



Theory of knowledge

In order to secure success for their candidates, schools are strongly recommended to ensure that this report is read in detail by all theory of knowledge (TOK) teachers, and the Diploma Programme Coordinators.

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Grade boundaries

Overall

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0 - 4	5 - 10	11 - 16	17 - 22	23 - 30

Essay

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0 - 1	2 - 3	4 - 5	6 - 7	8 - 10

Presentation

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0 - 2	3 - 4	5 - 6	7 - 8	9 - 10

Statistical summary

	November 2018	November 2017	% Change
English	6101	5356	13.91
French	2	0	-
Spanish	6949	6116	13.62
German	9	1	800.00
Chinese	49	31	58.07
Japanese	55	24	129.17
Total candidates	13165	11528	14.19

Essay

Many thanks are extended to the 111 examiners who marked TOK essays this session. This subject report is intended to reflect the thoughtful and thorough comments that these examiners have provided in their examiner reports. As any current or past teacher of theory of knowledge knows, examining this course is challenging, but most examiners comment that there are many benefits as well. The qualifying process allows one to test one's assessment skills against those of the senior team which is very helpful training for marking one's own students' essays. Reading many essays also allows one to see the scope of materials covered in TOK classes around the world. Many good resources are included in works cited lists, and new examples may be found that might be incorporated into one's own course. Teachers with at least one year of experience teaching theory of knowledge are encouraged to apply to become examiners. More information about becoming an IB examiner is available on the IB public website at <https://www.ibo.org/jobs-and-careers/become-an-examiner-or-assessor>.

It is strongly advised that this subject report be read in conjunction with the Examiner Preparation Notes (EPNs) for this session which may be found in the theory of knowledge page of the Programme Resource Centre under "General Material". These notes were written for examiners to consult before marking the essays. They provide some ideas for how candidates might approach the prescribed titles. They are not prescriptive or exhaustive but are simply a way for all examiners to think about the titles in case they are not familiar with them or are not currently teaching the essay portion of the course. As a teacher, one might use the notes as a teaching tool when assigning past titles for practice essays. Although this subject report points out weaknesses in various aspects of the assessment, many strong and positive points are included as well. It is hoped that this report and the EPN's will be useful to teachers in preparing future candidates.

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Candidates for this November 2018 session overall showed a slightly stronger performance than the candidates in the 2017 session. In general, the quality of the essays was better than in 2017 and schools offering TOK for the first time performed slightly better this session than those offering TOK for the first time last session. While there were slightly more marks at the lower end of the scale, there were also more essays with marks at the higher end.

There were some very good essays written in Spanish that showed fresh examples and engagement with the prescribed titles. In these essays, there seemed to be a good understanding of the course and the details of the assignment. To quote a senior examiner, "In contrast to earlier sessions, some essays were fluid, relevant and structured."

However, a large number of candidates writing in Spanish did not receive high marks. For too many, it seems, there is a lack of understanding of the course and a lack of the right kind of preparation for the external assessment. It is hoped that teachers will take advantage of, both on-line and face to face workshops in order to become more familiar with the substance of the course and the nature of the assessments. In addition, there are some teacher support materials available in the theory of knowledge page of the Programme Resource Centre, as well as materials shared by other teachers via the PRC communities. Teachers are encouraged to access these by going to **IBO.ORG > MYIB > PRC > View all DP Resources**; scroll down to **Curriculum to CORE > TOK > Support Material**. There is an on-line copy of the subject guide as well as many materials related to teaching the course and to assessment.

Candidate performance on specific titles

Title one: “Existing classification systems steer the acquisition of new knowledge.” Discuss this claim with reference to two areas of knowledge.

Successful candidates considered what was meant by a classification system. They understood that it was the system, as an organized entity, that somehow determined what fit in or qualified as new knowledge according to the criteria of the system. Candidates were often able to meaningfully discuss what was meant by new knowledge in a variety of areas of knowledge (AOKs). Most candidates also discussed how “steering” could have both positive and negative results. Some discussed the idea of classification, but they ignored the idea of a system being at work and this usually resulted in a lack of attention being paid to the idea of the system steering the acquisition of new knowledge.

Title two: “Technology provides ever-expanding access to shared knowledge. Therefore, the need to assimilate such knowledge personally is relentlessly diminishing. To what extent do you agree with this statement?”

Many candidates seemed to enjoy the opportunity to discuss technology and could readily agree that “technology provides ever-expanding access to shared knowledge.” Most focused exclusively on the internet. They had no difficulty providing examples of the immediate access, through search engines, to huge amounts of information. Only the most astute candidates discussed the difference between this information and knowledge and these candidates seemed to realize that although there is much information available, there is still a need to assimilate it personally to determine its usefulness or value. Some candidates did not consider the idea of assimilation at all. Instead, some suggested that, because so much information is available automatically, this removes the need for individuals to know anything. The better essays dealt with the idea of the need to assimilate knowledge personally in order to learn and expand one’s own knowledge and also discussed the idea that the need to assimilate is “relentlessly diminishing,” which resulted in a look at this happening over time.

Title three: Are disputes over knowledge claims within a discipline always resolvable? Answer this question by comparing and contrasting disciplines taken from two areas of knowledge.

The most successful candidates took note of the word “always” in the title. For disputes to always be resolvable, they realized that it would be necessary to see that “resolution” might take different forms depending on the seriousness of the dispute and possibly depending on the discipline in which the dispute occurred. Some offered that a resolution might not require complete agreement on both sides or the eradication of any issues between two knowledge claims but, instead, the resolution might end in both “sides” agreeing to disagree. Some candidates defined “resolution” as coming to a complete agreement and therefore, concluded that disputes are not always resolvable. They could then easily give an example of one that was resolvable and one that was not and conclude by answering the title question in the negative. These responses were often less analytical and sometimes superficial.

Title four: “Those who have knowledge don’t predict. Those who predict don’t have knowledge.” (Lao Tzu) Discuss this statement with reference to two areas of knowledge.

This was a challenging title that required candidates to stay focused on the two parts of the title and to treat them equally in two areas of knowledge. It was also challenging because prediction may take on different meanings and importance depending on the AOK. It was important for candidates to establish what it meant to “have knowledge” and why this determined whether or not one would predict. For the first part of the title, successful candidates mostly argued that those who have knowledge are wise enough

to appreciate the perils of prediction in the natural sciences or economics, for instance. For the second part of the title, the discussion was often on the role of hypothesis or the prediction of trends and the argument was that knowledge is needed to make sensible predictions. Some candidates considered only one side of the title or made the mistake of rephrasing the title to ask, “to what extent is it possible to predict if we have knowledge?” Any rewording of the title very often results in a skewing of the title or an elimination of an important part of the title.

Title five: “Too much relevant knowledge in a field might be a hindrance to the production of knowledge in that field. “Discuss this claim with reference to two areas of knowledge.

This title was challenging because of the need for candidates to keep several things in mind while addressing the title. First the idea of “too much knowledge” in a field had to be explained. How much is “too much” and how does this manifest itself? Also, the fact that “too much” is inherently negative; it is not the same as having a great deal of knowledge or abundant knowledge. If candidates reworded the title in this way, they missed the point of the allegation in the title about the amount of knowledge in the field being “too much.” It is far easier to imagine that “too much” of anything might be a hindrance. It is much more difficult to see that having an abundance of something is a hindrance. An abundance is a good thing; an abundance of knowledge allows for all kinds of positive results and is probably always an asset in the production of knowledge. Many candidates made this mistake. For candidates who did address the idea of “too much,” the next task was to appreciate the importance of the word, “relevant.” Having “too much relevant knowledge” is far more challenging than too much knowledge, only some of which is relevant. Successful candidates kept all this in mind and wrote about the challenges of determining which knowledge is relevant and the challenge of determining how much is “too much.”

Title six: “The importance of establishing incontrovertible facts is overestimated. Most knowledge deals in ambiguity. “Discuss this statement with reference to two areas of knowledge.

The title suggests that we have given a lot of weight to facts and that there are such things as incontrovertible” facts, or at least that we aim to establish these. Candidates needed to consider which AOK would most likely encourage this kind of certainty. By being “overestimated,” it is suggested that too much notice is paid to what can be said to be certain. Many successful candidates went on to explain what is meant by the second claim, that “most knowledge deals in ambiguity.” Successful candidates acknowledged the place of seemingly incontrovertible facts but also addressed the need to balance that perceived certainty with the possibility that the fact will be overturned or controverted. Conclusions about the overestimation of the importance of establishing incontrovertible facts often addressed the idea of knowledge being produced through trial and error, the role of serendipity and the place of the scientific method, among other ways that knowledge is produced in the real world.

Quality and degree of teacher guidance

It is difficult to assess the degree and quality of teacher guidance, but there seems to be a correlation between success on the essay and adequate teacher involvement. Of course, guidance and advice may be offered, but a candidate must accept and heed the advice. The subject report is written with that in mind. There are suggestions for guiding the candidate through the essay process in the next section.

Recommendations for IB procedures and instructions

Most essays are written in a standard, readable 12-font type and double-spaced but some are still written in single space, which makes them much harder to read. Teachers are asked to ensure that candidates follow the instructions about the formatting of the essay as stated in the subject guide under Part 1: Essay on a prescribed title. “General instructions”.

Most candidates write the prescribed title at the top of the first page as requested, and most candidates remember **not** to include any personal information on the first page, but we are still receiving a number of essays with cover pages giving the school and/or candidate name and the instructor’s name. Please do not do this. It is important to ensure that the marking of the essays is completely anonymous and free from any potential bias.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Knowledge questions should arise naturally as a candidate responds to the prescribed title. These questions are the same ones that candidates regularly respond to in discussions in TOK class when they are asked to defend or give evidence for a claim. These ideas should reflect the natural progression of candidates’ thoughts as they develop their essays. Under no circumstances, should the candidate construct an original knowledge question as in the internal assessment. Doing this almost always results in the candidate veering off course and responding to that knowledge question rather than addressing the title. In fact, it is not necessary for any questions that drive the inquiry to be asked explicitly. Knowledge questions can be implicit in the candidate’s discussion.

Ways of knowing should not simply be mentioned or listed at the start of the essay. Often, this is done and no further mention of them is made in the essay. As we probably use all of the ways of knowing (WOKs) to some degree when we are acquiring or producing knowledge, it is not even necessary for a candidate to say that a particular WOK is being “used.” Instead, a candidate may indicate an awareness that “**how** we know what we claim to know” is a result of all of our capacities and, just as we are not usually conscious of these capacities in real life, there is no need to point out that scientists “use” reason and historians “use” memory. This is simplistic and does not get at the heart of what is being discussed. It seems logical that a historian’s reliance on memory, aided by reason and intuition, etc. are a result of the methods used in the production of knowledge. The Global Assessment Instrument states that an essay should link to areas of knowledge **and/or** ways of knowing. If links are made to WOKs, candidates should be advised to show the interconnectedness of the ways of knowing as a network of capacities for producing or acquiring knowledge.

Examples should be explained in enough detail to shed light on the subject and extend our understanding, but the explanation should be as brief as possible to avoid long, descriptive passages. Examples taken from the candidate’s own life experiences, school work or culture, etc., are often the most effective, but all examples should clarify what is being offered by way of a model or analogy or other means of clarifying a point. It is not enough to state an example and expect the examiner to make the connections or to see how the example works. The candidate should explain the implications of the example thus showing why it is, in fact, an example.

Teachers are asked to have three interactions with candidates during the course of their essay preparation and development. The first interaction is intended to help candidates understand what the prescribed title means. Candidates must record the three interactions on their PPF. It is appropriate to discuss any terms or concepts in the title that may be unfamiliar and the command terms, such as “explain,” or “discuss.”

Teachers should refrain from suggesting specific examples during these discussions of the titles but should encourage the students to take notes as ideas occur to them.

In the second interaction, teachers should see evidence of a plan or outline that shows that the candidate understands the prescribed title and has come to a decision of which areas of knowledge (AOKs) are most appropriate (when the title requires them) and will allow for the best development of the his or her ideas. How detailed this plan is and what form it takes will depend on the ability of the candidates; the teacher's judgment is best in this case.

Before the final essay is submitted, the third interaction should include a discussion of the one draft that the candidate is allowed to submit and on which the teacher is allowed to give feedback. While this feedback should be of a general nature, it is appropriate for the teacher to comment on how balanced the exploration is; in other words, has the candidate devoted much more discussion to one AOK at the expense of the other. Although a teacher may not give an example to a candidate, it is appropriate to comment on the examples the candidate has chosen; do they actually shed light on the point being made and are they analysed, etc. It is not permitted for the teacher to edit the candidate's draft, but the teacher may make general comments about the clarity of the wording, and for candidates who are not writing in their first language, a bit more help may be given. The teacher might also comment on whether the conclusion of the essay actually **concludes** the discussion and does not simply repeat the introduction. The conclusion should seem to answer the question, "so what?" This is one way to offer the kind of implications that sets excellent essays apart.

Perhaps the most important comment a teacher can make is to tell the candidates whether or not they have addressed the prescribed title **as it is written**. If the candidate has written his or her own knowledge question and set out to answer it instead of addressing the question (s) implied by the title, it is very unlikely that the candidate will achieve a satisfactory mark. Telling the candidates that they have not answered the question will allow them to revise the essay, but as the teacher may not read another version, it is best that this reminder be issued throughout the process. It is important to remind teachers and candidates, as stated in the *DP Assessment procedures document*, that "A candidate's essay will be assessed against their chosen title as published, so candidates **must not** modify the title. Essays not written on one of the correct prescribed titles will automatically be awarded zero marks".

Presentation

Thanks are extended to the 18 examiners who moderated presentations this session. The richness and variety of the theory of knowledge presentation planning documents (TK/PPDs) viewed by examiners was compelling. The presentation task allows candidates to select their real-life situations from any field or state of affairs in the world and most made good use of that freedom. Many candidates showed genuine understanding of the nature of the task and also an ability to consider TOK concepts and develop solid argumentation from the spring board of those initial real-life situations. Those situations needed to be situations of significance for knowledge questions to be extracted from them in a meaningful way.

Starting with well-formulated real-life situations and knowledge questions enabled the exploration that is required in a TOK presentation. Candidates who did not select 'real' real-life situations and did not have well-formulated knowledge questions were generally unable to plan and deliver a solid TOK presentation. It is therefore all-important that candidates choose their real-life situations well and that they come up with a central knowledge question which is clearly extracted from it. It is also crucial that teachers support their students in this respect.

The range and suitability of the work submitted

As has been highlighted in previous reports, the purpose of the presentation planning document (TK/PPD) is twofold. On one hand it is there to aid the candidate in ensuring that the focus of their presentation is a TOK focus. That is the reason for the guided step-by-step approach of the TK/PPD. It is in the interest of all candidates to follow these steps to ensure that their presentations keep the right direction and thus fulfil the requirements of the assessment instrument. The other purpose of the TK/PPD is moderation of the teachers' marking. Examiners will read the 'Candidate Section' and consider if the evidence provided by the student supports the mark awarded by the teacher according to the assessment instrument. They will also use the teacher explanation of the mark as supporting evidence.

Many candidates did well this session, and their teachers provided helpful comments and good justifications for the marks they awarded. On the other hand, some candidates seemed to forget that content is needed in their TK/PPD. If for instance, the outline is just a list of headings of what the candidate is going to do (for example, introduction; KQ, outline, conclusion, etc) it is impossible for the examiner to identify any argument.

On the whole, candidates have improved their selection of situations which are real and significant, and furthermore they have improved their ability to describe them clearly. The space provided for the description of the real-life situation in the TK/PPD is small, making it clear to the candidate that he or she must not spend a lot of time describing the real-life situation – that is not what the TOK presentation is about. Two or three sentences are enough. There were fewer hypothetical or trivial 'real-life situations' but once again teachers are exhorted to help their students make sound selections and ensure that they help their students make a good start.

There were also fewer, but still too many, cases where the candidates described their real-life situation in the first box of the TK/PPD and then totally forgot about the real-life situation in the rest of their presentation. Those candidates evidently did not understand the point of having a real-life situation. Teachers must point their students to the basic requirement in the outline, which is that students indicate how they intend to develop their presentation *in the context* of their real-life situation.

The TOK presentation must show progression in an argument, hence the space given to conclusions. The presentation must go somewhere and the reader of the TK/PPD and the viewer of the presentation, must

find it clear that progress has been made from the initial question to a conclusion. Far too often, candidates do not seem to know what to write in the 'conclusions' box and that is usually the case when they do not have a clear argument in the outline with a clear direction.

Teacher comments were mostly clear and helpful. Some marks were overgenerous and were not explained in a way that showed how the assessment instrument had been applied.

Recommendations for IB procedures, instructions and forms

The TK/PPDs were mostly clear. There are still cases of high marks awarded where there is little or no evidence of TOK thinking in the candidate section.

A few candidates try to write too much in some of the boxes and examiners found that the last sentences were incomplete.

Yet again, some teachers do not check that they have submitted the same mark for the presentation on IBIS as that on the TK/PPD. Teachers are reminded that the mark that counts is the mark submitted electronically on IBIS. Please also be reminded that the 'Candidate Section' may not exceed 500 words.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

As has been mentioned before, candidates need to show TOK analysis in their TK/PPDs. For that they need to use TOK vocabulary and show evidence of second order TOK thinking. Teachers must work with their students to support them in this respect and it is recommended that they work on practice presentations. Some teachers would also benefit from further study of the subject guide, the teacher support material and additional support material (available on the TOK page of the Programme Resource Centre) in order to ensure they have a clear understanding of the nature of the TOK presentation.