

Your Ultimate Guide to ToK Essay Writing  
May 2019

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*The essay should be written in standard 12 font and double spaced. The maximum word count is 1600 words.*

*Details on uploading the finalized essays to the IB system will be provided at the time of upload.*

### Tools

1. Notes on Prescribed Titles (PTs) from your class, teacher notes document.
2. Pen and paper (notepad) so you can scribble ideas as they come to you.
3. The Theory of Knowledge Textbook.
4. The Theory of Knowledge Guide.
5. Access to the net to do some research.
6. Put away your phone and let go of social media for a few hours. You need to FOCUS!

### Opening Remarks and General Instructions from ToK teachers to students

- Remember that writing is a process. It does not just happen. No one sits in front of a pen and a paper (or a computer screen) and writes an award-winning essay (in your case an A winning essay) on the first try (Trust me, this is the third revision for this essay guide).
- The key here is to be patient, to accept that the first draft will not be good and will require you to go back and revise it.
- If you become nervous, refer to “Shitty First Drafts” for a good laugh and to remind yourself that even the best of writers need multiple drafts to get to the final one.
- Remember that as cool and as smart as we are as individuals finding support for our claims and counterclaims through research/real life situation that can support our arguments is a must. Reference your examples please, in other words tell us that those are indeed real.
- Examples can vary from real life situations you saw on the news, in a YouTube video or an article you read, or an example that is taken directly from your IB Studies.
- Your references need **not** be a primary resource, they can be secondary resources, as long as they are verified and credible resources. For example: The Onion is not a resource as it writes imaginary news.
- At any moment, you need support, help, a shoulder to cry on, we, the TOK teachers are here for you.
- Choose a title. Stick to it, tackle it and do not be afraid. Do not change your mind unless there is a good reason.



- Always choose AoKs that you enjoy. Make this an enjoyable experience. Why write about something you do not like?
- Once you have that, it is time to tackle your outline.
- Outlines will be produced inside the classroom. So bring your tools with you and we will be there to help you.
- Most of your essay will also be written inside the classroom. Always come prepared.

## **Specifics**

### I. On Prescribed Titles

1. Please note what the title is asking you. Make sure you understand the command term and the question it is asking. What kind of knowledge is being elicited? Will you focus on personal knowledge or shared? For a list of IBDP Command terms please refer to the end of this document
2. Essays are comparative in nature, when choosing your areas of knowledge (AoK) and ways of knowing (WoK) make sure that you are able to draw contrasts and comparisons.
3. Take note whether the PT is asking you to take on two Areas of Knowledge or two disciplines. With the exception of History and Math (these are AoKs and Disciplines at the same time), you will need to be very clear on what AoK or what discipline you are choosing.
4. You will need to spend some time unpacking the title. In other words, defining key terms, understanding what the title is actually asking and then developing your own response to it (this will be your thesis/main argument).
5. Respect the title. Do not rephrase it or rewrite it in your own words.

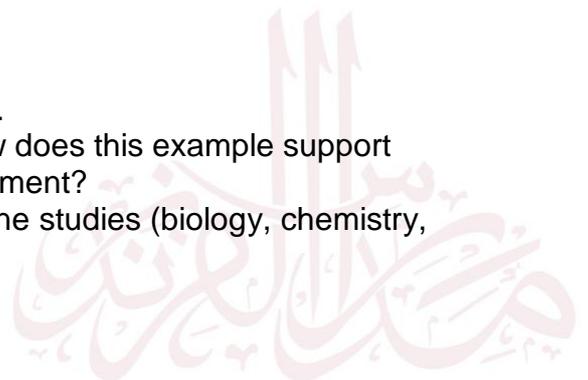
*“The chosen title must be used exactly as given; it must not be altered in any way. Students who modify the titles are likely to receive lower scores, since the knowledge questions that are explored in the essay must be connected to the titles in their prescribed formulation.” (Please see ToK Guide p. 52 for more detail)*

6. Your main job in the essay is to respond to the title.

*“Titles ask generic questions about knowledge and are flexible and cross disciplinary. They may be analyzed with reference to any part of the ToK course, to specific disciplines or to opinions gained about knowledge inside or outside the classroom. (ToK Guide p. 52)*

### II. On Analysis

1. The majority of your essay should be analysis.
2. Describe your example and then analyze: how does this example support your claim? How does it serve your main argument?
3. Use examples that stem from your DP discipline studies (biology, chemistry, economics, business...etc.)





4. Engage with WoKs. Do not just mention them. WoKs are analytical tools. Do not offer a selection of WoKs at the beginning of your essay as if a shopping list and never use them. Do not do that at the end of the essay either.

### III. On Essay Content

1. Pick your title, do your own analysis. Don't seek help until you have written something.
2. Do not search for responses to PTs on help websites. Once you do, your own thought process is clogged by other people's ideas and that cannot be undone! Do your work, go ahead grab a pen and jot down your own ideas!
3. You may consult your teachers, you may consult the PT analysis document we provide you. Come to us, we will help you!!!
4. Describe your examples with accuracy, connect them well with the point you are making. Make sure that the assessor is clear on why you chose this example and how it supports your claim/counter claim.
5. Do not be afraid to use examples from your DP studies. Those are highly encouraged.

*Real-life examples play an important role in the essay by illustrating the main ideas or taking forward the argument. Real life examples should come from the student's academic experience or from life beyond the classroom, as hypothetical examples are unconvincing. Anecdotal examples may be relevant but cannot on their own support the analysis in an essay. (ToK Guide p. 52)*

5. Do not be afraid to try new examples rather than recycling old examples used in previous years. Just make sure you research your new examples very well so you can show in detail why you chose them.



## ToK Essay Outline

We have a sample outline below that walks you through how you go about building your essay. It is entirely your choice. The key here is to write an essay that is comparative in nature. Please be prepared for the structure of your essay to change throughout the writing process. Once you write the essay, it may become clear that we need to rearrange your structure. So, our advice: choose one of the structures offered below, write your first draft and we will go from there.

- I. Introduction: start strong, a good quote will be a good idea. Make sure that you explain why the quote is relevant. Unpack your title. Tell your examiner what this title is about. State your main argument. A good essay tells the examiner what it is about from the first paragraph. Remember you have a limited number of words, so use them wisely and effectively.

### *A Note on Knowledge Questions:*

- *Do not begin your essay with a knowledge question (KQ) that overshadows the title. If the title is framed as a knowledge question, do not begin your essay by rephrasing the title. Respect the title.*
- *You do not have to explicitly write your KQ. In a strong essay, knowledge questions will shine through the analysis.*
- *“Writing “my knowledge question is...” near the start of the essay is usually a recipe for disaster as it means that, in effect, the title has been displaced.” - ToK Subject Report 2017*
- *You may write your knowledge questions, but do not start by saying “My knowledge question is....” this usually leads to a recipe for disaster because essentially you did not respect the title, and instead replaced it with a main KQ of your own writing.*

- II. Body 1: AoK 1

**Claim 1:** State your claim: be generous with your claim, make it clear. It can be more than one sentence.

**Example:** real life situation, describe your example, and analyze. Why is this example relevant to your main claim? How does it serve your argument? What ways of knowing are present in the example to produce knowledge? What role do they play?

**Counter-Claim 1:** See note on claim. **Remember counter claims do not need to be the exact opposite of your claim. What you need to present here is a different perspective.**

**Example:** real life situation, describe your example, and analyze. Why is this example relevant to your main claim? How does it serve your argument? What ways of knowing are present in the example to produce knowledge? What role do they play?

**Mini-conclusion:** Connect your claims/counter claims to your thesis and prescribed title. What are you saying here about this AoK?

#### IV. Body 2: AoK 2

**Claim 2:** State your claim: be generous with your claim, make it clear. It can be more than one sentence.

**Example:** real life situation, describe your example, and analyze. Why is this example relevant to your main claim? How does it serve your argument? What ways of knowing are present in the example to produce knowledge? What role do they play?

**Counter-Claim 3:** See note on claim. **Remember counter claims do not need to be the exact opposite of your claim. What you need to present here is a different perspective.**

**Example:** real life situation, describe your example, and analyze. Why is this example relevant to your main claim? How does it serve your argument? What ways of knowing are present in the example to produce knowledge? What role do they play?

VI. **Body 3:** Here you shine light on the two AoKs and you compare them in reference to your argument. Remember you have to do this. The essay is comparative and argumentative.

V. **Conclusions:** Your conclusion section is the glue that will make your essay stick together.

- Reiterate your thesis (initial response).
- Use your mini conclusions to write a final conclusion.
- Tell the reader what the significance is for knowing what we know in this particular PT.
- Discuss implications and limitations of your arguments.
- If you think it is important to offer another perspective on the argument, offer it. But only if it is interesting and will strengthen your essay.
- End strong! A good quote, something to make your examiner remember you



## Appendix 1: Roles

### The Role of the Student:

1. Students are expected to do their own work.
2. Students are expected to bring their tools to class and to be ready to write in class.
3. Students are expected to put effort and write their own essays.
4. Students are expected to offer well thought off and research supported examples for their arguments.
5. Students are expected to follow all procedures outlined by the teacher.
6. Students are expected to meet deadlines set by their teacher.

### The Role of the Teacher

*In relation to the student's essay on a prescribed title, the teacher has three principal responsibilities:*

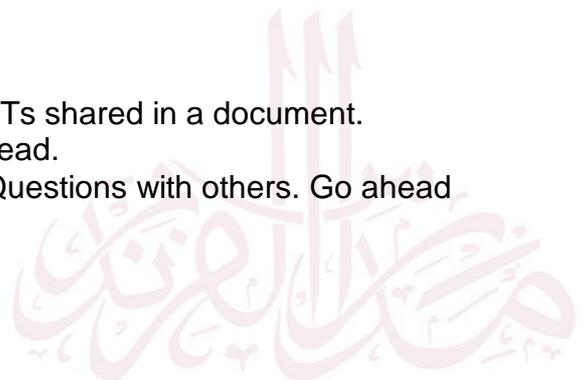
- *To encourage and support the student in the writing of the essay*
- *To provide the student with advice on and guidance about the skills needed*
- *To ensure that the essay is the student's own work. (ToK guide p. 53)*

### How will your teachers offer you support?

1. Your teacher is ready to discuss the prescribed titles with you. This will be done in class. However, your teachers are ready to offer you individual support to discuss the PTs with you. Please do not hesitate to contact us at any time. While your teacher might strongly recommend certain titles, the final choice on PTs is yours.
2. The teacher will offer you feedback on your essay outline/exploration. An exploration is a set of notes that maps out your essay journey.
3. Your teacher will offer you one written feedback on your written essay. Please do not submit a half written draft. Finalize your draft and submit it to your teacher.
4. You may seek further advice, guidance from your teacher, and they are obligated to help you. However, no further written feedback can be given beyond the prescribed feedback in point no. 3

### Further Support

1. Your teachers will offer you written notes on PTs shared in a document.
2. We encourage you to have your essay proof read.
3. We encourage you to check you Knowledge Questions with others. Go ahead throw your question at us.



## Academic Honesty

Students are expected to present original authentic work they have produced on their own. Students suspected of academic malpractice will be asked to rewrite their essays and will be treated according to the School's Academic Honesty Policy (please visit our website to review the academic policy on the link below. Academic malpractice will be treated accordingly.

<http://www.rfs.edu.ps/uploads/files/US Academic Honesty Policy.pdf>.

All student work will be scrutinized for authenticity by teachers.

**Disclaimer: If a student seeks help outside the school through private tutoring, or paid writing services, the school will consider this academic malpractice. Students will be required to redo their work separately. The school is only responsible for the work submitted by students following the procedures outlined in this guide. Any other work will not guarantee a higher grade and in fact may cost the student both school grades and IB Official ToK scores. ToK is very technical in nature and only teachers who received specific training (like our teachers) can offer the advice and support needed.**

**Do your own work!**

*A final word to parents: We understand your anxiety about ToK; we appreciate your worry about your children. We assure you that they are in safe hands. We care about them and wish that they achieve a high grade in ToK. We ask you to kindly offer them support but not to do their work for them.*

**Finally, stay calm and submit your essay!!!**

**Best of Luck!**



## Diploma Program Command terms

Students should be familiar with the following key terms and phrases used in examination questions, which are to be understood as described below. Although these terms will be used frequently in examination questions, other terms may be used to direct students to present an argument in a specific way.

<b>Analyse</b>	Break down in order to bring out the essential elements or structure.
<b>Annotate</b>	Add brief notes to a diagram or graph.
<b>Apply</b>	Use an idea, equation, principle, theory or law in relation to a given problem or issue.
<b>Calculate</b>	Obtain a numerical answer showing the relevant stages in the working.
<b>Classify</b>	Arrange or order by class or category.
<b>Comment</b>	Give a judgment based on a given statement or result of a calculation.
<b>Compare</b>	Give an account of the similarities between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout.
<b>Compare and contrast</b>	Give an account of similarities and differences between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout.

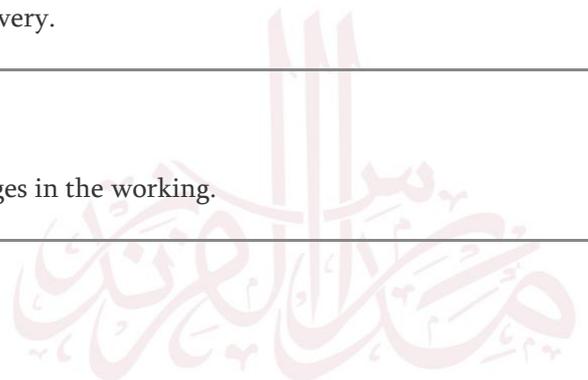


Construct	Display information in a diagrammatic or logical form.
Contrast	Give an account of the differences between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout.
Deduce	Reach a conclusion from the information given.
Define	Give the precise meaning of a word, phrase, concept or physical quantity.
Demonstrate	Make clear by reasoning or evidence, illustrating with examples or practical application.
Derive	Manipulate a mathematical relationship to give a new equation or relationship.
Describe	Give a detailed account.
Design	Produce a plan, simulation or model.
Determine	Obtain the only possible answer.
Differentiate	Obtain the derivative of a function.



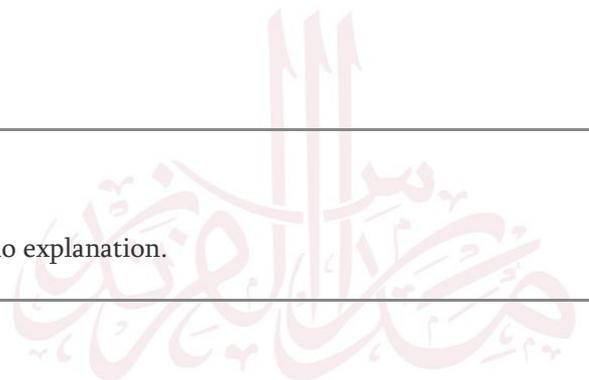


<b>Discuss</b>	Offer a considered and balanced review that includes a range of arguments, factors or hypotheses. Opinions or conclusions should be presented clearly and supported by appropriate evidence.
<b>Distinguish</b>	Make clear the differences between two or more concepts or items.
<b>Draw</b>	Represent by means of a labelled, accurate diagram or graph, using a pencil. A ruler (straight edge) should be used for straight lines. Diagrams should be drawn to scale. Graphs should have points correctly plotted (if appropriate) and joined in a straight line or smooth curve.
<b>Estimate</b>	Obtain an approximate value.
<b>Evaluate</b>	Make an appraisal by weighing up the strengths and limitations.
<b>Examine</b>	Consider an argument or concept in a way that uncovers the assumptions and interrelationships of the issue.
<b>Explain</b>	Give a detailed account including reasons or causes.
<b>Explore</b>	Undertake a systematic process of discovery.
<b>Find</b>	Obtain an answer showing relevant stages in the working.

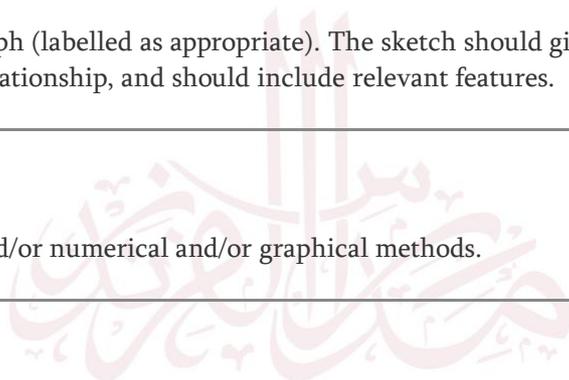




Formulate	Express precisely and systematically the relevant concept(s) or argument(s).
Hence	Use the preceding work to obtain the required result.
Hence or otherwise	It is suggested that the preceding work is used, but other methods could also receive credit.
Identify	Provide an answer from a number of possibilities.
Integrate	Obtain the integral of a function.
Interpret	Use knowledge and understanding to recognize trends and draw conclusions from given information.
Investigate	Observe, study, or make a detailed and systematic examination, in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions.
Justify	Give valid reasons or evidence to support an answer or conclusion.
Label	Add labels to a diagram.
List	Give a sequence of brief answers with no explanation.



Measure	Obtain a value for a quantity.
Outline	Give a brief account or summary.
Plot	Mark the position of points on a diagram.
Predict	Give an expected result.
Present	Offer for display, observation, examination or consideration.
Prove	Use a sequence of logical steps to obtain the required result in a formal way.
Show	Give the steps in a calculation or derivation.
Show that	Obtain the required result (possibly using information given) without the formality of proof. "Show that" questions do not generally require the use of a calculator.
Sketch	Represent by means of a diagram or graph (labelled as appropriate). The sketch should give a general idea of the required shape or relationship, and should include relevant features.
Solve	Obtain the answer(s) using algebraic and/or numerical and/or graphical methods.





<b>State</b>	Give a specific name, value or other brief answer without explanation or calculation.
<b>Suggest</b>	Propose a solution, hypothesis or other possible answer.
<b>To what extent</b>	Consider the merits or otherwise of an argument or concept. Opinions and conclusions should be presented clearly and supported with appropriate evidence and sound argument.
<b>Trace</b>	Follow and record the action of an algorithm.
<b>Verify</b>	Provide evidence that validates the result.
<b>Write down</b>	Obtain the answer(s), usually by extracting information. Little or no calculation is required. Working does not need to be shown.

