

Assessment details

Nature of the tasks

The two assessment tasks, the essay and the presentation, are seen as complementary opportunities for students to show the extent to which they have achieved the TOK course objectives.

Both assessment tasks have at their centre reflection on knowledge issues but this reflection is demonstrated differently in each. The emphasis in the TOK presentation is on demonstrating an understanding of knowledge at work in the world. It is thus distinguished from the TOK essay, where students are required to show their TOK thinking skills in the discussion of a prescribed title that may be primarily conceptual in nature. Concrete examples play an important role in the essay in illustrating the main ideas or taking forward the argument but the presentation is in a sense an extensive TOK reflection on a single example, albeit one that is necessarily of a particular kind.

Neither the essay nor the presentation is primarily a research exercise, although some factual information may need to be included. If so, its reliability needs to be established through proper checks and referencing.

Part 1 Essay on a prescribed title (1,200–1,600 words)

General

Each student must submit for external assessment an essay on any one of the ten 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 and main ideas should be illustrated with varied and effective examples that show the approach consciously taken by the student. Essays should demonstrate the student's ability to link knowledge issues to areas of knowledge and ways 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.

Acknowledgments and references

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, “The second world war ended in 1945”) do not need to be referenced. However, what one person thinks of as common knowledge, within a particular culture, may 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. Guidance on such matters is available in the Diploma Programme *Extended Essay guide* or on reputable web sites, for example <http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/Documentation.html>.

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.

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 name of the publisher or URL (<http://...>)
- the date when the web page was accessed, adhering to one standard 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)

- any maps, charts, diagrams, annotated illustrations and tables
- the bibliography.

Students are required to indicate the number of words.

The role of the teacher

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

- to encourage and support the student in the writing of the essay
- to provide the student with advice on and guidance about the skills needed
- to ensure that the essay is the student's own work
- to complete the coversheet.

While the teacher is encouraged to discuss the prescribed titles with the students, they should be allowed to make the final choice of title and to develop their own ideas.

If a preliminary draft is produced, the teacher may read and comment on it, but is not permitted to edit it for the student. Only one draft may be presented to the teacher before the final essay is submitted. In general, teachers' comments should be about the essay as a whole, although it is acceptable to question or comment upon a particular paragraph. Where a student is writing in a second or third language, more flexibility may be appropriate: for example, the teacher may indicate that a particular sentence or word usage is difficult for the reader. However, here as elsewhere, it is the student's responsibility to correct mistakes and make improvements.

Authenticity

Teachers must ensure that essays are the student's own work. If there is doubt, authenticity should be checked by a discussion with the student about the content of the essay submitted and a scrutiny of one or more of the following:

- the student's initial proposal and outline
- the first draft of the essay
- the student's references and bibliography for the essay, where appropriate
- the style of the writing, which may reveal obvious discrepancies.

It should be made clear to students that they will be required to sign a written declaration when submitting the essay, to confirm that it is their own work. In addition, students must be made aware that their teachers will also be required to verify the claim made in the declaration (see the relevant edition of the *Vade Mecum* for procedures).

Assessment criteria

Using the assessment criteria

The method of assessment used by the IBO is criterion-related. That is to say, the method of assessing the essay on a prescribed title and the presentation in TOK judges each in relation to identified assessment criteria and not in relation to the work of other students.

- There are **four** assessment criteria (A–D) for the essay on a prescribed title, and **four** (A–D) for the presentation. For each assessment criterion, achievement level descriptors are defined that concentrate on positive achievement, although for the lower levels (zero is the lowest level of achievement) failure to achieve may be included in the description.
- The aim is to find, for each criterion, the descriptor that conveys most adequately the achievement level attained by the student. The process, therefore, is one of approximation. In the light of any one criterion, a student's work may contain features denoted by a high achievement level descriptor combined with features appropriate to a lower one. A professional judgment should be made in identifying the descriptor that approximates most closely to the work.
- Having scrutinized the work to be assessed, the descriptors for each criterion should be read, starting with level 0, until one is reached that describes an achievement level that the work being assessed does not match as well as the previous level. The work is therefore best described by the preceding achievement level descriptor and this level should be recorded. In cases where a single descriptor covers two levels, a further decision is needed as to whether the work fulfills the descriptor to a greater or lesser extent.
- Only whole numbers should be used, not partial points such as fractions or decimals.
- The highest descriptors do not imply faultless performance and assessors and teachers should not hesitate to use the extremes, including zero, if they are appropriate descriptions of the work being assessed.
- Descriptors should not be considered as marks or percentages, although the descriptor levels are ultimately added together to obtain a total. It should not be assumed that there are other arithmetical relationships; for example, a level 4 performance is not necessarily twice as good as a level 2 performance.
- A student who attains a particular achievement level in relation to one criterion will not necessarily attain similar achievement levels in relation to the others. It should not be assumed that the overall assessment of the students will produce any particular distribution of scores.

Part 1 Essay on a prescribed title

A Understanding knowledge issues

This criterion is concerned with the extent to which the essay focuses on knowledge issues relevant to the prescribed title, and with the depth and breadth of the understanding demonstrated in the essay.

A **relevant** knowledge issue is one that directly relates to the prescribed title undertaken, or one that the essay has shown is important in relation to it.

Depth of understanding is often indicated by drawing distinctions within ways of knowing and areas of knowledge, or by connecting several facets of knowledge issues to these.

Breadth of understanding is often indicated by making comparisons between ways of knowing and areas of knowledge. *Since not all prescribed titles lend themselves to an extensive treatment of an equal range of areas of knowledge or ways of knowing, this element in the descriptors should be applied with concern for the particularity of the title.*

- Does the essay demonstrate understanding of knowledge issues that are relevant to the prescribed title?
- Does the essay demonstrate an awareness of the connections between knowledge issues, areas of knowledge and ways of knowing?

Achievement level	Descriptor
0	Level 1 is not achieved.
1–2	The essay includes very little treatment of knowledge issues that are relevant to the prescribed title and demonstrates little understanding of them. If present, areas of knowledge and/or ways of knowing are merely mentioned.
3–4	The essay includes some treatment of knowledge issues that are relevant to the prescribed title and demonstrates a rudimentary understanding of them. Some links to areas of knowledge and/or ways of knowing have been attempted but they are largely ineffective.
5–6	For the most part the essay treats knowledge issues that are relevant to the prescribed title, and demonstrates some understanding of them. Some effective links are drawn between areas of knowledge and/or ways of knowing.
7–8	The essay consistently maintains as its focus knowledge issues that are relevant to the prescribed title. Effective links and some comparisons between areas of knowledge and/or ways of knowing are drawn, so that the essay demonstrates a good understanding of the knowledge issues under consideration.
9–10	The essay consistently maintains as its focus knowledge issues that are relevant to the prescribed title. Effective links and comparisons between areas of knowledge and/or ways of knowing are elaborated, so that the essay demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the knowledge issues under consideration.

B Knower's perspective

- To what extent have the knowledge issues relevant to the prescribed title been connected to the student's own experience as a learner?
- Does the student show an awareness of his or her own perspective as a knower in relation to other perspectives, such as those that may arise, for example, from academic and philosophical traditions, culture or position in society (gender, age, and so on)?
- Do the examples chosen show an individual approach consciously taken by the student, rather than mere repetition of standard commonplace cases or the impersonal recounting of sources?

Achievement level	Descriptor
0	Level 1 is not achieved.
1–2	The essay shows no evidence of independent thinking about the knowledge issues related to the prescribed title. There is limited personal engagement with the knowledge issues and no attempt to acknowledge or explore different perspectives. There are no appropriate examples.
3–4	The essay shows very little evidence of independent thinking about the knowledge issues related to the prescribed title. There is some personal engagement with the knowledge issues. Different perspectives may be mentioned but there is no attempt to explore them. Examples chosen are sometimes appropriate.
5–6	The essay shows some evidence of independent thinking about the knowledge issues related to the prescribed title. The student has shaped the essay in a way that shows personal engagement with the knowledge issues. There is an awareness that different perspectives may exist, although there may be little attempt to explore these. Examples chosen are appropriate, although there may be little variety in their sources.
7–8	The essay shows adequate evidence of independent thinking about the knowledge issues related to the prescribed title. The student has shaped the essay in a way that shows thoughtful, personal engagement with the knowledge issues and some self-awareness as a knower. There is an acknowledgment of different perspectives and some attempt to explore these. Examples chosen are effective, with some variety.
9–10	The essay shows much evidence of independent thinking about the knowledge issues related to the prescribed title. The student has shaped the essay in a way that shows both a personal, reflective exploration of the knowledge issues and significant self-awareness as a knower. There is serious consideration of different perspectives. Examples chosen are varied and effectively used.

C Quality of analysis of knowledge issues

- What is the quality of the inquiry into knowledge issues?
- Are the main points in the essay justified? Are the arguments coherent and compelling?
- Have counterclaims been considered?
- Are the implications and underlying assumptions of the essay's argument identified?

This criterion is concerned only with knowledge issues that are relevant to the prescribed title. Analysis of knowledge issues that are not relevant to the prescribed title is not assessed.

Achievement level	Descriptor
0	Level 1 is not achieved.
1–2	There is no inquiry into knowledge issues, only description. There are very few attempts at justifying the main points of the essay. There is very little evidence of any awareness of counterclaims.
3–4	The inquiry partly explores, but largely describes, knowledge issues. There is some justification of main points and some coherent argument. Counterclaims are implicitly identified.
5–6	The inquiry explores knowledge issues. Most points are justified; most arguments are coherent. Some counterclaims are considered.
7–8	The inquiry explores with some insight, in some depth and/or detail, knowledge issues. All, or nearly all, main points are justified and arguments are coherent. Counterclaims are explored. Implications of the essay's argument are identified.
9–10	The inquiry explores with a high degree of insight, in considerable depth and/or detail, knowledge issues. All main points are justified and arguments are coherent and compelling. Counterclaims are explored and evaluated. Implications and underlying assumptions of the essay's argument are identified.

D Organization of ideas

- Is the essay well organized and relevant to the prescribed title?
- Does the use of language assist the reader's understanding and avoid confusion? Are central terms explained or developed clearly in a way that assists comprehension?

Note: This task is not a test of "first language" linguistic skills. No account should be taken of minor errors unless they significantly impede communication.

- When factual information is used or presented, is it accurate and, when necessary, referenced? "Factual information" includes generalizations.
- If sources have been used, have they been properly referenced in a way that allows them to be traced (Internet references must include the date on which they were accessed)?

Note: Not all essays require sources or references (see guidance in "Assessment details").

An essay that fails to meet the word limit of 1,200–1,600 words will not score above level 4 on this criterion.

An essay that has no relevance to the prescribed title will score 0 on this criterion.

Achievement level	Descriptor
0	Level 1 is not achieved.
1–2	The essay on the prescribed title is very poorly structured, with little overall organization. It is difficult to understand what the writer intends. Factual information used to support arguments may contain significant inaccuracies. Sources of information and ideas may not be acknowledged and there is no attempt at referencing.
3–4	The essay on the prescribed title is poorly structured, with limited overall organization. It is sometimes difficult to understand what the writer intends. There may be some attempt to explain or explore the meaning of terms but this contributes little to conceptual clarity. Factual information used to support arguments is not always reliable (there may be minor inaccuracies; sources of more important information may be missing or unreliable). Some sources of information and ideas are acknowledged; there is some attempt at referencing but it is not complete, nor sufficiently precise to permit tracing of sources.
5–6	The essay on the prescribed title is satisfactorily structured, with adequate overall organization. In general, concepts are used clearly: if concepts are explained, explanations are generally adequate. Factual information used to support arguments is mostly correct. Most sources of information and ideas are acknowledged; most referencing permits tracing of sources, although some precision may be lacking. The word limit has been met.
7–8	The essay on the prescribed title is well structured, with a clear overall organization. Concepts are used or developed clearly: some explanations are included, where appropriate. Factual information used to support arguments is correct. Sources of information and ideas are acknowledged; most referencing permits tracing of sources. The word limit has been met.

Achievement level	Descriptor
9–10	The essay on the prescribed title is very well structured, with an effective overall organization. Concepts are used clearly and, where appropriate, refined by helpful explanations. Factual information used to support arguments is correct. Sources of information and ideas are acknowledged; all referencing permits tracing of sources. The word limit has been met.

Note

In cases where an essay deserves a high mark for its quality of organization and clarity, but a low mark because of factual inaccuracy or lack of sourcing (or vice versa), examiners will make a judgment about which level to award. In general, more emphasis should be placed on the larger issues (organization and clarity) and less on the more minor ones (factual accuracy and sourcing). An important consideration is the status of the error or unsourced fact in the overall argument. If it is of marginal significance, little or no account should be taken of it. If it is central to the whole argument and undermines the value of the entire essay, then it can be argued that the quality of organization is itself much reduced. Conversely, meticulous acknowledgment of sources cannot improve the organization of a poorly structured essay.