

THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

In order to secure success for their students, schools are strongly recommended to ensure that this report is read in detail by all TOK teachers, and the Diploma Programme Coordinator. Teachers are also once again directed towards the IB Publication “Understanding Knowledge Issues” (on OCC) which provides clarification of the central concept of a ‘knowledge issue’.

Overall Grade Boundaries

There were no changes to grade boundaries from last year:

Grade	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range	0 - 17	18 – 28	29 - 37	38 – 47	48 - 60

Statistical Summary

	November 2011	November 2012	% change
English	3,727	4028	8.07
French	3	2	-33.33
Spanish	1,659	1835	10.60
German	0	1	n/a
Chinese	0	28	n/a
Total Candidates	5,389	5894	9.37

The essay

Component Grade Boundaries

Component grade boundaries remained unchanged:

Grade	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range	0-9	10-16	17-22	23-29	30-40

Examiners

Thanks are extended to 36 examiners who assessed TOK essays this session – whose individual contributions form the basis for this part of the subject report. Many of these examiners are quoted directly in the pages that follow. A number of examiners expressed how much they learned from marking essays and what a positive professional development experience it was. One such examiner opined: “It was a life-enhancing experience to share in students’ struggles to engage with wonderful fundamental questions about the nature of the world that we share and our understanding of it. I believe that I have learned a great deal in the last month of intensive marking.” Teachers who wish to become examiners can visit <http://www.ibo.org/informationfor/examiners/> for more information (note that teachers must have two years experience of teaching TOK before examining).

General Comments

Schools new to the Diploma Programme are asked to pay particular attention to what is required in a TOK essay. Schools which receive disappointing results in TOK are urged to invest in some of the opportunities for professional development that are available these days – especially face-to-face and online workshops led by experienced practitioners.

Spanish essays are still all too often written as if they were philosophy essays or with a heavy leaning on abstract notions. These tendencies have a detrimental effect on students as evidenced by final results which show a lower level for essays written in Spanish. All teachers of TOK in Spanish must ensure that their TOK courses follow the TOK syllabus. Therefore, they need to include consideration of areas of knowledge and the function of ways of knowing in areas of knowledge (and not in the abstract). Teachers must also instill in their students the need to use concrete, real-life examples to justify claims and counterclaims. There was a marked difference between schools with some showing evident focus on a ‘proper’ TOK course.

Presentation of work

Once again, candidates and schools are asked to observe the following requests in order to assist with the assessment process:

- Ensure that candidates use DOUBLE SPACING and a font size of 12
- Use a ‘standard’ font such as Times New Roman, Calibri or Arial
- Use default-sized margins without any added border
- Write the prescribed title at the start of the essay as stated on the list
- Take note of the limits of the word requirement for the TOK essay – the actual word-count must be entered when the essay is uploaded

The first of these points was made vociferously by a large number of examiners – single-spaced essays are generally more difficult to read on-screen for e-marking, and it is hard to add annotations when there is insufficient room to do so. It is for that reason too that margins must be at least default-size. It is worth sharing some comments from examiners here in order to get a measure of the strength of feeling about the importance of double spacing to

the assessment process. The following remarks constitute only a part of an overwhelming consensus among examiners on this issue:

- “Single-spaced papers are VERY difficult to comment on in Scoris. All papers should be required to be double-spaced.”
- “A number of essays used single spacing or left no space at the end of the discussion for examiner comments.”
- “Many students need to be reminded to double space their essays.”

Degree and quality of apparent teacher guidance

There were some positive remarks from examiners this session in this regard. One wrote that he “sensed less misdirection or poor quality teaching than in previous years”, while another claimed that “overall, candidates appear to have been quite well guided in terms of the general requirements of a TOK essay”. Another commented approvingly that “there were fewer obvious ‘I don’t care about TOK’ essays to mark”.

However, others complained about essays that exhibited signs of having been constructed under the influence of “help” websites whose content had not been fully understood by the candidates, and the use of the same examples and/or structure in essays from the same school. These observations suggest that some candidates suffer from either too little or too much guidance from teachers.

Several examiners commented that many of the essays they assessed would have benefited greatly from critical proof reading, and one wondered how many hours of TOK some students had undertaken as a preparation for the task of writing the essay. It is suggested that teachers encourage their students to follow a sequence of stages in preparing the TOK essay – from unpacking and exploring the titles, to planning, writing and reviewing the work. More explicit instructions will be found in the new subject guide on this matter.

Another examiner opined that “IB students appear quite conformist generally, at least when committing thoughts to screen or paper for the purposes of the TOK essay. No room for rugged individualists whose natural scepticism has been strengthened by the TOK experience”. Such conformism might perhaps be challenged by a stronger effort to explore the possibilities offered by the prescribed titles at an early stage of development.

Treatment of knowledge issues

It would seem that, in general, candidates have developed a greater awareness of the centrality of knowledge issues to TOK work. However, this is accompanied by the troubling developments that candidates now tend either to formulate a series of knowledge issues which they then neglect in the remainder of the essay, or to include what is often presented as “my knowledge issues” at an early juncture in the essay and then proceed to respond to them. Frequently these knowledge issues are not directly connected to the prescribed title, with the result that, in effect, the candidate is answering a different question. The failure to try to develop a response to knowledge issues is likely to have a detrimental effect on marks for

criterion C (quality of analysis), and a gap between the prescribed title and the knowledge issues that are engaged in the essay will tend to affect criterion A (understanding knowledge issues), so candidates should guard assiduously against both of these tendencies.

It is possible that the explicit presentation of knowledge issues in subject reports over the past few years has contributed to the misunderstandings which are responsible for the problems mentioned above. The intention behind their inclusion was to illustrate by example what good knowledge issues look like, and in the light of the comments above it can be argued that in this respect they have succeeded in contributing to the quality of candidates' essays. But the key point now is to ensure that candidates and teachers understand that these knowledge issues, such as those to be found in the section on individual titles below, are questions that could possibly arise within a candidate's attempt to develop a line of analysis. They might be thought of as stepping stones along the route chosen by the candidate for exploring the prescribed title, but they should never appear to be the origin of the analysis itself – it should always be possible to re-trace the line of development back to the prescribed title.

As noted in a previous report, it is also important to consider that some titles may need more unpacking than others, and candidates need to be aware that the shorter titles may well be the ones that require more work at this very early stage as there is less structure provided by the title itself. Too often, weaker candidates are attracted to such titles because they appear superficially more straightforward and candidates fail to appreciate the work that needs to be done in order to construct a viable response. Teachers are encouraged to find opportunities to practise with their students unpacking and exploring the possibilities that titles offer – this can probably be achieved most successfully through the use of prescribed titles from previous years.

Treatment of various ways of knowing and/or areas of knowledge

Candidates are encouraged, wherever possible, to treat ways of knowing within a context of areas of knowledge (related in particular to criterion A) or supported by concrete examples, in order to avoid treatment in the abstract. Addressing them in isolation or without reference to established knowledge easily leads to anecdotal claims and unsophisticated and unrealistic hypothetical examples which add little to the understanding of learning and knowing.

Teachers should note the prevalence of pervasive weaknesses associated with candidates' understanding of various parts of the course. Some specific examiner comments may clarify this:

- “Sense perception is confused with other types of perception that require reasoning, and with the use of different perspectives.”
- “Ways of knowing were treated in a superficial manner. Reason was often treated as an excuse for behaviour, rather than the application of a logical system.”
- “From what I saw this session ethics and the arts continue to prove the most challenging for students - they need to think carefully about what constitutes knowledge in both of these areas.”

- “Students clearly know what the arts are, but they’re not very aware of what knowledge in the arts may be.”
- “There was lots of reliance on religion as a basis for morality.”
- “Mathematics as an area of knowledge continues to be poorly considered; many students regarded numerical solutions to problems as verification for the rigour of mathematics.”

Often these weaknesses lead to clichéd assertions. As previously noted, these include:

- Mathematics is purely a product of reason
- There is one scientific method comprising five sequential steps starting with observation and finishing with a law
- The human sciences struggle to establish knowledge because human behaviour is totally unpredictable
- Historians are self-evidently biased in favour of their own countries of origin, and hence the history they produce is deeply parochial
- The arts are concerned exclusively with the transmission of emotion
- Moral judgements are relative

More guidance for students would be welcome here in order to facilitate an understanding that such assertions may be inaccurate, wrong, or at least eminently contestable.

Use of examples

Once again, candidates need to be made aware that hypothetical examples (related most obviously to criterion B) almost never work as support for claims made in essays; it should be emphasised that they function essentially as fabricated evidence, and thus cannot lend weight to whatever argument is being offered. As one examiner notes, “students need to be supported towards gaining awareness that their examples should be authentic and thus based within their IB Diploma programme studies, including CAS, or based upon solid and meaningful examples from the student’s more informal personal life experience”.

While some examiners were impressed with the efforts of candidates to reach beyond the commonplace in the examples that they employed, others lamented a persistent lack of diversity in the frequent cameo appearances of Hitler, Copernicus, Darwin, Picasso, Columbus, da Vinci, and the Wright brothers. But it must be stressed that the problem with such examples is not in the decision to use them; it is when they are treated lazily and without due regard for factual accuracy. Sometimes these examples do not support the claims being made in the essay. One examiner writes “often students seem to imagine that a single example ‘proves’ a claim, when it might not; at least they should discuss whether the example is a fair one or more generally representative”.

On the other hand, more esoteric examples need care too. Another examiner notes “examples used were often potentially relevant but used without development and the assumption the examples mentioned were common knowledge. While I never mind stopping to look up something cited that I am not sure of, I found myself doing this more often than I ever have.”

Perhaps the key is for candidates to proceed from what they know best:

- “In general candidates did not make much use of their own experiences as learners. It seems that TOK is still seen as a 'separate subject' and is not generating enough reflection on the experience of learning across the curriculum.”
- “It is always best when the candidate uses examples that have personal relevance or significance.”

In this way, candidates can find their voices and demonstrate their own perspectives through their own unique experiences with knowledge. However, they should avoid over-reliance on “personal anecdotes which tend to masquerade as the voice of the candidate” and emphasise the academic experience from which TOK is designed to draw. Candidates should aim for a balance between examples from their own personal experience and from shared knowledge in general.

Quality of analysis

Examiners routinely comment that often, quality of analysis (criterion C) is the criterion where they find it most difficult to award higher scores. This examiner was not alone in noting that “students need to be aware of the difference between description and analysis. Many essays remain descriptive and could not be called analytical”. So candidates should be warned of the pitfalls of approaches that are too descriptive or even too speculative. Some essays lack effective counterclaims, and sometimes they are present but expressed poorly, such that they appear to be contradictions rather than explorations of alternative viewpoints. Candidates should take care with the ways in which they introduce such contrasts. Counterclaims should arise naturally from arguments made or evidence presented and they may, for instance, be in the form of different perspectives or alternative evidence which will need to be evaluated. The metacognitive dimension of TOK lies at the heart of the course, and candidates should be encouraged to take a step back from their own arguments in order to grasp the possible implications of what they are asserting.

Another examiner weighed up the challenge facing candidates in this respect “students often find it difficult to analyse and discuss the implications of the question - and of course TOK is a very demanding experience. We should celebrate the depth that they do so often achieve in addressing highly demanding topics and issues”.

Treatment of key terms in titles

Some complaints were made once again about the misuse of definitions. One examiner lamented that “often these definitions were from a dictionary source where only a portion of the definition was used, or when an inappropriate definition was used for a TOK context. When the concepts were not defined clearly or appropriately the discussion became

generalised and fraught with internal confusion and contradiction”. Moreover, these definitions are often subsequently ignored and thus add no value to the work. It is emphasized once again that this type of use of the dictionary has the effect of closing down discussion and conceptual analysis just when it is desirable to open them up at an early stage in the essay. Rather than trying to pin down a definition of, say, ‘knowledge’, in a pat sentence in the introductory paragraph of an essay and risking making the rest of the essay irrelevant, it would seem a better strategy to indicate what is understood by the term by giving examples and stating that a closed abstract definition might be outside the scope of the essay.

Overall crafting of essay structure

Many candidates seem to struggle with overall essay structure (criterion D). Many candidates do seem to understand the basic structure, but only in a very rudimentary way. One examiner wrote “many essays needed proof reading and some editing to ensure sense and logical progression of ideas”. This is a challenge for teachers to provide opportunities to practise the art of essay exposition. Attention must be paid to the flow of an argument and also to the length of paragraphs.

A few examiners this session complained of inappropriate responses to the requirements for acknowledgements in essays – with some candidates either providing no references at all, or appending vast bibliographies that seemed to bear no immediate relationship to the content of the essay. Candidates and teachers are reminded that references to online sources should include access dates, and that quotations must be linked to references in some conventional manner through citations.

The attention of candidates and teachers is drawn to the window of word length for the TOK essay. While 1,200 words in an acceptable length in principle, it is often difficult to construct a convincing analysis without making use of the further 400 words allowed. Candidates should be encouraged to make as much productive use as possible of the full 1,600 words permitted. However, candidates should be reminded not to exceed this limit, even by one word, because the penalty associated with criterion D (maximum score of 4) will immediately be applied.

There are now numerous TOK ‘textbooks’ or ‘companions’ available to candidates. It is worth reiterating here that such materials can be useful but candidates should avoid undue reliance upon them in their essays. In particular, many essays refer to these books as a source of examples unfortunately taking precedence over the candidates’ first-hand experience of areas of knowledge during the course of the IB Diploma Programme. Candidates would be well advised to consider their own contact with their Diploma subjects a rich source for detailed exploration of knowledge issues.

In addition, as one examiner wrote, “students should be aware that using websites that discuss the prescribed titles is not a good idea. The TOK essay should be an investigation that reflects self-awareness and a personal exploration and not research of what others think about the topic.” Examiners noted the use of such websites in both English and Spanish language this session. In addition to problems with personal voice, there is a danger that the use of such sites will lead to issues of academic malpractice.

Feedback on Specific Titles

As in previous years, candidates appear to have found some prescribed titles much more attractive than others, though quantity did not always correlate to quality, and it is possible that many candidates chose titles without sufficient careful thought. Six examples of knowledge issues are given for each of the six prescribed titles. As emphasised earlier in this report, it is crucial that knowledge issues such as the examples below should arise naturally within the candidate's exploration of the prescribed title; not emerge abruptly as stand-alone questions or alternatives to the title itself.

1. Can we have beliefs or knowledge which are independent of our culture?

Six examples of knowledge issues that *could* be addressed in the development of an essay on this title:

- *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?*

Responses to this title sometimes floundered on the key term of culture. Unless carefully refined and interpreted, the concept proved too amorphous to provide focus to the analysis. Naturally enough, most candidates took culture to refer to groups of people bonded by geography or ethnicity, but there were some essays that examined other types of groups, such as organisations or academic practitioners of certain disciplines. Most candidates concentrated on knowledge, taking it as read – sometimes too simplistically – that beliefs, by their very nature, cannot be independent of culture. In many cases, candidates claimed that subjects such as mathematics and the natural sciences were predominantly free of cultural influence; whereas at the opposite end of the spectrum one would find the arts, ethics and possibly history. Stronger candidates succeeded in finding counterarguments to this scenario.

2. ***"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.**

Six examples of knowledge issues that *could* be addressed in the development of an essay on this title:

- *What is the relationship between facts/data and theories and how does this differ in different areas of knowledge?*
- *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?*
- *To what extent does the concept of theory change across areas of knowledge and how might we compare and contrast those theories?*

Candidates choosing this title were faced with quite a number of concepts, and unsurprisingly many essays did not deal directly with all of them. As one examiner noted, “many candidates used theory and hypothesis interchangeably as well as data, fact and knowledge. But those candidates who chose two distinct areas of knowledge seemed to have a greater scope within which to work a comparison/contrast of the disadvantages/advantages of either approach - data to suit theory versus theory to suit data”. The term “insensibly” created some problems, with uncertainty as to whether it should be interpreted as “without the use of the senses” or “without using common sense”, among other interpretations. A few candidates made the mistake of dwelling on the origins of the quotation in the title and wasting valuable words as a result. The human sciences were often singled out as more guilty of twisting facts than the natural sciences, and it would have been helpful to see more counterclaims on this point.

3. “Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.” (Albert Einstein) Do you agree?

Six examples of knowledge issues that *could* be addressed in the development of an essay on this title:

- *What are the strengths and weaknesses of using imagination as a basis for knowledge?*
- *What is the relationship between imagination and various ways of knowing across the areas of knowledge?*
- *Are there limits to what can be imagined?*
- *How can we decide when to trust our imagination?*
- *In what ways can knowers support claims that derive from their imagination?*
- *To what extent is the role of imagination constant across different areas of knowledge or does it mean different things to specialists in different areas?*

Again, some candidates insisted on lengthy descriptions of the origin of the quotation and the achievements of Einstein in particular as if the claim applied to his work more than anyone else's in this very popular title. Many candidates saw imagination and knowledge as opposites in a simple and limiting approach but numerous candidates did succeed – in many cases asserting that each is a necessary condition for the other. However, some essays failed to interpret “imagination” carefully enough in order to sustain the analysis. As one examiner mentioned “the best answers discussed imagination at work and the nature of knowledge within areas of knowledge such as mathematics, the arts or ethics, at advanced levels, raising issues about the importance and nature of creativity – or even the dangers as well as the innovative strengths of imagination.”

4. What counts as knowledge in the arts? Discuss by comparing to one other area of knowledge.

Six examples of knowledge issues that *could* be addressed in the development of an essay on this title:

- *Is knowledge in the arts the intentions of the artist, the art work itself, the views of the consumers of the art?*
- *Is artistic knowledge something that cannot be expressed in any other way?*
- *How can an imaginative process such as that employed by the arts lead to knowledge about the world?*
- *What similarities and contrasts are generated when the arts and a different area of knowledge tackle the same topic?*
- *Are ways of knowing exploited in radically different ways in the arts as opposed to other areas of knowledge?*
- *What kind of truth can be expressed by the arts, or by a particular art form, as compared with another area of knowledge?*

Many candidates struggled with this title – largely because they became enmeshed in the position that the arts are primarily a means of conveying emotion, and thus any claims about the capacity for them to deal in knowledge became severely diminished. By confining the discussion to aesthetic judgements, other candidates restricted themselves to looking at knowledge about the arts rather than in them. On the other hand, as one examiner noted approvingly, “it was sometimes argued that the arts can provide the deepest insights into the human condition like no other area of knowledge, offer graduated understanding of moral principles and dilemmas, or lead us to a purely aesthetic knowledge that is the key to the mysteries of human nature or the universe. One or two essays suggested that the arts can shock and de-familiarise so that we see the world anew and as it truly is”. Candidates who wrote about specific art forms, rather than ‘the arts’ in general, tended to do better as they were less prone to make generalisations and were able to give concrete examples.

5. “Habit is stronger than reason.” To what extent is this true in two areas of knowledge?

Six examples of knowledge issues that *could* be addressed in the development of an essay on this title:

- *What types of knowledge may be produced through the application of reason and habit?*
- *What are the relative values of habit and reason in the acquisition of knowledge?*
- *What type of influence may habit have on different ways of knowing and, by extension, various areas of knowledge?*
- *To what extent do habits play positive or negative roles in the methodologies of various areas of knowledge?*
- *To what extent are habit and reason in opposition, or items on a continuum?*
- *Are habits the unconscious products of reasoning? Is reasoning a good habit?*

This was a popular question probably because candidates felt they could identify with the concept of habit, although it is not one they would have considered in TOK, and reason, one of the ways of knowing. However, some candidates found trouble with this title early on when they equated “habit” with customs or addictions and various forms of negatively viewed behaviours (nail biting, overeating, obsessive-compulsive disorder, etc.). In such essays, there was little notion of the role of habits in the attainment of knowledge. As one examiner put it, “the most common conclusion was 'habit was stronger than reason because we could not break bad habits easily by reasoning only.' Success came for those candidates who centred on 'habitual procedures' such as scientific methodology, and linked this with reason”.

6. “The ultimate protection against research error and bias is supposed to come from the way scientists constantly re-test each other’s results.” To what extent would you agree with this claim in the natural sciences and the human sciences?

Six examples of knowledge issues that *could* be addressed in the development of an essay on this title:

- *In what way can re-testing make knowledge claims more secure?*
- *If re-testing means the exact reproduction of experimental or observational conditions, to what extent is this possible in the given areas of knowledge?*
- *What assumptions need to be made about the nature of scientific or human scientific knowledge in order for re-testing to yield validity?*
- *To what extent is the method of re-testing vulnerable to the problem of induction?*
- *To what extent is re-testing purely a psychological requirement of human investigators?*
- *What other forms of protection against research error and bias are available to scientists, and how important are they as compared with re-testing?*

One examiner seems to have summed up much of what needs to be said in connection with this title:

“Various approaches were to be found in good answers. Some pursued the variety of forms of error and bias, drawing effective distinctions and discussing the consequences and difficulties for re-testing. The effectiveness of re-testing in disposing of bad science was often demonstrated: a testimony to the self-correcting nature of science overall, though it was noted that this might not always be immediate. Other essays questioned the claim in the essay title, drawing attention to the professional standards of scientists, repeated high quality experiments in the first place, peer review, and use of double or triple blind techniques for experiments particularly within the human sciences – as more powerful safeguards. Kuhn’s theory of paradigm shift was also invoked to take a wider but still relevant view of scientific advance.” The nature of re-testing, as is the case with peer review, has changed with new technologies, and several candidates did well in considering such phenomena. Some candidates found it difficult to separate error from bias and ended up conflating them in their analyses.

Presentations

Component Grade Boundaries

The boundaries remained unchanged for this session.

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

Please note that some comments made in previous subject reports have been repeated. This is because weaknesses in the presentations viewed by verifiers this session were once again very similar to those evident in previous sessions. The majority of samples viewed continue to reveal a lack of understanding of this assessment component even though four successive subject reports give clear advice as regards the nature of the presentation (in addition to the guidelines set in the current TOK guide). Moreover, the *Understanding Knowledge Issues* document on the OCC has been repeatedly recommended too. Teachers play a fundamental role in guiding their students towards success in this assessment task and it is thus imperative that teachers read the comments below in order to ensure that their students avoid the persistent misunderstandings about the nature of the TOK presentation.

Administrative and Clerical Procedures

As is the norm, about 5% of the schools entering candidates were asked to record some or all of the TOK presentations given by the students for the purposes of confirming the scores awarded by teachers for this internally assessed component of the programme. Some of these schools were selected at random; others were selected on the basis of major inconsistencies in past sessions between performance in the essay and the presentation.

It is worth reminding schools that those selected for any given examination session are notified via the DP Coordinator by IBCA at the start of the diploma cycle that culminates in that session. For example:

- schools selected for the May 2013 session **will have been** notified by **September 2011**
- schools selected for the November 2013 session **will have been** notified by **March 2012**
- schools selected for the May 2014 session **will have been** notified by **September 2012**
- schools selected for the November 2014 session **will have been** notified by **March 2013**

Schools that have been asked to provide presentations for verification must observe the requirements outlined in the Appendix to this report. Some schools did not do so and there were cases of background noise in recordings which made it hard for verifiers to hear the presentations. This makes it difficult for verifiers to award appropriate marks and may affect the reliability of the verification process. There were instances of schools not keeping to the deadlines and late arrival of presentations also affects the process. Again, there were instances of schools which did not send the presentations at all and they will have to go through the process again.

Forms

Schools are reminded that, since May 2012, there is **one** form to fill in for the presentation which is the **TK/PPM Form (presentation planning and marking form)** which takes the place of the two TK/PPD and TK/PMF forms. Coordinators and teachers should ensure that the form from the current Handbook of Procedures is used for the administration of the TOK presentation.

It is important that the TK/PPM form is correctly filled in, and this is not just procedural. The “presentation planning” part of the form is intended to help students by guiding and structuring their planning and must thus be completed before the presentation. The “presentation planning” part requires candidates to state the title of the presentation and then to answer three questions which refer to:

1. The real-life situation
2. The knowledge issue that has been identified as arising from the real-life situation, expressed as a question
3. A plan of the presentation

Some schools are not using the form to guide candidates in their planning. In some cases there was practically no difference between the real-life situation (RLS) and the knowledge issue (KI) – showing a clear misunderstanding of the expectations of the oral presentation.

Moreover the form states in point 2 that the KI needs to be expressed as a question and some candidates did not do that. This is to help candidates. By expressing the KI as a question they are more likely to see that an analytical response to the knowledge issue is what is required, rather than a passive description of the RLS. Lastly in relation to the plan, a “plan” which follows a vague format, such as this example: “1. Introduction 2. Give areas of knowledge 3. Discussion 4. Conclusion” evidently cannot have been well thought out and prepared, and is not helpful to either the candidate or the verifier. Candidates need to be guided to plan their work and the planning must lead them to consider questions of the type “how do I/we know?” “how is X justified?” “why does X matter?” “so what?” “what does X imply?”. These questions will help students focus on their presentations as TOK presentations.

The reverse side of the form is the “marking form” and requires the following:

- The self-assessment of the individual candidate
- The candidate’s signature and date
- The assessment by the teacher
- The teacher’s name, signature and date
- The duration of the presentation in minutes

There is space for a one-line comment/justification for each criterion to be followed by the respective mark. The comment/justification should not just be a repetition of the descriptor for that grade but offer an indication of why that level was awarded in terms of that particular presentation.

Assessment issues

The presentation is supposed to be an integral part of the TOK course with the aim of giving students an opportunity to express their perspectives, to consider a topic in depth and to recognize and develop knowledge issues. It complements the essay as it helps students realize what they know, what their perspectives are and how valid their justifications may be. As has been said before, while the presentation is a formal *summative* assessment requirement for TOK, it is also intended as a *formative* opportunity for students to contribute a meaningful lesson to the TOK course in which they are participating. It is thus recommended that students do more than one presentation in their TOK course.

More practice will benefit students and ensure that they understand the nature of the presentation. All too often presentations are narratives about a topic rather than an exploration of knowledge issues. In the words of one verifier, “I watched a very interesting presentation about the learning difficulties of children with a particular syndrome but it was about that syndrome and not about the questions to do with knowledge which may be extracted from the topic”.

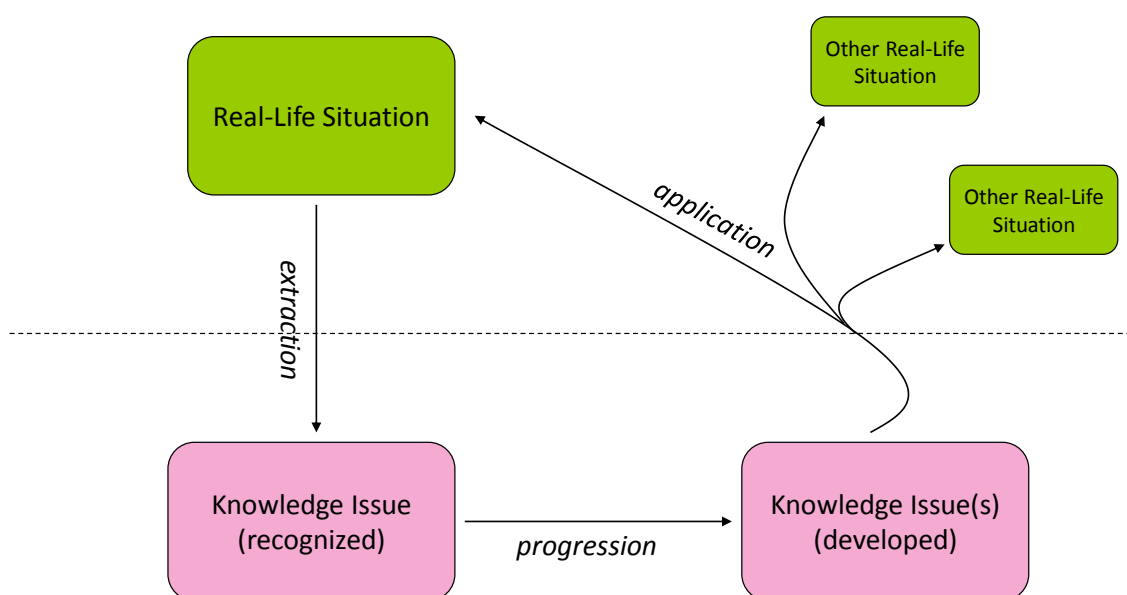
Some presentations suffered from lack of planning and this session there were several presentations which used as a format “a conversation” (for instance, a conversation in a

waiting room; a conversation between an expert in a topic and a novice; a conversation between two friends). These conversations were supposed to be the real life situations but were imaginary or hypothetical set ups and obviously did not lead to good presentations as it was difficult to extract KIs except in the more general or abstract of terms. Furthermore, they did not use TOK vocabulary or concepts, and areas of knowledge and ways of knowing were merely mentioned. Success cannot be achieved in this way and schools are reminded that a concrete **real** life situation must be the starting point from which a single knowledge issue (not multiple ones) may be extracted. The KI must be precise but also general (i.e. applicable to a wider range of situations than simply the one chosen) and couched in the concepts and vocabulary of TOK (see the linking questions in the guide for help in this respect). Schools have been directed to the Understanding Knowledge Issues document on the OCC and its use in the classroom has been recommended. Students should be given the opportunity to study and discuss the contents of the document so that they can see the extra quality of good knowledge issues and try to emulate them.

We cannot stress strongly enough that **the TOK presentation is NOT a descriptive research project; NOT a social studies “report” or “monograph” on some subject of general interest.** Without a focus on knowledge issues, presentations cannot deserve major credit on the assessment criteria (criteria A and B are almost certain to score zero for research projects, and a very low mark for D is very likely). They *can* be very good *presentations*, but are very poor *TOK presentations*.

The TOK presentation is supposed to focus on analysis, not description, and, in order to do this, a real life situation must be connected to a knowledge issue. Thus, the core intention of the TOK presentation essentially takes the form of an analytical dialogue between two levels of discourse. This is illustrated by the following diagram:

Theory of Knowledge: Presentation Structure



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 beyond the TOK classroom.

At the "real world" level, we have the real-life situation from which a knowledge issue (note that "knowledge issue" here is singular, corresponding to criterion A) 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 (note that "knowledge issues" here is plural, corresponding to criterion B) 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 demonstrating why the presentation is important and relevant in a wider sense.

In order to assist students and teachers in understanding this structure, the TK/PPM form requires the written documentation of both the real-life situation **and** the knowledge issue that is extracted from it. The TK/PPM form also requests a title for the presentation – this is intended as a useful summary label that can perhaps be used in a published schedule of presentations for internal school use, but could also be displayed on the DVDs and thus would also assist verifiers in identifying each piece of work.

In addition, it is strongly recommended that the construction by the students of a diagram like the one above, adapted to the individual nature of the planned presentation, be made a part of the planning process. A structured diagram of this sort could be attached to the TK/PPM form. This would encourage an analytic exploration of Knowledge Issues which would likely result in the award of high marks.

The following pairs of real-life situations and knowledge issues are intended to illustrate the sort of relationship that can be constructed between them.

Real life situation: The "undiscovery" of a Pacific island which had made its way on to navigational charts and Google Earth

Knowledge Issue: How can we know what to doubt?

Real life situation: The case of the gang rape of a young woman in India and her subsequent death, which caused international outcry

Knowledge Issue: Are there any absolute moral truths?

Real life situation: Messages taken to outer space in the form of diagrams

Knowledge Issue: To what extent are diagrams less culturally dependent than language?

Real life situation: Story of teenage campaigner shot by Taliban

Knowledge Issue: What makes an event historically significant?

Real life situation: The publication of controversial research into the bird flu virus
Knowledge issue: Should there be censorship of knowledge for the public good?

Real life situation: Article in a respected psychology journal presenting what its author describes as strong evidence for extrasensory perception
Knowledge Issue: Should ESP be entertained as a subject of scientific enquiry?

Real life situation: An ad campaign for a skin-whitening cream in Senegal
Knowledge issue: To what extent should emotion play a role in the evaluation of claims?

Real life situation: Google's Project Glass
Knowledge Issue: To what extent does the source of new technology influence our interpretation of it?

Real life situation: An article about new entries in the Oxford American dictionary (such as TTYL and BFF)
Knowledge issue: To what extent does the language we use affect our perception of the world?

It is hoped that the recommendations given will serve to guide schools towards better presentations. This is not to say that there were no solid or good presentations. We commend schools who take this assessment task in the spirit in which it is intended and which have produced presentations where students have engaged their knowledge issues effectively through real life situations.

There are other aspects of the TOK presentation that deserve reiteration:

- The presentation must not be delivered from a script – while flashcards and other prompts are likely to be helpful, these must be subordinated to the primary nature of the TOK presentation as an oral exercise. Similarly, a presenter turning his/her back on the audience in order to read large quantities of text from a projector is not delivering material in a manner consistent with the intentions of the task.
- The presentation must be a live experience with the intended *formative* opportunity for students to contribute a meaningful lesson to the TOK course. Therefore the presentation must not be filmed by students at home or in another setting, nor be edited.
- The use of movie and YouTube clips must similarly be subordinated to the overall aims of the presentation and not be used as substitutes for thinking and analysis

- The duration of the presentation should be recorded and entered onto the TK/PPM form – timings should be compatible with the recommendations given in the Subject Guide on page 47
- While the instructions in the Subject Guide allow for group presentations up to a group size of 5 candidates, the size of the group is likely to affect the structural logistics of the presentation itself. Presentations involving large groups are necessarily long, thus struggle to maintain high levels of interest among members of the audience, and tend to fragment as individual students are assigned particular tasks that are not re-integrated into the whole. On the other hand, presentations by individuals are necessarily very time-limited and candidates need to consider how much they can achieve within this allocation
- Just as good writing enhances the clarity and persuasiveness of an essay, good speaking skills, while not part of the formal assessment, can enhance a presentation. Material that cannot be heard clearly cannot attract credit and cannot contribute to understanding
- The principles of academic honesty must be observed and the need for acknowledgement recognized even in the oral context of the presentation

Appendix

Mandatory requirements for schools selected for verification of presentations

Selected schools are required to submit (by 15th September for November sessions, and 15th March for May sessions) materials for **5 candidates** (or all candidates if the school is registering fewer than 5 in total). These materials comprise:

- recordings of the presentations in which these candidates were involved, and
- the TK/PPM forms for those candidates

To clarify further:

- a TK/PPM must be included in the documentation for sampled candidates **ONLY**

The selection of the 5 candidates is at the discretion of the school, but should as far as possible reflect the diversity of assessment scores awarded for presentations. For this reason, schools should try to avoid the inclusion in the sample of candidates from the same presentation unless a small overall number of candidates make this inevitable. It is recognized that scores cannot be known in advance of the presentations themselves, and so it may be necessary to record more presentations than will actually be sent to the verifier in order to be sure of capturing evidence for the range of scores required. Many teachers have found that the recording of all presentations in any case has contributed to good practice for subsequent sessions, as these recordings can be helpful during the process of presentation preparation.

Schools are required to send recordings in DVD or USB format only

DVDs should be sent clearly labelled (examination session, candidate numbers where known, titles of presentations in correct order) and packaged such as to avoid damage in transit (e.g. bubble-wrap or padded envelope). Particularly important is the quality of sound on the recording, and teachers are strongly advised to check this before commencing the actual recordings of the presentations. The quality must also be checked after recording each presentation to ensure there have been no problems. If visual projections form an important part of the presentation, it should be ensured that they are readable on the recording.

As the verification of presentation assessment is on the basis of individual candidates, even if they participated in group presentations, **it is vital that verifiers can identify the candidates being sampled**. Candidates should announce clearly and slowly their identity on the recording at the start, including names (and candidate numbers if known at the time the presentation is given). Schools may consider asking students to hold up cards with this information at the start of the recording in order to facilitate this. Teachers should also ensure that recordings start well in advance of the presentation.