

THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Overall grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0 – 18	19 - 28	29 - 37	38 - 47	48 - 60

Statistical summary

	November 2006	November 2007	% change	May 2007	May 2008	% change
English	2025	2492	23	32433	36070	11
French	1	1	0	425	453	7
Spanish	1237	1065	-14	1912	2115	11
Total Candidates	3268	3558	9%	34844	38730	11%

Note: Totals may not match exactly because of small numbers of candidates in German and Chinese.

With such a large candidature, the assessment process is inevitably complex and time-consuming. Thanks are extended to 229 examiners who assessed the essays, and whose individual reports form the basis for this subject report.

The Essay

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0 - 10	11 - 16	17 - 22	23 - 29	30 - 40

As in previous years, the quality of essays varies a great deal both within and between schools. Nevertheless certain issues are consistently noted in examiners' reports and what follows is a synthesis of these. So while, perhaps inevitably, there is a focus in this report on common shortcomings, it should be noted that examiners were often full of admiration for the best essays, which were sophisticated, reflective and showed a remarkable level of intellectual inquiry.

It is perhaps unsurprising that some of the remarks in this report are very similar to those made in previous subject reports; students will tend to encounter the same difficulties. The introduction of the new assessment criteria, however, does offer teachers an opportunity to revisit familiar issues in a slightly different context, and it is sincerely hoped that this report will contribute to teachers' practice in the classroom.

While it is helpful for teacher to know the essay grade boundaries, any changes should be interpreted with some caution. Senior examiners met to look at essays in order to establish these boundaries, and essays were read, marked and discussed until the examiners were content that they had identified where the boundaries should be placed. Statistical information was used as a secondary check, in accordance with the procedures outlined in *Diploma Programme Assessment: Principles and Practices* (IBO 2004). It was found, empirically, that the marks awarded by examiners had a slightly lower mean and a greater spread, and this is consistent with the judgement of the senior examiners on whose judgement the placement of these boundaries rests.

Examiner Training

Prior to the May 08 marking, the senior examining team met with team leaders in Cardiff, Wales and in St Petersburg, Florida, to develop a close shared understanding of the new assessment criteria. These team leaders subsequently then trained close to 200 assistant examiners in an online training exercise in January and February (that is, shortly before the arrival of the essays in March). As well as the assessment issues, there were technical and pedagogical issues discussed and, while the virtual learning environment is still being developed, feedback was extremely positive. Over a period of one month (from course creation through to course end) there were around 57,000 'user actions' (postings, essay gradings, etc). In future sessions new assistant examiners will be required to undergo online training prior to undertaking actual marking.

New Criteria

Most examiners commented that the new marking criteria were easier to apply than the old ones, with a typical comment being that they resulted 'in a more structured and effective analysis of the knowledge issues under consideration.'

Criterion A

Many examiners noted that there was a distinct difference in sophistication between those essays which dealt with areas of knowledge and/or ways of knowing in isolation, and those which made explicit links or, even better, comparisons. Teachers would be well advised to convey this to students during the planning and drafting stages of essay writing.

Criterion B

This criterion is a significant change from the previous assessment criteria, and there were many excellent examples of essays in which the 'voice of the knower' was clear; one examiner describes 'some wonderful personal exploration and intellectual journeys in the outstanding essays.' There were centres, however, where the essays showed a remarkable similarity of structure, or commonality of examples – sometimes even in responding to different titles. This may reflect over-coaching with respect to assessment or a TOK course which is, for example, more akin to a history of ideas course than a student centred inquiry-based course. Essays from these centres did not score well on this criterion, and these centres may consequently experience a drop in the grades awarded this session. Some schools would be well advised to ensure teachers are aware of the distinction between TOK and Philosophy.

For teachers wishing to develop their understanding of this criterion, attention is drawn to the preamble to criterion B in the subject guide. It is also important to note that the use of 'I', while perfectly acceptable, is neither necessary nor sufficient to provide strong evidence of individual thought, which can be found *located* in a specific example, or *globally* in the overall shaping of the essay.

Local evidence for criterion B may be found in original examples, though it should also be borne in mind that what to teachers may be a clichéd example may be new to students. Accordingly, while fresh, new examples are desirable, examiners consider their *use* as much as their *content* (see the section below).

Global evidence for criterion B can be found in the overall shaping of the essay; that is, in the general structure and approach, particularly where the student develops an original organising principle for the essay. This point is worth explication; under the previous criteria a fresh analytical approach would be credited under recognition and understanding whereas under the current model it might also provide evidence for the knower's perspective. That is, analytical claims can be developed to show awareness of different perspectives, and therefore for this criterion.

Criterion C

The features of this criterion will be very familiar to experienced TOK teachers. A particular issue noted was that of counter-claims; while they have often been addressed, examiners note that they frequently tend to devolve into pure contradiction. Students seem to be unaware that in considering opposing viewpoints, they should attempt to *address* the tension thus created and develop their ideas as a result. In leaving their counter claim to stand as a direct opposition to their original argument, many undermine that argument, rather than take the opportunity to explore the ideas in more depth. Thus the aim should be to analyse and evaluate, rather than describe, opposing ideas.

Teachers' attention is also drawn to the difference between the 'counter-claims' strand of this criterion and the 'awareness of other perspectives' strand of criterion B. Awareness of a counterclaim will generally emerge when the student considers more than one possible answer to a specific question, and is likely to be localized in a specific paragraph. It occurs perhaps as a result of an evaluation of arguments and assumptions in the essay and thus relates to the analytical depth of the essay in a logical sense. Perspective is a broader term: different perspectives may emerge when students consider the views of people whose background and life experience are different from their own and, ideally, identify and evaluate the assumptions that underlie these differences. This sensitivity to different perspectives may be shown in various ways and is often a global feature rather than localized at a specific point in the essay.

Criterion D

Many examiners note that referencing is in general done poorly, and that students are needlessly losing marks for what should be a straightforward element of the essay.

Most essays near the lower word limit did not score well.

Other Issues

Administrative and Clerical Procedures

Similar to previous sessions, adherence to administrative and clerical procedures was generally very good but there were a few concerns.

- Several schools used the old TK/CS form. Though this was, in itself, a relatively minor worry, we hope that this does not demonstrate a lack of awareness of the new assessment criteria, and draw teachers' attention to the details in the new subject guide.
- Schools should take care to include a completed checklist/attendance sheet. This is important so that the examiner can check that all the essays have been received and that any problems can be dealt with quickly. Schools are reminded that binding essays in any way other than by using staples or treasury tags is both a hindrance to examiners and wasteful in terms of postage and energy required to fly the essays around the world.
- Most examiners were satisfied with Examnet; a minority found it difficult to use; their comments have been passed to the IB IT development staff.
- Many examiners requested that teachers be reminded that students should not use borders around the text of their essays, or margins that are set close to the edges of the page, as these make comments by examiners difficult to add.
- Schools should be aware that examiners work to tight deadlines and that adhering to arrival dates is very important.

Several examiners also noted that while there is no mandatory formatting rule for essays, those which have 1.5 or double spacing are much easier to read and mark, and schools' attention in this regard would be much appreciated.

Personal voice

The emphasis on originality of thought and on students' grounding their thinking in their own experience and ideas is one that has long been central to the TOK course. The new criterion B is an opportunity for examiners to give credit not just for original examples, but for individual thought in the *shaping* of an essay; this may be reflected in the structure and narrative thread of an essay. Examiners were full of praise for students who achieved well in these cases, but there is clearly some way to go for many.

- Teachers should ensure that students who may discuss a title do not follow a common template for essays nor use the same examples; and teachers should under no circumstances provide students with a common plan for an essay. It would appear that a small number of schools are going too far in advising students; in these cases the grades awarded have been affected.
- Teachers should, as far as possible, ensure that students remain authentic in their writing; students from one school nearly all had a cousin/girlfriend who had to consider an abortion over an unplanned pregnancy and also had a dying cat/dog that required euthanasia. In cases such as these, as important as the inevitable effect on marks awarded is the lack of honesty and ambition on behalf of students.

- Teachers should assist students in avoiding an over-reliance on sources; whether these be TOK textbooks, Wikipedia, or philosophy textbooks. Proper use of these is certainly possible, but there is a danger that students engage with the source, and not with the knowledge issues themselves. Teachers' guidance is crucial in ensuring that students do not use the sources as authorities which replace students' own analyses of knowledge issues.

While the use of examples has its own section (below), it is worth mentioning here that examples provide an excellent opportunity for students to demonstrate an individual approach. The examples do not have to be deeply personal ones, nor does the essay have to be written in the first person, but carefully chosen examples provide evidence of students' own thinking, and hypothetical examples are therefore strongly discouraged. One examiner writes "reading 190 essays would be terrific if students would write about what *they* claim to know. I do not want to hear what they *think* a doctor or a judge or a woman contemplating an abortion knows or thinks".

Examples

Prescribed titles are abstract in nature; as such examples play a very important role in grounding the general and in clarifying a student's thinking. Examples can also play a role in *each* of the four assessment criteria, and as such are worthy of careful attention from teacher and students alike.

- Criterion A; links and comparisons may be developed through examples or through analysis
- Criterion B; examples may provide evidence of awareness of a student's own perspective, or of other perspectives
- Criterion C: Counterclaims may be provided by examples, and in some cases (e.g. literary fields) argument may be developed through examples.
- Criterion D: Factual information and conceptual distinctions may be provided through examples.

There are two elements to using example effectively; (i) the choice of the example and (ii) the way it is used to further analysis, rather than in a simply descriptive way.

Choice of examples

- Further to the section on Personal Voice (above), students are generally advised against examples in which they have no personal experience and little actual information. Examiners report that in many cases examples were entirely speculative, and involved experiences dramatically removed from the students' own; for example, students made claims about why murderers murder, why people kill themselves, and so on. In almost every case, they attributed motivations to these hypothetical people that fitted the argument they, the students, were trying to make, and they demonstrated no understanding that there might be more than one motivation for these and a wide variety of other behaviours. Many essays were marred by blanket statements about why people do things that had no basis in reality and for which one could easily produce a whole raft of counter-arguments of which the student writers remain, apparently, completely

unaware. Students would be far better off using perhaps less glamorous, but certainly better-founded examples from their own lives or IB classes.

- While students could use the perennial examples of e.g. the Copernican Revolution, the flat earth, Hitler, $1 + 1 = 2$, examiners commented that these examples were rarely effective. While it is recognised that some well-used examples may be original to students meeting ideas for the first time, examiners consistently find that as these examples are so readily to hand they do not actively require deep thought from the students. Teachers would be well advised to strongly discourage students from using such clichéd examples.
- While examples from students' own experiences and localities are encouraged, these should be described in sufficient detail for a reader unfamiliar with the example to understand the relevant features.

Use of Examples

- Examples should be used to develop and further analysis. In some cases a TOK point was made, and then an example of that point described at great length, to no great effect. For example, when exploring the relationship between reason and emotion in justifying a moral decision, students often stated that reason and emotion might conflict, and followed this with a lengthy (in the worst cases, several hundred word) description of such a case. The same value could have been achieved in a single sentence, and the example could have then been used to move on to, for example, question the distinction between reason and emotion, or show that a conflict might have been more apparent than real. The example should not be a static statement of fact, but rather a vehicle for moving the analysis on.

Knowledge Issues

Most examiners who commented on it felt that the move from *Problems of Knowledge* to *Knowledge Issues* was a positive one that encouraged students to take a more balanced view in relation to the titles, and to acknowledge *strengths* of knowledge claims as well as weaknesses. This was very much the hope behind the change and so the comments were most welcome. There was, however, still some sense that some students were overly destructive in their approach; one examiner wrote that she fears 'at times TOK may be encouraging students to be disrespectful of knowledge' and therefore to be 'overly ready to make confident and ignorant judgments... many responses that shredded psychology as useless in giving knowledge of human beings simultaneously demonstrated roughly zero knowledge of what psychology actually studies and how. The "knower's perspective" might include a bit more humility'. Teacher's attention is drawn to this issue which has been a consistent feature of examiners' reports in recent years.

Introductions and Definitions

Many examiners noted an over-reliance on dictionary definitions in the introduction to their essays; some students using about a third of their word count, even when using generally accepted definitions. This is very unlikely to be a productive approach. While exploring ideas and making conceptual distinctions should be awarded credit in criteria C and D, these qualities should be made relevant and driven by the knowledge issues that arise in the course of the essay. As such, a firm conclusion about how to best interpret a particular term might

be more appropriate at the end of an essay, when different cases have been explored, than at the start, when such an approach is more likely to close down possibilities than to open them up.

A further point noted by many examiners was that an introduction often seemed to serve little purpose other than to restate the question. Introductions should do more than this. Of course, as TOK does not always lend itself to a black and white argument, it can be difficult to convey in the introduction subtle distinctions that are established over the course of the essay, but a statement of purpose (even if quite general) can often help make a stronger and more coherent essay.

Referencing and Factual Accuracy

The vast majority of examiners noted that there was significant room for improvement in this area. Teachers and students are directed to the Subject Guide which is extremely clear in this regard.

A related issue was raised by some examiners – that of irrelevant and occasionally distracting quotations. Some students seemed to attach a quotation (often but not always correctly referenced) to a point without discussion or explanation, as if it bolstered an argument or proved a point – for example, ending a discussion on science and religion with an opaque quote such as “As Einstein said ‘Subtle is the Lord, but malicious He is not.’”. Where the quotations replace rather than further analysis, they will attract no credit whatsoever. Students are strongly discouraged from this approach.

Feedback on Specific Titles

Strong essays tended to have an originality of thought and a freshness of approach that makes general conclusions difficult to make. Weaker essays, by contrast, often shared features. Where general issues arose, these have been dealt with above; what follows here is title specific. In both cases, however, examiners questioned the guidance that students had received in making what are, arguably, easily avoided errors. ‘Where was the teacher at the drafting stage?’ exclaimed one examiner, and schools are **very strongly advised to pay close attention to both the feedback on specific titles that follows, and the general points above; both can inform thinking for future sets of prescribed titles.**

1. Evaluate the role of intuition in different areas of knowledge.

This was a fairly popular title. The issue of definition (mentioned above) was a common one, though some chose to define it as a mysterious process about which little can be said, and were then unable to do more than list examples; this was the unhelpful definition *par excellence*. Weaker essays were largely descriptive and took ‘intuition’ as unproblematic and transparent; stronger ones used the differences in areas of knowledge (of which Natural Sciences and the Arts were the most commonly chosen) to motivate a discussion of intuition in relation to ways knowing. A common problem was in ‘evaluating’ the role; a few of the very strongest essays noted that evaluation required standards against which to measure the role of intuition, and explored possibilities for these standards.

2. Are reason and emotion equally necessary in justifying moral decisions?

This was the most popular title for many examiners – often by a large margin. It seems, however, that it was often poorly done, with sweeping generalizations and unsubstantiated claims, and poor use of examples along the lines indicated above.

- There was confusion between *making* a decision and *justifying* one, and some students actually changed the title, which is expressly forbidden.
- Many students failed to distinguish between “reason” as a way of knowing and “reasons” as psychological motivations for actions, and so struggled to maintain relevance.
- Many essays would have benefited from a deeper consideration of the possible interrelations of the two ways of knowing, rather than always treating them as independent competitors.
- Many essays were very general and sometimes not grounded in real situations. Students would often have been well advised to consider *specific* emotions and *specific* chains of reasoning in supporting their argument. These should be genuine and original; one examiner noted that “an extraordinary number of students from one school seem to have had relatives in a coma, on life support, with no hope of recovery”. Very little credit could be awarded for such examples.
- Few students recognised that ‘justifying’ could itself be analysed (for example, ‘justifying to oneself’, ‘forming the basis of the decision’, ‘justifying to others’ or ‘convincing others that the decision was correct’). Those that did tended to have a higher quality of inquiry.
- Few students addressed the ‘necessity’ in the title, which is stronger than the mere presence of reason and emotion.

3. “History is always on the move, slowly eroding today’s orthodoxy and making space for yesterday’s heresy.” Discuss the extent to which this claim applies to history and at least one other area of knowledge.

This was not a popular title. Students who did choose this title seem to have largely agreed with the quote, often having presented little counter-argumentation.

Many examiners noted a common confusion between “history” as a series of events and “history” as a discipline of study; that is, between the events themselves and *ideas and writings about* the events. It should be apparent from the subject guide that the latter is the intended interpretation, and teachers are very strongly recommended to ensure that students are aware of this; other interpretations often led to very poor essays. Weaker essays also attempted to tackle this question by describing numerous examples of how what may have been thought to be conventional thought was challenged by ‘rebels’. One examiner notes that few candidates went beyond this to explore ‘the question’s relationship to Theory of Knowledge concepts such as truth and the nature of knowledge itself.’ This often resulted from discussion of ideas and developments from the history of science, but an inability to draw or maintain distinctions between history of science, science and history.

4. Does language play roles of equal importance in different areas of knowledge?

This was a popular title, though it seems it was often poorly done. Many students took the view that language plays a single role – that of communicating facts, and overlooked other issues such as the role of languages in reflecting values, in conceptualising processes, possible relationships between language and thought or language and experience, confusions induced by language issues and so on. As a result the essays were often made up of one point ‘we use language to communicate’ reiterated across the different areas of knowledge.

One examiner suggests that the common failure to apply any helpful analytical device in response to this question is symptomatic of a wider issue in TOK essay writing. Students need to think about whether the implications of their analysis will lead to worthwhile conclusions. To say language is equivalent to communication; communication is important in history, science, etc.; therefore language is important in history, science, etc. needs to be seen for what it is –unenlightening. Students need to ask themselves – is this approach to the title going to bring us forward or merely produce some mundane truism?

5. “...we will always learn more about human life and human personality from novels than from scientific psychology.” (Noam Chomsky). To what extent would you agree?

This was not a popular title, and those students that did write on this title successfully did so in different ways. Some restricted their considerations to ‘novels’ while others looked at literature in general, and others still, after an initial consideration of novels looked at the arts in general. Any of these possibilities was acceptable, though in the latter cases some motivation for the broadening of scope was required. Stronger essays explored the different roles novels/literature/art and science play in human understanding and contrasted the methodologies of the scientist and the artist.

Weak responses tended to have similar problems.

- Many simply agreed with the Chomsky quotation and proceeded to imbue all novelists with godlike powers of observation and wisdom, concluding that the only worthy knowledge is the truth of shared human experiences gleaned from literature.
- Some candidates managed to write 1600 words without ever referring to a specific novel; and there were generally very few specific examples from psychology.
- Psychology was, in general, dealt with much more poorly than novels/arts. Many students fell back upon naive stereotypes (of psychology as cold, rational, objective, and dehumanizing) when they clearly had little understanding of how this field actually works. Few discussions dealt with the value of psychology beyond its ability to ‘generalize and remove emotions’ from its conclusions and many writers would complain of psychology being full of conflicting schools of thought, without recognizing that literature takes the principle of freedom of interpretation to its extreme.

6. In areas of knowledge such as the arts and the sciences, do we learn more from work that follows or that breaks with accepted conventions?

This was a relatively popular title, perhaps as the concept of breaking conventions is an appealing one to students; certainly answers tended to favour this aspect. Stronger essays examined the concept of a convention, which is not self-explanatory, and were careful to make distinctions in different areas between conventional *knowledge* and conventional *methodologies* and as a result they remained focused on *learning*. Thus, in science the better students would distinguish between the process by which a scientist arrives at a groundbreaking theory and the theory itself. Weaker papers, while showing how the arts and the sciences are in constant change, failed to analyse if the established conventions were or were not more effective in learning.

7. Our senses tell us that a table, for example, is a solid object; science tells us that the table is mostly empty space. Thus two sources of knowledge generate conflicting results. Can we reconcile such conflicts?

This was not a popular title, though one that examiners noted elicited some excellent responses. Most students began by examining the example in the title; in doing so some assumed the ascendancy of scientific ‘truth’ over perceptual ‘truth’ without realising they were doing so. Some very good essays then looked at the precise nature of the conflict – that is, at the ‘such’ in the title – and then considered different possible ‘reconciliations’. There was a range of answers here, with many essays concluding that there was no real conflict, possibly due to issues of scale and/or language, though the quality of justification varied greatly. Weaker essays exclusively analysed the table; teachers should guide students in recognising that such “examples” are there to provide a *starting* point or a clear illustration of the central knowledge problem.

8. Are some ways of knowing more likely than others to lead to truth?

Many students approached this essay with a simple structure – consider each way of knowing in turn and then draw a conclusion about the relationships between them and truth. In weaker cases this led to an unexamined notion of what ‘truth’ might mean, but in stronger ones the concept was more central and indeed was closely examined *through* the ways of knowing. Weaknesses tended to be either a hazy and unarticulated grasp of the concept of truth or a descriptive and over-reliant focus on specific theories of truth.

9. Mathematicians have the concept of rigorous proof, which leads to knowing something with complete certainty. Consider the extent to which complete certainty might be achievable in mathematics and at least one other area of knowledge.

This was not a popular title, but many of those who attempted it did successfully address the issue of ‘proof’ in maths and the extent to which it might be transferable to other areas. There was some confusion regarding the nature of mathematical proof, especially with regard to the term ‘induction’ which is both a specific mathematical type of proof and a general term describing reasoning which goes from the specific to the general (confusingly, mathematical induction is actually a deductive process). Natural sciences and history were often popular choices for other areas, though several examiners noted an over-emphasis on *problems* within history, which was often presented as subjective, biased, intuitive and emotional – indeed one examiner notes that in essays on this title

and others, ‘many students seem to think that all historians are liars and charlatans and that there could be little or no legitimate knowledge or truths in this discipline!’

10. “Context is all” (Margaret Atwood). Does this mean that there is no such thing as truth?

This was a reasonably popular essay, and gave rise to a great many approaches. While some students found it easy to generate examples to demonstrate either the truth or falsity of the claim, the examples were often hypothetical and in some cases were an end in themselves, rather than used as a basis for analysis. The strongest essays caught both the potential contradiction of the claim and also the irony of the question itself — taking Atwood out of context to examine how “context is all.” The least successful essays offered no counter to relativism, merely asserting that since there are multiple viewpoints there can be no truth. One examiner writes that ‘students often fell, unawares, into the trap of discussing how context affects our ability to *know* truth, rather than discussing the question, as prescribed, of whether changing context affects the *existence* of truth.’ The distinction here is one that could profitably be explored across different areas of knowledge, and this sometimes provided a useful central organizing principle on which students threaded their ideas.

A frequent problem with essays written on this title arose when students interpreted ‘context’ very broadly; arguing sometimes that any relationship was equivalent to a context.

One examiner comments that this title ‘perhaps lends itself to an explicit addressing of the concept of the knower’s perspective and the difficulties associated with embracing diversity in this respect while at the same time not abandoning the search for truths we can all agree on or jointly recognize’.

The Presentation

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0 - 8	9 - 12	13 - 15	16 - 18	19 - 20

Introduction

In accordance with the Subject Guide, about 5% of the schools entering candidates this session were asked to record at least some of the TOK presentations given by the students for the purposes of checking the scores awarded by teachers for this internally assessed component of the course. This was the first time that the procedure took place on a systematic basis, but will form a part of the overall assessment process in all sessions from now on.

The main purpose of the exercise is to try to confirm teachers’ scores as being at the appropriate levels, and to make some adjustments in the event that they do not conform to

these standards. However, due to the nature of the presentation task, it is not possible to do this for all schools in the same session. Hence the process is called verification rather than moderation. Despite the limitations of its reach, it is to be hoped that the verification of presentations will dispel some misunderstandings about what is expected of a TOK presentation, while at the same time creating more confidence as to the fairness of the assessment. Some findings that support the former objective form the main rationale for what is written below.

Quality of Work Viewed

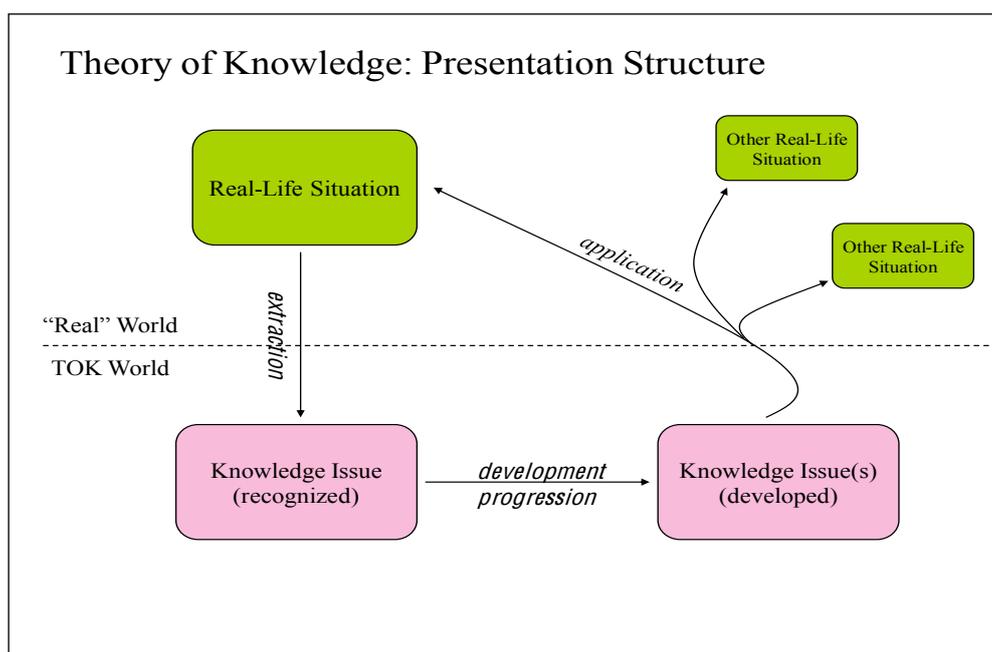
It was the general opinion of the team of verifiers that there is important work to be done in order to promote a better shared understanding of the nature of the TOK presentation. It is recognized that this view has been formed on the basis of only a small sample of schools, but this represents an important advance on previous years in which even less direct evidence concerning standards and practices was available.

Some verifiers reported having watched a number of presentations of a sophisticated nature and enthused that they contained ideas that they themselves had not formulated in the same terms. Congratulations are due to students and teachers involved in such high quality work. However, many comments pointed to some widespread shortcomings that need to be addressed in more specific terms below.

Real life Situations and Knowledge Issues

Verifiers commented on a number of aspects of the general quality of the work viewed. **But by far the single biggest cause for concern was the failure of many students to draw a clear distinction between a real-life situation and a knowledge issue. It cannot be over-emphasized how important this aspect is for the success of a presentation**, so it is worth examining it here at some length.

It may help to think of the structure of a presentation as having two levels, between which a relationship must be established. This is illustrated by the following diagram:

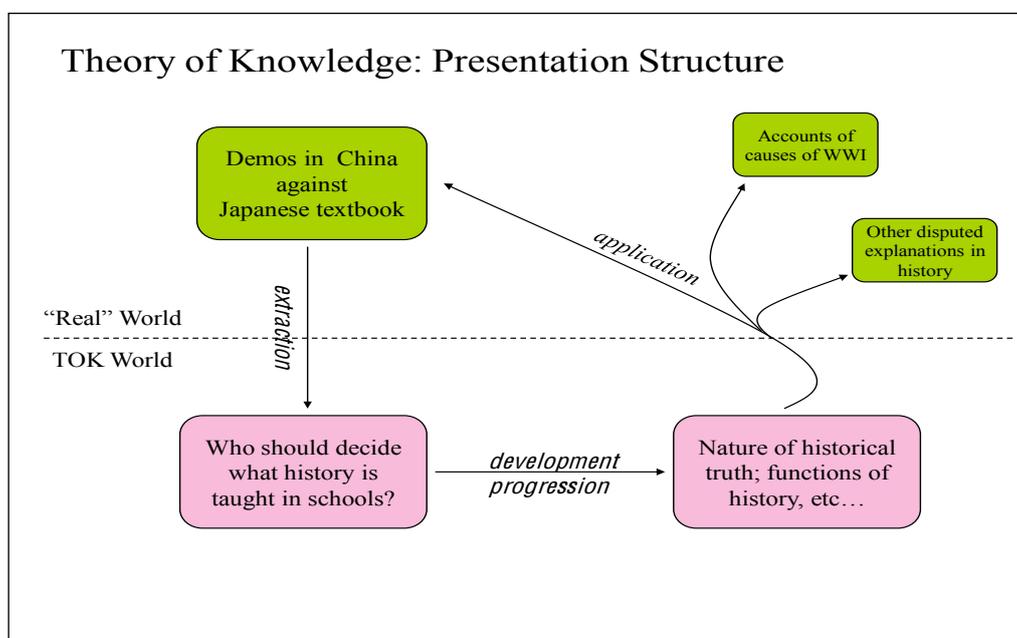


The two levels represent the students' experiences in the TOK course (lower level) and in the world beyond it (upper level), and the connection between the levels demonstrates the relevance of TOK to life by exemplifying "knowledge at work in the world".

At the "real world" level, we have the real-life situation from which a knowledge issue must be **extracted**. This knowledge issue, residing in the "TOK world", must be **developed** using ideas and concepts from the TOK course, and in this **progression** it is likely that other related knowledge issues will be identified and will play a part in taking the argument forward. The product of this reflection can then be **applied** back to the real-life situation at the "real world" level. In addition, the presentation should be able to show how the process of application extends beyond the original situation to others, thus answering the "so what?" question of why the presentation is important in a wider sense.

Several examples of possible presentations are included in the TOK Subject Guide (2006), and teachers are encouraged to refer to them (pages 49 and 50). Perhaps it is worth developing one of them in order to show these suggested processes in action:

- Real-life Situation: demonstrations in China against the issue of a new history textbook in Japan.
- Knowledge Issue: Who should decide what history is taught in schools?
- Related Knowledge Issues: To what extent is there an objective truth in history? Do or should historical accounts aim for telling the truth or providing support for issues of cultural or national identity?
- Other real-life situations: drawn from history in general....



In the absence of an identifiable knowledge issue extracted from it, a real-life situation loses its potency as an example. In the absence of a real-life situation, it is not clear how a knowledge issue is relevant or important in the real world. In cases where it is difficult to

decide if the stated focus is indeed a knowledge issue or a real-life situation in the first place, even more widespread confusion reigns. All of these versions of the problem were evident in the presentations viewed this session, although the lack of a clear knowledge issue was the most common. In the words of one verifier, some students “treated questions raised in the real life situation entirely within the framework set by its own vocabulary and concepts. This meant that the issues raised were rarely knowledge issues.”

Such presentations resided entirely at the upper level of the diagram, and usually took the form of presenting the pros and cons of the chosen situation, and then inviting the audience to “decide for themselves” or suggesting in some vague manner that “the answer depends”. Those students who abdicated responsibility for any substantive conclusions in these ways failed to demonstrate their participation in any meaningful intellectual journey beyond “raising awareness” of the situation and the responses that different people might have to it.

Content

It was also noted that many students chose content that focussed on matters of an ethical (often bio-ethical) nature (stem cell research, cloning, etc.). While these subjects are certainly legitimate ones for TOK presentations, acceptable solutions to the moral dilemmas that make these topics attractive in the first place are particularly hard to arrive at. Under these circumstances, it is easy for discussion to degenerate into a description of conflicting opinions that perhaps cannot be mediated or resolved even with reference to the underlying knowledge issues in the field of ethics. Thus it might be argued that presentations that deal with such topics face difficulties that are additional to those common to all. Because everyone seems to have a view on matters of morality, no matter how knowledgeable or otherwise they may be, many students consider such topics to be particularly amenable to TOK treatment. However, this view rests on a misunderstanding – namely that it is sufficient to **find** controversy rather than necessary to seek to **understand** it and look for at least **tentative or partial solutions**. While not advocating a move away from ethics as an area of knowledge for presentation treatment, it is perhaps important that students consider carefully the other options open to them from the TOK course before settling on the direction in which they are going to proceed.

Performance

While the correct emphasis in the TOK presentation falls squarely on its content, the evidence from this session suggests that some students should try harder to put themselves in the position of their audiences and consider carefully how the style of a presentation can affect what can be learned from it. Performance skills are not a part of the assessment (and deliberately so) but, as the presentation is intended as an integral part of the TOK course, it would be unfortunate if other students failed to gain insight as a result of poor articulation or a failure to consider ways in which audience attention can be sustained.

Audience participation in the body of a presentation is permissible, but it should be executed in the light of some advance planning. Some students this session seemed to rely on members of the audience to provide more thought than they themselves had invested in the work. Students should also be primed that excessive reading from a script is not allowed in the TOK presentation, and encouraged to consider the use of flashcards in order to keep the main points in mind. Reading large amounts of text from a screen viewable by the audience is also unlikely to produce a successful event.

Duration

Teachers are reminded that the Subject Guide (page 47) states that “approximately 10 minutes per presenter should be allowed, up to a maximum in most cases of 30 minutes per group.” This last figure should be seen as an upper limit, and it should be noted that verifiers are not required to watch or give credit for material beyond the 30-minute period for any given presentation. This could have a serious effect, as any conclusions offered are unlikely to be factored into the verifier’s assessment. Verifiers reported that this session some presentations lasted for more than an hour.

Planning

Many of the problems outlined above can be eliminated or ameliorated through an effective planning process that involves the teacher. This is why students are required to fill out the form TK/PPD (one such form is sufficient for a group presentation). Some verifiers commented that it appeared as if some of these forms were completed after, rather than before, the corresponding presentation was made, and this obviously defeats the purpose.

Many PPD forms offered only a very rudimentary sketch of what was intended, and once again provided evidence for a widespread lack of awareness of, or willingness to act on, the need for a separable but related real-life situation and knowledge issue. The submission of the PPD to the teacher provides a vital opportunity to deal with such misunderstandings at a stage when they can be addressed, and students should be advised that a more comprehensive description of their intentions is likely to lead to more helpful advice.

The Subject Guide states (page 47) that each presentation should have two stages:

1. an introduction, briefly describing the real-life situation and linking it to one or more relevant knowledge issue
2. a treatment of the knowledge issue(s) that explores their nature and responses to them, and shows how these relate to the chosen situation

What is written on the TK/PPD form should enlighten in both respects.

Assessment

Many of the comments above can be re-located within a brief elaboration of the assessment criteria for the presentation.

Criterion A

This criterion specifies the need for a clear real-life situation and a central knowledge issue that is relevant to it. Teachers and students should note that “knowledge issue” is written in the singular form. The process of **extraction** mentioned above is crucial to performance here, and was poorly executed in many presentations viewed this session.

Criterion B

The descriptors here deal with the level of understanding of knowledge issues. It should be noted this time that “knowledge issues” is given as a plural. This is because the processes of **development** and **progression** mentioned earlier will result in identification of, and reflection on, knowledge issues related to the central issue. It should be noted that the distinction

between knowledge issues and the real-life situation is mentioned again in the introduction to this criterion, and thus the failure to make the distinction can affect performance here.

Criterion C

This criterion is intended to reward students who succeed in showing how (a) the **development** and **progression** of the issues and (b) the **application** of the results have relevance to the students as knowers themselves.

Criterion D

Finally, criterion D focuses on the extent to which the **development** and **progression** in the presentation illustrates how different approaches are possible. This seemed often to be interpreted by students to mean different opinions about the real-life situation rather than divergent approaches to the underlying knowledge issues. These approaches may arise from the concepts associated with different ways of knowing or the traditions of different areas of knowledge, but they may just as well transcend the categories explicitly mentioned in the TOK guide and diagrams.

Form TK/PMF

The marking form TK/PMF comprises sections for the student and teacher to complete, and there should be a separate form for each student.

For the student, the completion of this form should be seen as an opportunity for an honest self-assessment of his/her presentation, or contribution to the work of a group. It is expected that the student will support the levels chosen with very brief comments in the boxes provided on the form, but verifiers reported that this was not always the case in this session. This task is afforded to the student as part of the reflective nature of TOK activity and should not be introduced by the teacher in a way that seems to render it intimidating in any way. The teacher then has the opportunity to agree or disagree with the student's judgements. It is reiterated that scores must be given in the form of whole numbers.

The Subject Guide (page 48) states that "participants in a group presentation should be marked individually, although all may be given the same marks if they have contributed equally." Verifiers noted that in some schools such participants had been awarded different marks – in some cases very different indeed. While the statement from the guide clearly indicates that this is permissible, such differences can be supported by verifiers only if they are borne out by the materials supplied. Hence, scores that vary between group participants need justification that is evidential and communicable.

Administrative Issues

Teachers are reminded that the recording of presentations is not a requirement unless an instruction has been received from IB in advance that the school is to be sampled for that session. If a sample is requested, it should comprise five candidates, with performance levels spread across the range of marks awarded. This of course creates the dilemma of how to know whose work to record in advance. The most comprehensive solution would clearly be to record all of the presentations, but this may be impractical, particularly in schools with large numbers of candidates. In this case, judgements will have to be made that take cognizance of prior knowledge of the students.

The sample sent to the verifier should comprise five different presentations, whether individual or group, unless the small size of the school's candidature makes this impossible.

In addition to the actual recordings of the presentations, copies of the relevant forms must also be sent to the verifier. Specifically, there must be at least one TK/PPD form that refers to each presentation and a TK/PMF form for each candidate. Teachers should note that only those forms that refer to the work of the sampled candidates should be included.

Teachers and coordinators should take note that the deadline for material to reach the verifier is 15th March (15th September), not the later deadline that applies to moderation samples in other subjects.

Recordings

As this was the first session of systematic verification, it was perhaps not surprising that material was sent in a vast array of different media and formats. Schools are hereby informed that the strongly preferred format for recordings is non-regional DVD, playable on standard equipment, not only on a computer. Discs should be clearly labelled with candidate names and session numbers and well padded for dispatch in order to avoid damage in transit. The recording of all presentations in the sample onto a single disc is to be encouraged.

As the sample consists of specific candidates, it is crucial that each of them is unambiguously identifiable in the recording. This can be easily achieved if students are instructed to call out their names and session numbers at the start of the presentation. For this reason among others, it is important to ensure that the recording starts clearly in advance of such announcements.

Particular attention needs to be paid to the quality of sound on recordings, and it is advised that some sort of test be performed in advance of each presentation in order to ensure that the evidence sent to the verifier is capable of being understood. Presentations that involve visuals such as PowerPoint slides or film excerpts may require special consideration too in connection with recording quality.