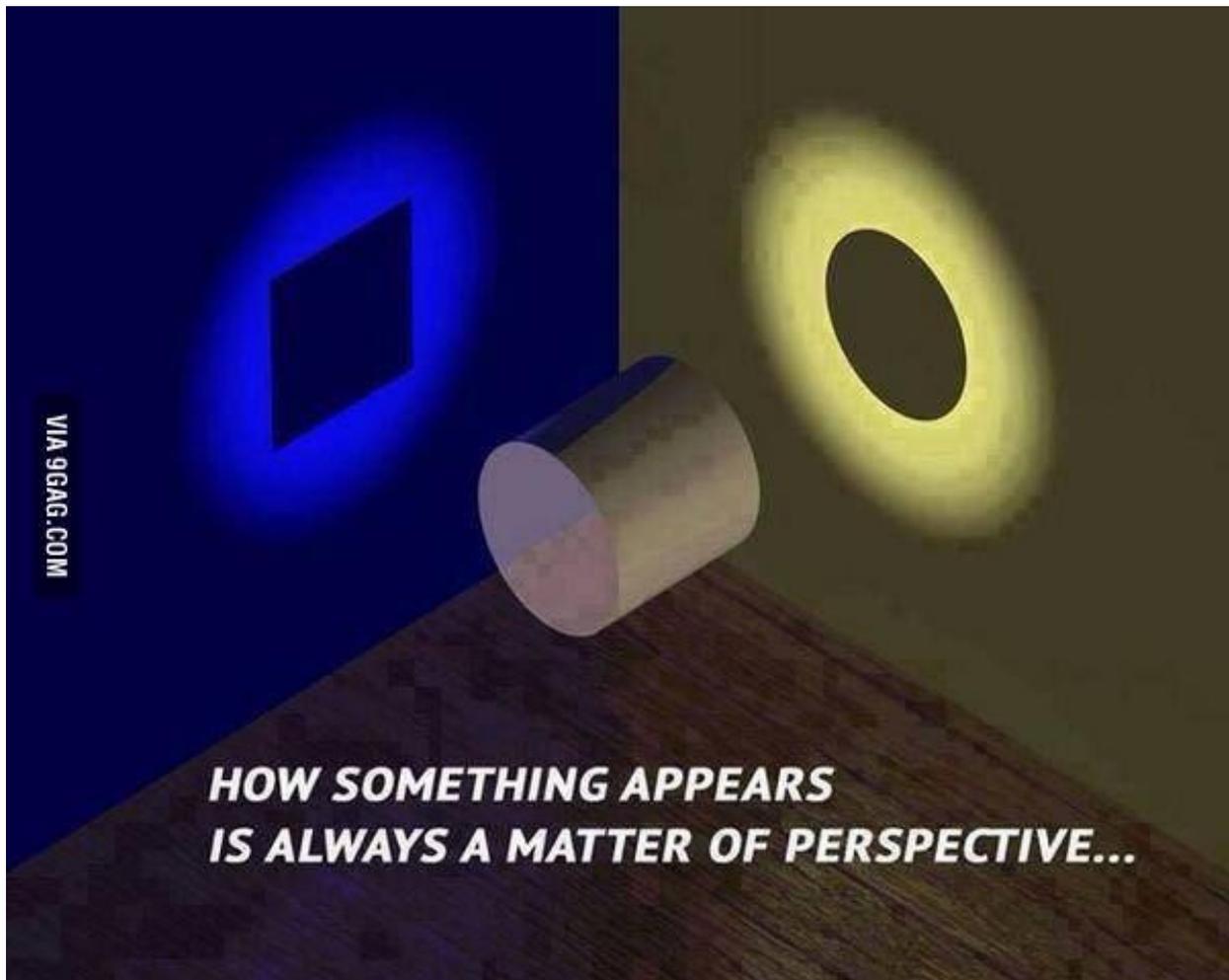


THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Course description



TOK plays a special role in the International Diploma Programme by asking students to reflect on how we know what we know. It is central to the IB philosophy and compulsory for all students like CAS and the extended essay.

What is the course about?

The aims of the TOK course include the ability to make interdisciplinary connections and to become aware of the interpretative nature of knowledge including personal and ideological biases. How does it work?

REFLECTION

- Students reflect on their experience as knowers and as learners

- Students make connections between academic disciplines

PERSPECTIVES

- Students appreciate the diversity of ways of thinking and living
- Students take an interest in individuals and communities

APPRECIATION

- Students develop a fascination with the richness of knowledge as a human endeavour
- Students understand the empowerment that follows from reflecting upon it

NUTS AND BOLTS

- Students develop awareness of how knowledge is acquired, critically examined and evaluated by communities and individuals
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RESPONSE

- Students place TOK in context of IB educational goals
- Students respect and appreciate cultural, political, religious, theoretical and other perspectives
- Students connect shared knowledge or personal knowledge with knowledge questions

How is the course structured?

In the first year we explore ways of knowing and areas of knowledge. They are mathematics, the natural sciences, the human sciences, the arts, ethics, religious knowledge systems.

In the second year we will look at indigenous knowledge systems.

Assessments

In the first year students will learn how to make presentations and how to formulate knowledge questions.

In the second year students will learn how to write essays and will prepare for their internal assessment and their external assessments.

What are ways of knowing?

The IB course uses 8 ways of knowing which lead to knowledge. They are:

Sense perception, reason, language, emotion, intuition, faith, memory and imagination. Some are used more than others depending on context and the areas of knowledge studied.

What are the areas of knowledge?

The TOK course distinguishes between eight AOKs:

- mathematics
- natural sciences
- human sciences
- history
- the arts
- ethics
- religious knowledge systems
- indigenous knowledge systems.

What is a successful TOK course?

A successful TOK course

- Ensures that students understand and are prepared for assessment tasks;
- Has a structure that is clear to students;
- Is student centred
- Ensures that students understand the purpose of TOK and its central role in the DP;
- Encourages students continually to apply the TOK thinking skills process to discussions of examples, themes and areas of knowledge and ways of knowing;
- Allows the teacher model critical thinking, thoughtful enquiry and curiosity;
- Ensures that students are taught how to approach a TOK title.

What materials will I need?

Students will need:

- To have a folder to take notes

- To be involved in the classroom
- To have an enquiring mind

What Will students learn?

Students will understand the purpose of TOK and its central role in the DP. Students will learn to prepare for assessment tasks and will build on their own experience and become independent thinker. Students will learn to appreciate the perspectives and values of others and will develop habits of mind that come from considering other perspectives. Students will learn how to write a TOK essay and how to unpack an essay title. Students will learn to formulate knowledge questions for their presentation.

What are knowledge questions?

They are open questions about knowledge. They are open in the sense that there are a number of plausible answers to it. Knowledge questions are about knowledge and are not questions of knowledge themselves. They focus on ways of knowing and knowledge frameworks.

What is not a TOK knowledge question?

What is the atomic mass of Hydrogen? It is not a TOK knowledge question: it has a definite answer. What makes knowledge questions controversial is that they often depend crucially on the contested understanding of one or other key idea leaving room for disagreement.

Is Rembrandt a better painter than Maxfield Parrish? It is not a TOK knowledge question since it is not specifically about knowledge.

Knowledge questions in TOK:

What sort of knowledge, if any, is expressed by an artwork?

How can we know how reliable DNA evidence is in criminal trials?

What methods of advertising do advertisers use to manipulate the beliefs of consumers?

How do we know to what extent we can rely upon expert witnesses in murder trials?

Do non-rational elements help shape one's judgements of the reliability of others?

How could we know if it is right to give equal pay to male and female football stars given that there is more interest in the male game?

How could the claims of homeopathy be definitively tested?

What evidence establishes guilt 'beyond reasonable doubt' in a murder trial?

How can we assess the reliability of two historical accounts of the Falklands/Malvinas conflict?

To what extent is it legitimate to use statistical techniques to estimate population sizes of woodland insects?

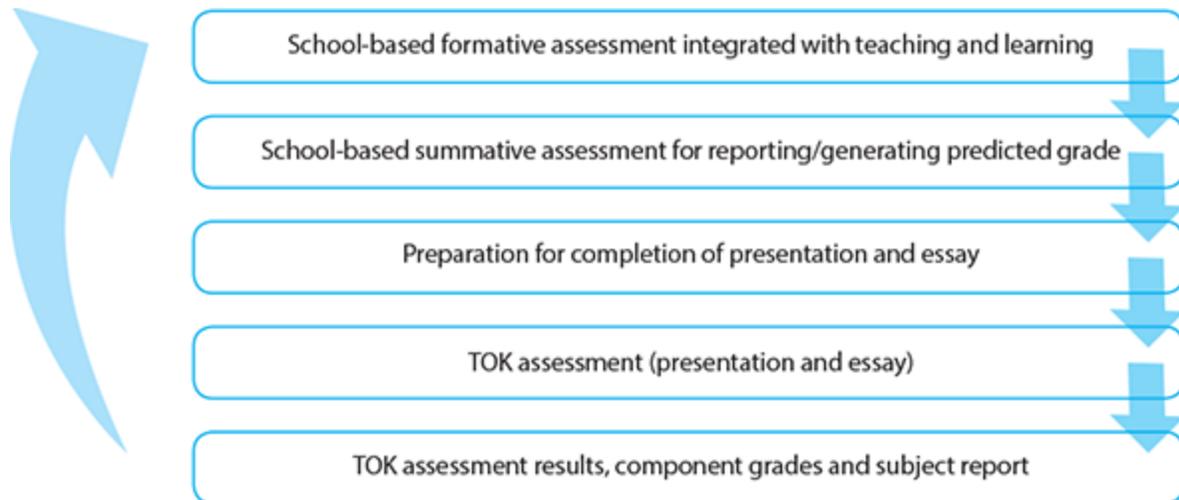
Possible presentation topics

- Items pertaining to the local community, school area or country which have practical consequences;
How do we know the social benefits and disadvantages of building a new factory in the locality?
- Conflicts between two groups of a political, social, psychological or economic nature:
What can be said about the role of values in the dispute? What are the strengths and weaknesses of different ways of knowing employed in the conflict?
- Sciences or arts: how can the truth of the knowledge claim be decided? Is there any weakness in the support of the claim?

How is the course assessed?

The course is assessed through an oral presentation and a 1 600 word essay

Students have to choose one essay title from a list of six 'prescribe titles' which are set by the IB.



MyIB and TSM

TOK presentation assessment instrument

In what ways the syllabus promotes the attributes of the IB learner profile?

- Reflective: this is the essence of the TOK; the knower reflects on his/her own beliefs and examines his or her traditions;
- Balanced: the TOK knower seeks a balance between thought and action, between verbal knowledge and practical experience.
- Risk-taker: the TOK learner is an intellectual risk-taker: this means that she/he is prepared to take on the unknown and shows a readiness to learn and adapt to new and unfamiliar situations;
- Caring: the TOK knower seeks to think in a way that takes into account the interests of others and of the environment around him/her.
- Open-minded: The TOK learner appreciates the perspectives and values of groups other than her/his own and develops habits of mind that come from considering other perspectives.
- Enquirers: Enquiry forces the learner to become an independent thinker.
- Knowledgeable: The knower acquires a broad base of knowledge across the subject disciplines and in practical experience outside the classroom.
- Thinkers: the knower seeks to be active, reasoning, creative and ethical in his/her decision-making.
- Communicators: the knower realises that the enterprise of knowledge is often collaborative; there is a need for communicating and expressing ideas clearly.
- Principled: the knower seeks to understand and respect others. He/she understands the meaning of ethical responsibilities and conduct.

What is the relationship between TOK and CAS?

TOK, the EE and CAS are central to the IB philosophy and there are links and relationships between them. They are committed to the principle of developing the whole person and support the IB continuum of education and the learner profile. Opportunities will be given to students to have conversations with others from different backgrounds and different viewpoints, therefore challenging their own values.

Example of projects linking CAS and TOK: Mode United Nations

What TOK resources will students use?

Here are some examples:

- Articles from journals like:
 - The Economist
 - The New Scientist
 - Philosophy Talk
- TED.com
- Radio Lab

- Own experience
- Examples from other disciplines
- Websites:

Spiked, Edge, Arts and Letters Daily, Science online, Ethics update for example.

How is collaboration built at BISC?

Here are examples of effective collaboration at BISC:

- Subject teachers are informed of opportunities to link Topics in their subjects with TOK topics and themes;
- Subject teachers and members of the school community are invited to TOK lessons to support the learning experience;
- IB meetings provide opportunities to build an understanding of skills needed in TOK;
- The TOK teacher has informal discussions with subjects teachers to encourage collaboration;
- Teachers are informed of the TOK titles to subject teachers so that they participate in the TOK experience and become familiar with it;
- Teachers are invited to the TOK presentations;

How are challenges overcome?

Subject teachers and guests are empowered through informal TOK discussions and attending TOK presentations or TOK lessons. The TOK core element is demystified by telling subject teachers that they do not have to teach TOK and they can collaborate by:

- Using the TOK references in their subject guides;
- Encouraging students to ask enquiry questions in class;
- Highlighting assumptions and biases in arguments;

How does the TOK teacher share her professional development with other teachers?

This is made possible by sharing ideas from workshops and updating teachers on how the materials from a course can be a catalyst for ideas using subject teachers' own creative thinking and context in the classroom.

How does the course encourage international-mindedness?

Students are encouraged look at different perspectives and to be aware that there are multiple perspectives on a knowledge issue. The exploration of issues of a local and global significance encourages students to examine different perspectives.

How students' international-mindedness will develop?

The core programme is driven by the IB's mission 'to develop enquiring knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect'. This will be developed using the aims of the TOK course and, in particular, by critically examining how communities and individuals can be different and respecting different perspectives. Issues of global significance will be explored and students will be encouraged to consider different values and norms and different cultural perspectives.

Acknowledgement

MyIB and TSM

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