

TOK FOR PARENTS

Please note the following about this PDF:

- The original version of this e-learning resource features extensive use of video. Please access the e-learning version to view these videos.

About this resource

This short resource is designed to give parents an experience of learning as a DP student. If you visit each section in order, you will be encouraged to construct your own knowledge through a series of interactive activities.

However, if you only want a brief introduction to TOK, then the **Welcome to Theory of Knowledge** section is for you.

1. [Welcome to Theory of Knowledge \(TOK\)](#). This section provides a general overview of the TOK course.
2. [Understanding Theory of Knowledge \(TOK\)](#). A more detailed introduction to the basics of the TOK course is offered in this section.
3. [TOK in action](#). Here, we provide some TOK activities.
4. [Summing up TOK](#). In this final section, provide you with some tips and resources to reflect on your progress and take your learning further.

Section 1: Welcome to Theory of Knowledge (TOK)

This section of the resource featured IB educators covering the fundamental elements of TOK. The video should be viewed on the e-learning resource. It features the interviewees answering the following questions:

- What is TOK?
- What are the building blocks of TOK?
- What is a knowledge claim?
- What is a knowledge question?
- How is TOK taught?
- Why is TOK essential to the Diploma Programme?
- What do parents need to know in order to help students be successful in TOK?
- What are some ways you communicate the TOK expectations and benefits to parents?

Section 2: Understanding Theory of Knowledge (TOK)

Now that we've heard an overview of TOK, let's delve a little deeper. Confucius said that 'real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance'. In TOK students sometimes feel ignorant. The more they learn, the more questions they have!

That's why they use the tools of TOK, like **Ways of Knowing** and **Areas of Knowledge**, to help structure those questions and understand the world around them.

TOK in the DP

Theory of Knowledge (TOK) is a **practical** course (as opposed to a philosophical one) which investigates the nature of knowledge in a variety of different contexts, as well as the means by which knowledge is made and tested.

TOK is a **core element** of the Diploma Programme, which all DP students must take and to which all IB schools are required to devote at least 100 hours of class time.

TOK and the Diploma Programme subjects should support each other through the use of common TOK language. In this way, the learning that takes place in one subject is reinforced in another.

Theory of Knowledge is one of three core elements of the Diploma programme, along with **creativity, action and service (CAS)** and **the extended essay (EE)**.



Its place at the center of the diagram reflects the fact that TOK connects to all the other subjects that students take.

The core is seen as the heart of the Diploma Programme. The academic disciplines, while separate to the core, are nonetheless linked to it. The core relies on these disciplines to provide rich content, and individual subjects should be supported by the core.

Assessing TOK

Students in the DP are assessed in six subjects and can score a maximum of 7 points in each subject. TOK and the extended essay offer students the opportunity to score an additional 3 bonus points, bringing the total possible score to 45. The TOK component is based on two assessments:

1. **Oral presentation.** Every TOK student is required to produce a 10-minute oral presentation and a written planning document. Students can present individually, or in groups of two or three. The topic of the presentation should be a knowledge question that the students have identified and extracted from a real-life situation. That real-life situation could be almost anything, from the student's personal experiences to global news. However, it should allow the student to ask questions about knowledge. The oral presentation is worth 67% of the TOK assessment.
2. **Essay.** Each year, the IB prescribes six titles that the students can choose to write about. Each title asks a generic question that crosses disciplines. As students answer the question, they should demonstrate their ability to use the tools of TOK, such as Areas of Knowledge and Ways of Knowing, to discuss claims and counterclaims and formulate their own conclusion. The essay should not be more than 1,600 words, not including acknowledgements, references, diagrams or the bibliography. The essay is worth 33% of the TOK assessment.

Aims of TOK

The main aim of TOK is to help students formulate answers to the question “how do you know?” in a variety of contexts, and to see the value of that question.

This approach helps students by allowing them to develop an enduring fascination with the richness of knowledge. By asking the question 'how do you know?' they are encouraged to question their own understanding of reality, and to think of knowledge not as a series of facts, but as a collection of individual and shared understandings.

The TOK course will:

- ask students to consider how they construct knowledge and to draw connections between specific subject areas and the wider world (*For example, students might be asked how they know that the sky is blue, connecting to the science of colour and the extent to which they can trust their own sense perceptions*)
- encourage students to develop an awareness of how personal and shared knowledge is constructed and how to examine this. (*For example, a student's understanding of a particular faith will likely be influenced by their upbringing.*)

TOK asks students to consider their experiences in the context of a larger group. How much of what they know is personal, and how much is shared? What is the interaction between personal and shared knowledge?)

- allow students to critically reflect on their own beliefs and assumptions. (*For example, students may have strong views on animal testing. TOK might consider this topic from different 'Ways of Knowing', by asking students to consider it from the point of view of 'reason' and 'emotion', or by considering different 'Areas of Knowledge' like 'ethics' and 'the natural sciences'.)*)

Everything is AOK

How do we know things? Using a range of methods of inquiry, that incorporate different **ways of knowing**, helps us to construct knowledge in different areas of knowledge (AOKs). TOK distinguishes between eight **areas of knowledge** (AOK), of which TOK teachers are advised to cover at least six, and eight ways of knowing (WOK), of which teachers are advised to cover at least four.

[Instruction text]: Below are two buttons, select each for a detailed list of areas of knowledge (AOK) and ways of knowing (WOK).

The eight areas of knowledge are:

- mathematics,
- natural science,
- human science,
- history,
- the arts,
- ethics,
- religious knowledge systems,
- indigenous knowledge systems.

The ways of knowing are:

- sense perception,
- reason,
- emotion,
- language,
- imagination,
- intuition,

- memory,
- faith.

Within the study of the ways of knowing and areas of knowledge, consideration is given to both personal knowledge ("how I know") and shared knowledge ("how we know"), with the latter predominating.

The Knowledge Framework

The knowledge framework is a core TOK tool that recognizes areas of knowledge (AOKs) as a complex system of five interacting components.

These components allow students to compare and contrast different AOKs using a common vocabulary. They allow for a deeper exploration of the relationship between AOKs and WOKs.

It's an important tool because it highlights that comparing different areas of knowledge is **not just a descriptive exercise**.

The framework is appearing on screen now. Select each component in turn to see the questions they prompt you to ask.

The five components of the Knowledge Framework are shown below:

1. Scope/applications
2. Concepts/language
3. Methodology
4. Historical development
5. Links to personal knowledge.

Summary

Below is a summary of main points from this section:

- Knowledge can take many forms.
- TOK encourages students to examine how we know what we claim to know by analyzing knowledge claims and exploring knowledge questions.
- When discussing knowledge we can make a distinction between shared and personal knowledge.
- Most knowledge is shared knowledge.
- Much of this shared knowledge is organized into areas of knowledge (AOKs). In order to examine these areas of knowledge we can use the knowledge framework. The framework specifies five key features of each AOK: scope and applications, language and concepts, methodology, historical development and links to personal knowledge.

Section 3: TOK in action

The classroom is where students implement their TOK tools. John Locke wrote that "no man's knowledge here can go beyond his experience". In TOK, we try to push the boundaries of our knowledge by experiencing the world in different ways.

Please visit the e-learning resource to watch the video **Introducing TOK from a student's perspective**. It features the students answering the following questions:

- How would you describe the TOK course?
- When you first started taking TOK, what did you think of the course?
- What kinds of adjustment in thinking and approach did you have to make in order to adapt to the demands of TOK?
- How does TOK differ from the other courses in the IB diploma programme?
- How do the principles of TOK enhance your practice in other subject areas?
- How much do you discuss TOK with your parents?
- How would you describe TOK to your parents?
- Have you ever found that what you study in TOK has caused any conflict or concern at home?
 - If so, what aspect of the course was source of the concern?
- What do you see as the benefits of TOK for:
 - helping you to be successful in the IB Diploma Programme?
 - helping you to make your way through life in college and beyond?

Activity 1: shared vs personal knowledge

Let's test your personal knowledge with a few quick questions. You can answer these questions individually, but it may be useful to carry out some discussion with others.

Please answer the following questions by recording your ideas in the box provided (to the right).

Question	Correct answer
<i>How far away is the moon from the earth?</i>	
<i>What was the date of the signing of the Declaration of Independence?</i>	

<i>Given a right angled triangle, what is the theorem that describes the relationship between the lengths of the three sides?</i>	
<i>What is one important idea in Shakespeare's Sonnet 18?</i>	

The correct answers are shown below.

Question	Correct answer
<i>How far away is the moon from the earth?</i>	384,400 km
<i>What was the date of the signing of the Declaration of Independence?</i>	July 4, 1776
<i>Given a right angled triangle, what is the theorem that describes the relationship between the lengths of the three sides?</i>	Pythagoras' theorem, $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$
<i>What is one important idea in Shakespeare's Sonnet 18?</i>	Love, death, language, and more

Think about how you answered these questions and consider the following reflective prompts:

- Can you identify the sources you used to recall the answer?
- If you didn't know the answer, how might you find it out?
- Think about the means by which the answer to the question was determined for the very first time by the professional who determined it.
- Do you think there is a single identifiable answer to these four questions? Why do you think this? Do you think the answers shown are debatable?

In this activity, **you have been asked to think about what you actually know and how you know it.** This knowledge is your own personal knowledge; however, most people will only know these things because someone else found them out and shared that knowledge.

For the first three questions, it is almost certainly true that you did not discover the answer for yourself from original source documents, your own personal measurements of the earth and moon, or from creating your own mathematical proof. Those three questions require knowledge that was amassed long ago by others.

The final question, about Shakespeare's Sonnet, is slightly different. It is possible that you know something about this sonnet because you were told, but it is also

possible that you read the sonnet for yourself and, based on your knowledge of the nuances of the English language, you created your own interpretation; personal knowledge.

We should note, however, that your ability to interpret the sonnet does require the shared knowledge of the English language that you have garnered over your personal lifetime of learning English.

While you may very well have been asked these questions before, it is possible that you have not been asked these the knowledge questions — the questions about how you know the answers to the content questions.

The process of going through this thought experiment is directly related to the process students go through in class. TOK focuses on learning to formulate and answer knowledge questions.

Activity 2: investigating differences between the Areas of Knowledge.

This activity will help you to understand the way in which students in TOK consider knowledge from different perspectives.

Consider which of these two images is **more likely to have been created by an artist and which by a natural scientist?**

Image 1

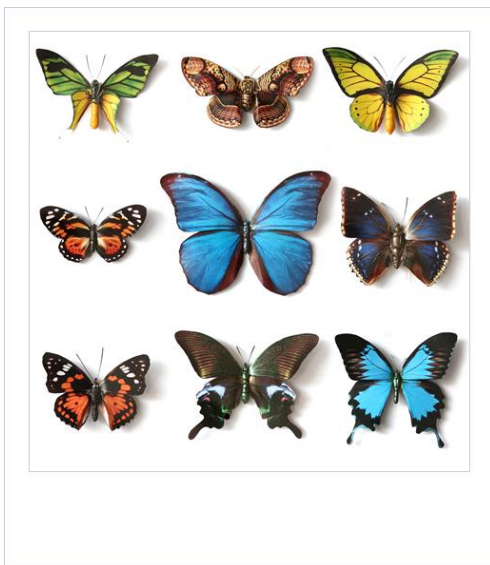
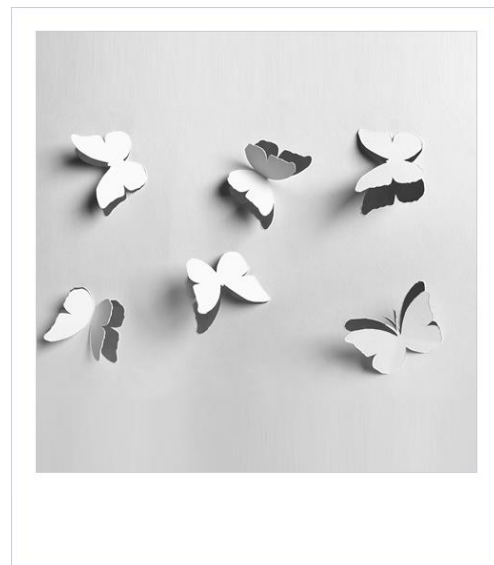


Image 2



Think about how you know this and which features of the image suggest these particular areas of knowledge?

Our thoughts

It is quite clear that Image 1 is the work of a natural scientist and Image 2, the work of an artist.

Image 1 shows real butterflies displayed and photographed for **ease of comparison of details**. This reflects one kind of work that scientists do: they observe the world very closely in order to describe it accurately.

Image 2 consists of a collection of shapes that **suggest butterflies in general**. They have been designed and laid out to form a pleasing image that stimulates the imagination. This image reflects one kind of work that artists do: they take what they see in the real world and alter it, using their imagination, in order to create something aesthetically pleasing.

While it is possible to imagine that an artist might have contrived Image 1 as a study in colour, for example, or comparative shapes, it would be extremely unlikely that a scientist would have any need to contrive the image on the right, as it does not help shed any light on the nature or processes of the physical universe.

Now consider the two images below.

Image 1

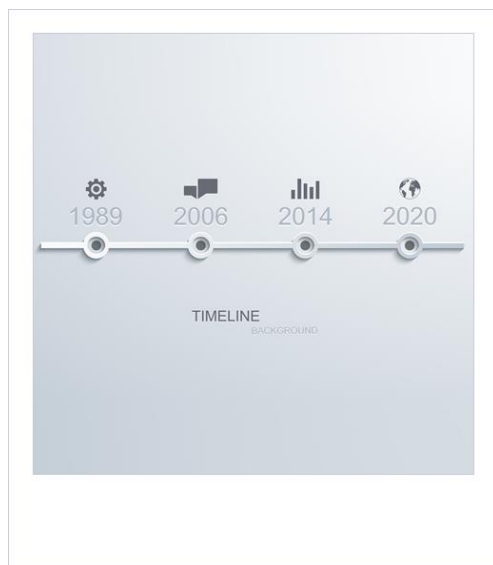


Image 2



One was created by an historian and one was created by an economist. **Which do you think was created by a historian?**

Our thoughts

We would say that **image 1** was created by a historian. Part of a historian's role is to **determine the order and relationship of events in history**, so a timeline of events is a logical means of conveying some of their work.

The role of an economist involves **mapping trends and making predictions for the future**.

Both the historian and human scientist might have a use for the graph on the right. The graph may represent a particular situation that once occurred, useful to an historian studying past economic trends. At the same time, an economist may use a similar chart using past data to make further predictions.

The methods and goals of the human scientist and the historian are in some ways very similar. The primary difference is that while the historian tries to document and explain specific events of the past, the human scientist tries to document and explain universal patterns of human behavior. The work of the historian can be very useful to the human scientist in helping him or her to spot and explain patterns, while the work of the human scientist can be very helpful to the historian in helping him or her understand the events of the past.

Now, consider this image.



Six professionals asked six different questions about this tree. The professionals were an:

- artist
- historian
- human scientist (economist)
- human scientist (social anthropologist)
- natural scientist
- mathematician

The questions each asked are show in the table below. **Can you match the professional with their question?** Record your thoughts in the right hand column.

Question	Professional
<i>What social function does this object perform?</i>	

<i>What is the effect on the economy of increased use of electricity for the lighting of holiday decorations?</i>	
<i>What type of tree is this and what is the impact on the population of that tree species of the cutting of trees for the holiday?</i>	
<i>When did the practice of decorating trees for the holiday season first arise and why?</i>	
<i>How does the choice of colour enhance the aesthetic effect of this tree?</i>	
<i>If we know the height of the tree, what other information do we need before we can calculate the volume of the space taken up by the branches?</i>	

The correct answers are shown below.

Question	Professional
<i>What social function does this object perform?</i>	Human scientist (social anthropologist)
<i>What is the effect on the economy of increased use of electricity for the lighting of holiday decorations?</i>	Human scientist (economist)
<i>What type of tree is this and what is the impact on the population of that tree species of the cutting of trees for the holiday?</i>	Natural scientist
<i>When did the practice of decorating trees for the holiday season first arise and why?</i>	Historian
<i>How does the choice of colour enhance the aesthetic effect of this tree?</i>	Artist

<p><i>If we know the height of the tree, what other information do we need before we can calculate the volume of the space taken up by the branches?</i></p>	<p>Mathematician</p>
--	----------------------

Our thoughts

This activity demonstrates the idea that areas of knowledge are not defined solely by their content but are largely defined by the kinds of questions that practitioners ask and their purposes for asking them.

Activity 3: developing an understanding of the TOK essay

We are now going to consider some TOK essay titles:

Title 1

“Can we have beliefs or knowledge which are independent of our culture?”

Generate some ideas about what points might be made in an essay addressing this title.

Record your ideas in the box below and compare them with our own.

Our thoughts

Knowledge issues that could be addressed in response to this title include:

- To what extent does our culture determine or shape what we believe or know?
- What is the impact of culture in the production and distribution of knowledge in various areas of knowledge?
- Are our beliefs or our knowledge more susceptible to cultural influences?
- To what extent do the perspectives that are fostered through membership of a particular culture exert positive or negative influences on our knowledge?
- To what extent are we aware of the impact of culture on what we believe or know?
- Is there anything which is true for all cultures?

- Who is best placed to attempt to evaluate a culture (and its impact on knowledge or belief) objectively?

Title 2

“Knowledge is nothing more than the systematic organization of facts.”

Discuss this statement in relation to two areas of knowledge (mathematics, natural sciences, human sciences, arts, ethics, religious knowledge systems or indigenous knowledge systems).

Generate some ideas about what points might be made in an essay addressing this title.

Record your ideas in the box below and compare them with our own.

Our thoughts

Knowledge issues that could be addressed in response to this title include:

- What counts as a fact in different areas of knowledge? Do all areas of knowledge deal in facts?
- To what extent can areas of knowledge be characterized by their factual content and organized structure? Is this a sufficient description?
- What criteria could be used in order to organize facts in a systematic fashion?
- What room is there for personal interpretation in a system of organized facts?
- What room is there for cultural differences in a system of organized facts?
- What assumptions are implicit in the (supposedly incomplete) description of knowledge in the title?
- When an area of knowledge presents rival edifices of organized facts, on what basis can we choose between them?

Title 3

“It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts” (Arthur Conan Doyle).

Consider the extent to which this statement may be true in two or more areas of knowledge (mathematics, natural sciences, human sciences, arts, ethics, religious knowledge systems or indigenous knowledge systems).

Generate some ideas about what points might be made in an essay addressing this title.

Record your ideas in the box below and compare them with our own.

Our thoughts

Knowledge issues that could be addressed in response to this title include:

- What is the relationship between facts/data and theories and how does this differ in different areas of knowledge?
- To what extent are theories based on facts in different areas of knowledge? Is it reasonable to suspend theorizing until facts are available?
- Can facts and theories be successfully distinguished on the basis of their degree of certainty?
- To what extent does the insensible or deliberate twisting of facts undermine theories in different areas of knowledge?
- Under what circumstances might it be justified to “twist facts” in the interests of a theory?
- Are there circumstances in which problems might arise from twisting theories to suit facts?
- What is the relation between theory and knowledge in various areas of knowledge?

Section 4: Summing up TOK

"The apple cannot be stuck back on the Tree of Knowledge; once we begin to see, we are doomed and challenged to seek the strength to see more, not less."

This is a quote from American playwright Arthur Miller. Are you beginning to see what he means?

Students can get bonus points towards their DP grade by studying TOK, but the skills they learn in this class go beyond school or college. By changing the way they see the world, and challenging their beliefs, they become critical thinkers, risk takers, and lifelong learners.

Summary

Below are some of the key points of TOK that you have covered in the previous sections.

- TOK is a course which helps students develop critical thinking skills.
- TOK focuses on knowledge claims and knowledge questions, rather than on content with subject areas.
- TOK makes a distinction between personal and shared knowledge, and the course emphasizes the making of shared knowledge by professionals working in the formal areas of knowledge.
- The areas of knowledge can be compared and contrasted to each other through the use of the knowledge framework, which identifies specific aspects of each area of knowledge to be studied.
- TOK is a course which helps students understand their other IB subjects better.
- TOK contributes to the scoring for the IB Diploma through a system of bonus points which are earned in conjunction with the Extended Essay.

Next steps

Here is an outline of some suggested next steps to help you take your learning further.

- Discuss any queries you have with a dedicated TOK teacher
- Help your children develop their understanding of TOK by engaging in discussions with them
- Consider the extent to which TOK could be applied to your everyday decisions
- Encourage your child's IB school to undertake a TOK evening. Here, students could be involved and host a panel discussion or give sample presentations

to be discussed. Parents would be invited to attend as the audience but would participate in discussions.

Useful resources

[Display text]: Here is a further resource to use as a point of reference to guide your TOK learning in the future.

- **Theory of Knowledge page on the IB website**

(<http://www.ibo.org/en/programmes/diploma-programme/curriculum/theory-of-knowledge/>)

The IB website you with a brief outline of TOK along with links to information on other areas related to TOK. You will also find example essays and information on deadlines to keep you informed.