

ST. JOSEPH'S INSTITUTION INTERNATIONAL MALAYSIA



THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE HANDBOOK 2017-19

What is the Theory of Knowledge (TOK)?

TOK is a course about critical thinking and inquiring into the process of knowing, rather than about learning a specific body of knowledge. It is a core element which all Diploma Programme students undertake and to which all schools are required to devote at least 100 hours of class time.

TOK and the Diploma Programme subjects should support each other in the sense that they reference each other and share some common goals. The TOK course examines how we know what we claim to know. It does this by encouraging students to analyse knowledge claims and explore knowledge questions.

A knowledge claim is the assertion that “**I/we know X**” or “**I/we know how to Y**”, or a statement about knowledge; a knowledge question is an open question about knowledge. A distinction between **shared knowledge** and **personal knowledge** is made in the TOK guide. This distinction is intended as a device to help teachers construct their TOK course and to help students explore the nature of knowledge.

The place of TOK within the IB Diploma

Along with CAS and the Extended Essay, TOK forms part of the Core of the IB Diploma. However, its specific role in the IB Diploma has always been a special one.

TOK plays a special role in the Diploma Programme by providing an opportunity for students to reflect on the nature of knowledge. The task of TOK is to emphasize connections between areas of knowledge and link them to the knower in such a way that the knower can become aware of his or her own perspectives and those of the various groups whose knowledge he or she shares. TOK, therefore, explores both the personal and shared aspects of knowledge and investigates the relationships between them.

The raw material of TOK is knowledge itself. Students think about how knowledge is arrived at in the various disciplines, what the disciplines have in common and the differences between them. The fundamental question of TOK is “how do we know that?” The answer might depend on the discipline and the purpose to which the knowledge is put. TOK explores methods of inquiry and tries to establish what it is about these methods that makes them effective as knowledge tools. In this sense TOK is concerned with knowing about knowing.

The individual knower has to try to make sense of the world and understand his or her relationship to it. He or she has at his or her disposal the resources of the areas of knowledge, for example, the academic disciplines studied in the Diploma

Programme. He or she also has access to ways of knowing such as memory, intuition, reason and sense perception that help us navigate our way in a complex world.

It is easy to be bewildered by the sheer diversity of the knowledge on offer. For example:

- In Physics, experiment and observation seem to be the basis for knowledge. The physicist might want to construct a hypothesis to explain observations that do not fit current thinking and devises and performs experiments to test this hypothesis. Results are then collected and analysed and, if necessary, the hypothesis modified to accommodate them.

- In History there is no experimentation. Instead, documentary evidence provides the historian with the raw material for interpreting and understanding the recorded past of humanity. By studying these sources carefully a picture of a past event can be built up along with ideas about what factors might have caused it.

- In a literature class students set about understanding and interpreting a text. No observation of the outside world is necessary, but there is a hope that the text can shed some light upon deep questions about what it is to be human in a variety of world situations or can act as a critique of the way in which we organize our societies.

- Economics, by contrast, considers the question of how human societies allocate scarce resources. This is done by building elaborate mathematical models based upon a mixture of reasoning and empirical observation of relevant economic factors.

- In the islands of Micronesia, a steersman successfully navigates between two islands 1,600 km apart without a map or a compass.

In each case above there is clearly knowledge at work, although the collection as a whole illustrates a wide variety of different types of knowledge. The task of TOK is to examine different areas of knowledge and find out what makes them different and what they have in common.

At the centre of the course is the idea of knowledge questions. These are questions such as:

- what counts as evidence for X?
- what makes a good explanation in subject Y?

Approaches to teaching and learning in the Theory of Knowledge (TOK)

The ways of knowing (WOKs)

While there are arguably many ways of knowing, the TOK course identifies eight specific ways of knowing (WOKs). They are **language, sense perception, emotion,**

reason, imagination, faith, intuition, and memory. Students must explore a range of ways of knowing, and it is suggested that studying **four** of these **eight** in depth would be appropriate.

The WOKs have two roles in TOK:

- they underlie the methodology of the areas of knowledge
- they provide a basis for personal knowledge

Discussion of WOKs will naturally occur in a TOK course when exploring how areas of knowledge operate. Since they rarely function in isolation, the TOK course should explore how WOKs work, and how they work together, both in the context of different areas of knowledge and in relation to the individual knower. This might be reflected in the way the TOK course is constructed. Teachers should consider the possibility of teaching WOKs in combination or as a natural result of considering the methods of areas of knowledge, rather than as separate units.

The areas of knowledge

Areas of knowledge are specific branches of knowledge, each of which can be seen to have a distinct nature and different methods of gaining knowledge. TOK distinguishes between eight areas of knowledge. They are **mathematics, the natural sciences, the human sciences, the arts, history, ethics, religious knowledge systems, and indigenous knowledge systems.** Students must explore a range of areas of knowledge, and it is suggested that studying **six** of these **eight** would be appropriate.

The knowledge framework is a device for exploring the areas of knowledge. It identifies the key characteristics of each area of knowledge by depicting each area as a complex system of five interacting components. This enables students to effectively compare and contrast different areas of knowledge and allows the possibility of a deeper exploration of the relationship between areas of knowledge and ways of knowing.

Theory of Knowledge (TOK) and the IB learner profile

While you progress through your diploma programme studies and activities, you will develop a number of attributes. The IB calls this the IB “learner profile”. This table shows you what the learner profile attributes are and some examples of how your Theory of Knowledge course is linked with them.

We hope you will become ...	Link to TOK
Inquirers	TOK students seek to find out how knowledge is constructed using various ways of knowing and by considering what constitutes knowledge in various areas of knowledge. It is a fundamental premise of TOK that personal knowledge should

	not result from simple acceptance of knowledge claims without sufficient inquiry and evidence.
Knowledgeable	TOK students strive to be knowledgeable about the nature of knowledge. This means becoming knowledgeable about the methods of inquiry of a variety of subject areas, from a number of perspectives. Students are encouraged to explore the processes by which individuals arrive at their own knowledge and understanding of the world and the presuppositions that underpin this understanding.
Thinkers	TOK students examine thinking in order to understand what constitutes good thinking and also to recognize potential flaws in thought processes. Students also think about what thinking is required in a variety of situations, as well as how thinking relates to emotional processing and intuition.
Communicators	TOK students are required by the TOK assessment tasks to communicate their understanding and perspective in both oral and written form. Students also study the language that is used to develop a body of knowledge, so they learn what gives language its power as well as what causes failures of communication.
Principled	TOK students scrutinize knowledge in a critical manner, leading to what could be called principled knowledge. Students are required to examine the relationship between possessing knowledge and the moral obligations that this carries. Learning to see the world from a TOK perspective challenges students to think about acting in principled ways.
Open-minded	TOK students need to be open-minded about knowledge claims they encounter. They will learn not to simply accept claims at face value, but to consider the factual accuracy of any proposition and the potential emotional, social or cognitive bias of any person making a proposition. At the same time, they must learn to balance skepticism with belief, and recognize that in many situations there is a need to make decisions without possessing absolute certainty.
Caring	TOK students are asked to care about how they use their knowledge. This necessarily means thinking about how knowledge can be used in sympathetic, empathetic and compassionate ways.
Risk-takers	TOK students must be willing to risk questioning what they hold to be true. This means that they must be willing to risk being wrong. When we are willing to accept being wrong then we make progress towards correcting existing misconceptions and increasing our knowledge and understanding of the world. The word "judgment" is central in TOK, and students should be prepared to take the risks involved in making judgments in matters where the evidence does not definitively favour one view or another, while at the same time acknowledging the provisional nature of these judgments.
Balanced	TOK students are committed to viewing knowledge claims from different perspectives. They are also required to consider a range of areas of knowledge. TOK requires a balance of ability in speaking and writing, and a balance of ability in drawing general conclusions from specific examples and in drawing on specific examples to demonstrate general claims.

Reflective	TOK students learn to reflect on the degree to which their own and other people's motivations, beliefs, thought processes and emotional reactions influence what they know and what they are capable of knowing.
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Topics studied

- Personal and shared knowledge
- In-depth examination of at least the following four WOKs: **language, sense perception, reason, faith**
- In-depth examination of at least the following six areas of knowledge: **mathematics, the natural sciences, the human sciences, History, Ethics, Religion**
- Sub-topics related to the six areas of knowledge, which may include: **simple mathematical proofs, beauty and elegance in mathematics, axioms and rejection of the axiomatic approach, mathematics in nature, the problem of induction, falsification, the scientific method, Scientific Revolutions and paradigm shifts, the relationship between the human sciences and the natural sciences, observation and the effect of the observer, polling, predictions, trends, and laws, reliability of historical sources, objectivity in history, the relationship between history and the human sciences, progress and patterns in history, emotion and reason in ethics, ethical dilemmas, ethical theories, ethical language, the nature of God, religious language, religious experience and miracles, religious pluralism**

Theory of Knowledge (TOK) in the timetable at SJIIM

The IB requires 100 hours of teaching time for the Theory of Knowledge course. At SJIIM, TOK is allocated one double lesson per week.

Final assessment in TOK

There are two assessment tasks in the TOK course: an essay and a presentation. The essay is externally assessed by the IB, and must be on any one of the six prescribed titles issued by the IB for each examination session. The maximum word limit for the essay is 1,600 words.

The presentation can be done individually or in a group, with a maximum group size of three. Approximately 10 minutes per presenter should be allowed, up to a maximum of approximately 30 minutes per group.

Before the presentation each student must complete and submit a presentation planning document (TK/ PPD) available in the Handbook of procedures for the

Diploma Programme. The TK/PPD is internally assessed alongside the presentation itself, and the form is used for external moderation.

TOK course outline

Students can expect the first year of their TOK course to focus on discussions and analysis of both the ways of knowing and the areas of knowledge through a variety of formats and media. The second year of the course will primarily focus on students developing their TOK presentations and completing their final essays.

TOK resources

Textbooks

The textbook we use is 'Theory of Knowledge for the IB Diploma, Second Edition' by Richard van de Langemaat, published by Cambridge University Press.

Although the text serves as background information for all the key topics in the course, it shall be emphasized that TOK is not a "textbook driven" course. The kinds of questions and discussions students will be engaging in are by their nature exceedingly complex. Thus, students should expect to explore these topics in a wide array of formats.