

Theory of knowledge teacher support material

First assessment 2022

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Diploma Programme

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Published March 2020

Updated July 2020

Published on behalf of the International Baccalaureate Organization, a not-for-profit educational foundation of 15 Route des Morillons, 1218 Le Grand-Saconnex, Geneva, Switzerland by the

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IB mission statement

The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment.

These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.



IB learner profile

The aim of all IB programmes is to develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world.

As IB learners we strive to be:

INQUIRERS

We nurture our curiosity, developing skills for inquiry and research. We know how to learn independently and with others. We learn with enthusiasm and sustain our love of learning throughout life.

KNOWLEDGEABLE

We develop and use conceptual understanding, exploring knowledge across a range of disciplines. We engage with issues and ideas that have local and global significance.

THINKERS

We use critical and creative thinking skills to analyse and take responsible action on complex problems. We exercise initiative in making reasoned, ethical decisions.

COMMUNICATORS

We express ourselves confidently and creatively in more than one language and in many ways. We collaborate effectively, listening carefully to the perspectives of other individuals and groups.

PRINCIPLED

We act with integrity and honesty, with a strong sense of fairness and justice, and with respect for the dignity and rights of people everywhere. We take responsibility for our actions and their consequences.

OPEN-MINDED

We critically appreciate our own cultures and personal histories, as well as the values and traditions of others. We seek and evaluate a range of points of view, and we are willing to grow from the experience.

CARING

We show empathy, compassion and respect. We have a commitment to service, and we act to make a positive difference in the lives of others and in the world around us.

RISK-TAKERS

We approach uncertainty with forethought and determination; we work independently and cooperatively to explore new ideas and innovative strategies. We are resourceful and resilient in the face of challenges and change.

BALANCED

We understand the importance of balancing different aspects of our lives—intellectual, physical, and emotional—to achieve well-being for ourselves and others. We recognize our interdependence with other people and with the world in which we live.

REFLECTIVE

We thoughtfully consider the world and our own ideas and experience. We work to understand our strengths and weaknesses in order to support our learning and personal development.

The IB learner profile represents 10 attributes valued by IB World Schools. We believe these attributes, and others like them, can help individuals and groups become responsible members of local, national and global communities.

Overview

“Three years later, I’m still making references to the course in conversation”.

(Former theory of knowledge student)

The theory of knowledge (TOK) course plays a special role in the Diploma Programme (DP) by providing an opportunity for students to reflect on the nature, scope and limitations of knowledge and the process of knowing. The course can have a huge impact on students, helping them to make connections between different disciplines, to engage with multiple perspectives and to be more aware of their own personal perspectives and assumptions.

This teacher support material (TSM) is intended to provide additional guidance and exemplification to support the teaching, learning and assessment of the DP TOK course. It has been created to support teachers in designing and delivering TOK in their schools. It is intended to complement International Baccalaureate (IB) professional development by offering support for both experienced and inexperienced TOK teachers.

This resource consists of six sections: “Introduction”, “Designing your TOK course”, “Approaches to the teaching and learning of TOK”, “Assessment”, “Connections across the Diploma Programme” and “Wider resources”.

Frequently asked questions

What is TOK?

Theory of knowledge, or TOK, is one of the three core elements undertaken by all DP students. It is a taught course consisting of at least 100 hours of class time in which students are encouraged to explore and reflect on the nature of knowledge and the process of knowing. TOK encourages students to be more aware of their own assumptions and perspectives, to consider the diversity and richness of different perspectives and to think deeply and carefully about complicated issues.

Is TOK a philosophy course?

While the course clearly shares some common ground with philosophy, the TOK course is not intended to be a philosophy course and there is absolutely no expectation that TOK teachers will have any academic or teaching background in philosophy. There is no expectation that students will discuss, or even mention, specific philosophers or schools of thought within their TOK assessment tasks.

Is TOK a critical-thinking course?

The TOK course puts a great deal of emphasis on the development of students' critical-thinking skills. For example, students are expected to be able to develop relevant, clear and coherent arguments and to consider the implications of their arguments and conclusions. They are encouraged to examine the evidence for claims and to consider how we, for example, distinguish fact from opinion, or how we evaluate the credibility of claims that we are exposed to in the media.

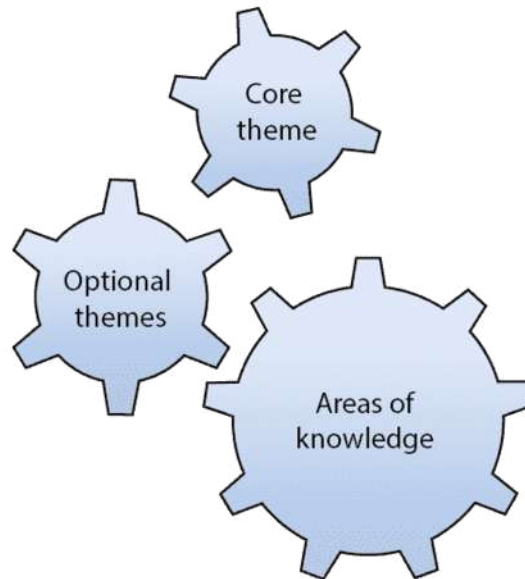
However, the TOK course has a broader scope than a typical critical-thinking or thinking skills course. The defining feature of the TOK course is the explicit focus on knowledge and on encouraging students to reflect on the central question, "how do we know?" in a variety of different contexts and situations from their academic studies and their lives outside of the classroom.

Rather than being seen as a standalone course, it is intended that TOK will underpin, and help unite, studies in the rest of the programme. It is also important to note that the development of critical-thinking skills is something that should be developed in all DP subjects, not only in TOK.

What are the three parts of the TOK curriculum?

The TOK curriculum (first assessment 2022) is made up of three interconnected parts:

Figure 1
The TOK curriculum



How is TOK assessed?

The TOK course is assessed via two assessment components: the TOK exhibition and the TOK essay. The TOK exhibition is an internal assessment component. It is marked by the teacher and then a sample of exhibitions are submitted to the IB to be externally moderated by IB examiners. The TOK essay is an external assessment component which is written in response to one of the six prescribed titles issued by the IB for each examination session. Every TOK essay is submitted to the IB to be externally marked by an IB examiner.

What happens if a student writes their TOK essay on a title that is not on the list of TOK prescribed essay titles for the correct examination session?

If a student submits an essay on a title that is not on the prescribed title list for the correct examination session, for example if they submit an essay on a title from a previous examination session, they will receive zero marks. It is therefore vital that teachers ensure that students have the correct list of prescribed titles to choose from.

What is moderation?

The internal assessment component of TOK, the TOK exhibition, is internally marked by the teacher using the assessment instrument published in the subject guide. Teachers then submit a sample of candidate exhibitions and marks to the IB for moderation.

The purpose of this moderation is not to re-mark candidates' work but for the examiner to determine how accurately and consistently the teacher has applied the assessment instrument. In cases where the teacher's marks are too harsh or too lenient, a moderation factor is determined and applied to all of the school's marks for the exhibition component.

The purpose of moderation is to help ensure that all TOK exhibitions are marked to a consistent global standard. Within a school, all TOK teachers are required to standardize their marking so they are consistent with each other. Moderation is the way that the IB extends this so that teachers in all schools are consistent with each other.

Talking about TOK

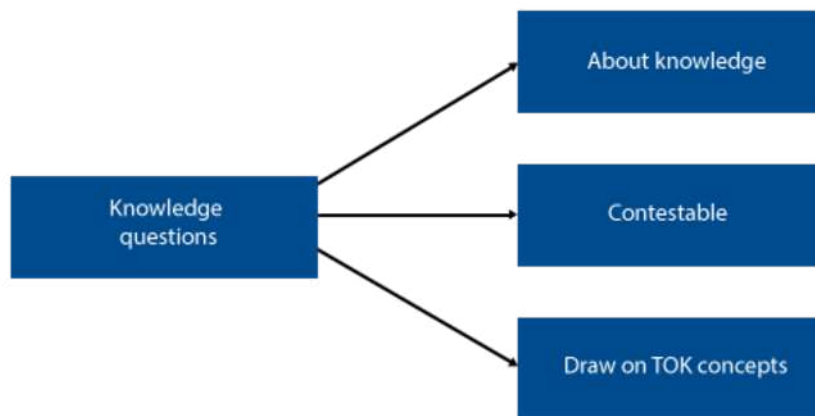
This section provides a variety of resources that TOK teachers and DP coordinators can use and adapt to talk about TOK with students, parents and teachers. They are included as an attachment to this TSM.

- [The TOK course at a glance](#) (PDF), a one-page summary of the TOK course from the TOK subject guide.
- [Top 10 changes in the TOK course](#) (PDF), a one-page summary document outlining the key changes made in the TOK course for first teaching 2020 and first assessment 2022.
- PowerPoint presentation: [The DP theory of knowledge \(TOK\) course](#).
- [Short video on the DP core](#).

Knowledge questions

The TOK course centres on the exploration of knowledge questions. They are a key tool for both teachers and students and they help to ensure that students are having a TOK discussion rather than just a generally interesting discussion.

Figure 2
The three key features of knowledge questions



Knowledge questions help students and teachers to ensure that they are keeping a clear and explicit focus on knowledge. TOK discussions have the potential to be extremely rich and wide-ranging, but can also drift into, for example, debates about political, social or ethical issues.

For example, when having discussions about ethics in TOK lessons, students sometimes find it difficult to avoid getting caught up in debating the ethical issues themselves rather than focusing on the knowledge questions that are woven into and implied in the ethical issues being discussed.

Ethical issue		Knowledge question
Should the state be able to censor films?	→	On what criteria could it be decided if the state has the right to censor art?
Is it wrong to steal a loaf of bread to feed your starving family?	→	Do emotion and reason have equal weight in making or justifying ethical decisions?
Is bribery always wrong?	→	Can the practices of one culture be judged with any validity by applying the moral values of another culture?
Should the genetic engineering of humans be legal?	→	Should scientific research be subject to ethical constraints, or is the pursuit of all scientific knowledge intrinsically worthwhile?

This short video provides additional guidance on knowledge questions and their role and importance within the TOK course.

Video: understanding knowledge questions

Course outlines

The TOK course can be structured in a variety of ways and can start from a variety of different entry points. Teachers are encouraged to exercise flexibility and creativity in the design and delivery of their TOK course and to bring in a range of diverse examples that meet the needs and interests of their students.

Effective course design begins with having a clear understanding of what students need to achieve by the end of the course. Before starting the process of course design it is therefore important to have a clear understanding of the requirements laid out in the *Theory of knowledge guide*.

TOK teachers usually plan their TOK course in two stages.

1. Development of an overall course outline.
2. Development of specific unit plans.

The TOK course outline should be a dynamic and useful document that provides a high-level overview of your TOK course. It should outline how your TOK course will be designed to meet the requirements set out in the subject guide and how it will reflect the logistics of your particular school context.

The course outline should include details of how many lessons are provided for TOK—ensuring the exclusion of examination sessions, school activities and holidays, for example—as well as details such as timings for the submission of the assessment tasks.

When developing your course outline, it is important to note that the TOK course should be allocated a minimum of 100 hours of teaching time and that the course cannot be taught in one year. It is also strongly recommended that the TOK exhibition, the internal assessment task, should be scheduled to take place in year one of the programme.

Examples of TOK course outlines

[Example 1](#)

[Example 2](#)

[Example 3 \(Course outline for use at authorization\)](#)

Unit plans

All DP teachers are required to engage in explicit planning. However, the IB does not prescribe a particular format of unit planner that teachers should use.

Examples of DP unit planners are provided in the resource *Approaches to teaching and learning in the Diploma Programme*. This section of this support material also includes examples of unit plans for TOK. These examples are intended to help teachers to reflect on their own planning and are not intended to be model plans or to prescribe how unit planning should be undertaken.

Examples of TOK unit plans

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

TOK lessons from around the world

This section of the support material contains examples of TOK lessons from TOK teachers around the world.

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

Example 4

Example 5

Reflecting on your TOK course

TOK teachers should take the time to review and reflect on their TOK course design and approach, taking into account feedback both during and after the course. Particularly opportune moments for reflection are at the end of each unit, after professional development experiences and at the end of each teaching cycle when the results are released.

Timing	Examples of reflection questions
After each unit is completed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were the learning experiences in this unit effective? • Was the formative assessment successful in letting both the student and teacher know how the student is progressing? • Did the unit encourage students to develop their approaches to learning (ATL) skills? • What could have been modified, improved or left out to improve this unit? • Are there any further collaboration opportunities here?
After professional development experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were my action points from this professional development experience? • How can my action points be integrated into my curriculum planning? • How can I share my learning with other teachers? • Where can I find further information or resources?
At the end of the course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the subject report highlight any common issues that I recognize in my own students? • Were the grades I predicted significantly different to the actual grades my students received? • Did we undertake sufficient internal standardization of internal assessment (IA) marking between the different teachers of TOK within the school? • Are there areas where additional professional development would be useful?

TOK and ATL skills

Questions for reflection

- What skills do my students already have when they start the TOK course?
- What skills do I want my students to be able to demonstrate by the end of the TOK course?
- How will I know when my students are able to demonstrate these skills?

All DP courses should contribute to the development of five key categories of approaches to learning (ATL) skills: thinking, communication, social, research and self-management skills.

More detailed guidance and resources on these skills are provided in the [Approaches to teaching and learning in the Diploma Programme](#) resource on the programme resource centre. However, this section of the TSM provides suggestions of ways in which TOK teachers can help students to develop these skills during their TOK courses. The examples provided are intended purely as suggestions and are in no way intended to be prescriptive.

Skill category	Examples of activities and strategies TOK teachers could use to help develop these skills
Thinking skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging students to question claims rather than accepting them unreservedly. • Asking students to provide a reasoned argument to support their opinion. • Incorporating interesting reflection activities into TOK lessons—these could range from reflective journals to online reflection using video blogs. • Using visible thinking routines from Project Zero—from Harvard Graduate School of Education—to help students make their thinking more deliberate, explicit and visible. • Engaging students in tasks that require them to identify and expose assumptions. • Engaging students in tasks that build on specific prior learning.
Communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking students to explain their understanding of a concept or example to each other. • Helping students to formulate arguments clearly and coherently. • Helping students to develop their essay-writing skills, for example, through activities that help with essay planning, paragraph structuring, introduction writing and conclusion writing. • Exposing students to examples and materials in a variety of media, including visual sources, speeches, interviews and maps. • Developing “critical literacy”—where students analyse and critique texts for assumptions, bias or distortions—by encouraging students to consider questions such as: “what is the purpose of the text?”, “what assumptions are made about perspectives, values, knowledge and beliefs by the author(s)?”, “what has been omitted and why?”, “does the language mask intention?”, “what are the underlying power structures that created the context for the text?”. • Encouraging all students to contribute to class TOK discussions.

Skill category	Examples of activities and strategies TOK teachers could use to help develop these skills
Social skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing and discussing ideas with colleagues for how you will establish the tone and culture of the class to encourage good quality TOK discussions. • Encouraging students to be respectful of their peers during discussions. • Setting formative assessment tasks that require students to work collaboratively. • Providing students with opportunities to peer-assess each other's work. • Considering whether there are opportunities for your TOK students to collaborate—either virtually or face-to-face—with students from another IB World School. • Assigning, or asking students to assign, specific roles to each member of the group during group activities. • Encouraging students to consider the perspective of others, or to reflect on the impact of their behaviour or comments on other members of the class.
Research skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting students a task that explicitly requires them to practise and use effective online search skills—for example, the use of search limiters. • Explicitly discussing the importance of academic honesty and of fully acknowledging the ideas of others in all pieces of work. • Encouraging students to get into a routine of using a single, standard method of referencing. • Setting tasks that explicitly require students to use resources in the school library. • Engaging students in a discussion about how they evaluate contradictory sources.
Self-management skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with students to create a plan of how they can break down their TOK essay into a series of stages with interim deadlines. • Working with the DP coordinator to effectively plan key TOK assessment dates against dates for other tasks such as extended essay deadlines and internal assessment deadlines for other subjects, to help students spread their workload effectively. • Trying to model the characteristics and behaviours that you would like your TOK students to display, such as being punctual, meeting deadlines, taking risks and concentrating effectively. • Providing opportunities for students to revise and improve pieces of work. • Encouraging students to set their own learning goals. • Giving students feedback on their approach to a task as well as on the piece of work they have produced.

Concepts in TOK

The following 12 concepts have particular prominence within, and thread throughout, the TOK course. Exploration of the relationship between knowledge and these concepts can help students to deepen their understanding, as well as facilitating the transfer of their learning to different contexts.

Figure 3

The 12 concepts in TOK

Evidence	Certainty	Truth
Interpretation	Power	Justification
Explanation	Objectivity	Perspective
Culture	Values	Responsibility

Concepts can be an effective way to organize and frame a TOK course. For example, a TOK teacher might decide to approach their course by structuring it into explicit units on concepts such as “power”, “truth” and “responsibility”.

Regardless of how a TOK course is structured and organized, teaching for conceptual understanding is a powerful teaching strategy that can help students to build the capacity to engage with complex ideas. There is also a strong link between concepts and moving students to higher-order thinking; for example, developing conceptual understanding helps students to move from concrete thinking to abstract thinking.

One way in which these 12 concepts can be threaded throughout the TOK course is by using them explicitly within the wording of knowledge questions. For example, the concept of **evidence** could be explored through knowledge questions such as:

- What counts as good **evidence** for a claim?
- Are intuition, **evidence**, reasoning, consensus and authority all equally convincing methods of justification?
- Do historians have an ethical obligation not to ignore contradictory **evidence**?
- In what ways is factual **evidence** sometimes used, abused, dismissed and ignored in politics?
- Does what is seen to constitute “good **evidence**” vary from culture to culture?

Other useful strategies include:

- explicitly identifying key concepts in TOK unit plans
- encouraging students to make links to concepts being covered in other DP subjects
- encouraging students to make use of tools such as concept maps or mind maps to help them see connections and relationships.

Teamwork and collaboration

Collaboration, and particularly collaborative planning, is an important focus for all subjects and all IB programmes. It also plays a crucial role in planning and delivering an effective TOK course. Collaboration is one of the main keys to effectively incorporating TOK across the curriculum.

Effective TOK courses benefit from teamwork and collaboration at a number of different levels:

- between students
- between students and teachers
- between TOK teachers—where there are multiple TOK teachers within a school
- between TOK teachers and subject teachers
- between TOK teachers and other members of the school and local community
- between TOK teachers and other members of the global IB community.

Collaboration	Examples
Between students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative classroom activities such as “think, pair, share” activities. • TOK students in two different schools engaging in a collaborative project or sharing experiences and ideas via an online tool such as Skype or Zoom. • Collaborative formative assessment tasks such as group presentations.
Between students and teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing opportunities for students to give regular feedback on what they have and have not understood during their lessons. • Ensuring that teaching is inclusive and values student diversity—that it values students’ prior knowledge, affirms identity and builds self-esteem, and scaffolds and extends learning as appropriate. • Creating a respectful classroom environment where the TOK teacher is seen as the facilitator of learning and dialogue rather than a source of definitive and authoritative knowledge.
Between TOK teachers—where there are multiple TOK teachers within a school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking part in internal standardization exercises before submitting marks for the TOK internal assessment task to the IB in order to ensure that all teachers in the school are marking to a consistent standard. • Experienced TOK teachers mentoring young or inexperienced TOK teachers within the school. • Collaboratively planning and/or team-teaching TOK units as a way to share ideas and teaching strategies.
Between TOK teachers and subject teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with subject teachers to build an understanding of the skills and experiences students have prior to starting TOK. • Encouraging subject teachers to understand and reinforce the use of TOK vocabulary in their subject lessons. • Working with the DP coordinator on an in-school professional development event to help other subject teachers identify and

Collaboration	Examples
	<p>develop opportunities to link topics in their subjects with TOK topics and themes.</p>
<p>Between TOK teachers and other members of the school and local community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging members of the school community to participate in and support TOK activities such as the TOK exhibition. • Working with the school librarian to provide support on effective citing and referencing in all TOK assignments. • Inviting members of the local community to visit TOK lessons to talk about their experiences and perspectives, or taking students on visits and trips to meet with members of local communities.
<p>Between TOK teachers and other members of the global IB community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having conversations with other TOK teachers via the IB Communities. • Meeting and sharing ideas with other TOK teachers through IB professional development experiences • Collaborating with other TOK teachers by sharing ideas for TOK lessons or units, either virtually or at local or regional teacher discussion forums, networks or association meetings.

Formative assessment in TOK

Formative assessment is a process that teachers can use to improve student learning—it is about assessment for learning, rather than simply assessment of learning.

Formative assessment tasks can help to provide insight into students' progress and their particular strengths and weaknesses. They can also provide useful information that teachers can then use to amend and update their planning. A wide variety of formats of formative assessment tasks can be useful for TOK teachers.

Examples of TOK formative assessment tasks

- A “spiderweb” discussion on how we distinguish claims that are contestable from claims that are not.
- Creating a concept map or mind map showing links between an area of knowledge and the core theme.
- A “fishbowl” discussion on the impact of the internet on what we know and how we know.
- A Socratic seminar on whether history should have special status as its own area of knowledge within the TOK course.
- Writing a dialogue between two people holding contrasting perspectives.
- Oral presentations in pairs, with follow-up questions from the teacher and from the other students in the class.
- An imaginary interview with a famous figure, dead or alive, from one of the areas of knowledge. Who would you interview and why? What questions would you ask and why?
- Writing a blog entry or series of blog entries on ethics in the TOK course.
- Writing an entry or entries in an electronic TOK journal.
- A review of a book chapter or article.
- A peer-marking exercise where students look at anonymized TOK exhibitions or TOK essays completed by previous TOK students and discuss their strengths and weaknesses against the marking instruments.
- Working in groups to produce an essay plan on a past TOK prescribed essay title.
- Writing a full practice essay on a past TOK essay title.
- A video reflection on the TOK issues raised by a topic or task the student has recently completed in one of their other DP subjects.
- Writing a social media-style post and commenting on posts from other TOK students in the class—or from another school collaborating on the assignment.
- A combined creativity, activity, service (CAS) and TOK project exploring the concept of perspectives.
- As scaffolding towards the TOK exhibition task, having students bring in one physical object that they think highlights how TOK manifests in the world around us and then give a four-minute presentation on why they chose that object and the connections they see to TOK.

TOK assessment

The TOK course is assessed via two assessment components: the TOK exhibition and the TOK essay.

An important source of feedback on these assessment tasks is the **TOK subject report**. This is a report produced by the senior examiners after each examination session and it can be found on the TOK page of the programme resource centre.

Both of the TOK assessment tasks are marked using a “global impression marking” approach. This means that the assessment of both tasks is envisaged as a process of holistic or global judgment rather than an analytical process of totalling the assessment of separate criteria. The assessment instruments for each task can be found in the TOK subject guide and it is recommended that these assessment instruments should be made available to students.

The TOK exhibition

The TOK exhibition focuses on exploring how TOK manifests in the world around us. Students are required to select one prompt from the list of 35 internal assessment prompts provided in the TOK subject guide. They then curate an exhibition of three objects connected to their chosen prompt.

An extremely wide variety of different types of objects are suitable for use in a TOK exhibition. Students are encouraged to select objects that have personal relevance or that link to areas of personal interest. For example, a student with an interest in fantasy football might select an object such as a set of fantasy football rankings or a set of football statistics, or a student might choose to include a personal item such as a photograph of a grandparent.

The student may have created the objects themselves, but they must be pre-existing objects rather than ones created specifically for the purposes of the exhibition. The objects may also be digital rather than physical. For example, students could include a photograph of an object where it would not be practical or possible for them to exhibit the physical object. Students may also use digital objects, such as a post on social media.

However, what is really important for this task is that the students select objects that have a specific real-world context—objects that exist in a particular time and place, including virtual spaces. For example, a photograph of a student’s childhood teddy bear is an example of an object that has a specific real-world context, whereas a generic image of “a teddy bear” from an internet search is not.

Figure 4

An example of three physical objects used in a TOK exhibition



Figure 5

An example of three physical objects used in a TOK exhibition



Figure 6

Examples of three photographs used in a TOK exhibition



It is recommended that students base their exhibition on one of the themes, either the core theme or one of the optional themes. This can help students to select their prompt and to narrow down their choice of potential objects, helping them to find a starting point for what can otherwise be a very open task with a vast number of possible approaches.

It should be noted that there are a number of different, and equally valid, entry points into the TOK exhibition. Students may begin by being drawn to a particular theme and prompt, and then find objects that exemplify how that question manifests in the world around them. Alternatively, a student may begin with an object of particular interest and then decide which prompt provides an interesting TOK lens through which to think about that object.

One useful strategy can be to encourage students to take an exploratory approach where they play around with different prompts and objects before making their final selections. However students choose to approach the task, they must ensure that their exhibition is based on just one internal assessment prompt and all three objects must be linked to this one same prompt.

The format of the exhibition

All students must be given the opportunity to present or showcase their exhibition to an audience. As this does not form part of the formal assessment task, teachers have a great deal of flexibility as to how they choose to hold these exhibitions.

Ten examples of TOK exhibition formats

1. A class of TOK students could hold an exhibition within one of their regular TOK classes.
2. A school could host a TOK exhibition evening for parents and other members of the school community.
3. A school could host a TOK exhibition event where students present to a panel of visitors from the local community.
4. A class of TOK students could host an exhibition for younger students, for example, prospective DP students in the school.
5. A school could host a combined event celebrating the Primary Years Programme (PYP) exhibition, the Middle Years Programme (MYP) personal project and the TOK exhibition.
6. A school could host a combined “DP core” event where students discuss their TOK exhibition, CAS experiences and extended essay research question.
7. Two classes of TOK students in the same school, or different nearby schools, could host exhibitions for each other to visit.
8. Students could display their TOK exhibitions in a “virtual exhibition”—by using an online gallery space.
9. Students could display their TOK exhibitions in a central public place within the school, such as the library or entrance foyer, to help raise the profile of TOK within the school.
10. Students could hold a TOK exhibition where teachers of other DP subjects are the audience and discuss the exhibitions with the students.

Figure 7

An example of a TOK exhibition event



Figure 8

An example of a TOK exhibition event



Figure 9

An example of a TOK exhibition event



Figure 10

An example of a TOK exhibition undertaken within a TOK lesson



The TOK essay

Teachers play an important role supporting students during the planning and writing of their TOK essay.

Three formal recorded interactions between the student and teacher are required and these must be recorded on the TOK essay *Planning and Progress Form* (TK/PPF).

Three required teacher–student interactions for the TOK essay		
Discuss the list of prescribed titles with the student.	Discuss the student’s initial exploration of their selected title, for example, an essay plan.	Comment on one draft of the student’s essay.

The *TK/PPF* is not seen by the examiner when they are marking student essays. It is submitted to the IB and is referred to in cases where there are concerns about academic malpractice or concerns about the preparation of students for the TOK assessment tasks.

The *TK/PPF* has two key purposes:

1. To help ensure that students around the world are getting a similar level of help and support with their TOK essays by specifying three required interactions between teachers and students.
2. To help ensure that the essay is the student’s own work.

Understanding the TOK essay assessment instrument

The assessment of the TOK essay is underpinned by the driving question: **does the student provide a clear, coherent and critical exploration of the essay title?** The assessment instrument then provides five levels of performance. These levels are to be seen as holistic descriptors rather than as a checklist of necessary characteristics and it is not necessary for every single aspect of a level descriptor to be met for a mark in that level to be awarded.

Key phrase from the essay assessment instrument	Additional guidance or comments
“A sustained focus on the title”	The TOK essay is an exploration of the chosen title, so ensuring that the essay is tightly focused on the title is crucial. If this doesn’t happen, the essay will be seen to lack relevance and will only achieve low marks.

Key phrase from the essay assessment instrument	Additional guidance or comments
	<p>Common weaknesses seen in TOK essays:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They fail to address the title, or that they begin well but then deviate from the title. Strong TOK essays retain a clear focus on the title throughout. • They focus on one part of the title but completely ignore another part of the title. Strong TOK essays ensure that they address all parts of the title, as well as considering any assumptions that are written into the title. • They fail to consider central terms and concepts used in the title, or alternatively where they simply provide lengthy descriptive dictionary definitions of these terms.
<p>“Linked effectively to areas of knowledge”</p>	<p>The TOK prescribed essay titles may refer to specific areas of knowledge or they may ask students to discuss a claim in relation to two areas of knowledge but leave the choice of areas of knowledge to the student. In both question formats, it is vital that students make clear and effective links to areas of knowledge in their essays.</p> <p>The term “area of knowledge” refers explicitly to the five areas of knowledge listed in the TOK guide: history, natural sciences, human sciences, mathematics and the arts.</p> <p>Sometimes students may wish to use an example or discipline that does not fit comfortably into an area of knowledge. While examiners are encouraged to be open to a variety of approaches, if a student takes this approach then it does require them to offer some additional justification or explanation for why they are using this example for that area of knowledge. It is therefore recommended that teachers advise their students against this approach, as it requires the student to make the case for why that example or discipline belongs to that particular area of knowledge.</p>
<p>“Arguments are effectively supported by specific examples”</p>	<p>The TOK essay requires students to undertake a critical exploration of the chosen title. It is therefore crucial that the discussion is analytical rather than simply descriptive and that students provide clear and coherent arguments that are supported by specific examples.</p> <p>The term “specific examples” means that the student, for example, makes reference to a particular artist or artwork or scientist or scientific theory rather than making a generic reference to “artists” or “scientists”.</p> <p>The examples in a TOK essay play an important role in supporting the argument. This means that it is not only the examples themselves that are important, but crucially also how they are used within the essay to support the arguments that the student is making.</p> <p>A common weakness seen in TOK essays is where students use too many examples and/or skip from one example to another without unpacking their relevance and significance and without showing how these examples support the argument being made. This tends to make the essay overly descriptive rather than analytical.</p>
<p>“Clear awareness and evaluation of different points of view”</p>	<p>The TOK essay should be a critical exploration rather than simply a one-sided statement of the student’s own viewpoint or opinion. To achieve high marks, students need to not only show awareness of</p>

Key phrase from the essay assessment instrument	Additional guidance or comments
	<p>different points of view but also to critically evaluate these different points of view.</p> <p>Although students are required to engage with different points of view, TOK students should be encouraged to come to their own conclusions. They should be encouraged to make a critical appraisal of different points of view and to be clear what their own position is; for example, they might agree with a claim with reservations.</p> <p>Within an essay, different points of view might take the form of claims and counterclaims or arguments and counterarguments. Students might, for example, discuss contrasting examples and different perspectives from different disciplines or areas of knowledge, or indeed from within the same discipline or area of knowledge.</p>

TOK and the DP core

“I think TOK is an essential aspect of the International Baccalaureate experience. As a diploma recipient, I feel that it truly reflects several of the qualities that I think make IB such a potent programme: an emphasis on multiculturalism, the promotion of independent thought, the willingness to question and analyse ideas and promoting education that goes beyond just teaching for a test”.

(Former DP student)

TOK is one of the three elements that make up the core of the Diploma Programme. These core elements focus on the education of the whole person, and they share three common aims.

Aims of the DP core

The three elements of the DP core are intended to complement each other and to work together to achieve three common aims. These are:

- to foster international-mindedness and encourage students to become responsible and actively involved global citizens
- to develop students’ self-awareness and sense of identity, and provide an opportunity for reflection on their development of the attributes of the IB learner profile
- to enrich and add value to students’ overall learning experiences through the core supporting, and being supported by, their academic studies in the rest of the programme.

Much of the power of the DP core lies in its potential to engage students in stimulating experiences and thoughtful self-reflection. For example, it is hoped that through the TOK course students will develop a richer and more nuanced understanding of themselves as knowers and thinkers.

[Video: reflections on the DP core](#)

TOK across the DP curriculum

It is intended that TOK should support, and be supported by, the rest of the programme.

Subject teachers do not need to “teach” the TOK course in their subject lessons. However, they play a crucial role in helping students to make connections to TOK across the curriculum and in helping to reinforce the development of the skills and dispositions that the TOK course seeks to develop in students. Much of the process of embedding TOK across the curriculum involves demystifying the course and empowering all teachers to engage in TOK conversations.

Tips for effectively embedding TOK across the curriculum

1. Encouraging subject teachers to utilize the suggested links to TOK provided within many DP subject guides.
2. Encouraging subject teachers to explicitly use the language of the knowledge framework—scope, perspectives, methods and tools and ethics—in their lessons to help students see connections to TOK.
3. Inviting subject teachers to be audience members for TOK exhibitions.
4. Inviting subject teachers to take part in “ask the expert” sessions or to co-teach a TOK lesson on their area of specialism.
5. Encouraging students to keep TOK notebooks or journals where they note down examples from their other subjects to take back to their TOK lessons—encouraged by other teachers.
6. Having teachers of all subjects help reinforce skills needed for the TOK course; for example, encouraging students to highlight assumptions being made in arguments and to identify the implications of arguments.
7. Sharing TOK course outlines or unit plans with subject teachers so that they can identify opportunities where they can link topics or themes in their subjects to units being explored in TOK.
8. Organizing in-school professional development experiences on TOK for subject teachers, or encouraging teachers to undertake dedicated IB professional development on TOK for subject teachers.
9. Exploring connections between the completion of subject internal assessment (IA) tasks and TOK. For example, the history IA task explicitly requires students to reflect on what their historical investigation highlighted to them about the methods used by, and challenges facing, the historian.
10. Making examples of TOK essays available in teacher areas to encourage discussions.
11. Encouraging subject teachers to suggest and liaise with subject experts and members of the local community who could take part in TOK lessons or events.
12. Planning scheduling alignments, for example, coordinating discussion of natural sciences as an area of knowledge with the timing of the Group 4 project.
13. Generating enthusiasm for and raising the profile of TOK within the school through events such as a month-long “TOKtober” event in October.
14. Flipping the focus by asking subject teachers what one key thing they would like you as a TOK teacher to incorporate in your course, such as they wish their students were more aware of issues relating to statistics.
15. Providing, or encouraging subject teachers to create, TOK posters for their classrooms.

Identifying good TOK resources

There are a wide variety of useful resources available to TOK teachers.

- Resources produced by the IB and published on the programme resource centre. This could include the TOK subject guide, teacher support material, samples of assessed student work, specimen essay titles, and annual subject reports.
- Textbooks specifically written to support the TOK course.
- Short audio clips or videos from sites such as Radio Lab (www.radiolab.org), TED.com (www.ted.com), or Edge (www.edge.org/videos).
- Speeches such as the 2011 speech by Sir Harold Kroto, the 1996 Nobel Prize Laureate for Chemistry, in which he talked about the importance of science, which, in his view, is the academic pursuit best positioned to develop the truth about the natural world.
- Books such as *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error* (Schulz, K, 2010. London, Portobello Books) in which she addresses such questions as “what makes us wrong?”, “why are we so resistant to admitting that we are wrong?” and “what are the consequences of being wrong and, especially, of refusing to admit that we are wrong?”.
- Academic lectures, for example, the 1961 lectures given by the historian E.H. Carr at the University of Cambridge.
- Political cartoons.
- Articles from news and social media sites.
- Articles from magazines such as *The Economist* and *New Scientist*.

There are also a number of websites designed specifically to support teachers and students with the TOK course. These websites can contain some excellent materials and examples. However, teachers and students need to exercise caution in their use of such sites. Often students lack the ability to distinguish between good advice and bad advice from these sites, particularly in relation to assessment. Some of these sites can also encourage a formulaic, tick-box approach to the TOK course and assessment tasks, which can undermine the opportunities for students to think the issues through for themselves and to come to their own conclusions.

Often it is not the resource itself that determines the success of a TOK lesson, it is the quality of the discussion it stimulates or the questions that are asked about it within the TOK class. For example, one potential resource could be a political cartoon from the United States of America commenting on a remark made by Rick Santorum—candidate for the Republican Party nomination in the 2012 presidential election—that he believed there should be no separation between church and state. This cartoon could be a useful resource for a TOK class, but not if it is used only to provoke a debate about whether Mr Santorum was a good candidate for president of the United States of America. Instead, students could use the cartoon as a stimulus to consider questions such as:

- How is the use of an image to convey an idea different from the use of words?
- How are the means by which political cartoons endeavour to convince people of a particular viewpoint different from the means by which other media strive to do the same thing?
- Should political cartoons be considered art? They employ some of the methodologies of art, but do they fit into the scope of the arts?

The use of these kinds of deeper questions could make this cartoon useful in a wide variety of TOK lessons on language, politics, the arts or the human sciences.

Database of useful TOK resources

This [database](#) contains examples of resources that other TOK teachers have found useful when teaching the TOK course. Some will be useful as resources for the teacher and some will be useful as materials for students. Many of the resources are free and available on the internet; however, some require a subscription or purchase.