



TOK ESSAY

Student's Guide

(some of the texts in the content of this guide are taken or adapted from the IB TOK Guide)

Introduction

According to the IB, the TOK essay “engages students in a formal, sustained piece of writing in response to one of the six titles that are prescribed by the IB for each examination session. These titles take the form of knowledge questions that are focused on the areas of knowledge.”

Areas of Knowledge: History
The Arts
Mathematics
Human Sciences
Natural Sciences

The TOK Essay is to be completed during the early part of the second year of the Diploma Program. Therefore, you will complete this task in the second year of the program which is Form 6 in context of the school. It is important to follow strictly the school's overall schedule of internal deadlines for the completion of the TOK Essay. You will be guided in this process. You will have the opportunity to do practices for the TOK Essay and understand how it will be graded. This is an external assessment. Therefore, it is marked by IB examiners. It contributes to 2/3 of your TOK grade. Each student must write the essay individually.

The Prescribed Titles

The IB releases a set of six prescribed titles for each examination session. These titles are published six months before the submission deadline. Your teachers are advised to spend 10 hours of teaching on the TOK Essay.

The chosen title must be used exactly as given; it must not be altered in any way.

If the title has been modified but it is still clear which prescribed title for the current session it refers to, the essay will be marked against that prescribed title. Any lack of relevance in the student's response to the prescribed title arising from this modification will be reflected in the score awarded.

If it is clear that the title bears no resemblance to any title for the current session, the essay will be awarded a score of zero, in accordance with the TOK essay assessment instrument.

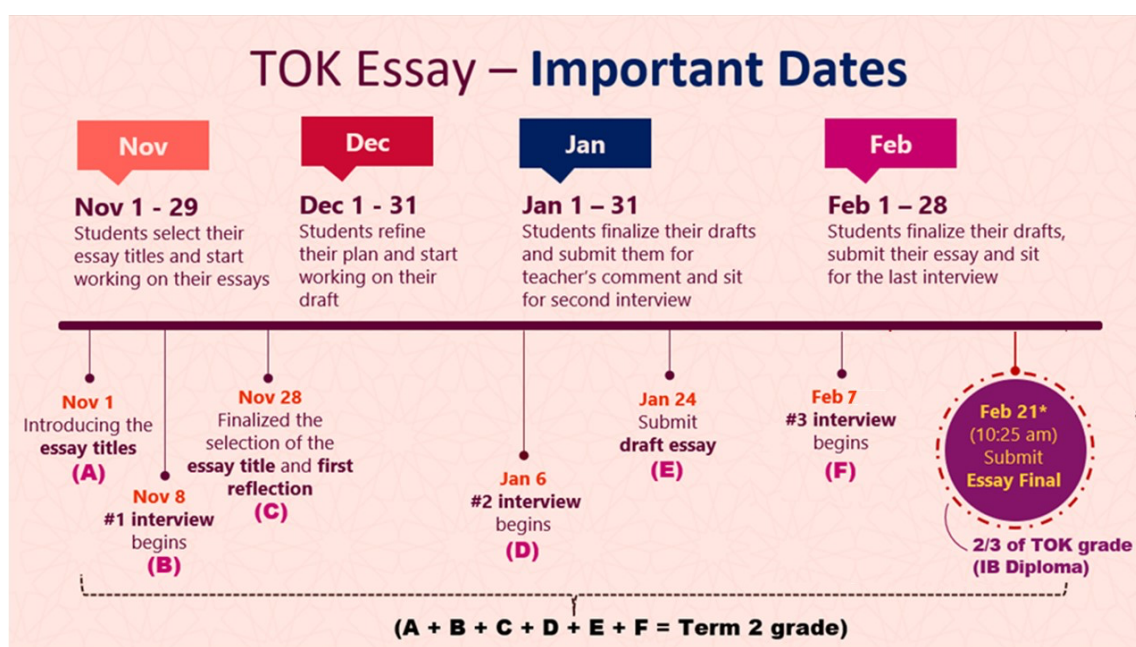
The prescribed titles for the May 2025 sessions are:

1. Do historians and human scientists have an ethical obligation to follow the directive: “do not ignore contradictory evidence”? Discuss with reference to history and the human sciences.
2. Is our most revered knowledge more fragile than we assume it to be? Discuss with reference to the arts and one other area of knowledge.
3. How can we reconcile the relentless drive to pursue knowledge with the finite resources we have available? Discuss with reference to the natural sciences and one other area of knowledge.
4. Do the ever-improving tools of an area of knowledge always result in improved knowledge? Discuss with reference to two areas of knowledge.
5. To what extent do you agree with the claim “all models are wrong, but some are useful” (attributed to George Box)? Discuss with reference to mathematics and one other area of knowledge.
6. Does acquiring knowledge destroy our sense of wonder? Discuss with reference to two areas of knowledge.

The Schedule and internal deadlines

TOK lessons on the TOK Essay and its requirement will take place in the mid of Term 1 after you have completed your review of the *Areas of Knowledge*, the *TOK Concepts*, the *Knowledge Framework* (completed in the beginning of Term 1) and the *Essay Practice*. You will be guided in unpacking the prescribed title of your choice.

The internal deadlines may be subject to change, and the below diagram summarizes the tentative timeline for the current year. You need to pay attention to any modification to this timeline as the year progresses.



Do note that certain work during this process will contribute to the Term 2 grade that will be reflected in your school report card. The final essay is meant for the IB DP external assessment and will not be used for any school related grading or reporting. These are strictly for the TOK grade for your IB Diploma Programme only.

Three required teacher–student interactions for the TOK essay

During the first interaction (interview), you should discuss the prescribed titles with the teacher. While the teacher may provide advice and suggestions, the final choice of title remains with the student, who should develop their own thinking and ideas. It is expected that you will write a reflection on this meeting after the session and post it on **Toddle**. This is the platform where you will keep evidences of the essay writing process.

You will then discuss your initial exploration of your selected title and present to your teacher your essay plan/proposal during your second interaction. It is your responsibility to develop ideas in relation to your selected titles and the areas of knowledge that you will be using for making comparison or discussion. It is expected that you discuss your initial work/explorations with the teacher by sharing them in written form. Without a written set of notes, it is extremely difficult for you to later turn them into a more formal essay plan.

Finally, in your third and final interaction with the teacher, you will get a formal feedback on the draft of your essay. Remember, you are permitted to present **ONE FULL DRAFT** of the essay to the teacher. The teacher will provide oral or written advice on how the work could be improved. This advice may take the form of written comments of a holistic nature, but teachers are not permitted to mark or edit this draft. While the student may seek further advice from the teacher, for example, on the appropriateness of a particular example or on the clarity of a section of writing, no further written advice on drafts is permitted. The next version handed to the teacher must be the final version for submission.

Guidance and authenticity

While the teacher has the responsibility to assist you in understanding the basic meaning and significance of concepts that relate to academic honesty (especially authenticity and intellectual property), you share in this responsibility by making sure you are familiar with the assessment instrument, ask clarification questions, seek assistance during all stages of the essay writing process and pay attention to cite external sources you referred to carefully. **The TOK essay must be your own work.** You must confirm that the work is your authentic ideas and work and constitutes the final version of that work. Once you have officially submitted the final version of the work it cannot be retracted.

All work submitted to the IB for moderation or assessment must be authenticated by a teacher. It is typically done through scrutiny of the style of writing compared with work known to be that of the student, or the analysis of the work by a web-based plagiarism detection service. Your work will not be submitted if it includes any known instances of suspected or confirmed misconduct.

Global Impression Marking

The TOK Essay is marked using a global impression marking approach. This means that the assessment of this task is envisaged as a process of holistic or global judgment rather than an analytical process of totaling the assessment of separate criteria. The assessment instruments present five described levels of performance. These levels are to be seen as global and holistic descriptors rather than as a checklist of necessary characteristics. When marking, the aim is to find the descriptor that conveys most accurately the level attained by the student. It is not necessary for every single aspect of a level descriptor to be met for a mark in that level to be awarded. Your teacher will explain more in class. Do make sure you pay extra attention during the classes so that you know how your work will be graded.

TOK Essay assessment instrument

The TOK Essay is an opportunity for students to engage in a formal and sustained piece of writing in response to a prescribed title focused on the areas of knowledge. The assessment of this task is underpinned by the following single driving question:

“DOES THE STUDENT PROVIDE A CLEAR, COHERENT AND CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF THE ESSAY TITLE?”

The assessment instrument provided below describes the five levels of performance in response to this driving question. These levels are to be seen as holistic descriptors rather than as a checklist of characteristics.

Does the student provide a clear, coherent and critical exploration of the essay title?					
Excellent 9-10	Good 7-8	Satisfactory 5-6	Basic 3-4	Rudimentary 1-2	0
The discussion has a sustained focus on the title and is linked effectively to areas of knowledge. Arguments are clear, coherent and effectively supported by specific examples. The implications of arguments are considered. There is clear awareness and evaluation of different points of view.	The discussion is focused on the title and is linked effectively to areas of knowledge. Arguments are clear, coherent and supported by examples. There is awareness and some evaluation of different points of view.	The discussion is focused on the title and is developed with some links to areas of knowledge. Arguments are offered and are supported by examples. There is some awareness of different points of view.	The discussion is connected to the title and makes superficial or limited links to areas of knowledge. The discussion is largely descriptive. Limited arguments are offered but they are unclear and are not supported by effective examples.	The discussion is weakly connected to the title. While there may be links to the areas of knowledge, any relevant points are descriptive or consist only of unsupported assertions.	The discussion does not reach the standard described by the other levels or is not a response to one of the prescribed titles for the correct examination session.
Possible characteristics					
Insightful Convincing Lucid Precise	Pertinent Relevant Analytical Organized	Acceptable Mainstream Adequate Competent	Underdeveloped Basic Superficial Limited	Ineffective Descriptive Incoherent Formless	

Step 1: Initial exploration

Here are a few things that you can expect during the initial exploration of the essay:

- Brainstorm ideas for all six prescribed titles as a class.
- Select 3 out of 6 prescribed titles that you are interested in and unpack them further individually. Seek advice from your teachers.
- After given your initial selection enough time, decide on 1 out of the 3 prescribed titles shortlisted in previous session.
- Write an initial description of your approach and understanding of the selected prescribed title.
- Submit it to the teacher and print a copy to your first teacher-student interaction (interview). Remember, your ideas have to be in written form.
- Write your first reflection on **Toddle**.

Step 2: Making a proposal for your TOK Essay

Complete the TOK Essay plan on your selected title.

Step 3: Writing your first draft

Since your teachers can only give feedback on ONE draft only, do make sure your first draft is of good quality with substantial content. The TOK Essay must be written in standard 12 type size and be double spaced. It is not primarily a research paper, but it is expected that specific sources will be used, and these must be acknowledged.

- a title page with the prescribed title and word count
- a 1,600-word essay
- appropriate citations and references – choose either APA or MLA

Consult the study and reference materials provided by your teachers.

Word count

The maximum length of the essay is 1,600 words. **DO NOT** use footnotes or appendices.

The word count includes:

- the main part of the essay,
- any quotations.

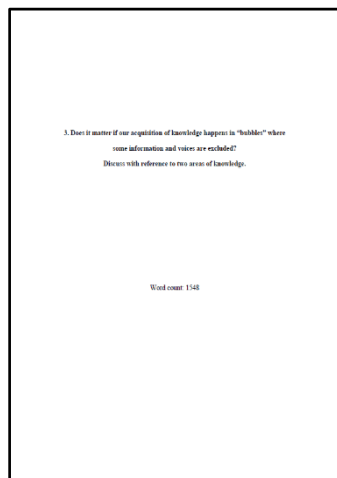
The word count does not include:

- any acknowledgments,
- the references (in-text) and bibliography,
- any maps, charts, diagrams, annotated illustrations or tables.

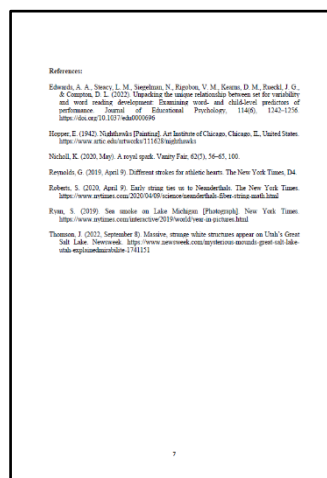
If an essay exceeds the word limit, then examiners are instructed to stop reading after 1,600 words and to base their assessment on just the first 1,600 words. Students are required to indicate the number of words when the essay is uploaded during the submission process.

Step 4: Finalize your TOK Essay and submit it

After receiving the official feedback from your teacher, you will have about two weeks to finalize your essay. It is for this reason that your draft must be of a good quality and substantial since it is quite impossible to for you find time to repeat the process all over again. The final product should follow the same format as the draft.



sample cover page



sample reference page

Step 5: Reflection

Make sure all reflections for the teacher-student interactions (interviews) are accounted for. These reflections have to be entered and saved on **Toddle**.

Example:

The screenshot displays the 'Planning and Progress Form (TK/PPF)' interface in Toddle. The top navigation bar shows 'Approved Status', 'On track Overall progress', and 'Request review'. The left sidebar lists 'Proposal', 'Reflection space', 'TOK essay', and 'TK/PPF'. The main content area is titled 'Planning and Progress Form (TK/PPF)' and includes a description: 'This space is utilised to record interactions between students and supervisor over the course of the TOK essay journey.' There is an '+ Add' button in the top right. The interface shows three numbered interaction entries, each with a 'Locked' status and a three-dot menu icon:

- 1 First interaction**
Added by Aisha Patel on 8 August 2023
I discussed my TOK essay's Knowledge Question and Preliminary Planning Form (PPF) with my supervisor. We talked about making my question clearer and connected it better to real-life situations and areas of knowledge. I shared my ideas and got feedback on expanding key terms and examples. I now understand the importance of critical analysis and depth. My next steps are refining my question, explaining terms, and using more examples for a stronger essay. I'm excited to improve and move forward in my TOK essay process.
- 2 Second interaction**
Added by Aisha Patel on 12 August 2023
I discussed my TOK essay's Knowledge Question and Preliminary Planning Form (PPF) with my supervisor. We talked about making my question clearer and connected it better to real-life situations and areas of knowledge. I shared my ideas and got feedback on expanding key terms and examples. I now understand the importance of critical analysis and depth. My next steps are refining my question, explaining terms, and using more examples for a stronger essay. I'm excited to improve and move forward in my TOK essay process.
- 3 Third interaction**
Added by Aisha Patel on 21 August 2023
I discussed my TOK essay's Knowledge Question and Preliminary Planning Form (PPF) with my supervisor. We talked about making my question clearer and connected it better to real-life situations and areas of knowledge. I shared my ideas and got feedback on expanding key terms and examples. I now understand the importance of critical analysis and depth. My next steps are refining my question, explaining terms, and using more examples for a stronger essay. I'm excited to improve and move forward in my TOK essay process.

A red warning banner above the third entry states: 'This interaction will auto lock in 15m'.