

Frequently asked questions about theory of knowledge (TOK)

1. What are the assessment components in TOK?

TOK has two assessment components: an external component (the essay) and an internal component (the presentation). The essay is marked by external IB examiners and the presentation is marked by the teacher (internally). The teacher's marks are then moderated by IB examiners based on the evidence shown on the TOK presentation planning document.

2. What are the requirements of the essay?

The essay is 1600 words maximum response to one of six prescribed titles published by the IB for each assessment session. It is not a research task, but specific examples are needed to support claims and arguments. The prescribed titles ask generic questions about knowledge and are cross-disciplinary in nature. They may be answered with reference to any part or parts of the TOK course, to specific disciplines, or with reference to opinions gained about knowledge both inside and outside the classroom.

3. What does the essay assess?

The essay assesses a candidates' ability to reflect on knowledge questions and their TOK thinking skills through the discussion of one of the six prescribed titles. The titles are not meant to be treated only in the abstract, or on the basis of external authorities. In all cases, essays should express the conclusions reached by students through a sustained consideration of knowledge questions. Claims and counterclaims should be formulated and main ideas should be illustrated with effective examples. Essays should demonstrate the student's ability to link knowledge questions to AOKs and/or WOKs.

4. Can candidates write the essay on any title they like?

No. While candidates do have a choice in selecting a prescribed title from a list of options, the choice *must* be one of the six prescribed titles published by the IB for that particular assessment session. Candidates must develop an essay in response to one of the titles as they are written. Candidates *must not* change the title in any way.

5. What happens if a candidate writes an essay on a different title or topic, or writes a response to an old prescribed title?

The candidate automatically receives zero marks. It is very important that teachers ensure their candidates have the right prescribed titles to choose from and that candidates have not amended their chosen title in anyway. An amended title will elicit a response that does not answer the intended question or instruction, meaning "*The essay does not reach a standard described by levels 1–5 or is not a response to one of the prescribed titles on the list for the current session.*", as described in the assessment instrument.

6. What happens if the candidate gets a zero?

If a candidate gets a zero in their essay, they are put at high risk of receiving a grade E for the course. Receiving a grade E for TOK means the candidate is not eligible to receive their IB diploma.

7. What is the presentation?

The TOK presentation is an individual or group task where candidates identify and explore a knowledge question raised by a real-life situation that interests them. As stated in the guide, the selected real-life situation may arise from a local domain of personal, school, or community relevance, or from a wider one of national, international or global scope. This is a rather wide and open definition allowing candidates to select any situation that they have encountered as students, family members, citizens, as long as it is real (and not hypothetical). Whatever situation is chosen, it must lend itself naturally to a question about knowledge.

8. What forms and documents are candidates and teachers required to complete?

Candidates and teachers must complete the essay planning and progress form (TK/PPF) and the presentation planning document (TK/PPD).

9. What is the planning and progress form (TK/PPF)?

The planning and progress form, as the name suggests, is a form that helps candidates and teachers maintain a record of the planning and development of the essay. Teachers and candidates are required to have at least three interactions with each other where they discuss the prescribed titles and subsequently, the development of the essay.

The purpose of this form is to help ensure that candidates are getting the required support from their teachers, and it helps ensure academic honesty. This form is completed by the candidate, followed by the teacher for additional comments, and finally submitted with the essays by the DP coordinator at the time of upload.

10. Where can I find the TK/PPF?

The TK/PPF is available in the IBIS library for coordinators and as a link in the document titled *May 2017 - Forms and cover sheets* under **Assessment** on the TOK page of the Online Curriculum Centre (OCC).

11. Where and when is this form submitted?

The TK/PPF is uploaded by the coordinator (once the teacher has completed their comments) via the eCoursework functionality on IBIS and must be submitted by the essay submission deadline (15 March/15 September). Please note that the system will not allow the submission of the essay if the form is not included. For details please consult the *Handbook of procedures for the Diploma Programme* published every year.

12. What is the presentation planning document (TK/PPD)?

This document, as the name suggests, is the document used by the candidates to plan their presentation before delivery. The appropriate completion of this document is essential as it is used for the purposes of moderation of the teachers' marks for the presentation.

This document is *not* a mere administrative requirement, the successful planning of a presentation is likely to result a higher quality presentation **and** the TK/PPD plays a crucial role in moderation of the marks awarded by the teacher. The skeleton contents of the presentation must be evidenced in this document. It must show evidence of what the candidate will be expanding on during the actual delivery. Teachers must complete the teacher's section of the document.

13. What is the difference between the TK/PPF and the TK/PPD?

The TK/PPF accompanies the process of planning, developing and writing *the* essay. It must be submitted with the essay.

The TK/PPD is the presentation planning document which candidates use to plan their *presentation*. This document is submitted by the student to the teacher for internal assessment. The teacher submits a sample of the TK/PPDs to the IB for the purpose of external moderation.

14. Where can teachers find the TK/PPD for the relevant session?

The TK/PPD is available to coordinators in the **IBIS library** and to teachers on the TOK page of the OCC under **Assessment**. The document is not free-standing on the OCC page but is available as a link in the publication titled *May 2017 - Forms and cover sheets*. When you open this document you will see a list with links of all the forms and coversheets for all Diploma Programme subjects.

Important: It is very important that teachers use the official TK/PPD published by the IB on the OCC and on IBIS. Please refrain from using documents posted on the OCC forum by non-IB staff.

15. Do all candidates have to submit a TK/PPD?

Yes, all candidates must submit a TK/PPD to their teacher. Candidates in the same group must each present an identical TK/PPD.

16. What is external moderation?

The internal assessment component of TOK, the presentation, is internally marked by the teacher using the assessment instrument published in the subject guide, and those marks are externally moderated by an IB examiner.

Teachers submit a sample of the candidates' TK/PPDs to the IB and these are used for moderation.

17. What does moderation consist of?

The purpose of moderation is not to re-mark candidates' work but for the examiner to determine how accurately and consistently the teacher has applied the assessment instrument.

The examiner will moderate the teacher's marking based on an initial sample of three TK/PPDs. If the examiner agrees that the marks awarded by the teacher are evidenced by the contents of those three initial TK/PPDs (there is a tolerance of one mark) *all* the teacher's marks awarded to all candidates are upheld. If, however, the teacher's marks cannot be supported in at least one of those initial TK/PPDs, the examiner will award marks based on the contents of the TK/PPDs. If the examiner's marks have more than one mark difference (i.e. teacher's marks are outside the one mark tolerance), the examiner will then moderate an additional set of TK/PPDs until a moderation factor can be calculated for the school. The tolerance of one mark means that if the examiner awards a mark above or below the teacher, the teacher's marks are upheld.

18. What is the moderation factor?

Based on the teacher's marks and the examiner's moderation of those marks, a linear regression formula is calculated that is then applied to all the candidates in the cohort. The moderation factor is applied to produce the final marks for the presentation.

19. What is the nature of the internal assessment feedback?

When examiners disagree with the teacher's marks they are required to provide the school with feedback. Examiners must justify why they disagreed with the marks and why they made the relevant changes to the marks. It is important that schools understand that examiners have to write feedback for dozens of schools and cannot therefore provide a detailed report with a thorough analysis. They are required to write brief comments that will help teachers identify any issues and improve. Teachers are also advised to use the subject report published every session for feedback as this report contains the common problems examiners find and suggestions on how to address the problems.

20. Can schools request the return of their moderated TK/PPDs?

Schools cannot request the return of their moderated TK/PPDs because the mark that examiners give to the TK/PPD does not necessarily reflect the final marks that those candidates will receive. Because the sample is used solely to calculate a moderation factor and not to assign a definitive mark, it cannot be considered as a final assessment and may therefore not provide the schools with meaningful information. In their feedback, some examiners have incorrectly advised schools to request their planning documents back, but this is actually not an option.

21. What can a school do if they are in strong disagreement with their results in the presentation?

The IB has an Enquiry upon Results service by which certain schools can request a re-moderation of their internal assessment work. There are specific conditions that schools must meet in order to request a Category 3: re-moderation of the internal assessment. For details, please consult the *Handbook of procedures for the Diploma Programme*.

22. What is the subject report? What can teachers expect to find in it?

The subject report is a report written by the TOK Chief Assessor and the principal examiner for the presentation. The report provides schools with information about the grade boundaries determined for the session and it provides a discussion on how the TOK prescribed titles were treated this session, and provides guidance as to how to improve the essays in the future. It also includes a section on the presentation where it discusses the common problems identified by examiners, and ways to address these problems.

The report is based on the summary reports provided by each team leader who bases their reports on the reports of each individual examiner. The subject report then seeks to reflect the general findings of all examiners in the session.

Teachers may notice that some material in the reports are repeated from previous sessions. This is because we continue to find the same issues session after session.

Additional guidance on TK/PPD instructions

The comments below provide advice regarding the completion of the Candidate Section and the Teacher Section of the TK/PPD.

Candidate Section

- The TK/PPD is a planning document, a working document, it is not your full presentation. Therefore, the candidate section will not include everything you will say in the delivery of your presentation.
- What you will include in the TK/PPD are the concepts, ideas and connections you will be developing when you deliver your presentation.
- It is not enough that you understand what you are planning on doing. It is important that your teacher and the examiner understand your plan too. What you write must be clear to you and to them.

Comments for each of the parts of the **Candidate Section**:

Describe your real-life situation

- The real-life situation may be one of local or global interest. Thus it may arise from your personal, school or community experience, or from national or world concerns. Choose a RLS that is clearly identifiable as a real situation.
- The real-life situation must be **real**, not hypothetical. Do not invent.
- You are asked for **one** real-life situation. Do not describe more than one. Other related real-life situations may be included in the outline section, not here.

State your central knowledge question (this must be expressed as a question)

- You must state a knowledge **question**. Make sure that you formulate it **in the form of a question**.
- Check that the knowledge question is **a) about knowledge b) an open question c) general**.
- **To check that a) your KQ is about knowledge**, try to reformulate it so that the word 'knowledge' or a version of 'to know' appears in it explicitly. Check that the target of the question is knowledge not a real-life situation. The question should be, for example, about ethics rather than being an ethical question. 'Is euthanasia wrong?' lies within ethics so is a first-order question. 'How can we evaluate the utility of the consequences of an action?' is a question *about* ethics; namely, about the methods of utilitarianism. This makes it a second-order question.

- **To check that b) your KQ is an open question**, see if it can have different answers. If it can have one definitive or correct answer, then it is not an open question.
- **To check that c) your KQ is general**, make sure that it does not refer to a specific example or your real-life situation.
- Remember that your TOK analysis, what you do in your presentation, will depend on the knowledge question.
- Questions within disciplines are not knowledge questions. This rules out questions such as ‘Is X ethical?’ or ‘Is group therapy better than individual therapy?’
- Questions about how ethical knowledge *is produced, or acquired* or how knowledge in psychology *is produced, or acquired* are good knowledge questions.
- You are required to state your ‘central knowledge question’ in the singular. That means one knowledge question.

Explain the connection between your real-life situation and your knowledge question.

- You need to explain how your knowledge question is a question that arises from your real-life situation. That will show how they are connected.
- In other words, you need to explain how you go from the specifics of the real-life situation to asking a second-order question about knowledge.

Outline how you intend to develop your TOK presentation in the context of your real-life situation. Include analysis of your main knowledge question and related knowledge questions as well as arguments and perspectives. Responses can be presented in continuous prose or as a list of points.

- The outline must include the main points in the arguments you will present to answer your knowledge question.
- The main points are the ideas and concepts you are discussing.
- To explain the main points other supporting or related real-life situations and knowledge questions may arise.
- Listing or mentioning ways of knowing and areas of knowledge, or the knowledge framework, will not suffice. You need to give an outline of your ideas.
- The outline must contain actual content. Just writing what you will do in each step is of little use. For instance, “I will present my knowledge question” or “I will explain the connection with the RLS” are not actual content. They say nothing about the ideas, concepts and arguments which you will be developing in your presentation.

Show the significance of your conclusions with particular reference to your real-life situation and indicate how those conclusions might be relevant to other real-life situations

- Make sure that you actually state what your conclusions are, even in the form of bullet points.
- Ensure that your conclusions are *about knowledge* and **not** conclusions within a discipline or about the specific real-life situation. For example, a conclusion stating that ‘experimenting with animals is wrong’, is **not** a conclusion about knowledge and it is **not** a conclusion that can be generally applied to other real-life situations.
- Your conclusions should focus on how the analysis of your knowledge question has helped you gain a better understanding of your real-life situation and other related real-life situations.

Teacher section

Provide brief comments to support your assessment of the presentation. These should include remarks on the extent to which the knowledge question was well formulated and connected to the real-life situation, and on the effectiveness of the arguments and TOK analysis.

- The main function of the TK/PPD is to establish the reliability of the teacher mark. Based on the evidence shown on the document, it is the examiner’s job to determine if the teacher has applied the assessment instrument accurately and consistently.
- Therefore, some detail is required in this section. It should not, however, be either a rehashing of the assessment instrument nor of the presentation itself. What is required here is a connection between what the teacher saw in the presentation – specifically the TOK content – and the descriptors in the assessment instrument.
- This section should focus strictly on **justification** of the marks in relation to the assessment instrument.
- The TK/PPD is not an administrative requirement or a coversheet, but a working document which candidates are instructed to use to prepare and plan their presentation, with specific support from the teacher (see page 56 of the guide: “The role of the teacher”). It constitutes the presentation in its ‘skeleton’ form and should therefore provide evidence for what the presentation will include.
- The TK/PPD is a planning document, so candidates should work on the document by editing, adding, removing, improving it as they see fit. Teachers need to work with candidates and advise them regarding their presentation planning to make sure that candidates understand what exactly is expected in each section of their planning document.

TK/PPD

For first assessment in 2017

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International Baccalaureate®
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Candidate personal code:

Session:

Theory of knowledge presentation planning document

Title of presentation:

Indicate the **duration** of the presentation: minutes

Indicate the **number of participants** in the presentation:

CANDIDATE SECTION

*Candidate responses on this document must be **typed** and limited to a **maximum of 500 words** for the whole of the **Candidate section** (not per field). It is not permitted to exceed the two sides of the candidate section.*

Describe your real-life situation:

State your central knowledge question (this must be expressed as a question):

Explain the connection between your real-life situation and your knowledge question:

Outline how you intend to develop your TOK presentation in the context of your real-life situation. Include analysis of your main knowledge question and related knowledge questions as well as arguments and perspectives. Responses can be presented in continuous prose or as a list of points:

Show the significance of your conclusions with particular reference to your real-life situation and indicate how those conclusions might be relevant to other real-life situations:

TEACHER SECTION

Enter your mark (0-10) for this presentation:

Provide **brief comments** to support your assessment of the presentation. These should include remarks on the extent to which the knowledge question was well formulated and connected to the real-life situation, and on the effectiveness of the arguments and TOK analysis.

Moderator comment:

This is a very promising real life situation. The knowledge question is good, although it might have been sharper to restrict the scope to the knowledge community of the natural sciences. There is a very good link between the real life situation and the knowledge question. The outline section is a little uncritical in places, for example the Ways of Knowing seem to be treated individually/ slightly stereotypically. Nonetheless the analysis is entirely second order and there is evidence of investigation of different perspectives - excellent TOK. The conclusions section is a little generic, but it is clear that the candidates are penetrating down to the level of methodology. The teacher comments are rather generic, and are not entirely convincing of the teacher having made a reliable assessment. More specific detail is needed to help the moderator understand why the mark that has been awarded by the teacher has been justified. However, the student planning is compelling in this case, and on this basis there is felt to be enough evidence to support the teacher's mark of 9.