

TAKEAWAYS FROM GRADING TOK MAY 2020 ESSAYS

These are strictly based on my personal learning as a first-time examiner, so please use it with that understanding.

OVERALL:

- While the examiner notes have a list of knowledge questions for each title, TOK essays need not have explicit knowledge questions. At no point should a student focus on answering their knowledge question in the place of the title itself.
- It is very important to read all parts of the title carefully. If the title asks "to what extent do you agree with...", then the student must clarify the extent to which they agree in the course of their essay.
- A structure that seemed to work: the breaking down of key terms in the title/ examining two or more AOKs (depending on the title)/ developing claims and counterclaims that are substantiated with examples/ incorporating multiple perspectives with nuance/ bringing in WOKs or TOK terminology in a relevant manner/ systematically drawing implications from the claims made/ a clear conclusion that isn't just a repetition of earlier points made/ references.
- Students should avoid making generalized statements such as "human sciences are unpredictable", "arts is subjective", "emotion has no role in science", "history is biased", "religious knowledge lacks validity as there is no proof", and so on.
- Students should incorporate WOKs in a relevant manner and not force it into a claim. They need to bring out how it contributes to the claim made or to knowledge development in general. Students should avoid confusing 'reason' with 'reasoning' and 'memory' with 'history' or 'past knowledge'.
- In essays where external resources are used, candidates should follow referencing conventions. References are checked by the examiner, and so, students should be careful to ensure that their sources are valid and credible. Invalid/ incomplete references are checked and commented on.

SPECIFIC SECTIONS:

THE INTRODUCTION

- Students present their initial thoughts, using a quote, example or personal experience to start off their essay.
- Key terms of the title must be broken down. It is better to avoid simply using dictionary or online definitions of terms. If conventional definitions are used, students must add their own understanding and interpretation to make it clear. The focus should remain on the title, and how a particular term has been used in *that* title.
- The angles through which the title will be explored and the AOKs that will be used should be clarified in the introduction.
- Students should provide a framework of the nature of arguments that will follow in the rest of the essay.

THE BODY

- The better essays are where students: make an argument + provide an example + explore / justify the example + come back to the argument + use this to make a claim or conclusion.
- Students should avoid making unsubstantiated statements.

- THE EXAMPLES USED:
 - The better essays are where students are familiar with the examples and can directly connect them the title, showing that they have done sufficient research and have explored these example as part of their academic experience.
 - Students should avoid using examples they are not familiar with because there is a tendency to simplify or ignore important aspects of that example which an examiner can easily pick up on.
 - They should check multiple sources to verify that the example is presented accurately.
- As mentioned earlier, WOKs should be used where relevant and where they help analyze implications and not be presented like a laundry list without substantiation.
- In the better essays, students are able to bring in their academic experiences and perspectives as a knower in a relevant way, using these to support the overall argument made. Students should avoid getting carried away with their personal experiences and perspectives.
- Every paragraph/ argument should show a clear connection to the title and students should avoid digressing from it.

THE CONCLUSION

- The conclusion should clearly respond to the title and specific questions raised in the title.
- It should tie up the different angles and perspectives presented in the essay in a nuanced manner.
- Students should avoid getting 'preachy' and focus on the implications raised from the claims made.
- In the better essays, students raise implications, assumptions, exceptions and limitations, and do not just repeat stuff they have already said earlier in the essay.