points.
- Identify the conclusions the writer reaches.
- Last, take an active role yourself. Write a statement of what main point you would make yourself on this topic, with two or three further points that support it.

Extending to different perspectives

If you are able to find two articles that put forward arguments from different perspectives on the same issue, you will find this activity particularly beneficial. Do contrasting opinion

pieces refer to the same pool of evidence and examples, or do they dip into quite different pools? To find articles expressing contrary points of view, go to different media sources, perhaps taking into account their ownership and political leaning.

It is helpful to think of opinion pieces as *putting ideas into play* as part of a larger social conversation that bounces ideas around. Feel free to make analogies to sports! No one writer treats the whole of a topic or considers all relevant arguments, and all writers are likely to pick out for comment the issues that are important from their own perspectives. Following an argument involves tracing the reasoning and supporting justifications *from a particular point of view*. Following an issue more broadly involves noticing ideas as they are picked up and tossed to readers, and volleyed back and forth between commentators with different perspectives.

Transitions to connect ideas

Notice words and expressions that indicate connections between ideas:

- adding a point to one already made: in addition, furthermore, moreover, also, besides, beyond that, for one thing/for another, first/second/third
- conceding a point to an opposing interpretation: certainly...but, granted that, no doubt, to be sure, admittedly
- comparing: likewise, similarly, in like manner, in the same way
- contrasting or introducing a counter-claim: however, nevertheless, on the contrary, on the other hand, even though, instead, despite
- giving examples: for example, for instance, as a case in point, in particular, such as
- qualifying with some uncertainty: perhaps, maybe, it is possible that, possibly
- emphasizing: above all, most important, surely, indeed
- concluding: consequently, therefore, thus, as a result, clearly, in brief, on the whole, to sum up



Know what's expected

You will not be applauded in a gymnastics competition if what you perform is contemporary dance. Nor will you receive an excellent evaluation for a TOK essay unless you demonstrate the appropriate thinking and writing skills. In preparing your essay, familiarize yourself with the marking criteria and aim to show your skills at their best.

catch your personal interest and give you a sense that you have something to say that will show your perspective as a knower?

STEP 3: Gather your ideas

Brainstorm in several sweeps across the ideas. Have paper in front of you, and a pen ready for quickly jotting down your ideas, or else be ready with a new document on your computer screen.

First sweep: think openly

You've already understood the knowledge questions in the title and your instructions. Now – what comes to your mind? Write or type it quickly. What assumptions might there be within the title? What areas of knowledge and ways of knowing will you talk about in your essay? What kind of comparisons will you make between them? What examples can you think of already? Don't give *any* attention to sentence structure or beautiful phrasing. Just write quickly, until your mind storm, inevitably, passes.

Second sweep: think more deliberately

Use circles, arrows, links, bold highlighting, colour or whatever other markings work for

What are the key concepts?

There are some key words you will find in each of the titles, for example, "evidence", "belief", "knowledge", "methodology" and "justification". Are you clear about what they mean? Are there multiple possible meanings or ambiguities in their meaning? Think back on class discussions and check your notes. Refresh your memory on chapters in this book that are particularly relevant.

Put the title into your own words to make sure you understand what is being asked, and check your understanding with your teacher.

Identify explicitly what is/are the central knowledge question(s) of the title. If after having given it some thought you still aren't sure about this, choose a different title, no matter how much time and effort you have expended. Without clarity regarding the knowledge question(s) involved in the title, you will not be able to write a good TOK essay.

you to connect up the main jotted ideas on the page in front of you. Cluster them: group them for similar points. Then focus your mind again on the knowledge questions of the title, and *brainstorm again*, pushing your thoughts more deliberately now. Are there perspectives other than the ones you have noted – perspectives from other cultures, other age groups and interest groups, other areas of knowledge than the ones that came to you first? Within an area of knowledge, do different theories provide different perspectives? Can you notice any assumptions that you are making yourself, or any values that come with your own point of view? What key words do you find yourself using, and are you entirely clear over what they mean? Scribble down your thoughts. If they obviously and instantly belong to your first clusters, add them there, but otherwise *just write*.

Third sweep: counter-think

Read over everything you have written and mark new clusters forming. Then focus your mind again on the questions of knowledge of the title, and *brainstorm again*, this time giving much more deliberate attention to what you have gathered so far. Think in reverse. What can be said *against* the

points you are starting to make? What counter-claims might expose their limitations or add a level of complexity? What are the implications of your main points? If you accept them then what else do you end up also accepting? Could someone else object to the conclusions you reach and, if so, on what grounds? Without discarding anything yet, start to highlight the main points towards an essay that will treat the topic with balance and awareness of counter-claims.

Fourth sweep: develop ideas

Now enrich your immediate ideas by going back over notes from your TOK class to remind yourself of discussions that are relevant to your title. Go back through this book, using chapter titles and headings – and, of course, memory – to locate relevant ideas and refresh your memory on them. What areas of knowledge and ways of

knowing, from among the first ones you noted, would be the *best* ones to use? Gather examples to illustrate your points from notes and texts from your other IB courses, the media, people you know, your own experience, or any other relevant sources. But remember that the TOK essay is not a research paper: you will not find your response to the title in a book or on a website. Books and other sources give you only the raw material from which you, as knower and author, must shape your *own* response.

STEP 4: Organize your ideas in preparation for writing

Now comes probably the greatest challenge – to move from scribbled notes towards a plan for an essay that lays out a sequence of arguments that clearly respond to the title. If you find this

Patterns of development: thesis first or thesis last

1. Thesis first

In this pattern of development, you place your thesis in your introductory paragraph (usually as its final sentence after an opening to catch attention and a sentence or two to establish your topic) so that your central argument hits the reader right at the beginning. Each subsection of the body of the essay then supports and develops the thesis to create a sustained argument.

The overall argument is created by the sequence of main points: the thesis gives the main argument and the topic sentences of paragraphs give the supporting arguments. The conclusion picks up the thesis again, restating it in somewhat different words as an argument that you have, by that point, firmly established.

Note that the thesis will often have counter-claims built right into it (e.g. “*Although X has some justification, Y is more convincing.*”). You will usually treat counter-claims or counter-arguments at the beginning, in order to lay them aside. Move on to give arguments that you think are better justified – with the most persuasive at the end, in order of climax.

2. Thesis last

In this pattern of development, you place in your introduction (usually as its final sentence, just as

with the thesis first pattern) a focused question raising for discussion the knowledge question(s) of your title.

Each subsection of the body of the essay then treats aspects of the question or possible answers to it, usually in order of climax with the most convincing answer at the end. The thesis then emerges firmly at the end of the essay as the conclusion of the argument, the answer to the question posed at the beginning.

This pattern simulates the process of thinking and reaching a conclusion. Do not be fooled, though, into thinking that you really can just think and write as you go. This pattern demands just as much advance planning as the other; you will need to know before you start to do the actual writing exactly what your introductory question will be, exactly what your answer will be at the end, and the sequence of questions that will lead your reader through the simulated reasoning process from beginning to end.

Different school systems or writers favour one pattern or the other. If you are in doubt about which to use or unsure of your writing skills, however, the thesis-first pattern is safer in immediately getting your argument on track and giving a reader confidence in your control of ideas.

step difficult, remember that no one is born already knowing how to write an essay. It takes concentration and practice to learn to swim, to tango . . . or to organize ideas for an essay. Allow yourself only a few minutes to wail “But I *can't* . . .!” and then settle down to start planning.

(a) Identify your thesis.

At this point, you should concentrate on identifying your *thesis* – that is, the central point that you want to make about knowledge issues in response to the title, the *argument* that emerges from your thoughts on your rough material. Distill this argument into a single sentence to write at the top of your plan. Your *thesis* is the single most important sentence in your entire essay. *Make*

sure that it responds to the title and focuses on its central knowledge questions.

(b) Consider counter-claims.

Will you agree with the title’s assertion (if it makes one) or will you disagree? Most of the best essays agree (or disagree) *with reservations*. What will these be? There is almost always something to be said for different perspectives and for different sides of an argument. Consider alternate views and be as critical (or as forgiving) of your own perspective as you are of others.

(c) Plan your sequence.

To write a golden essay, have a golden plan. The sequence of ideas as you move from subsection to

The essay: assessment criteria

The essay: assessment criteria

*Does the student present an appropriate and cogent analysis of knowledge questions in discussing the title?*⁸

The judgment about the TOK essay is to be made on the basis of the following two aspects:

1. Understanding knowledge questions

Knowledge questions addressed in the essay should be shown to have a direct connection to the chosen prescribed title, or to be important in relation to it.

Depth of understanding is often indicated by drawing distinctions within ways of knowing and areas of knowledge, or by connecting several facets of knowledge questions to these.

Breadth of understanding is often indicated by making comparisons between ways of knowing and areas of knowledge. Since not all prescribed titles lend themselves to an extensive treatment of an equal range of areas of knowledge or ways of knowing, this element in the descriptors should be applied with concern for the particularity of the title.

Relevant questions to be considered include the following.

- Does the essay demonstrate understanding of knowledge questions that are relevant to the prescribed title?

- Does the essay demonstrate an awareness of the connections between knowledge questions, areas of knowledge, and ways of knowing?
- Does the student show an awareness of his or her own perspective as a knower in relation to other perspectives, such as those that may arise, for example, from academic and philosophical traditions, culture or position in society (gender, age, and so on)?

2. Quality of analysis of knowledge questions

This aspect is concerned only with knowledge questions that are relevant to the prescribed title.

Relevant questions to be considered include the following.

- What is the quality of the inquiry into knowledge questions?
- Are the main points in the essay justified?
- Are the arguments coherent and compelling?
- Have counter-claims been considered?
- Are the implications and underlying assumptions of the essay’s argument identified?
- Are the arguments effectively evaluated?

Analysis of a knowledge question that is not relevant to the prescribed title will not be assessed.

⁸ *Theory of knowledge guide*. Pp 44–45.

subsection in the body of your essay must develop your thesis, which in turn must respond to the title. Generally it should be possible to follow the argument of your essay simply by reading your thesis in the introduction, the opening topic sentence of each of your paragraphs, and the restated thesis in your conclusion, clinching the argument.

STEP 5: Write your draft essay and revise it

The actual writing is only a small part of a good essay.

Before you start, be aware of some of the most common pitfalls that assessors of TOK essays can recognize in an instant. Things to avoid:

- Avoid sweeping claims (overgeneralization and oversimplification). If you do not intend to show that you are aware you are making a large generalization or to analyse it in some way, do not make it.
- Avoid caricatures and stereotyping: for example, all historians are unaware of their biases; all adherents to religion possess blind, perfect faith in what their religion tells them to believe; because of their professions, scientists rely on reason, artists on emotion, always. Go back to the section on reason as a way of knowing for a review of the dangers of the hidden “all” and possible fallacies, and go back to the section on classification to remind yourself of its possible dangers.
- Avoid an essay composed principally of questions, paragraph upon paragraph of questions: What is truth? Can we ever be certain? How can we know? If you do not try to answer the questions, they will be considered to be empty rhetoric and you will gain no credit.
- Avoid quoting other people’s words unless you will analyse them or otherwise use them directly in argument. An essay that merely pastes quotations together does not achieve the critical analysis and argument that you are expected to do in your own words.
- Avoid full-blown preaching. Absence of counter-claims and acknowledgment of alternative perspectives significantly undermines the quality of an essay.
- Avoid using this book as a substitute for thought. We have written it to stimulate your

own thinking – to encourage you to consider thoughtfully a multitude of knowledge questions with a perspective of your own of which you are increasingly aware. You should not need to quote us. Put ideas entirely into your own words. You do not need to borrow the examples we use to illustrate ideas. Find your own examples. Have confidence in yourself. After a course in TOK, you are entirely ready to fly on your own.

Now write. Use your introduction to:

- catch your reader’s attention
- establish the title that you are going to discuss
- give your thesis.

The taste for stylistic flourishes and fine writing in an introduction varies from culture to culture, but be warned that the marking criteria do not reward elegance of style. But they do count the words in a preamble as part of your maximum allowed.

As you write, *develop ideas in proportion* to their importance in your overall plan. Your essay must not be more than 1,600 words in length, so control the degree to which you expand on an idea as you go. Doing so is not easy, but it is easier than trying to readjust the whole essay at the end.

Clarify concepts as you go, defining and/or exemplifying terms if they are key terms necessary to your argument.

Things to avoid:

- Do not pad your essay with definitions of terms which are not particularly ambiguous.
- Do not drop into your essay lumps of definition which are not clearly linked to your argument and are ignored thereafter.
- Do not, above all, use a dictionary definition to bypass complexities: no assessor will be impressed if, after a course in which you discuss possible understandings of “truth” or “knowledge”, you resolve this question of ambiguity and different perspectives by plunking down a citation from the dictionary as if you have thereby settled the matter.

Use examples to develop and illustrate your arguments. Examples do not *prove* a point. Remember all that you learned about the evidence base necessary for sound inductive conclusions. However, well-chosen examples can bring arguments to life, clarify concepts,

expand upon points, and demonstrate your understanding. In your brainstorming, you have already gathered possible examples from which you now have to *select*.

Select examples for breadth. Take your examples from a variety of sources and areas of knowledge as a major means of demonstrating the breadth of your understanding. Draw from the media, books that you have read, lectures on special topics that you have heard, cultural issues of which you are aware, documentary films that you have seen, and so on. Draw from your other IB courses and course textbooks. Do not just make up your examples or suppose them in a hypothetical way (“If a historian were to write from an American perspective, he might...”). Then, out of the wide range of examples select the ones that seem most effective for illustrating your points. Your goal is not to stuff your essay with as many examples as possible, but to have breadth within the ones selected as best.

Use the examples effectively. Think strategically to use those examples to give the best support you can to your ideas. Will you use a single sustained example in a paragraph in order to demonstrate, in some detail, how knowledge works in a particular area? Or will you use two or three smaller examples, giving them brief development to ensure that they do play their part to clarify points and illustrate your argument?

Reference your work. Give the source of any quotation or unusual pieces of information, using accepted conventions of footnotes and bibliography. Acknowledge any source that has contributed significantly to your thinking. If you are not sure whether to footnote or not, it is better to footnote too much than too little.

Check your facts as you bring in examples and support generalizations. Are your assertions accurate, sufficiently specific and detailed?

Polish the essay as you finish writing. Check for mistakes in sentence structure, grammar, word choice and spelling. Errors can interfere with the clarity of your communication.

You are almost finished, but there is still an essential step between the draft and your final version: you have to make sure that you have not drifted from the expectations of a top performance that you had in mind as you began. With the marking criteria in hand, go through the essay to confirm that it is as close as you can make it to the description of the top achievement. Read carefully, check, and pick out features of your essay that you may still strengthen and polish. This done, you are ready, triumphantly, for the final step.

