

THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

In order to secure success for their students, schools are strongly recommended to ensure that this report is read in detail by all TOK teachers, and the Diploma Programme Coordinator.

Teachers are also once again directed towards the IB publication *Understanding Knowledge Issues* (available on the OCC), which provides clarification of the central concept of a 'knowledge issue'.

THIS IS THE LAST SESSION IN WHICH THE TERM 'KNOWLEDGE ISSUE' WILL BE USED. The new TOK curriculum, with first assessment in May 2015, refers to 'knowledge questions' instead of 'knowledge issues', and further clarification on this change in terminology can be found in the new subject guide and teacher support material (also available on the OCC).

Overall Grade Boundaries

Boundaries for this session were as below:

Grade	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range	0 - 16	17 – 27	28 - 35	36 – 46	47 - 60

Statistical Summary

	November 2013	November 2014	% change
English	4180	4545	8.73%
French	1	1	0%
Spanish	2209	2352	6.47%
Chinese	40	12	-70%
German	0	0	0%
Total Candidates	6430	6910	7.46%

Section 1: Essays

1.1 Component Grade Boundaries

Essay grade boundaries for this session were set during the grade award meeting after extensive reading and discussion of scripts, as follows:

Grade	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range	0 - 8	9 - 15	16 - 20	21 - 28	29 - 40

1.2 Examiners

Thanks are extended to the 38 examiners who assessed TOK essays this session whose individual contributions form the basis for this part of the subject report. The comments in a document such as this tend to focus on weaknesses of assessed work, but there are many rewards associated with the opportunity to appraise TOK work from around the world. Teachers who wish to become examiners can visit <http://www.ibo.org/en/jobs-and-careers/become-an-examiner-or-assessor/> for more information (note that teachers must have two years' experience of teaching TOK before examining).

It is often the case that teachers find examining helpful both in terms of their own understanding of the curriculum and for the insight afforded with respect to the strengths and weaknesses of their own students. Such comments are often made in the examiners' reports. In the words of one examiner this session "As I gain more experience as an examiner I find the process itself more satisfying and I greatly enjoy the opportunity to read and evaluate the work of students from other parts of the world. Examining also has a positive impact on my daily work as a teacher and on the way that I design and put into practice the course for my students".

Many of the points that follow are the same as those to be found in the M14 subject report. This is because, unsurprisingly, the work from candidates in the November session displays a great many similarities with that of candidates in the May session. The account below concerning essay work differs from the earlier report with respect to comments about performance on the specific prescribed titles for this session, and where noticeable disparity with scripts from the May session has been noted.

1.3 The TOK dynamic

Successful work in TOK involves a delicate interaction between the teacher, the candidate, and the TOK curriculum itself. It is perhaps worth providing an outline of the components of this dynamic which should be borne in mind as the rest of this report is read.

The teacher

The effectiveness of the TOK teacher in supporting candidates requires first and foremost a mastery of the TOK curriculum. There are numerous opportunities for professional development ranging from face-to-face and online workshops provided by the IB and other approved providers to the everyday collaboration and exchange with school colleagues that may be possible given favourable local conditions. As a basic minimum, candidates need exposure to a TOK course that follows the conceptual distinctions as they are specifically, and in some cases uniquely, articulated in TOK. Whatever the academic background of the teacher, successful TOK teaching demands a degree of adjustment that is not to be underestimated.

Judging by the quality of some of the candidate work presented this session, it is difficult to believe that every TOK teacher has been furnished with the support that is essential for success. In many cases, school administrators would do well to review their investment in TOK, given its centrality to the Diploma Programme and its educational philosophy, its essential curricular connections with the rest of that programme, and the fact that no one starts teaching it with tailor-made qualifications.

In addition to class teaching, the TOK teacher plays crucial roles in assisting candidates in the production of their essay and presentation (these roles are set out in some detail in the new subject guide under 'The role of the teacher' in **Assessment details**, "Part 1: Essay on a prescribed title" and "Part 2: The presentation"—pages 53 and 56 of the PDF version). It is of paramount importance that the nature of this assistance is fully understood by all teachers, and, once again, judging by the work inspected by examiners, it is not evident that this is the case. If it were so, many of the perennial complaints of examiners would be greatly diminished. It is possible to do a major disservice to candidates through both the provision of too little or too much assistance, and the problems that arise from these misjudgements are elaborated below. It is a source of great concern that so many of them need to be described in the subject report every session.

The candidate

While the teacher's supporting role in them is vital, the primary goal of the assessment tasks in TOK is to provide opportunities for the candidate to demonstrate, in a summative manner, the impact of the TOK curriculum on their experience over the period of the course. The ideal outcome is that their performance in these tasks will be the product of sustained critical and reflective thought. The best essays carry a vestigial trace of a struggle to marshal the material and display a mastery that can only be achieved through sustained engagement. While ideals are not always realised, it should nevertheless be the aim of the TOK teacher to provide the conditions in which such engagement can thrive. The evidence from this session's work suggests that there are many candidates who come to the end of their TOK course without having had the kind of experience outlined above. The reasons why this is the case need to be confronted in the longer term interests of the educational value of TOK for Diploma Programme candidates as a whole.

As usual, this report will inevitably catalogue ways in which candidates' ideal experience with TOK can fall short. Increasingly prominent among these ways seems to be, for whatever reason, a weak assimilation of TOK concepts during the course, followed by a search for pre-

packaged material that will serve well enough in order to meet at least the minimum acceptable standards in the assessment. As always, it is hoped that the content of this report will serve to assist teachers in helping students fulfil their potential in TOK through an extended worthwhile engagement with it.

The curriculum

The sections below will once again comment on the degree of candidates' success in handling various aspects of essay writing. Of crucial import here is an accurate understanding of the concept of a knowledge issue (or 'knowledge question' as the equivalent term in the new subject guide – see section **Knowledge claims and knowledge questions** – pages 20-21 of the PDF version). This is the central concept of the curriculum, and hence a failure to understand what is meant by the term will lead inexorably to problems in participating effectively in TOK and responding successfully to its assessment tasks.

1.4 Degree and quality of apparent teacher guidance

As in every recent session, the concern was expressed by many examiners that assistance to candidates veers from far too extensive to non-existent. At one extreme, it seems that candidates are being provided with common templates and formulaic guidance such that there is little room for them to express themselves in their own terms.

At the other (and more common) extreme, there are large numbers of essays that seem to have been written by candidates with no input from teachers at all. Examiners lamented that in such cases teachers must have been either too detached even to read the candidates' work before submission, or lacking in knowledge of what kind of advice to offer. It appeared to some examiners as if candidates had in some cases barely been taught TOK at all, that their work had seemingly been done at the last minute; and all in all there was evidence of a disheartening lack of engagement. As it would be hard to believe that such huge numbers of candidates wilfully ignore advice if it is being provided, the temptation is to conclude that many candidates do not receive such advice. Common misunderstandings of what various prescribed titles required would otherwise occur far less frequently.

In Spanish, examiners did note that there were fewer essays which did not show any teacher guidance at all; however there were still some essays which were completely irrelevant and where there was no TOK to be found. There were also essays in which the word limits were not respected, and where the question had been changed. It does seem surprising that teachers do not ensure that this does not happen. Given that the essay writing process is a lengthy one, it would seem to be inexcusable. Sadly, there were examples of essays where the teacher guidance did not appear to be at all effective but on the contrary appeared to have steered students in wrong directions as was evident by the lack of relevance in the arguments and in the examples, as well as the dearth of connections and, most worrying, misconception of what constitutes a knowledge issue.

The new *Theory of knowledge – Planning and progress form* (TK/PPF) form that must be submitted for each candidate from the May 2015 session onwards requires that a written

record of interactions between teachers and candidates be kept. The new form is designed to ensure that a suitable working relationship is formed in which appropriate advice and feedback take place, and to send a signal that this is expected.

Key Points

- Some teachers are providing too much input, sometimes with counterproductive results
- Many teachers seem not to be providing any guidance to candidates at all
- The distinctive nature of the TOK essay requires carefully tailored support

1.5 Treatment of knowledge issues

Problems continue to be noted by examiners with respect to the formulation and purpose of knowledge issues. Knowledge issues in a TOK essay should perform the function of stepping stones during the exploration of the prescribed title. They should arise naturally in the course of the analysis and their articulation in that role should provide added clarity to the structure of that analysis. Hence, they are not to be thought of as "additions" to the essay; they are questions to which answers are necessary *en route* to an effective response to the title.

Accordingly, when a cluster of knowledge issues is merely listed in the introduction, the candidate's essay often turns out to be ineffective because the knowledge issues are not set out in the context of the relationships that need to exist between them. Alternatively, some candidates pepper their work with numerous knowledge issues that seem to be offered as an alternative to argumentation - often no response to them is given and they sit in the text undeveloped and ignored. Most harmful of all is the temptation to identify one knowledge issue at the start of the essay and subsequently treat it as the starting point for analysis rather than correctly adopting the actual title on the list as the trigger for that role. While some examiners felt that there was evidence of a tighter grasp of the focusing potential of knowledge issues within the flow of essays, others lamented that many of them seemed to have their origins in the various "help" sites on the internet that are subverting the candidates' own process of coming to an understanding of the chosen prescribed title.

Teachers and candidates should note that the new subject guide sets out what is meant by a knowledge question (in the terminology of the new curriculum). Part of this description concerns what is meant by an "open question" (under **Section Knowledge claims and knowledge questions** – page 20 of the PDF version):

"Knowledge questions are **open** in the sense that there are a number of plausible answers to them."

Readers will note that many of the knowledge issues/questions offered in the title-specific part of this report are couched ways that might appear to demand a definitive answer ("is it a good thing that...", "is it the case that...", etc). Such questions could indeed be answered with an emphatic "yes" or "no", but equally well a response might be, depending upon the specific

question, along the lines of “yes but only if x is included”, “not unless y”, or “increasingly so nowadays”. It is the variety of plausible answers to the question that should be taken as the most important measure of its “openness” rather than the degree to which the formulation of the question indicates that such variety is possible. Indeed, the prefixing of knowledge issues with “to what extent...” has become somewhat of a cliché in TOK, and more successful analysis often stem from questions that are put more assertively.

Key Points

- Knowledge issues should act as stepping stones that arise naturally in the process of responding to prescribed titles
- A raft of knowledge issues listed in sequence in the introduction lack context and hence often do not provide a clear picture of the shape of the essay to come
- Knowledge issues used rhetorically in the main body of the essay cannot replace analysis and the attempt to provide answers to knowledge issues
- Converting a prescribed title into "my knowledge issue" is a recipe for an irrelevant response

1.6 Treatment of various ways of knowing and/or areas of knowledge

There is little new to add to previous reports here. The first instinct of many candidates is to “translate” titles and their subsequent treatment into what might be termed “WOKspeak”, in which ways of knowing are simply assigned roles in the analysis in a process that routinely involves casual generalisations about science and reason, arts and emotion, and so on. The outcome of this manoeuvre is that areas of knowledge are presented as if they were meals prepared from particular combinations of WOK ingredients, where the natures of these ingredients are understood in advance and do not need to be examined further. In the worst cases, the analysis assumes an almost tautological form, in that it is obvious that science, for instance, involves certain ways of knowing and its description using this vocabulary is basically an empty reformulation of the meaning of science that provides no novel insight. Competent responses to prescribed titles need to go beyond this sort of formulaic approach.

Once again, examiners complained bitterly about the gross misrepresentations of history that seem to have become so deeply entrenched. History is an academic discipline concerned with the study of the recorded traces of the human past; it is not the past itself, and historians are not all liars and “victors” in military conflicts; neither are they necessarily journalists or politicians or other people with a parochial axe to grind.

It is sadly still necessary to point out that “perception” in TOK does not mean “point of view”, and that ethics is an area of knowledge in its own right - it may have close links with religion but is not synonymous with it (particularly in Spanish-language essays), nor is it concerned exclusively with matters of etiquette.

A significant number of candidates this session confused the human and the natural sciences, with fields such as medicine being misappropriated.

Examiners working in Spanish also commented on candidates' comprehension of areas of knowledge being descriptive and superficial – reflecting that they had been studied with little detail or rigour. In many essays, too much time was spent describing and defining them at the expense of answering the question. The same occurred with ways of knowing, where they were considered.

Key Points

- Ways of knowing are almost never effective if treated as the sole "building blocks" of analysis
- History is a type of academic enquiry carried out by professional historians; the word must not be used synonymously with "the past"
- Although nominally absent from the subjects available in the IB Diploma Programme, ethics is a well-established academic discipline that requires an understanding of its scope and key concepts if it is to be treated well in TOK
- In TOK, "perception" does not mean "point of view" (hence, the use of the term "sense perception" in the official TOK literature)

1.7 Use of examples

In previous subject reports, complaints have been made about the use of hypothetical examples. In general, examiners have noted a trend away from them in recent sessions. Unfortunately, they seem to have been largely replaced with a suite of real examples that exhibits troubling uniformity. This tendency is observed across schools as well as within them, which speaks to the fact that many of these examples have come from a relatively small range of sources that have been mined by large numbers of candidates. Examiners noted a lack of fresh material, lamenting that candidates are "ignoring much of the potential of their own heritage" or experiences within their own school learning. Candidates and teachers should take note that considerable effort is expended by examiners and IB authorities in monitoring websites "tailor-made" for TOK so that the use of second-hand external material is not mistaken for insightful originality.

Examples tended to be very general, with little variety. Helping candidates in the selection of examples during the TOK course should be a part of the TOK teacher's work because examples do not only serve to corroborate reasoning but also function as instruments for inquiry and analysis. Candidates also need to understand that personal examples do not refer to anecdotes but to examples from their experience as learners. In that respect probably the best and most original examples came from the arts.

It is tempting to conclude that at some point in the journey from the TOK classroom to the final essay submission, be it from the teacher's lesson planning or the candidate's search for

suitable material, personal thought and reflection has given way to expediency. Furthermore, some “examples” that candidates use may be rooted in reality but are extended into sweeping categorisations that distort it beyond tolerance (eg all Christians rejecting the theory of evolution or science as a whole).

Key points

- Hypothetical examples are almost never convincing when offered as support for assertions in essays
- Examiners greatly appreciate effort by candidates to use examples that arise naturally from their own experience
- Candidates whose examples match those to be found on TOK "help" sites, or in other online discussions specifically concerned with the task of the TOK essay, struggle to demonstrate a mastery of them, and trigger suspicion in the minds of examiners as to the provenance of the work as a whole

1.8 Treatment of key terms in titles

Many candidates consider “knowledge” itself to be a key term in their work, regardless of the prescribed title chosen. Naturally, this is appropriate in a course called ‘theory of knowledge’, but the outcome is that large numbers of candidates feel unable to avoid claiming in their first paragraph that knowledge is the same as justified true belief. The overwhelming majority of these candidates then have neither any further comment to offer about this definition nor how it might impact what they write in the rest of the essay. As with most definitions, this one tends to close down discussion rather than provide a platform for exploration of knowledge issues, and is so narrow that it makes treatment of large swathes of the TOK curriculum extremely difficult. The new TOK curriculum exhorts teachers and students to take a different approach to the concept of knowledge with the express intention of avoiding these unnecessary and debilitating problems (see new subject guide, section **Knowledge in TOK** - page 16 of the PDF version).

The unpacking process that needs to be undertaken as a first step in appraising any prescribed title often seems to be very badly handled (please refer to the new subject guide once again under **Assessment details**, “Part 1: Essay on a prescribed title” - page 53 of the PDF version, for an outline of the essay-writing process that is recommended and may be described on the new form TK/PPF). Perhaps encouraged by previous educational experiences, candidates find it extremely difficult to resist instantly turning to a dictionary for support, even when the terms under consideration are familiar to them and are cognitively accessible. A true conceptual approach recognizes that there is always some “wobble room” within which the meaning of key terms can flex - allowing, within limits, the relationships between those terms to assume different and interesting forms. Such is the foundation upon which a successful analysis can be built.

The teacher has a crucial and subtle role to play in making this foundation possible - there is a need to model this process and emphasise its crucial impact on the final product. At the

same time, it is important to recognize the difference between key terms and other connecting words in the title that do not merit lengthy discussion – thus avoiding an overly pedantic approach. This also often requires teacher guidance.

Apart from a lack of effort in being precise when defining key terms within the context of the question, candidates often did not see contrasts and relationships between the terms – tending instead to examine them in isolation (eg ‘describe’ and ‘transform’; ‘stories’ and ‘facts’) thus spurning an excellent opportunity for analysis.

Hampered by a failure to complete the unpacking stage satisfactorily, many candidates stumble onward toward exploration and planning phases that have no secure foundations (or toward writing the essay without rigorous exploring or planning either).

Key points

- Definitions can close down the kind of analysis encouraged in TOK rather than enable it
- Offering definitions for key terms and then ignoring them is a waste of words
- "Justified true belief" is an unsatisfactory definition for knowledge in the context of TOK that is not well suited to an inclusive approach to knowledge issues
- Unpacking and exploring prescribed titles (and planning the essay structure from the exploration) are key steps in the TOK essay task that require thoughtful and measured support from teachers

1.9 Overall crafting of essay structure

Shortcomings in this area include:

1. An obvious lack of proof reading, or seemingly inappropriate proof reading with track changes left visible that suggest that teachers have micro-edited the text
2. A paucity of paragraphs and/or poor transitions
3. Essays submitted that are outside the permitted word limits
4. Essays that get mired in linguistic analysis at the start
5. Essays that read as if the candidate’s chief aim is to get over the line to 1200 words (teachers and candidates should note that from 2015 there will be no minimum word count as it is expected that essays will approach the 1600 maximum or may suffer through lack of content)

1.10 Quality of analysis

As always, examiners cited this aspect as the most challenging aspect of the essay task, and often the least satisfactory in practice. Many essays are riddled with generalisations rather than evidence of close attention to specific claims, with descriptions of processes rather than a focus on the mechanisms that might bring them about, and rhetorical questions intended to stand in for the analysis itself. It is not uncommon to see candidates bogged down in definitional squabbles that prevent the essay from reaching any satisfactory point of departure.

Some essays were built upon such general, abstract and nebulous assertions that, without seeing the prescribed title written out, it would have been difficult to know which title was being answered. In those essays candidates seem to be trying to conceal their lack of focus behind a torrent of words with no specific direction.

As with the construction of an exploratory essay at the macro level, the construction of requisite argumentation at a more micro level is a skill that needs to be taught, modelled and practised.

These points have been largely addressed elsewhere in this report.

1.11 Factual Accuracy and Acknowledgement of Sources

Just a few points here:

- Candidates need to be reminded of the need to connect claims in the essay with references at the end through the use of citations; otherwise the requirements of academic honesty are not fully met
- As the TOK essay is intended to provide an opportunity for the candidate to set out their own thinking, essays that rely heavily upon acknowledgement of teachers' notes may be looked upon with some suspicion
- Bulky footnotes should be avoided – especially if they are an obvious attempt to circumvent the word limit

1.12 Presentation of Work

Yet again, candidates and schools are asked to observe the following requests in order to assist with the assessment process:

- Ensure that candidates use DOUBLE SPACING and a font size of 12. It is extraordinary how often the double spacing request has been made and yet there are so many essays which are single spaced.

- Use a 'standard' font such as Times New Roman, Calibri or Arial
- Use default-sized margins without any added border
- Write the prescribed title at the start of the essay as stated on the list
- Avoid adding a paraphrased or otherwise altered version of the prescribed title
- A cover page from which the candidate can be identified by name or candidate number must **not** be used
- Take note of the limits of the word requirement for the TOK essay – the actual word-count must be entered when the essay is uploaded

Despite the request for double-spacing that has been repeated in every subject report over recent years, many candidates and schools are still not complying with this simple measure. Single-spaced essays create significant and totally avoidable difficulties with the marking – many examiners find them hard to read and they create difficulties with the insertion of comments that aid the assessment process. It is strongly recommended that teachers spread the word that candidates who insist on presenting work in this fashion are doing themselves no favours with examiners.

1.13 Feedback on Specific Titles

1. “Some areas of knowledge seek to describe the world, whereas others seek to transform it.” Explore this claim with reference to two areas of knowledge.

Seven examples of knowledge issues that *could* be addressed in the development of an essay on this title:

- In what ways does a particular area of knowledge describe the world?
- Is it possible for an area of knowledge to describe the world without transforming it?
- What is the difference between transformation of the world (by an area of knowledge) and mere change?
- What is it about an area of knowledge that makes it more suitable for description than transformation (or vice versa)?
- What is the role of language (and other ways of knowing) in the way a particular area of knowledge describes the world?
- In what sense might the use of language and concepts in description to some extent actually shape (or in extreme cases create) the world that is being described?
- What problems have to be solved in order for the conclusions of an area of knowledge to be interpreted in the world and therefore play a part in transforming it?

This was a popular title that in many cases was answered competently. Nevertheless, significant numbers of candidates adopted an overly narrow approach to it, in which the role of the candidate's school subjects in describing the world dominated the treatment, followed by an appraisal of the candidate's own personal transformation as a result. The format

favoured a straightforward structure – describing and transforming in two areas of knowledge – but unfortunately some candidates allowed the initial simplicity of this approach to dominate their essays, producing rather shallow outcomes. Stronger responses made sure not to omit the important part of the claim about areas “seeking” to describe or transform, and in the end managed to focus on the various possible relationships between describing and transforming. Several candidates presented solid arguments to show how ‘describing’ is not always or necessarily neutral as the mere use of language introduces an interpretive dimension, and, depending on the area of knowledge, perhaps already involves some ‘transforming’. ‘Transforming’ was mostly seen in a positive light but there were good responses which argued that it is not necessarily so and ‘transforming’ could be either regressive or progressive. Moreover, analysis was better where ‘transforming’ was related to understanding rather than the improvement of living standards. More sophisticated essays clarified what might be meant by ‘the world’ – often embracing the ‘outside’ physical world but also then world of thought and mental activity.

2. “Knowledge takes the form of a combination of stories and facts.” How accurate is this claim in two areas of knowledge?

Seven examples of knowledge issues that *could* be addressed in the development of an essay on this title:

- Do different areas of knowledge produce different types of facts?
- What are the features of an account or explanation that qualify it as a story?
- Are there types of knowledge that consist of either facts or stories alone?
- How might different conceptions of facts and stories lead to different combinations of them in different areas of knowledge?
- Is the collaboration of facts and stories exhibited more in the structure of knowledge or in the processes involved in the production of knowledge?
- What roles are played by ways of knowing in producing facts and stories, and in binding them together?
- Do some types of knowledge require components in addition to facts and stories? If so, what are these components?

A major shortcoming in many essays on this prescribed title was a failure to interpret adequately the nature of “stories”. Numerous candidates took the word to be synonymous either with unreliable subjective judgements or falsehoods, rather than teasing out the typical features of stories such as their narrative structure or fictional means of describing “larger” truths. Hence, many essays metamorphosed into accounts of epic struggles between subjectivity and objectivity, or truth and untruth. This led to fairly predictable characterisations of specific areas of knowledge – with facts as the “winners” in the sciences and stories in the arts, *etc.* The better essays questioned whether it is possible to have knowledge with just

facts, and explored the idea that stories are the “glue” that puts them into context. Well-argued essays went on to examine the nature of those stories. Good responses gave careful definitions of stories in the context of a given area of knowledge so that they were more than myths or fiction but explanations, such as theorems in mathematics.

3. "In the production of knowledge, it is only because emotion works so well that reason can work at all." To what extent would you agree with this claim in two areas of knowledge?

Seven examples of knowledge issues that *could* be addressed in the development of an essay on this title:

- What are the fundamental differences between reason and emotion as ways of knowing?
- How can the claim that reason is dependent upon emotion be justified?
- What are the functions of reason and emotion in various areas of knowledge?
- Are there any areas of knowledge in which reason and emotion operate independently?
- Given the differences between reason and emotion, how is it possible for them to work effectively together in the service of areas of knowledge?
- What roles do other ways of knowing perform in the relationship between reason and emotion?
- How do variations in the relationship between reason and emotion result in the production of different kinds of knowledge?

A typical weakness of essays on this title was the treatment of reason and emotion separately rather than attempting to understand the kind of relationship that might exist between them. Once again, despite the prompting in the title, areas of knowledge were often divided into those dominated by “reliable” reason and those in which “unreliable” emotion dominates. Additionally, some candidates allowed their response to deal almost exclusively with the machinery of emotion, while the nature of reason was left largely unexamined – as if it were too obvious for sustained analysis. There was a tendency to accept the prompt unquestioningly, apart from the counterclaim that in mathematics the situation was different. Few candidates commented on the claim being contentious. Stronger essays also elucidated on “works so well” and “can work at all” in the two chosen areas of knowledge where others largely ignored these key terms. In Spanish some candidates changed the sense of the title by transposing into the question the homophone “*también*” (as well) for the original “*tan bien*” (so well). This careless transposition was costly.

4. “To gain an understanding of the world we need to make use of stereotypes.” With reference to two areas of knowledge, to what extent do you agree with this statement?

Seven examples of knowledge issues that *could* be addressed in the development of an essay on this title:

- To what kinds of subject can the concept of a stereotype be applied?
- How are ways of knowing involved in the production and distribution of stereotypes?

- Should stereotypes within areas of knowledge be regarded more as ‘essential tools for’, or more as ‘barriers to’, an understanding of the world?
- What is the role of stereotypes in the construction of a particular knowledge perspective?
- Do all areas of knowledge make a contribution to an understanding of the world by making use of stereotypes?
- Does the origin of a stereotype matter, or should we be concerned only with its content?
- What might be the consequences of a refusal to make use of stereotypes?

While many candidates did a reasonable job in describing the general nature of stereotypes, a good number of them allowed this interpretation to drift towards a rather uncritical identity of stereotypes with every kind of generalisation. When this happened, it often seemed that the word “stereotype” might as well be excised from the text altogether and replaced with “generalization” – which rather left the specifics of the title behind. Alternatively, some essays concerned themselves almost exclusively with a much narrower conception of stereotypes – such as those commonly associated with the word to do with sweeping judgements about race or gender. A path negotiated between these two extremes was most likely to lead to success.

5. “The task of history is the discovering of the constant and universal principles of human nature.” To what extent are history and one other area of knowledge successful in this task?

Seven examples of knowledge issues that *could* be addressed in the development of an essay on this title:

- To what extent is it possible to identify the principles of human nature?
- Does history, or any other area of knowledge, explicitly aim to uncover principles of human nature?
- Do the insights that are gained from history or other areas of knowledge indicate that human nature is constant and/or universal?
- What is it about a given area of knowledge that makes it suitable for understanding human nature?
- To what extent do different branches or specialisms in history suggest different possible principles for human nature?
- To what extent does the suite of ways of knowing that we possess give us an insight into human nature?
- Are various areas of knowledge more concerned about discovering truths about human nature or making prior assumptions about it?

Candidates choosing to respond to this prescribed title were somewhat rare. A key error exhibited by some of these essays was the failure to discriminate between the adjectives “constant” and “universal” – treating the two as a single construct. The identity of the principles themselves was also somewhat problematic, despite complete freedom to decide on what they might be. Successful responses to this title managed to consider the nature of history and the second selected area as systematic knowledge structures with their own

traditions of methodology, concepts and so on. Weaker essays focused more narrowly upon the “lessons” that could be learned from an appreciation of the content of the areas only.

6. “We may agree about general standards in the arts but disagree as to whether a particular work has artistic merit. In ethics the situation is reversed: we may disagree about ethical theories but we all know an unethical action when we see one.” Discuss.

Seven examples of knowledge issues that *could* be addressed in the development of an essay on this title:

- On what basis could general standards in the arts and theories in ethics be compared?
- On what basis could the merit of an art work and the ethical status of an action be compared?
- Should we dismiss judgements of artistic merit if they do not correspond to our agreement about shared standards in the arts?
- Should we reject ethical theories that produce outcomes that contradict our intuitions?
- What are the similarities and differences between moral and aesthetic judgements?
- Why might theorising in the arts be more conducive to consensus than theorising in ethics? Or vice versa?
- How might ways of knowing such as reason and intuition be invoked in explanations for the nature of knowledge in the arts and ethics?

This was a title phrased in a somewhat complex manner which nevertheless provided the candidate with a fair amount of structure with which to get started. Unfortunately, many candidates struggled to marshal this structure and add to it in a meaningful way. Standards in the arts were often interpreted as ways of determining whether a particular entity “counted” as art, rather than as criteria for evaluating its worth as art. Moreover ‘artistic merit’ was all too often equated with taste. Ethical theories were commonly given an outing, but sometimes poorly described. There was also a tendency to equal ethics and religion, which led to a poor understanding of the scope of the prescribed title. Many candidates found difficulties in maintaining the distinction between the general and the specific that lies at the heart of the title.

Section 2: Presentations

2.1 Component Grade Boundaries

The boundaries remained unchanged for this session.

Grade	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range	0 - 8	9 - 12	13 - 15	16 - 18	19 - 20

Although this is the last session with the current criteria from the 2006 TOK subject guide, the comments and advice given below continue to be relevant as the overall nature of the oral presentation has not changed.

2.2 Administrative and Clerical Procedures

As is the norm, about 5% of the schools entering candidates were asked to record some or all of the TOK presentations given by the candidates for the purposes of confirming the scores awarded by teachers for this internally assessed component of the curriculum. Some of these schools were selected at random; others were selected on the basis of major inconsistencies in past sessions between performance in the essay and the presentation.

Schools selected for any given examination session are notified via the DP Coordinator by the IB assessment centre at the start of the diploma cycle that culminates in that session. For example:

- schools selected for the November 2015 session **will have been** notified by **February 2014**
- schools selected for the May 2016 session **will have been** notified by **August 2014**
- schools selected for the November 2016 session **will have been** notified by **February 2015**
- schools selected for the May 2017 session **will have been** notified by **August 2015**

Notification is given very much in advance to allow schools flexibility regarding the timing of their recordings. This also means that schools need to ensure that they have made note that they are required to record their presentations.

Schools that have been asked to provide presentations for verification must observe the requirements which are outlined in the appendix to this report and must adhere to deadlines – the late arrival of presentations affects the process. Schools are asked to send five presentations and five forms in total, *ie* for one candidate per presentation. From May 2015 the form is the *Presentation planning document* (TK/PPD).

Presentations viewed this session were clearly labelled with forms mostly completed correctly and, on the whole, the quality of the recordings was good. Some schools are choosing to send their recordings in USB format which makes it very user friendly for the verifier. The use of Dropbox is also encouraged.

There were two noticeable improvements this session in the delivery of the presentations. One was that there were no presentations where there was too much reading (either from the screen or a prompt sheet). It has been repeatedly said that that is not permitted, and that teachers should not assess presentations where there is too much reading. The instruction in those cases is for the teacher to stop the presentation as soon as it is evident that it is being fully or mostly read and tell the student/s in question that it must be prepared properly and presented on another occasion. It was very pleasing to see adherence to that requirement.

On the other hand, a couple of schools included the transcripts of what the students would be saying in their presentations. The students had memorized a script to the letter and then delivered it as something which had been rote learned. They did not seem confident in what they were saying and that is equivalent to reading a script which may not represent the student's ideas. The student has to present an argument in which he or she believes. It has to be the student's presentation.

The second improvement to point out regards the use of videos or film clips in presentations. These were kept to a minimum and there were no concerns in that respect.

On the whole, presentations adhered to the allowed length of time. A few of the individual presentations did exceed the time limits. Please note that verifiers are not required to view beyond the stipulated lengths of time and teachers should not do so either. Presentations should be approximately ten minutes long for an individual presentation, about 20 for a presentation of two students and a maximum of thirty minutes long for a group presentation of now up to 3 students. Some discretion needs to be applied but clearly 30 minutes is too long for an individual presentation.

Key points

- Presentations must demonstrate the students' own ideas and reflect their TOK learning
- Teachers must ensure there is solid presentation planning and provide guidance so that students are able to present their own arguments with confidence
- Presentations should adhere to the time limits

2.3 Forms

- **Presentation planning document (TK/PPD) (to be used from May 2015 session)**

There is one document to complete for the presentation. As of May 2015 this is the Presentation planning document TK/PPD which is available on the TOK home page of the OCC under "Assessment" and available in the Handbook of procedures for the Diploma

Programme (2015). The TK/PPD will be completed by each candidate and by their teacher, and will be used by the IB TOK internal assessment moderators. The document has the following three purposes.

- For the candidate: to help in the planning and structuring of a presentation. Therefore the TK/PPD must be completed before the presentation. The candidate section is divided into five parts to guide the student so that the essential components of a TOK presentation are addressed.
- For the teacher: the teacher will assess the presentation using the presentation assessment instrument and will provide supporting comments in the teacher section of the document. The comments will explain and exemplify why a certain mark was awarded. They must not just repeat the wording of the assessment instrument. It will be helpful if the teacher were also to indicate the duration of the presentation.
- For the moderator: the TK/PPD will be used for verification purposes. The moderator will refer to both the candidate and teacher sections. Moderators receive separate instructions on how to carry out the moderation.

Key points

- Teachers must guide their students so that the Presentation planning document (TK/PPD) is used appropriately and for their benefit
- Candidates must ensure that they complete the TK/PPD in advance of delivery of their presentations
- Teachers must remember that the candidate and teacher sections are intended to help in the planning and assessment respectively, but will also be used for moderation

2.4 Assessment issues

Assessment procedures have changed but the nature of the presentation has not. The presentation continues to be an integral part of the TOK course and complements the essay. Teachers are asked to keep in mind that while the presentation is a formal *summative* assessment requirement for TOK, it is also intended as a *formative* opportunity for students to contribute a meaningful lesson to the TOK course in which they are participating. It is thus recommended that students do more than one presentation in their TOK course.

Presentations viewed this session showed that more schools are using the recommended presentation structure (see **Assessment details**, “Part 2: The presentation” in the new TOK subject guide – page 55 in the PDF version). Perhaps its use has led to the more widespread understanding of the nature and intention of the TOK presentation. However, there are still too many cases of presentations which cause concern. These are presentations which are descriptive and do not go beyond a narrative. In some cases the narrative did not describe a real life situation but presented hypothetical or imaginary situations which did not even allude to an area of knowledge or a way of knowing, nor use any key TOK vocabulary. Of greatest

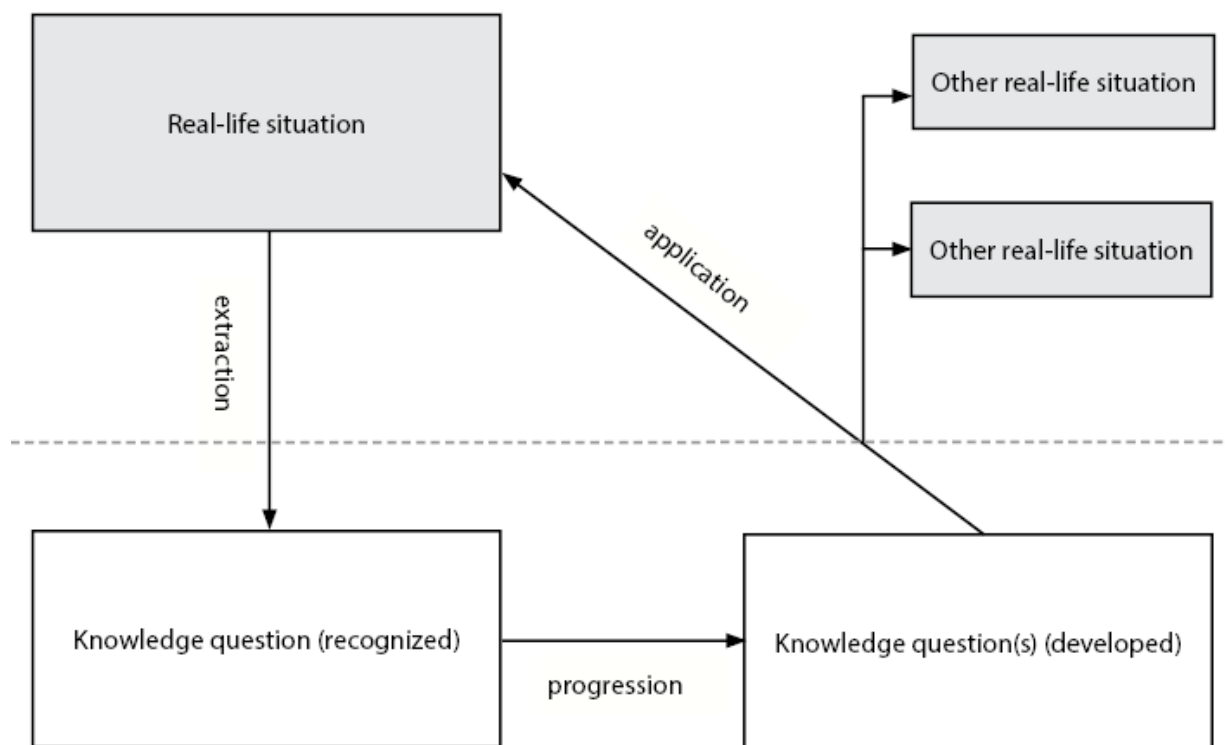
concern is that these presentations were often given high marks. Most presentations were marked over-generously and in some cases the teachers gave the same marks to presentations which were of very different standards.

The better presentations viewed were also the ones where the TK/PPM form was completed adequately or well. Point 3 of the form (“write a summary in note form of the way you plan to deal with knowledge issues during your presentation”) was particularly telling. Those candidates who gave a bullet point list just naming the areas of knowledge or ways of knowing which they were intending to consider invariably performed badly. A list such as “a) introduction b) natural sciences c) ethics d) conclusion” did not in any way show how the candidate was planning to deal with knowledge issues. It is to be hoped that the command term requirements on the TK/PPD (“describe”, “state”, “explain”, “outline” and “show”) will encourage better planning and lead to better TOK presentations.

It is worth reminding all schools that the real life situation (RLS) is not *the* focus of the presentation but a starting point from which to explore knowledge issues (KI)/knowledge questions (KQ). Solid presentations made this distinction; weak presentations confused the RLS with the KI/KQ.

A concrete real life situation must be the starting point from which a knowledge question may be extracted. Some presentations forced the insertion of a KI/KQ which had little to do with the RLS. A failure to have a real or concrete RLS impedes candidates from analysing different perspectives in an appropriate way.

Yet again, it was evident that students had put a lot of effort and care into the preparation of their presentations but all too often they did not seem to have received good guidance. Too many of the presentations viewed were excellent, often very interesting, presentations on a topic, but they were not TOK presentations. The TOK presentation has to focus on analysis, not description, and the way to do that is by connecting the knowledge issue/question to a real life situation. This is why the diagram (figure 19 of the new guide) is so useful. In a graphic manner it shows how the presentation should take the form of an analytical dialogue between two levels of discourse: the real world above the dotted line and the TOK world below it as shown below. Additionally, teachers now have the new Teacher support material (TSM) on the OCC. Under “TOK Assessment”, the sections ‘Preparing for the TOK Presentation’ and ‘Common mistakes and how to avoid them’ are very helpful as are the sample student presentations available under “Assessed student work”.



Key points

- The knowledge question must be relevant to the real life situation and arise from it
- TOK vocabulary must be used, and the presentation should focus on knowledge acquisition through ways of knowing and how areas of knowledge produce knowledge

Examples of starting points for presentations

RLS: Forbes magazine article - how the human face might look in 100,000 years

KI/KQ: How do we know if a prediction is valid?

RLS: Deforestation in the Amazon

KI/KQ: On what basis can we decide if an issue is a moral one?

RLS: Case of Italian scientists in Aquila initially found guilty for not giving adequate warning of 2009 earthquake

KI/KQ: To what extent do scientists have ethical responsibility regarding what they communicate?

RLS: Memorials commemorating the centenary since the outbreak of WWI

KI/KQ: What is the significance of collective memory?

RLS: Article in The Guardian about ISPs criticised over deal to filter extreme material online

KI/KQ: How do we know when censorship is justified?

RLS: 'Emoticons'

KI/KQ: What is the role of emotion on our sense perception?

It is hoped that the recommendations given will serve to guide schools towards better presentations. We commend schools that take this assessment task in the spirit in which it is intended and that have produced presentations where students have engaged their knowledge issues/questions effectively through real life situations.