



Your Ultimate Guide to ToK Essay Writing

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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 and 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). *Please remember that definitions you provide cannot just be simple dictionary definitions, they need to be working conceptual definitions of key terms in the title.*
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)

7. 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.



II. 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)

6. 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

Below is a general outline of what your essay should look like. When in doubt follow this structure. Yes some of you, in fact many of you, are talented writers who will find ways to write this essay that are slightly different, but in general an essay should have the following components:

- 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 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 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: Link 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?

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

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.

