

A student guide to writing the theory of knowledge essay



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A Student Guide To Writing the Theory of Knowledge Essay Page | 2

BERTRAND RUSSELL, 1872 1970 some princi LINUS PAULING, 1901 1994

ourselves . . . When we read, another person thinks for us; we merely

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER, 1788 1860 WILLIAM FAULKNER, 1897 1962

SAMUEL JOHNSON, 1709 1784 h should embrace a distinct episode; and as

sentences should follow one another in harmonious sequence, so paragraphs

must fit into one another SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL, 1874 1965 nd say it as

clearly as you can. That is the only MATTHEW ARNOLD, 1822 1888

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, 1844 1900 Page | 3 Introduction mes from the

French verb essayer from 1533 to 1592, was the first person to use the word

in its modern sense.) The origin of the word is of more than passing interest.

Theory of Knowledge (TOK) is concerned with questions that do not have

definite answers. This does not make such questions redundant. On the

contrary, many of the most important questions in life do not have definite

answers. When writing a TOK essay, it is best to think not so much in terms

of answering a question as of illuminating a problem. That is what you are

trying to do. A certain amount of humility is in order here. You are unlikely to

come up with the definitive solution to the problem. To illuminate a problem

is to do such things as: explain what the problem is and why it matters;

clarify the meaning of key words; consider different ways of thinking about

the problem; construct arguments and counterarguments; give examples;

assess supporting evidence; explore implications; make relevant

connections; and uncover hidden assumptions. Since it deals with open-

ended questions, an essay is essentially personal in nature. Other people

may have come this way before, and you can doubtless learn a great deal

from their explorations. But your essay should of some textbook or other.

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You need to have the courage occasionally illuminate the problem. at least to strike out on your own; for this is your attempt to

Page | 4 Diploma Point Matrix TOK Points Points awarded for the externally assessed component, part 1, the essay on a prescribed title (40 points), and for the internally assessed component, part 2, the presentation (20 points), are combined to give total out of 60. The grade boundaries are then applied, to determine the band (A to E) to

The band descriptors are: A Work of an excellent standard B Work of a good standard C Work of a satisfactory standard D Work of a mediocre standard E Work of an elementary standard

The band descriptor is used both to determine the contribution of TOK to the overall diploma score and to provide the basis for reporting to schools on each stude

Page | 5 TOK and The Extended Essay The performance of a student in the Diploma Programme requirements of both Theory of Knowledge and the Extended Essay, is determined according to the quality of the work, based on the application of the IB Diploma Programme assessment criteria. It is described by one of the band descriptors A E. Using the two performance levels and the diploma points matrix, a maximum of three combined performance. A student who, for example, writes a satisfactory extended essay and whose performance in theory of knowledge is judged to be good will be awarded 1 point, while a student who writes a mediocre extended essay and whose performance in theory of knowledge is judged to be excellent will be awarded 2 points. A student who fails to submit a TOK essay, or who fails to make a presentation, will be awarded N for TOK, will score no points, and will not be awarded a diploma. Performance in both theory of knowledge and the extended essay of an elementary standard is a failing condition for the award of the diploma. 28 points overall will be required to be eligible for the

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diploma if a student As previously essay and theory of knowledge continues to represent an automatic failure. Page | 6 The TOK Essay All Diploma Programme students must submit for external assessment an essay on any one of the six titles prescribed by the IBO for each examination session. The 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. 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 issues; claims and counterclaims should be formulated. Main ideas should be illustrated with varied and effective examples that show the approach consciously taken by the student. Essays should demonstrate the of knowing. The chosen title must be used exactly as given; it must not be altered in any way. Students who modify the titles may gain very few or no points, since the knowledge issues that essays treat must be relevant to the titles in their prescribed formulation. The essay must be well presented, clearly legible, and, where appropriate, include references and a bibliography. Page | 7 Referencing Assessment details Students are expected to acknowledge fully and in detail the work, thoughts or ideas of another person if incorporated in work submitted for assessment, and to ensure that their own work is never given to another student, either in the form of hard copy or by electronic means, knowing that it might be submitted for assessment as the work of that other student. Factual claims that may be considered common knowledge (for example, However, what one person thinks of as common knowledge, within a particular culture, may

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be unfamiliar to someone else, for example, an assessor in a different part of the world. If in doubt, give an authoritative source for the claim. Even the most carefully argued case is weak if its foundations are not secure. The principle behind referencing in TOK is that it should allow the source to be traced. The simplest way to achieve this is to use consistently an accepted form of referencing. A particular difficulty arises in the context of class notes or discussion. Reference to factual claims or ideas originating from these sources should be as precise as possible (for example, giving the name of the speaker and the date of the discussion). In cases where factual claims are fundamental to the argument of an essay, high academic standards demand that such claims should always be checked and a proper, traceable source supplied.

Page | 8 Bibliography The TOK essay is not a research paper but, if specific sources are used, they must be acknowledged in a bibliography. The bibliography should include only those works (such as books, journals, magazines and online sources) consulted by the student. As appropriate, the bibliography should specify: author(s), title, date and place of publication the date when the web page was accessed, adhering to the Harvard Author-date method of listing sources.

Essay length The essay on the prescribed title must be between 1, 200 and 1, 600 words in length. Extended notes or appendices are not appropriate to a TOK essay and may not be read. The word count includes: the main part of the essay any quotations. The word count does not include: any acknowledgments the references (whether given in footnotes or endnotes)

IBO, TOK Guide Page | 9

The Essay Process Unpack the six titles Choose the title Brainstorm the elements to include Plan the Essay Write the essay

Page | 10 Assessment Criteria This criteria directly assesses the extent to which your essay shows

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that you understand the knowledge issue/s directly related to the title. P a g e | 11 When you unpack the title, you should identify the knowledge issues related to the title. Sometime the knowledge issues are very clear but for other titles are less explicit. Show your understanding of the knowledge issue identified in the title through your own reflections, expressions and perspectives. You should explicitly address the knowledge issues raised by the question. If not you will not achieve the upper mark bands in this criteria and it will have a knock on effect for the rest of your essay. You can address several knowledge issue, but the order and manner in which you do so will depend on the approach and perspectives taken by you, the knower. Use the introduction to clearly present what the knowledge issues will be, in your own words. Show both depth and breadth discussing the nature of knowers, the Woks and the AOKs etc but only to the extent that you can show they are relevant to the title. mentioned, is not enough. In some cases it might be necessary to mention all the WOKs but in others this would be less appropriate. Unpacking the title well and planning carefully will show which The same would apply for the AOKs. Some titles however explicitly request that you deal with certain WOKs and AOKs. To demonstrate depth, carefully and systematically explore and analyse one (or usually more) WOK or AOK. Show hoe the KI related to this/these WOKs and AOKs are connected to the title. Display your breadth of understanding by comparing and contrasting two or more) WOKs and AOKs, taking note of the particular focus of the title. Explain how they are different or similar. Aim for depth rather than trying to cover too many AOKs and WOKs. P a g e | 12 Think for yourself others your teacher, your TOK book may say. Link your own life experiences as a learner to the knowledge issues that you have identified. Be aware of how your own <https://assignbuster.com/a-student-guide-to-writing-the-theory-of-knowledge-essay/>

viewpoint has been shaped by your own features such as gender, social setting or type of education. P a g e | 13 Consider how there may be multiple perspectives and how the issue might be approached differently. (Culture, generation, philosophical tradition etc.) Support the claims and points that you have made by picking out specific authentic examples, often from your own experience either in everyday life, or in the areas you have studied, or from media such as films or from academic material that you access.

Convince your reader that this is your essay, and only you could writing in the first person. Using the first person is not necessary for achieving this criterion. Beware of offering unsupported opinions without considering what others might think as well. P a g e | 14 Analysis goes beyond merely stating or describing KIs. Analyse is a command term that requi essential elements or structure a high degree of depth, detail and insight. Break down in order to bring out the . Analysing therefore goes beyond merely stating or describing the KIs. You need to explore them with Whenever you make a major claim you should have given the reader reasons to agree with you. The arguments should hang together, so that, if you claim that a conclusion follows from what you have previously written, it really does. P a g e | 15 You have presented and developed at least some counterclaims alternative views against what you have been arguing. Be very clear ng counterclaims is to improve your analysis so you should deal with them rather than stating different views. The essay flows well: The reader knows where you are going next and why. Transitions should be signposted using words and phrases etc.

Where appropriate, you have told the reader what follows if you are right (the implications of your argument) and what the underlying claims have been taken for granted by you and others (the assumptions on which your <https://assignbuster.com/a-student-guide-to-writing-the-theory-of-knowledge-essay/>

views are based). P a g e | 16 P a g e | 17 Working out the design of your essay is essential. Before you start writing you should have a detailed plan. You can make sure that your ideas fit well together much better if you work with a condensed plan. After writing the essay you should check that: You have organised the ideas generated in the brainstorm well. You essay addresses in a focused manner the title that you have chosen. The essay as a whole remains connected and relevant so that the reader can easily follow your overall argument. You have explanations of the key terms identified when the titles were unpacked and that you have used them in a consistent way. You have a good introduction. You have gathered and checked the accuracy of any facts and referenced them properly. P a g e | 18 A

Understanding knowledge issues Focused on knowledge issues Links and comparisons Relevant Sophisticated understanding B Independent thinking Self-awareness Different perspectives Varied examples C Analysis of knowledge issues Insight and depth Main points justified Arguments and counterarguments Assumptions and implications D Organisation of ideas Well-structured Key concepts explained Factual accuracy References As a rough approximation and aide memoire you might think of the above criteria in terms of four Cs: CONTENT (criterion A): Think: knowledge issues CREATIVITY (criterion B): Think: personal thought CRITICAL THINKING (criterion C): Think: arguments and counterarguments CLARITY (criterion D): Think: well-structured essay Although there is more to it than this, if your essay is focused on knowledge issues, shows personal thought, develops arguments and counter-arguments, and is clearly written and well-structured, then you will at least be on the right track. P a g e | 19 Unpacking

the Titles The six titles offered cover a range of focuses and styles, each <https://assignbuster.com/a-student-guide-to-writing-the-theory-of-knowledge-essay/>

indicating different knowledge issues and inviting considerations when you write your essay. Your job is to unpack the titles and carefully examine each of them. As you go through this process, you will discover very familiar knowers or key TOK concepts such as certainty, reliability, truth, validity, context and culture. different Know what can be found in the titles All titles share basic features. They all:

- o Arise from the course.
- o Contain references to key TOK elements.
- o Contain command terms.
- o Point to or state knowledge issues.
- o Allow for different, equally valid, approaches to the essay.

Unpacking the title means examining, clarifying and exploring all the possibilities and features of each particular title. Contestable concepts

Page | 20 Unpack all six titles Consider the assumptions in each title Brainstorm Identify Key terms and phrases Command terms Check you understand the whole title Identify Key Knowledge issue/s Ambiguities Choose Unpack more thoroughly Brainstorm Consider your Knowledge Issue Concepts to clarify AOKs to use WOKs to use Place of knower/s What examples? How to analyse? make? Different perspectives? Evaluation. Counter examples and counter arguments? What points to Line of argument Plan (see pg 49) Develop Arguments Choose from brainstorming material Structure Write

Page | 21 Page | 22 Page | 23 Some titles allow for a certain amount of ambiguity in how the title or the key term is to be understood, or are based on assumptions with which you may or may not agree. Essay Types The titles from previous lists seem to fall into four broad categories. Recognising the type may assist you to unpack, address and answer the prescribed title.

Type 1 Titles that focus on a TOK related term (or two) asking for evaluation across the WOKs and/or AOKs. When mathematicians, historians and scientists say that they have explained something, are they using the word

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explain in the same way? TOK related term? AOKs? Type 2 Titles that focus on an area of knowledge (or maybe two) and require comparison or contrast between AOKs or across WOKs, generally looking at a TOK related term (or two). It is often claimed that scientific results must be replicable. Is this possible or desirable in other areas of knowledge? AOK? Other AOK? TOK-related term? P a g e | 24 Type 3 Titles that focus upon a way of knowing (or maybe two) and require comparison with other WOKs or across AOKs, generally looking at a TOK related term or two. Some people say that religious beliefs can neither be justified nor refuted by reason. However, while sometimes this claim is used as a reason for rejecting religious beliefs, at other times it is used to conclude that these beliefs are established by faith. To what extent is faith a legitimate basis for knowledge claims, in different areas of knowledge? WOK? TOK-related term? Type 4 Titles that focus on an example, quote or general statement, to be explored by reference to AOKs and/or WOKs and/or TOK related terms. There are many different authorities, including academics, politicians, global organisations and companies. As an experienced TOK student, what criteria do use to distinguish between knowledge, opinion and propaganda? General Statement? AOKs/WOKs? TOK-related terms? P a g e | 25 P a g e | 26

Choosing the Title When choosing a title that suits you, you are looking for the best match of three things: The demands of the title. The map of TOK you have developed throughout the course. Yourself as a knower with certain interests and attributes. A backward look at your TOK course should highlight certain knowledge issues in which you have gained experience and developed an interest. Reflecting on yourself as a knower, you will have discovered what style of knowing and learning you have gained through your <https://assignbuster.com/a-student-guide-to-writing-the-theory-of-knowledge-essay/>

school experiences and your everyday life. Some essays will appeal more to your interests, experience and concerns. To help you choose a title. Here is a selection of useful questions that you can ask yourself. What does each title want you to do? Do any of the titles link strongly to matters that your class covered in depth or detail? Do any of the titles suit your style of learning, for example, by requiring a more critical and rational, or a more creative and imaginative, approach? Would any of the titles allow you to focus on your academic strengths and interests, for example, the AOKs you are doing at Higher Level? Would any of titles allow you to focus on the WOKs that you prefer to use to gain knowledge? For any of the titles, could you draw on your Extended Essay research or your CAS activities? Would any of the titles allow you to focus on activities and projects that interest you outside school?

Page | 27 What other considerations might help you to choose the best title? _____

_____ You will need to think carefully about which title to choose from the IBO prescribed list. To avoid falling at the first hurdle, make sure that: You understand the question You should be clear about what the question means, what knowledge issues it raises and what is and is not relevant to it. You are interested in the question If you are not interested in the question, then you will find it difficult to get the reader excited about it. (However, if you feel too passionately about a topic, you may find it difficult to be objective.) You have something to say about the question You should be confident that you could relate the question to the ideas you have covered in TOK, the subjects you study and your own experience. P a g e | 28 Choose five titles that interest you the most and suits you best. _____

_____ Brainstorming Use the standard brainstorming techniques to come up with ideas on your chosen questions. Begin by scribbling down everything that comes to mind when you think about the question without passing judgement on the quality of the ideas. Then evaluate the ideas and discard those which are weak or irrelevant. Finally, think about how your ideas are related to one another and organise them into about six main points with related sub-points clustered around them. (You might find it useful to visualise the relationships between your ideas by making a mind map.) Since a TOK essay is primarily a reflective <https://assignbuster.com/a-student-guide-to-writing-the-theory-of-knowledge-essay/>

essay, do not start by consulting a textbook as you may be over-influenced by what you read and be inhibited from coming up with your own ideas. As the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 subject before we have thought about it ourselves When we read, have the courage to think for yourself and try to map out your own response to the question before looking at what other people have said about it. P a g e | 29 How to write an essay A

necessary but not sufficient condition for a good TOK essay is that it is a good essay. An essay is more than a series of statements loosely connected to the question. A good essay in any subject should minimally be (a) well structured; (b) clearly written. Structure es it a sense of direction. You will need to think carefully about how to order your key points so that they flow naturally and help the reader to follow your argument. Here are some points you should keep in mind: 1 Introduction An introduction can be thought of as a contract between writer and reader. You tell the reader what you are going to do and then in the body of your essay you deliver the goods. There are three things you should try to do in your introduction: get the by the question; briefly outline how you plan to tackle it. gin with something surprising or played by reason and might begin with the David Hilbert (1862 1943) was told that one of his students had given up mathematics to become a novelist, he did not because we usually identify mathematics with reason, and literature with imagination. So we begin to P a g e | 30 wonder what Hilbert meant by this comment and how, if at all, it could be justified.

When it comes to explaining what you understand by the question, you might want to: ts meaning) entrenched stereotype). You might also need to impose your own limits on the question. For example, if you tackle the question on reason and imagination, you might limit yourself to comparing <https://assignbuster.com/a-student-guide-to-writing-the-theory-of-knowledge-essay/>

the roles they play in mathematics and literature. An introduction should include a thesis statement. This is the fundamental claim you are making in your essay and is the thread which runs through it and holds everything together. With reference to the above essay, your thesis might be that reason and imagination play an important role in both mathematics and literature but, while the imaginative insights of mathematicians must ultimately be provable, those of novelists need only be reasonable. In planning your essay, the thesis will probably be the last thing you come up with and you may find that you modify it in writing your first draft. (Note that there is more than one way of writing a good essay: instead of putting your thesis in the introduction, you may decide to build to it and put it in your conclusion.)

P a g e | 31 2 Paragraphs The point of breaking an essay into paragraphs is not to make the pages look pretty, but to signal the introduction of major new points in your argument. A well-constructed paragraph typically consists of a cluster of arguments and evidence that bear directly on a specific sub-theme. You might think of it as a mini-essay with a beginning, middle and end and its own clear line of development. You should begin each paragraph with a topic sentence which, as the name implies, sets up a new topic for analysis; and end with a sentence which makes clear how it contributes to the development of the thesis. When it comes to the length and order of your paragraphs, three points are worth mentioning: Devote more space to important points and less to minor ones, and avoid getting sidetracked by trivial or irrelevant details. Pay particular attention to the transitions between your paragraphs and organise them in such a way that one flows smoothly into the next. Think of your readers and help them by occasionally signposting where you are in the overall

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development of your argument. 3 Conclusion To prevent your essay ending abruptly, you should write a conclusion which draws things together and gives your reader a sense of closure. Rather than repeating what you have already said, try to find a new way of formulating your key insights. You might also mention unresolved issues and the broader implications of your argument. Think in particular about your final sentence: a striking and well-crafted last sentence acts as an P a g e | 32 effective full stop and helps to give your reader a positive overall impression of your essay. Quick tip Get someone to read the first and last sentence of each paragraph of your essay. If it is well structured, this should be enough to give them an idea of its main points. Style Different styles are appropriate to different tasks. Good essay writing Style can be summarised in three words: clarity, economy and precision. 1 Clarity Since your goal as a writer is to communicate, the onus is on you to ensure that the reader can follow what you are saying. Some people confuse clarity with superficiality, and obscurity with depth. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, it requires real depth to write with clarity and a great deal of hard work to make writing look easy. (As Samuel Johnson, 1709 at is written without pain is read style will not only lose your readers, it will also lose you marks; for you will get no credit for writing something that no one can understand. 2 Economy Since you are writing to a 1, 600 word limit, it is important that you make every word count. Although your essay should flow, you should try to express yourself succinctly and eliminate the extravagant use of adjectives and other unnecessary words. Guard in particular against: (a) elaborate throat-clearing especially in your introduction; (b) irrelevant padding; (c) P a g e | 33 pointless repetition.

When you have written a first draft, go through each sentence and ask <https://assignbuster.com/a-student-guide-to-writing-the-theory-of-knowledge-essay/>

yourself: (i) Does it say anything? (ii) Is it relevant to my argument? the sentence from your essay.

3 Precision

Since there is a danger of a TOK essay floating off into empty abstractions, you should, where possible, try to be precise rather than vague. Three points are worth making here: Avoid death by a thousand qualifications. While you may need to qualify some of your assertions, if you are too vague and hedge them around with too many qualifications, you will end up not saying anything.

questions you should strike

Choose your language with care and be aware of subtle differences in the meanings of words. There is, for example, a difference between belief and faith; and a generalisation is not the same thing as a stereotype. which are often misused or inadequately justified.

Quick tip

When you have finished your essay, read it out loud to yourself. This is a good way of seeing how well it flows and whether there is a natural rhythm to what you have written.

P a g e | 34 Factual accuracy and references

Since TOK can be corrosive of accepted truths, it is important to keep in mind that there is a difference between a fact and an opinion: as the US senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1927 entitled to his own opinion, are patently false. Since, for example, the atomic number of gold is 79, you cannot announce that it is 52. At the same time, you should keep in mind that some alleged facts may turn out not to be facts at all. Despite being widely believed, it is not the case that we use only ten per cent of our brains or that the Great Wall of China is the only man-made object visible from space. You may need to include some references in your essay to show the source of your information. While there is no hard and fast rule about when this should be done, here are some guidelines: Everyone is You should reference surprising, counter-intuitive or little-known claims, but not well-known facts or commonly held opinions. If

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you albeit it in your own words them. should put the quotation in inverted commas and reference it. You must use the Harvard author-date referencing system with in text citations. The reader should be able to trace the source of your information and check its accuracy. Try to be consistent in the way you reference; and if you are citing a website, remember to include the date you accessed it. it is intellectual good manners to acknowledge P a g e | 35

The points we have made so far are relevant to writing a good essay in any subject. We now need to talk more specifically about what makes a good essay a good TOK essay. Key features of a TOK essay Content Despite being an unusual subject, TOK does have a specific content not in the sense of a syllabus to be memorised and reproduced, but in the sense of a range of questions to be explored and reflected on. The content of TOK is therefore the critical skills that you should demonstrate. (The IBO consists almost entirely of questions and does not refer to any content.) From the start, you need to be clear about what distinguishes a TOK essay from a subject-specific essay on the one hand and a general essay on the other. Here are three pointers: 1. TOK is focused on knowledge issues The central question in TOK is and the course asks you to assess the strengths and weaknesses of knowledge claims in various Areas of Knowledge. 2. TOK deals with second-order questions. TOK is not primarily concerned with first-order questions within a subject but with second-order questions about a subject known? 3. TOK is interdisciplinary and comparative. TOK asks you to compare and contrast various sources and types of knowledge. P a g e | 36 To write an essay that is sufficiently rich in TOK content, you will be expected to demonstrate a detailed understanding of the ways of knowing and areas of knowledge you choose to discuss. Above all, avoid vague, superficial, cliché-

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ridden characterisations of, say, mathematics, the natural sciences, or the arts. For it is impossible to give a worthwhile analysis of a subject you do not understand properly. Since the lifeblood of TOK is critical thinking, you should also ensure that description is always a prelude to analysis. You might, for example, briefly describe the theory of evolution in order to analyse the extent to which it is a genuine scientific theory. But, if you find yourself writing at length about HMS Beagle, you have drifted on to the reef of descriptive irrelevance and will, assuredly, be shipwrecked. Quick tip Ask yourself if your essay could have been written by someone who has not contain enough TOK content. Personal thought In writing a TOK essay, a mixture of insecurity and inertia might tempt you recycle their thoughts and opinions. Given the importance that the IBO place on personal thought, you should resist this temptation and limit any recycling urge to your dealings with household garbage. According to assessmentreflective exploration of the knowledge issues and significant selfThis may sound intimidating, but the expectation is not that you come up with a Big Idea that no one has thought of before P a g e | 37 (unlikely) or summarise your personal philosophy of life, the universe and everything (undesirable). What is required is that you show personal thought in a variety of more modest ways such as: the position you take the points you raise the way you organise them the comparisons you make your choice of examples your use of language your awareness of bias. Keep in mind that an accumulation of small examples of personal thought will, when taken together, give your essay a distinctive voice. Once you start to focus on a specific question, you will find that new ideas occur to you in the process of planning and writing a draft, and you may be surprised by the freshness and originality of your final

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essay. Definitions There is a convention, with which you are probably familiar, that you should begin an essay by defining your terms. There are several dangers with this convention. The first is that, rather than making a judgement about what needs definition, you simply define everything in sight. The second is that you give facile dictionary definitions of key terms and then wash your hands of them. Part of the problem here is that many dictionary definitions are point to grasp is that TOK is full of what might be called contested P a g e | 38 concepts. The hallmark of such concepts is that they are both important and up for grabs, in the sense that there are substantial disagreements about what they mean disagreements that cannot be resolved simply by consulting a dictionary. There are numerous examples of such concepts: These concepts are worth arguing about because something hangs on how ch a way that astrology can be described as a science, then why not teach astrology as an IB subject? And if the Popular Front for the Liberation of Habagashi consists of freedom fighters rather than terrorists, then why should we fight them? What emerges from this discussion is that when you define a word you need to show why the definition matters and what hangs on it. (If nothing hangs on it, then it is probably not worth defining.) Furthermore, you should think in terms not so much of pinning down the meaning of a word and drawing a circle round it as of analysing a concept. While you might begin with a preliminary definition, you will probably need to refine it during the course of your essay. You might, for example, begin by saying that knowledge is commonly defined as justified true belief, and then find that you need to say more about what counts as an adequate justification. The point, in short, is that a definition should be the beginning rather than the end of reflection. Instead of relying <https://assignbuster.com/a-student-guide-to-writing-the-theory-of-knowledge-essay/>

on a dictionary to elucidate a concept, you might adopt the following three-part strategy: (a) gather typical examples; (b) find common characteristics; (c) test your concept. If, for example, you are of art, such as Mona Lisa Jupiter Symphony War and Peace. Then ask yourself what they have in common that justifies show skill, or appeal to our emotions. P a g e | 39

trying to think of counter-examples. Can you think of examples of things that are not beautiful, nor skillful, nor emotionally engaging that you would still want to call art? From this brief sketch, you can see that you are now on the way to a much richer discussion of the nature of art than anything that can be conjured out of a dictionary. Arguments Some students do poorly in their TOK essay because they do not know what an argument is. An argument is not a series of statements loosely related to a theme, but connected series of to quote a famous Monty Python sketch statements intended to establish a definite ents merely state things, an argument gives reasons (premises) to support a claim (conclusion). To see the difference, compare the following two sets of statements: Astrology is the belief that the position of the stars at the time of your birth affects your destiny. There are ten times more astrologers than astronomers in the United States. Despite its popularity, astrology cannot be classified as a science. One of the hallmarks of a genuine science is that it makes testable predictions. Admittedly, astrologers do make predictions, but they are so vague that they cannot be verified or falsified. So, unlike astronomy, astrology cannot be classified as a science. The difference between (1) and (2) is that, while (1) makes three unrelated assertions about astrology, (2) makes a claim that is supported by reasons. There is a simple test called the therefore test for determining whether or not a series of statements constitutes an argument. If you can put a <https://assignbuster.com/a-student-guide-to-writing-the-theory-of-knowledge-essay/>

therefore in front of one of the statements and the series makes sense, then it is an argument. (You may need to reorder the statements if the claim P a g e | 40 is in the beginning or the middle of the series.) You can see that, while (2) there is no way of ordering the statements in (1) them. If you make such a series of unsubstantiated assertions in your essay, then even if they are vaguely relevant to the title them. Quick tip When you have finished your essay, go through it and make explicit all of the implicit therefores . This will enable you to see how many arguments your essay contains. you will get no credit for Evidence Even if the arguments in your essay are logically valid, they will only be as good as the reasons on which they are based. To return to argument (2) above which is a valid argument your readers will only find the conclusion convincing if they are willing to accept that science makes testable predictions and astrology does not. To give weight to your argument, you might want to flesh it out by comparing the kinds of predictions made in astronomy with those made in astrology thought was just a dream comes into much sharper focus in the week Since you cannot justify every assertion you make without getting caught in an infinite regress, you will need to make a judgement about which assertions need to be supported with further evidence and which can be supporting evidence if what you are saying is: (a) central to your argument; (b) disputable or surprising. The more that hangs on an assertion and the more disputable it is, the more evidence you should give in support of it. P a g e | 41 (As the astronomer Carl Sagan, 1934 You will also need to think about the strength of the evidence you appeal to. Some of it should be drawn directly from your own experience; but a lot will be derived from second-hand sources such as class notes, books, TV, newspapers, discussions with friends and <https://assignbuster.com/a-student-guide-to-writing-the-theory-of-knowledge-essay/>

acquaintances and, of course, the Internet. Exercise caution here! Rather than accept the sources you use at face value, you should, where appropriate, be willing to question their reliability and trustworthiness. This is particularly necessary in the case of the Internet, which is now most information. Keep in mind that, despite the existence of many good websites, the Internet is not an electronic oracle that infallibly dispenses truth. What is required when using any of these sources is that you approach them critically. Ask questions such as: Who says? Do they have the relevant expertise? Are they trustworthy? Do they have a vested interest? Is it? Do they show both sides? Do they use emotive language? Do other experts agree? Since evidence, whatever its source, is ultimately based on perception or reason or intuition, you may at some point want to discuss these ways of knowing in more detail. You might, for example, draw attention to the fallibility of perception, or the limitations of reason, or the unreliability of intuition. However, it is important that you do not confuse critical thinking with destructive thinking; and you should, where appropriate, draw attention to the strengths as well as the weaknesses of any such sources of knowledge. In particular, you should avoid a kind of idiot scepticism which mindlessly questions everything. Your goal is not to reduce the edifice of knowledge to rubble but to engage in the difficult task of distinguishing between more and less reasonable claims to knowledge.

Page | 42 Counter-arguments Your TOK essay should not just consist of arguments backed up by evidence: you must also consider counter-arguments. To the extent that you question the strength of your supporting evidence (see above), there is likely to be a natural movement from argument to counter-argument. To help this movement, try to think of your

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essay not so much as a monologue but as a dialogue. Ideally, it should contain two (or more) voices, one proposing various arguments and the other opposing and suggesting alternatives. Since controversial issues are the meat and potatoes of TOK, you should be able to find at least two sides to every question. If you have kept good notes from TOK class discussions, then you will have a preliminary bank of arguments and counter-arguments on which to draw. You should be able to supplement this through background reading, trying out arguments on friends, and above all personal thought. If you cannot think of any counter-arguments to what you are saying, then it is probably so obvious that it is not worth arguing for at all. You should, however, avoid the straw-man fallacy of constructing and then demolishing weak or spurious counter-arguments. If you plan to take a position on an issue, the best way of carrying conviction is to show that it can withstand even the strongest criticism that can be levelled against it. Once you have given a counter-argument, you will need to decide how it affects your original argument. There are two main types of response you can make: 1. Refutation You reject the counter-argument by showing that it is mistaken or unlikely or unimportant. 2. Concession You allow that there is some truth in the counterargument and qualify your original argument to take account of it. P a g e | 43 Here are two abbreviated examples to illustrate each of the above patterns of response: 1. We usually assume that human beings are capable of genuine altruism(claim); but it could be argued that even so-called altruists are simply doing what they most want to do and so, in a sense, are being selfish (counterclaim). However, if everything anyone ever its meaning (refutation). 2. The language of universal human rights reflects a widespread belief that values are objective (claim); but some

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people argue that the sheer diversity of moral practices means that there are in fact no objective values (counterclaim). Admittedly, different cultures have very different views about, for example, sexual morality (concession); but I would still argue that there are some core values common to all societies (qualification of claim). These examples are just rough sketches and they would need to be fleshed out to carry any conviction in an essay; but they should at least give you an idea of how you might respond to counter-arguments.

Sound reasoning The arguments you use in your essay will not get you very far unless they are good arguments. To avoid sloppy reasoning, check that the claims you make are supported by the reasons you give for them. Guard, in particular, against the following commonly committed errors:

Hasty generalisation: This is the fallacy of generalising from insufficient evidence. Above all, avoid superficial caricatures of subject areas and cultures.

Black-and-white thinking: This is the fallacy of going from one extreme to the other. For example, just because we cannot achieve certainty, it does not follow that any opinion is as good as any other.

Inconsistency: Check the overall consistency of your essay and ensure that your various points do not contradict one another.

Quick tip Go through your essay and highlight every generalisation (e. g. rly justified.

Depth Your TOK essay may be focused on knowledge issues and contain sound arguments supported by evidence, but if it comes across as thin it will still not achieve a top grade. You need to give it weight. In general, the more good points you make, the better you are likely to do. (However, keep in mind that such points will only have value if they are crafted into a meaningful whole.) In writing your essay, you might think of yourself as operating with two different lenses: a zoom for depth and a wide-

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angle for breadth. Depth is about taking your analysis to the next level.

Among the factors you might think about here are:

1. Depth of dialogue Try to extend your dialogues beyond the cursory cycle of argument and counter-argument, and think of a response to the counter-argument and a counter-response to that. You will, of course, need to think about: (a) the quality as well as the quantity of such exchanges; (b) at what point to bring them to a close (this is likely to depend on how important the particular argument is to your overall thesis).
2. Weight of evidence The more supporting evidence you can give for your arguments the more conviction they will carry. For example, if you are trying to argue that literature contributes to our knowledge of the world, then saying that it not only illuminates the human condition but also teaches us sensitivity to language is probably better than making only one of these points.
3. Relevant distinctions Introducing relevant distinctions will add subtlety and finesse to your argument. You might, for example, distinguish between knowing how and knowing that; or between inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning; or between an empirical proposition and a metaphysical proposition. You should also be aware that when you talk about an area of knowledge such as, say, the arts, there are many different art forms, and that what holds true of one will not necessarily hold true of another.
4. Key implications By exploring the implications of your argument, you show that you are thinking around the issue. Ask yourself what follows from the point you are considering. For example, you might argue that: If knowledge is equated with certainty, then it follows that we know almost nothing. If all values are relative, then it follows that we can no longer speak of universal human rights. If human free will is an illusion, then it follows that we can no longer hold people

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responsible for their actions. 5. Background assumptions Ask yourself What assumptions am I making here? and, where appropriate, be willing to question them. Since we often confuse what is cultural with what is natural, and unthinkingly assume that the practices we have grown up with are attention to any cultural biases that may be colouring your analysis. Breadth When it comes to breadth, you should think in terms of making connections. As was mentioned earlier, TOK essays are usually comparative in nature and you will be expected to consider the similarities and differences between various ways of knowing and different Areas of Knowledge. As a brainstorming exercise, you should be able to think of an interesting link between any given word on the TOK diagram and every other word on it. This will help to get you thinking in a sufficiently broad way. You must then decide which of these connections are relevant to your chosen question. You will also need to ensure that you do not achieve breadth at the expense of depth. P a g e | 47 If, for example, you tackle the question mentioned earlier roles played by reason and imagination in at least two Areas of Knowledge but do not try to cover all six. To attempt the latter in one thousand six hundred words is to condemn yourself to writing an essay that is nothing more than a superficial survey of the territory. As well as making connections within the TOK diagram, you should also try to come up with some different perspectives on your chosen topic. To do this, you might ask yourself How would an X look at this? where an X is someone of a different age, gender, profession, culture, or historical era. (You could even ask how an animal or a Martian would look at whatever it is). This will help you to think beyond the confines of your own viewpoint and may bring to light hidden assumptions in your own thinking. Examples writing and help the reader to grasp some of <https://assignbuster.com/a-student-guide-to-writing-the-theory-of-knowledge-essay/>

your more abstract points. There are a number of factors to keep in mind here:

1. Hypothetical examples While occasional thought experiments have their place, real examples generally carry more conviction than manufactured, hypothetical ones.
2. Clichéd examples vice versa, is not the only example of a paradigm shift. P a g e | 48
3. Representative examples Try to ensure that your examples are representative so that you do not distort things by focusing only on extreme cases.
4. Varied examples Try to take examples drawn from different sources such as: personal experience, the news media, different subject areas and a variety of cultures.
5. Brevity of examples Keep your examples relatively brief and make sure that they illustrate what they are supposed to illustrate.
6. Examples vs statistics Keep in mind that, as Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809 but in some cases dry statistics are a more reliable guide to the truth.

Quotations You may wish to include a few well-chosen quotations in your essay, but you should be aware of two common pitfalls:

1. Cut-and-paste essays Make sure your essay does not degenerate into a cut and- paste montage. While two or three short quotations are one thing, an essay words is quite another. You will get no credit for such intellectual ventriloquism. (see rent-a-quote essays).
2. Undigested quotations Rather than simply parachuting quotations into your essay, try to integrate them into the flow of your argument. In particular, keep in mind that a quotation is a provocation not a proof and that a telling quotation is not in itself enough to clinch an argument. Given this, you should be willing to subject quotations to critical scrutiny. For example, if you quote John Keats (1795 1821), that is all / Ye know on earth, and P a g e | 49 itself and then start a new paragraph. For, as it stands, it is clearly false.

After all, there are many beautiful things de Milo that are not true, and many
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truths such as the Holocaust that are not beautiful.

Perhaps there is a more interesting interpretation of what Keats said; but, if that is the case, you will need to convince the reader of it. Note: According to the IBO definition, plagiarism found to have plagiarised in the TOK essay you submit for assessment, you will not be awarded your diploma. To avoid plagiarism, the IBO says when you quote another person, be sure that you put their words in inverted commas and give appropriate references. Page | 50 Common Pitfalls 1. Avoid sweeping generalisations and claims.

(Oversimplification). If you do not intend to show that you are aware that you are making a large generalisation or to analyse it in some way, stay away from it otherwise you are at risk of losing marks in criteria C. 2. Avoid caricatures and stereotypes: For example all historians are willingly or unwillingly victims of bias. Artists always rely on emotion and scientists always rely on reason always without exception. Be 3. Avoid an essay composed of endless rhetorical questions. What is truth? Can we ever be certain? How can we know? If you do not try to answer these questions, they will be considered empty rhetoric and you will be penalised. 4. -astudents enter key words and terms into a search engine and hopes for the best and then copies and pastes quotes and passages from the Internet into the essay. 5. Avoid fullcounterclaims, consideration counterarguments of alternative and perspectives will absence of acknowledgement undermine and the soundness of your own arguments. 6. Avoid using the TOK textbook as a substitute for thought. The your own thinking to encourage you to consider thoughtfully the knowledge issues within your own experience as a knower, with a perspective of your own. Do not use arguments and examples from the textbook even with citations. Page | 51 Essay Timeline Outline <https://assignbuster.com/a-student-guide-to-writing-the-theory-of-knowledge-essay/>

The TOK essay is externally marked; therefore its purpose must be very clear to the examiner. To help you organise your ideas and map out the essay writing you will undertake it is imperative that you submit a detailed plan with your annotated bibliography (works cited). Your planning should include the question, the thesis statement, topic sentences (which might also be a knowledge issue), knowledge issues, introduction and conclusion. Unlike the presentation you might extract a number of relevant but related knowledge issues. However all need to be explored in detail also it is best to limit your enquiry to the most pertinent thereby avoiding a mosaic essay. (Many knowledge issues explored but not connected in any way). A strong outline is a strong essay. There are many possible ways of completing your planning. Here is a template for you to consider.

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Name Essay title: (must be exactly as published by the IBO. You may not omit a punctuation mark or change any word in the title).

Thesis statement Topic sentence presented as an argument. Premise of argument 1 2 3 Therefore Thesis statement

Introduction Thesis statement why is worth investigating? Knowledge issues Establish what your position is on the issues. What, if anything, is already known or has been written about the topic? Place the knowledge issues in context. Scope/overview/method Establish that the rest of the essay is worth reading. Groundwork Purposeful clarification of terms, concepts and ideas. Agreed understanding of controversial terms. Establish logical purpose of will go with a pragmatic Supporting details Topic sentence presented as a counterclaim. 1. 2. Identify other possible positions. Counterclaims should not be presented as an argument but an examination of the issues or methods that would lead to the counterclaim. Do not create a counterclaim that is easy to refute (strawman fallacy). Do not avoid a counterclaim only

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Conclusion Draw together all conclusions of the thesis statements and knowledge issues in a way that directly addresses the essay title. It must be relevant and relate to the thesis statement. Any unresolved issues should be included. Topic sentence presented as an argument. Premise of argument 1 2 3 Therefore Thesis statement Supporting details 3. 4. Topic sentence presented as an argument. Premise of argument 1 2 3 Therefore Thesis statement refuted. Conclusion on counterclaim Clarify only what is needed for the logical purpose of the essay. Supporting details

P a g e | 53 Date Week ending January 11 Task Unpack essay titles Choose two possible titles Brainstorm both titles Research Annotated Bibliography Three works cited cards per title. Choose title Outline submitted for approval There will be a collection point in the IB office. 8 additional works cited cards for the chosen title Feedback on outlines returned to students. Working draft to be presented in Lessons Working draft to be peer assessed using a feedback form that will be provided. Full version to be submitted for formal feedback. Essays returned to students with formal written feedback. Complete copy in lesson. Final version emailed to p-koster@bisspudong. com for Turn it in verification. Essay electronically submitted to the IBO. 18 January 24 January 31 January 7 February 18 February 1 March 5 March 8: 30am 6 March Now write the essay You have all demonstrated that you are capable of critical and reflective thinking. Follow the timeline and make sure that you allocate some time to your essay every day until the due date. Enjoy the journey. You have now gained skills that will stand you in good stead for the rest of your life. However in the immediate future, apply your TOK skills in your examinations and internal assessment tasks. You will be amazed at the outcome. P a g e | 54 P a g e | 55 Sources 1. Van de Lagemaat, R. 2005 <https://assignbuster.com/a-student-guide-to-writing-the-theory-of-knowledge-essay/>

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