

ToK Essay Assessment Criteria

Essay on a prescribed title

A. Understanding knowledge issues (Achievement Level 0 – 10)

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?

B. Knower's perspective (Achievement Level 0 – 10)

- 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?

C. Quality of analysis of knowledge issues (Achievement Level 0 – 10)

- 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.

D. Organization of ideas (Achievement Level 0 – 10)

- 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.

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.

**** See course web site for specific descriptors per achievement level in criteria A –D. ****

The four above categories are equally weighted and, combined, lead to a score out of a possible 40 points for the ToK Essay. Point totals correspond to the following grades:

Component grade boundaries

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|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Grade: | E: Elementary | D: Mediocre | C: Satisfactory | B: Good | A: Excellent |
| Mark range: | 0 - 10 | 11 - 16 | 17 - 22 | 23 - 29 | 30 - 40 |