

Theory of knowledge

The subject

The Theory of Knowledge (TOK) course is all about critical thinking and inquiring into the process of knowing. As such, TOK plays a special role in the Diploma Programme as it gives the students the opportunity to reflect on the nature of knowledge itself.

In TOK students think about how knowledge is arrived at in the various disciplines and areas of knowledge (natural sciences, human sciences, math, etc.), what the disciplines and areas of knowledge have in common and the differences between them. The fundamental question of TOK is “how do we know that?” and the answer to this question might very well depend on the discipline and the purpose to which the knowledge is put. The aim of TOK is not only to make the students aware of the connections between different areas of knowledge but also to make them reflect upon his or her own perspectives (personal knowledge) and those of the various groups whose knowledge he or she shares (shared knowledge).

The TOK course invites the students to explore the methods used in their different subject inquiries and guides them in trying to establish what it is about these methods that makes them more or less effective as knowledge tools. During the TOK course the students examines how they can know what they claim to know by analyzing knowledge claims (“I/we know X”) and exploring knowledge questions (open knowledge questions like: “How can a mathematical model give us knowledge even if it does not yield accurate predictions question about knowledge”). These abstract questions are made accessible to the students as they are dealt with not only in the TOK classroom both also with in the specific practical context of the different subject areas, from which these seemingly abstract questions arise naturally during the subject course work. Students are thereby encouraged to consider knowledge questions against the backdrop of their experiences of knowledge in their other Diploma Programme subjects but also in relation to the practical experiences offered by CAS and the extended essay.

The teachers



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Theory of Knowledge and International-mindedness

As Theory of Knowledge is part of the core of the IB Diploma it plays a key role in fostering and nurturing an international-mindedness, with the ultimate goal of developing responsible global citizens in accordance with the IB mission statement. To this end, the TOK course encourages students to explore issues of global significance, examine links between the local and the global and to reflect upon and discuss how different cultural traditions have contributed to our current constructions of knowledge.

Skills and toolkit (ATL)	Topics	Assessments objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical thinking skills • Communication skills • Research skills • TOK and the learner profile attributes (guide p. 6-7) • The Knowledge Framework (guide p. 28-33) 	<p>Knowledge Claims and Knowledge Questions, the latter being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open, general and about knowledge. <p>Shared versus Personal Knowledge</p> <p>Ways of Knowing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense perception, reason, emotion, language etc. <p>Areas of knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Natural Sciences, The Human Sciences, History, Mathematics, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify and analyse the various kinds of justifications used to support knowledge claims. • formulate, evaluate and attempt to answer knowledge questions. • examine how academic disciplines/areas of knowledge generate and shape knowledge. • understand the roles played by ways of knowing in the construction of shared and personal knowledge. • explore links between knowledge claims, knowledge questions, ways of knowing and areas of knowledge. • demonstrate an awareness and understanding of different perspectives and be able to relate these to one's own perspective. • explore a real-life situation from a TOK perspective in the presentation.

Some examples of concepts and conceptual understanding in TOK

Scope/Applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the area of knowledge about? • What practical problems can be solved through applying this knowledge? • What makes this area of knowledge important? • What makes the current open questions in this area - important questions that are currently unanswered? • Are there ethical considerations that limit the scope of the inquiry? If so, what are they?
Concepts/Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What role does language play in the accumulation of knowledge in this area? • What are the roles of the key concepts and key terms that provide the building blocks for knowledge in this area? • What metaphors are appropriate to this area of knowledge? • What is the role of convention in this area?
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the methods or procedures used in this area and what is it about these methods that generates knowledge? • What are the assumptions underlying these methods? • What counts as fact in this area of knowledge? • What role do models play in this area of knowledge? • What ethical thinking constrains the methods used to gain knowledge?

Link to IBO subject brief

https://www.ibo.org/globalassets/publications/recognition/core_tok.pdf