

# THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

## NATURE OF THE SUBJECT

TOK plays a special role in the Diploma Programme by providing an opportunity for students to reflect on the nature of knowledge. The task of TOK is to emphasize connections between areas of knowledge and link them to the knower in such a way that the knower can become aware of his or her own perspectives and those of the various groups whose knowledge he or she shares. TOK, therefore, explores both the personal and shared aspects of knowledge and investigates the relationships between them.

The raw material of TOK is knowledge itself. Students think about how knowledge is arrived at in the various disciplines, what the disciplines have in common and the differences between them. The fundamental question of TOK is “how do we know that?” The answer might depend on the discipline and the purpose to which the knowledge is put. TOK explores methods of inquiry and tries to establish what it is about these methods that makes them effective as knowledge tools. In this sense, TOK is concerned with knowing about knowing.

The individual knower has to try to make sense of the world and understand his or her relationship to it. He or she has at his or her disposal the resources of the areas of knowledge, for example, the academic disciplines studied in the Diploma Programme. He or she also has access to ways of knowing such as memory, intuition, reason and sense perception that help us navigate our way in a complex world. It is easy to be bewildered by the sheer diversity of the knowledge on offer. For example:

- In physics, experiment and observation seem to be the basis for knowledge. The physicist might want to construct a hypothesis to explain observations that do not fit current thinking and devises and performs experiments to test this hypothesis. Results are then collected and analysed and, if necessary, the hypothesis modified to accommodate them.
- In history there is no experimentation. Instead, documentary evidence provides the historian with the raw material for interpreting and understanding the recorded past of humanity. By studying these sources carefully a picture of a past event can be built up along with ideas about what factors might have caused it.
- In a literature class students set about understanding and interpreting a text. No observation of the outside world is necessary, but there is a hope that the text can shed some light upon deep questions about what it is to be human in a variety of world situations or can act as a critique of the way in which we organize our societies.
- Economics, by contrast, considers the question of how human societies allocate scarce resources. This is done by building elaborate mathematical models based upon a mixture of reasoning and empirical observation of relevant economic factors.
- In the islands of Micronesia, a steersman successfully navigates between two islands 1,600 km apart without a map or a compass.

In each case above there is clearly knowledge at work, although the collection as a whole illustrates a wide variety of different types of knowledge. The task of TOK is to examine different areas of knowledge and find out what makes them different and what they have in common.

At the centre of the course is the idea of **knowledge questions**. These are questions such as:

- what counts as evidence for X?
- what makes a good explanation in subject Y?
- how do we judge which is the best model of Z?
- how can we be sure of W?
- what does theory T mean in the real world?
- how do we know whether it is right to do S?

While these questions could seem slightly intimidating in the abstract, they become much more accessible

when dealt with in specific practical contexts within the TOK course. They arise naturally in the subject areas, the extended essay and CAS. The intention is that these contexts provide concrete examples of knowledge questions that should promote student discussion.

Discussion forms the backbone of the TOK course. Students are invited to consider knowledge questions against the backdrop of their experiences of knowledge in their other Diploma Programme subjects but also in relation to the practical experiences offered by CAS and the formal research that takes place for the extended essay. The experiences of the student outside school also have a role to play in these discussions, although TOK seeks to strike a balance between the shared and personal aspects of knowledge.

Recognizing the discursive aspect of the course, the TOK presentation assesses the ability of the student to apply TOK thinking to a real-life situation. The TOK essay gives the opportunity to assess more formal argumentation prompted by questions of a more general nature.

TOK is a course in critical thinking but it is one that is specifically geared to an approach to knowledge that is mindful of the interconnectedness of the modern world. "Critical" in this context implies an analytical approach prepared to test the support for knowledge claims, aware of its own weaknesses, conscious of its perspectives and open to alternative ways of answering knowledge questions. It is a demanding course but one that is an essential component not only of the Diploma Programme but of lifelong learning.

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## AIMS

The overall aim of TOK is to encourage students to formulate answers to the question "how do you know?" in a variety of contexts, and to see the value of that question. This allows students to develop an enduring fascination with the richness of knowledge.

Specifically, the aims of the TOK course are for students to:

1. make connections between a critical approach to the construction of knowledge, the academic disciplines and the wider world
2. develop an awareness of how individuals and communities construct knowledge and how this is critically examined
3. develop an interest in the diversity and richness of cultural perspectives and an awareness of personal and ideological assumptions
4. critically reflect on their own beliefs and assumptions, leading to more thoughtful, responsible and purposeful lives
5. understand that knowledge brings responsibility which leads to commitment and action.

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## SYLLABUS – OUTLINE

(The syllabus is subject to changes according to the needs and preferences of the class)

### Year 1

The nature of Knowledge.

AOK

WOK

<p>The Knowledge framework</p> <p>The TOK presentation (Internal assessment) is developed throughout year 1, finalised, and graded at the end of year 1 PPD form is to be completed before grades are awarded.</p>
<p><b>Year 2</b></p> <p>Students plan, unpack, finalized The Essay on a prescribed Title., through three interactions with the teacher and completion of the Form PPF.</p>

ASSESSMENT – OUTLINE

Assessment component	Weighing
<p><b>External assessment, Essay on a prescribed title</b></p> <p>Students plan, unpack, finalize the Essay on a prescribed Title, through three interactions with the teacher and completion of the Form PPF. PPD forms uploaded on to IB coursework</p>	67%
<p><b>Internal assessment, the Presentation (33% of the final grade)</b></p> <p>The TOK presentation (Internal assessment) is developed throughout year 1, finalised, and graded at the end of year 1 PPD form is to be completed before grades are awarded.</p>	33%