



TOK COORDINATOR'S HANDBOOK

Creating Your TOK Department

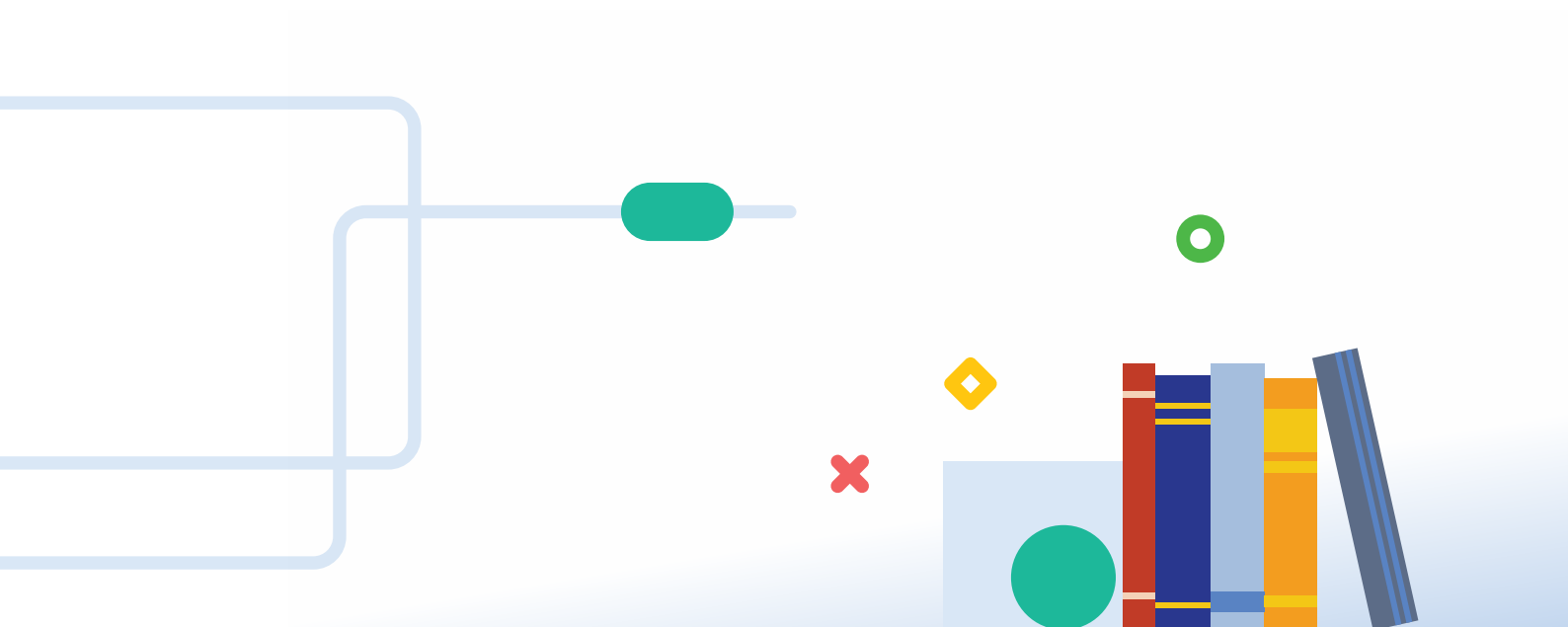
A guide for new and beginning TOK coordinators.



PART 1



Creating your TOK department





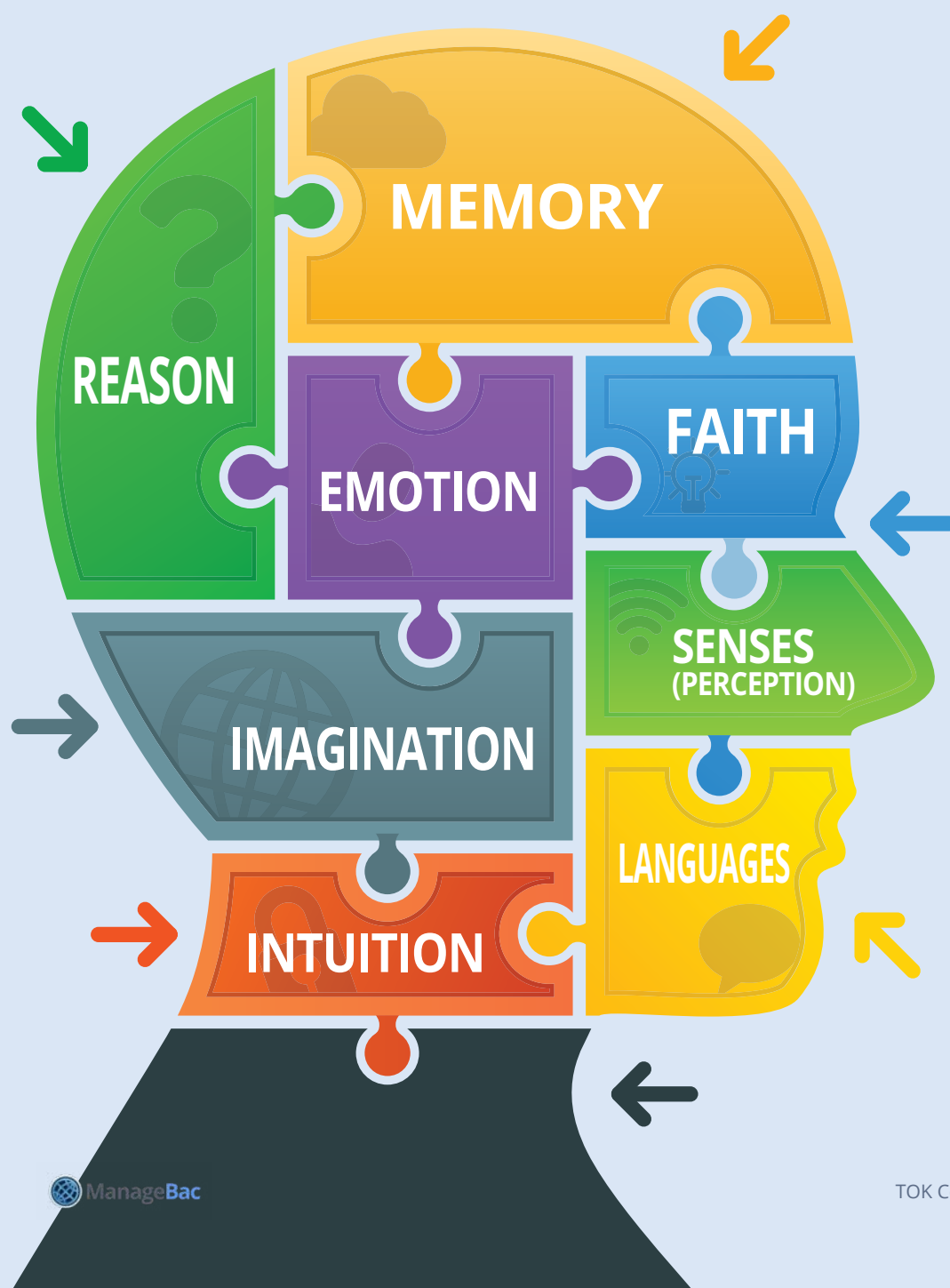
About the Author

Michael Dunn is the creator of theoryofknowledge.net. He attended school in Cambridge, followed by the Universities of Edinburgh (MA hons) and Exeter (PGCE). He spent a couple of years teaching in London, and since then has been hopping between Colombia, Peru, and the UK. He also runs the world's largest website for TOK where he manages customers in over 100 different countries, as well as serving as the TOK Coordinator and Head of Form VI at Newton College, Lima, Peru.

Michael is now dedicated to revolutionizing not only resources for TOK, but also how to conceive the course itself. With the development of the '[8 Big Question Framework](#)', he has created a completely new approach to TOK, which enables teachers to deliver a course that is far more engaging and integrated than the usual 'shopping list' approach based on separate ways of knowing and areas of knowledge. You can find out more, and download sample lesson resources [here](#).

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WAYS OF KNOWING



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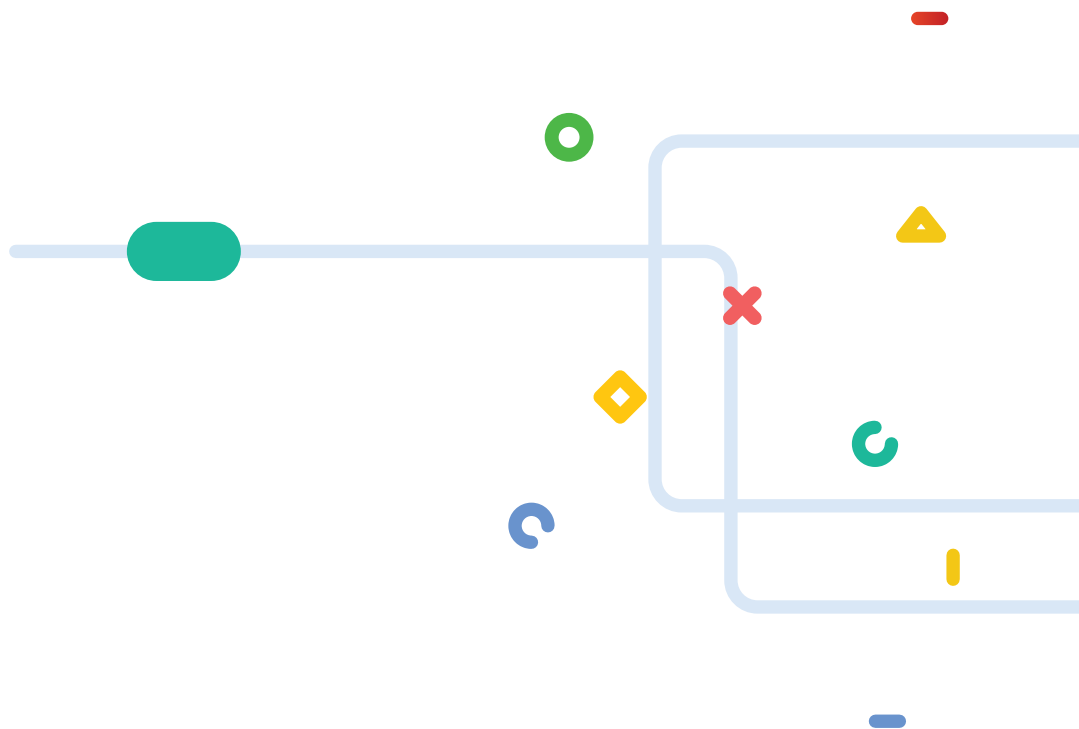
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Creating Your TOK Department

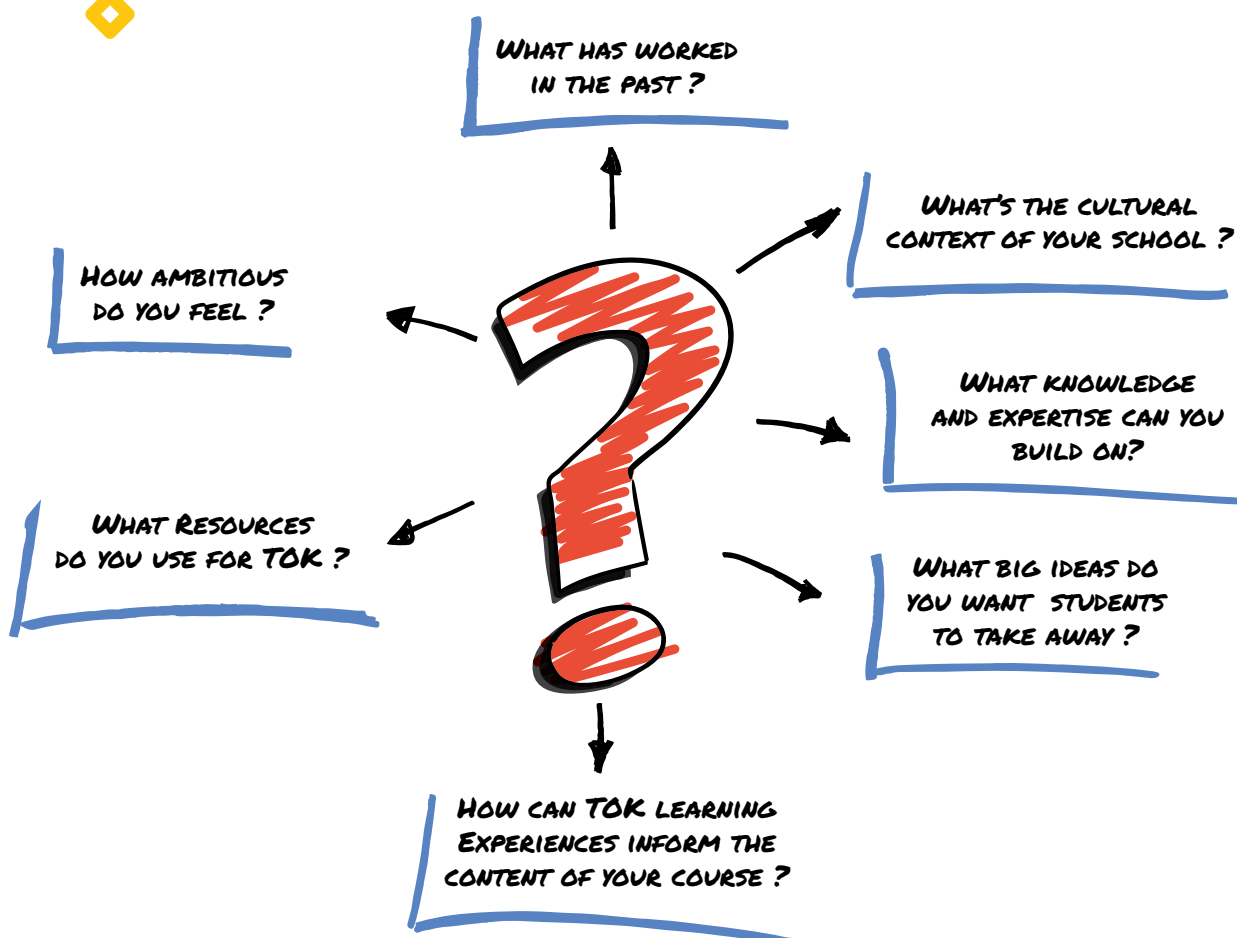


a.

Getting started

Structuring your TOK course

One of the first questions that faces any TOK coordinator when they set up or rethink the TOK programme at their school is how to structure the course, and what content to include. The great thing about the subject is that there is no set curriculum that's examined after two years, so there is a lot of flexibility - there's nothing your students 'have' to learn. But this, of course, means there is far less to guide you, beyond the IB precept that you should consider 4 of the WOKs, and 6 of the AOKs, as well as the prescribed essay titles that have come up during previous sessions. Here are some questions that can guide you as you decide on the format of your programme.



1. What has worked (and hasn't worked) in the past?

Unless you are setting up TOK in a new IB Diploma school, then you'll have a pre-existing course to base your planning on. Talk to the students and teachers involved in TOK and find out what has worked, and what hasn't, in the past. For the students, this evaluation could be based on:

- Which elements of the TOK course do students have a clear understanding of, and which elements did they find harder to grasp and understand?
- What learning experiences made an impact on them, and what aspects of the course do they have difficulty recalling?
- Have they managed to apply any of the concepts they've learned in TOK to their other subjects, and which concepts have been less helpful in terms of understanding the rest of the DP?

For teachers, in addition to the above, the information they could provide you with could include:

- What have they enjoyed teaching, and what was less rewarding?
- What elements of the course have students applied successfully to the production of essays and presentations?
- What content, learning experiences and teaching strategies worked well in the past (see question 5 below)?

Building up a clear picture from your students and teachers will not only allow you to plan an effective course, it will also enfranchise the people who are most involved in TOK.

2. What's the cultural context of your school?

One of the best resources you have available to you is the culture in which you work. Although your students may not all 'belong' to that culture, they will all have a relationship with it, so not making use of it would be an opportunity lost.

Examples of how this could inform the areas of knowledge you decide to cover include :

- How easily can you access indigenous knowledge in the culture you work in? Many schools are located in or near to indigenous societies; covering IKS would enable you to draw on these societies, and increase your students' awareness of how different approaches to knowledge can be amongst different societies.
- Is your school in a historically significant place? If a particularly important historical event (or events) has occurred where you are working, covering history would give you a focus point that you could use to explore this area of knowledge.
- What's the religious context of the culture you're working in? Teaching students of different religious affiliations could give you the opportunity to compare and contrast religious knowledge systems. Obviously, certain sensibilities might need to be observed, but students should be encouraged to share experiences of how their religious outlooks create their identities and understanding of the world.
- Are you near good artistic institutions? Getting students out of the school environment, and visiting art galleries or exhibitions is a fantastic way to get them exploring the arts.

3. What knowledge and expertise can you build on?

The course you create depends partly on the knowledge, expertise, and interests of the teachers who make up the TOK team. The starting point for this is the subject your teachers are trained in - the perfect department might include those who teach history, science, mathematics, art. But the subject areas of your teachers is by no means the end point (and many departments are successful without this diversity): what are their interests and hobbies? Building a course that gives teachers the opportunity to draw on these things will make your team more passionate about TOK, meaning it's easier for them to deliver engaging lessons.

Virtually anything can be co-opted to create a great TOK course; below are a few examples of areas of expertise and interests that we have seen utilised:

- Teachers who are interested in **photography** might find their interest a great way to initiate an exploration of the arts. Is photography really art? Has modern technology undermined the integrity of photography? Broadening this to include other artistic genres, how does artistic knowledge develop over time?
- Many teachers working in IB schools are dedicated **travellers**. What does spending time in different cultures reveal about how our knowledge is determined by our perspective? Which areas of knowledge are more subjective? Do the ways of knowing vary from one place to another?
- Teachers who have experience of **writing** will be able to use this to help students explore language and imagination, as well as create great TOK journals. Perhaps teachers who have had success in writing articles or books can lead workshops showing students how to draw on experiences to explore the world?
- Do you have a teacher who has expertise in **computer programming** or website design? This can form a nice entry point into both language and reason, and given the ubiquity of algorithms in today's society, might enable some interesting questions to be asked in terms of ethics.

4. What big ideas do you want students to take away?

You don't have to start with your WOKs/AOKs and then figure out which ideas to include within them, you could turn this process on its head, and begin with a consideration of the big ideas you want your students to come away with by the end of the course, and then decide on the WOKs/AOKs.

These big ideas might be specific to one WOK/AOK, or they might encompass multiple elements of the course. A few examples of the sort of ideas that engage you, and which you want to pass on to your students:

- The concept of **proof** and **certainty** in knowing would be hard to do without a consideration of **mathematics** (eg axioms), perhaps compared to more subjective areas of knowledge like ethics.
- Looking at how knowledge progresses via **paradigm shifts** would probably prompt you to include natural sciences in your scheme of work.
- Looking at the viability of **predictions** works particularly well in the **human sciences**; perhaps this AOK could also be compared to the natural sciences.
- Discerning **progress** and **patterns** in what we know is best viewed via **history**.

5. How can TOK learning experiences inform the content of your course?

Your school may already have a big TOK event, such as a conference, exhibition, presentation day, or retreat. This may be based on a specific theme or topic, which in turn may determine some of the the content you cover. If this is a successful part of your TOK calendar, then there's obviously no need to change it; if, however, it doesn't work as well as you might like, or if you don't currently have any events based around TOK, then perhaps it is time to think about setting up a new event to showcase and promote TOK.

Possible learning experiences, and examples of how this could inform the content of your TOK course, include the following:

- TOK **conferences** are held in many countries around the world throughout the year. These may have a specific theme, or feature several different ideas and concepts, so it might be difficult to build them into your course content. However, if your school does participate in one, the amount your students will get out of it will depend on the level of preparation you do. One great example of a TOK conference, and arguably the best known around the world, is the one held in February at United World College Maastricht. You can see details of their 2018 conference [here](#).
- An increasing number of schools are organising **TOK retreats**, which involve placing their students in a different environment for a few days to encourage them to view the world from a different perspective. How different that perspective is depends on the school, and its location. Newton College in Lima organises a trip to the Peruvian jungle where, as well as getting students to carry out coursework for geography, biology, and do their Group 4 projects, they spend time thinking about the knowledge they gather via the question '**What makes someone an expert knower?**' This question is explored by comparing and contrasting knowledge in the human and natural sciences to indigenous knowledge systems, and presenting their findings at the end of the trip.
- It's great to showcase and publicise TOK to the rest of the school, and this can be done via displays, exhibitions, or activity days. What do you do particularly strongly that you could show to the rest of the school? What knowledge issue or controversy would you like to showcase? What work have your students done that you'd like to showcase? Giving students a couple of weeks focusing on something specific, and deepening their knowledge of a particular theme could enable them to carry off such an event successfully.
- Your school might have an agreement with a specific guest speaker who appears every year. Again, preparing students for this experience is essential so that they get the most out the talk, and ask meaningful questions.

6. What resources do you use for TOK?

The resources you use for TOK should play a big role in determining what you cover during the course. Reading a great article from a media source, watching a particularly enlightening TED talk, seeing a thought-provoking video, or coming across a provocative opinion or interview, can all provide you with means to build and craft an engaging unit of study, or at the very least, pass on to your students for them to view in their own time. Although textbooks can play a role in delivering TOK in your school, you shouldn't base your course on them, because they don't provide the level of engagement or freshness that articles and videos can give.

So keep a folder of resources from things you come across as you use media sources, and don't be afraid of using them to develop and change the structure and content of your TOK course - every year your course should be refreshed by new content; sometimes this new content should introduce radical changes in the way you do TOK.

Here are a few examples of individual resources that can have a big impact on the way you cover ideas and content:

- **TED** is a fantastically rich source of ideas for TOK, and everyone will no doubt have their own favourites that they draw on in lessons. One talk that could be considered 'seminal' is [Beau Lotto's presentation](#) on how optical illusions show how we see. Lotto not only demonstrates a series of mind-boggling illusions that will have your students tearing their hair out as they try to make sense of them (a great learning experience!), he also explains the incredibly important concept of how context is key to the way we see and make sense of the world around us. This can form the core of any study of sense perception in particular, and more generally on how we trust our 'immediate knowledge' of the world - and how valid this tendency is.
- Linking to what we have said about the cultural context of your school, find out what languages are spoken by your students, and connect this to the many **articles** you can find about the role of language in shaping our experiences of the world. [Here's one](#) on how we have 'untranslatable' emotions; [here's another](#) on the Portuguese sensation of 'saudade'. Perhaps you could link this to the wider idea of shared and personal knowledge - does language reinforce the former or the latter?
- Exposing your students to **controversial ideas** or opinions is a great way to get a reaction out of them, and start a vigorous debate. If it's a big enough idea, it can also form the basis of an extended series of lessons. [Here's Andrew Keen](#) on how the Internet is returning us to a 'pre-Copernican level of understanding', which is guaranteed to generate a response. Use this as a launch pad onto an exploration of whether we are 'progressing' in terms of our knowledge, or whether the idea of progress is an illusion. This could be considered within the human or natural sciences, or in terms of history - and whether having such suppositions help or hinder us to discern patterns in human understanding changes over time.
- **Fake news** is one of the great debates of our time (even though it has been around forever), and reminds us why TOK is such a potent course for students. There are many ways of handling this issue; [here's a recent article](#) that looks at the Moses effect, which will get students thinking about the way they utilise (or fail to utilise) reason. [An older article](#) from The Scientific American supports this, and provides us with the lovely phrase 'cognitive miserliness'. Are we cognitive misers in all our ways of knowing, and areas of knowledge?

7. How ambitious do you feel?

If you are a new TOK coordinator, you may feel reluctant to make many changes to your TOK course, or you may feel that the changes you do want to introduce should be made within a traditional framework. This might mean approaching TOK via the ways of knowing or areas of knowledge, and sticking to what has been done before, but with a few minor changes. If this is your first stint at coordinating a TOK department, then this is perfectly reasonable. This, after all, is how TOK textbooks are structured, and how the majority of schools deliver TOK.

However, you might feel a little more ambitious, and be keen to revolutionise rather than reform TOK in your school. Going this way could involve introducing the following changes:

- Abandoning the traditional structure of TOK (ie via individual ways of knowing and areas of knowledge), and basing the course on questions or themes to be explored via multiple WOKs and AOKs. This gives a more integrated TOK experience, and enables a more question-based approach be followed.
- Building in a new learning experience for students (see part 5 above), and using that to dictate the content of the TOK course for part of the year.
- Making a part of your course an 'elective', whereby students choose elements of the course to research, and you support them with self-guided resources.
- Getting rid of textbooks as a means of delivering TOK, and only using articles and online sources as a way of delivering the course.

The first three of these ideas will be explored in the '*Enriching your TOK course*' section of '[Introducing Excellence into your TOK Department](#)'.

Creating a TOK course outline

Putting together a course outline is one of the first jobs for a TOK coordinator, and is an excellent way of fully understanding the nature of the course. In the process of designing your course, you will answer questions such as, 'What are the aims and purpose of TOK?', 'How do you develop the skills required to carry out the assessment tasks?', and 'How do the different elements of the course integrate?' All of this will take you a long way along the path towards ownership of TOK.

Here is a diagram of the suggested steps you should go through in creating your TOK course outline. Underneath the diagram, we discuss each step in more detail. Consult our exemplar course outlines to see how this all looks when you have followed the different steps.



STEP
1

Decide whether the unit titles of your course will be based on the AOKs and WOKs **(a)**, or themes/ questions **(b)**

The more traditional way of organising the TOK course is to create units of study that are based on the WOKs (the IB recommends students exploring 4 of these) and AOKs (the IB recommends students look at 6). This is the approach followed in many textbooks, and is the more straightforward to organise.

However, you might want to follow a more integrated, imaginative approach, getting your students to look at 2 or more WOKs/AOKs per unit, and designing these units via a theme or a question. This requires you doing a little more thinking in order to choose themes or questions that work in TOK, but we have suggested one way of doing this below.

For a longer exploration of this issue, see 'Choosing the Right Unit Titles' section of ['Part 2: Introducing Excellence into your TOK Department'](#).

STEP
2a

Decide the order of WOKs/AOKs

This is subject to many variables - how your school has always done it whether there's a pre-planned event or guest speaker to embed, and what you think works logically.

Our exemplar course outline shows how this approach could work in practice.

STEP
2b

Decide which WOKs/AOKs you will use to explore your themes or questions

If your unit titles are based on themes or questions, you need to decide which elements of the course you'll use to explore these.

STEP
3

Decide on an appropriate time span for each unit of study

Depending on your school timetable, a unit length of 4-5 weeks is about right, assuming approximately 1 ½ - 2 hours of TOK per week, in a 4 term academic year. Note the following points:

- You'll have less time in your second year than the first, because of study leave, final exams, and the TOK assessments.
- The TOK course has to be completed in either April or October, depending on whether you are a Northern or Southern Hemisphere school.
- You need to ensure that you are hitting the requisite amount of time stipulated by the IB, which is (at least) 100 hours.

STEP
4

Decide when you will provide time for both practice and actual assessment tasks

It's important to build in time on your TOK calendar for the students to write at least one practice essay (or essay plan), and deliver a 'mock' presentation. Think about:

- Whether you have allocated enough time for the assessed essay and presentation. Students should be given plenty of class time for this, allowing them easier access to you for the assessment interactions.
- When the presentation is scheduled. Some schools like to do the presentations in year 1, to avoid clashing with other DP deadlines; others prefer to leave it until after students have completed the TOK course, giving them more knowledge to draw on.



STEP
5

Incorporate events or guest speakers in your calendar

Many schools have TOK events pre-planned in the calendar, so this could inform your course outline.

- If your event is based on a particular WOK or AOK, or on a theme or question, then obviously your students will need to cover those aspects of the TOK course beforehand.
- If your speaker is a specialist in a particular field, then you should provide your students with relevant knowledge before the talk to scaffold their understanding.
- Consider other school events (ie trips, mock exams, etc.) Before you assign actual dates to your TOK course outline, make sure you have taken into account any activities that might take the students out of school for an extended period of time. These might include subject or year group trips or mock exams for the Diploma.
- You should also consider the deadlines for internal and external assessments of other subjects when you decide when they submit their essays and presentations in year 2.



STEP

6

Create your course outline

Now you're set to add your units of study to the school calendar. At this point, all you need to do is simply schedule your units, without thinking too much about individual lessons, learning objectives, and so on.



STEP

7

Start creating your unit and lesson plans.

Writing these plans is an ongoing process that you will probably only complete when you have finished your first year as TOK coordinator, and it will likely continue to evolve beyond this. However, you should have an idea of where you are taking each unit before you start teaching it, and how the learning objectives of individual lessons fit into these units.

A typical TOK class

So what does a typical TOK class look like? How do you decide on learning activities? How do you link an individual lesson to an overall unit of study? How do you incorporate real-life situations within a class? How should students be carrying out their work? What should the balance be between 'chalk-and-talk' from the teacher, and autonomous learning?

The answers to all of these questions depend to some degree on what sort of a TOK course you're delivering, and this in turn depends on how TOK is timetabled and organised within your school. Some schools treat TOK just like any other subject, giving it the requisite hour or two in the classroom every week; some schools approach it a little more creatively - by choice or by necessity. Here are a selection of different types of TOK classes, with a link to a sample lessons that might work in each one, plus an outline of the process taken to create this lesson.

1. Teacher-led classes

Teacher-led classes are what could be referred to as the most typical of TOK classes. Characteristics of these lessons are:

- The environment is an ordinary classroom
- Lesson duration is around an hour
- Group number will be around 15 - 20 students, in either Year 1 or 2
- Lesson structure is similar to ordinary DP classes (with a lesson objective, an explanation the key concepts, individual tasks followed by group tasks)
- A final 'exit' question, to assess whether they have achieved the learning objective individually

[The attached lesson](#) shows how this structure works in the context of a lesson that explores the relationship between empathy and ethical knowledge, and whether we should use the former to help to generate the latter. It also fits in with a bigger unit question about how our knowledge of the world is based on shared and personal knowledge. It was created around two short videos, featuring Barack Obama and Paul Bloom. Sources such as these can provide an engaging central element of a TOK lesson, and also lead on to some healthy debates over the ways in which we gather and use knowledge about the world.

2. Self-guided classes

Assuming students receive timely, accurate, and useful feedback on what they produce, self-guided classes are an effective way of developing students' skills of autonomous learning. SG classes are characterised by:

- The learning environment can be anywhere (ie inside or outside school; in an ordinary classroom or another location)
- Group size is unimportant - any number of students can follow the lesson
- Students work on their own, following more explicit instructions in the lesson presentation and handouts

[The attached lesson](#) shows how this works in the context of a lesson that explores 'how we see' - relating to either an introduction to the nature of knowledge, an exploration of sense perception, or a unit question like, "Can we trust our 'immediate' knowledge of the world?" It is based on a TED talk by Donald Hoffman, in which he provides a fantastic analogy about how our knowledge of the world is based on what makes sense to us, rather than what's actually there; an idea that can be applied to many aspects of the TOK course. Students could complete either an electronic or hard-copy version of the [handout](#). Suggested answers can be viewed [here](#).

3. Workshop class

Workshop classes are designed to:

- Introduce assessment tasks to students
- Provide an outline and analysis of new skills needed to complete the task, or how to re-apply skills already learned
- Give a deep understanding of a rubric (ideally based on the TOK essay and presentation assessment instrument)

[The attached lesson](#) shows how this works for a workshop on writing TOK journals. It assumes that students have already written a first journal entry, and are now developing their skills of identifying and exploring second order knowledge questions (which are given their own workshop lesson). Students are given [this rubric](#) to understand, and [this exemplar journal entry](#) to model their own responses.

4. Debrief classes

A debrief class would follow on from an assessment that you have done in TOK (such as journal writing, an essay or essay plan, or a presentation). Debrief classes:

- Help students to evaluate where their skills (that were identified in the workshop class) fell short
- Take place in a usual classroom environment, typically with 15 - 20 students


[The attached lesson](#) shows how to run a debrief on the TOK presentation. It assumes that students have already designed and delivered a presentation, early on in the course (perhaps their first TOK presentation), and have received individual feedback on it.

5. Plenary classes

Plenary classes are timetabled in many schools as a way of getting the whole cohort together. They can be used to:

- Introduce a new topic, or round up one that has just been completed
- Explain an upcoming special event, such as a guest speaker
- Give students experience of university lecture room style environments (although the learning experience should still be interactive)
- Involve up to 80 or so students, in a large space, such as a theatre or assembly hall (depending on the size of the DP cohorts at your school)

[The attached lesson](#) shows how this works for a plenary on the nature of indigenous knowledge. Students begin by answering the starter individually, ensuring that the large group environment begins in a focused way. Slide 3 gets them thinking about their own biases, which they do with a partner, and slide 4 gets them 'breaking out' into groups of 4 or 5, which should happen in spaces all over the theatre. Within these groups they fill in their [worksheets](#), by reading through the two readings on the [handout](#).



✖ Resourcing your TOK department

As with setting up your TOK course, it is both an advantage and a disadvantage that there is no concrete curriculum when it comes to resourcing your department. On the one hand, there's no go-to resource in TOK that gives students all they need to know for an end of course exam. On the other, this makes choosing what to use to support your course a creative and fun process, where the sky's the limit when it comes to variety, type, and provenance.



Media sources

Despite the fact that using the Internet can be challenging in terms of access to reliable information, the access we now have to useful online media sources makes this a golden age for teaching TOK. Here are a few examples of sites that provide a plethora of great (free) content for TOK.

- [Aeon](#) offers content on a wide variety of areas, such as science, philosophy, and culture. Content ranges in terms of accessibility, from long in-depth essays to short 'ideas' and videos.
- [The Atlantic](#) is a long-established news magazine, that offers sharp analysis of what's going on in the news, and a strong science section.
- [Big Think](#) is a fantastic source of short videos and articles presented by influential thinkers from many different perspectives.
- The [BBC](#) website is one of the most extensive in the world, on which you can find videos and articles for virtually any topic you can imagine. The link takes you to a new section, BBC Ideas.
- [The Conversation](#) is a well-organised and comprehensive site, offering particularly relevant information for TOK in its Arts, Ethics, and Science sections.
- [FiveThirtyEight](#) is a similar, but slightly smaller, site than The Conversation, but has a particularly good science and health section.
- [The Guardian](#) is a British newspaper that has had a long relationship with educators in the UK. Although it definitely has an agenda, it has excellent sections on culture and science.
- [Massive](#) is a science-based site that offers an excellent antidote to the way science is often covered in superficial way in the mainstream press.

- [New Republic](#) has a lot of political and social commentary, and a strong section on culture.
- [Vox](#) is very media-savvy site that packages its ideas within very accessible 'explainers' and short videos.
- Although [Wired](#) is primarily a magazine dealing with technology, its commentary extends as far as anything (such as knowledge acquisition) related to the Internet.

TED

[TED](#) deserves a separate category as a resource all on its own as it seems almost tailor-made for our subject - you could almost deliver the whole course just by using the TED site! Talks are delivered by experts on all subjects connected with TOK-related issues and ideas, sometimes as lecture, sometimes as an animation, sometimes with images and video supporting the words. Transcripts and subtitles are available for virtually all the talks, which help students a great deal to follow what's being discussed. For lessons, we recommend showing clips from talks, giving students specific ideas or terms to understand aspects of the course. But if you want to flip your classroom, get students to watch a whole talk in advance, and be ready to discuss themes and ideas with you in the lesson.

There are literally hundreds of talks that you could use to convey key TOK ideas; here, chosen more-or-less arbitrarily, are a (very) few examples:

- [Uri Aron](#) on the process of gaining scientific knowledge via a 'leap into the unknown'
- [Elizabeth Loftus](#) on the way our memory works like a 'Wikipedia' page
- [Dan Ariely](#) on the inconsistency of our ethical methodology
- [David Eagleman](#) on how we can extend our sensory 'umwelt' (a great word for TOK)
- [Lesley Hazleton](#) on how doubt is an essential component of faith

TOK websites and blogs

There are an increasing number of websites that cater to TOK students and educators, but care must be taken when using them. Some, such as [theoryofknowledge.net](#), [Theory of Knowledge Student](#), and [Larry Ferlazzo's TOK blog](#), have a large amount of content, are useful for both teachers and students alike, and have been created by experienced IB educators. Others are overly-g geared towards the production of the essay or the presentation, and have an emphasis on coaching, rather than educating students, something that the IB does not encourage. The best approach is to do some extended research online for a site that works for you, focusing more on the sites that provide support for a broader understanding of the course, rather than how to write a TOK essay in 'five short steps'.

Non TOK-teachers

A key TOK resource in any DP school is the expertise and knowledge of non-TOK teachers, so making sure that they are onboard with what you are doing is crucial to the successful delivery of the course. We look in a lot more depth about ensuring the integration of TOK with the other DP subjects in the [‘Part 2: Introducing Excellence in your TOK Department’](#) section, but here’s an outline of how you can make use of the other staff members.

As guest speakers

Asking teachers to step into your TOK classroom to provide a lecture or workshop-style lesson on a specific theme, topic, or question is great way not only to draw on more specialist knowledge than you possess, but also a fantastic opportunity to draw other teachers into the TOK realm. The more controversial, the more engaging this can be! For example:

- Ask the mathematics department to discuss the extent to which knowledge in their field can be considered subjective.
- Science teachers can help you assess whether, ultimately, the sciences are about having faith in experts whose ideas we can never fully understand.
- The Economics department could help you explore the extent to which human science predictions are always doomed to failure.
- History could help you consider whether historical knowledge is always a matter of perspectives, and we will never be able to access the ‘truth’ about the past.

To convey TOK ideas and concepts

If teachers are reluctant (or simply too busy) to run a session in your classroom, try to get them delivering TOK ideas in more depth and detail in their own classroom. The more specific the topic you ask them to deal the more successful this is likely to be, and if you can provide them with resources, such as a link to a great article or video, even better. This is often a very successful way of getting across a tricky concept or topic, which you can follow up later.

Help support the writing of essays and presentations

With a little bit of care, non-TOK teachers can play a useful role in helping students to create effective essays or presentations. Whilst they can’t provide any written or editorial advice, and shouldn’t venture too far out of their own subject, they can, for example:

- Advise on suitability of claims and counterclaims.
- Evaluate whether selected RLSs are well regarded.
- Provide quotes and opinions that students can use.

Outside speakers

One of the wonderful things about TOK is that its questions, concepts, and subject matter provide you with the perfect opportunity to invite into your school speakers and presenters from just about any field or profession. Academics, scientists, artists, politicians, and physicians, can not only provide expert insight into knowledge, but also demonstrate (as the assessment instrument for the presentation demands) that “TOK concepts can have a practical application”. Whilst there is less scope than with members of staff at your school to dictate what sort of presentation or talk they deliver, you should nonetheless give them a clear idea about what TOK entails, and how we are chiefly interested in second order knowledge.

Textbooks

Textbooks are controversial in TOK. Whilst there is no doubt that many of them are well written, by genuine authorities on both the content and skills necessary to do well in TOK, there is a strong argument that the boundaries of what students experience should not be determined by a traditional-style textbook. There is also an engagement issue: there's little doubt that students are less enthused by textbooks than other sources of knowledge, and whilst you can justify this in other subjects by arguing that they have an exam to cope with ('the end justifies the means'), such an argument does not apply in TOK. If you are going to use a textbook, make sure it's one that encourages students to go further in their exploration of the different elements of TOK, and acts as a starting point, rather than an end, for an exploration of this wonderful course.



b.

Engaging your students

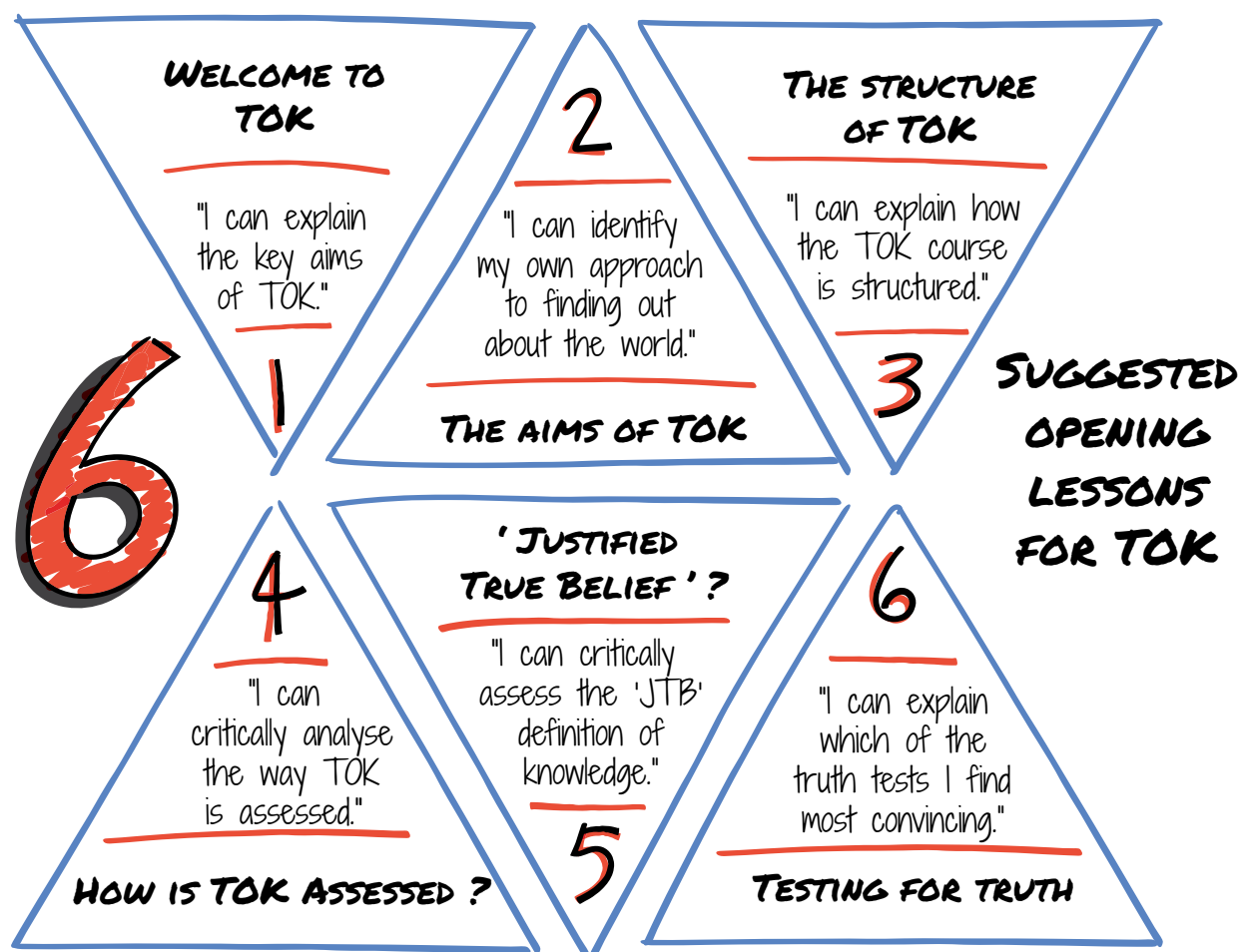
Acclimatizing students to TOK

TOK is unfamiliar - and quite possibly unwelcome - territory for students. There are various reasons for this, and you must understand and acknowledge them if you are going to successfully enfranchise your students:

1. It's a mandatory course, so they haven't chosen to be in your classroom.
2. The course deals with conceptually challenging ideas and concepts, which are quite hard for the uninitiated to comfortably and concisely define.
3. It's assessed in the way the students won't be used to - an end of course open-book assessment - and whilst this might be a welcome difference, it also means there's no concrete curriculum for them to base their understanding on.
4. Although you might be sold on the virtues of TOK, and what [the aims of the course](#) are, but your students won't be (yet), so don't assume they are excited about learning an essential skill, or taking part in the element of the DP that sets it apart from all others.
5. They will probably already know that the points on offer seem to be very limited: a measly 3 points, when combined with their extended essay mark, despite them having to spend around 100 hours in the TOK classroom.

This is why it's massively important to spend the first few weeks of the course introducing the subject, and heading off any problems before they appear. **Here's a suggestion of some lessons you could deliver during the first, crucial weeks of TOK, together with a learning objective, and outline of content.**





Lesson 1 - Welcome to TOK	<i>I can identify my own approach to finding out the world</i>	Students could focus on Socrates's assertion that 'the unexamined life is not worth living', and evaluate their own level of curiosity. You can also reassure them that 'confusion is good' (another Socratic concepts), as it encourages questions to be asked about the world, and avoids dogma.
Lesson 2 - The aims of TOK	<i>I can explain the key aims of TOK</i>	Students could examine the different aims of TOK (see our suggestions for what those are here), think about how their validity in this 'post-truth' world, and assess whether they already demonstrate some qualities of TOK thinkers.
Lesson 3 - The structure of TOK	<i>I can explain how the TOK course is structured</i>	Students could examine the different AOKs and WOKs, and/or the themes used to create the structure of TOK, and anticipate any difficulties in understanding these. You can also emphasise that bringing their own experiences into the classroom (not to mention the essays and presentations) is an important part of studying TOK.

Lesson 4 - How TOK is assessed	<i>I can critically analyse the way TOK is assessed</i>	Students could evaluate the TOK rubrics, and decide whether they think they are user-friendly and effective. The method of assessment in TOK can be compared to assessment in other subjects, and other educational programmes.
Lesson 5 - Justified True Belief?	<i>I can critically assess the 'JTB' definition of knowledge</i>	This lesson could introduce students to the problems of defining knowledge, focusing on the classic Platonic approach of justified true belief. Students can be shown some objections to this definition, so they can arrive at their own way of pinning down this problematic word.
Lesson 6 - Testing for truth	<i>I can explain which of the truth tests I find most convincing</i>	This lesson could build on the previous lesson, focusing on truth, and ways of testing for truth via the correspondence, coherence, consensus, and pragmatic truth tests.

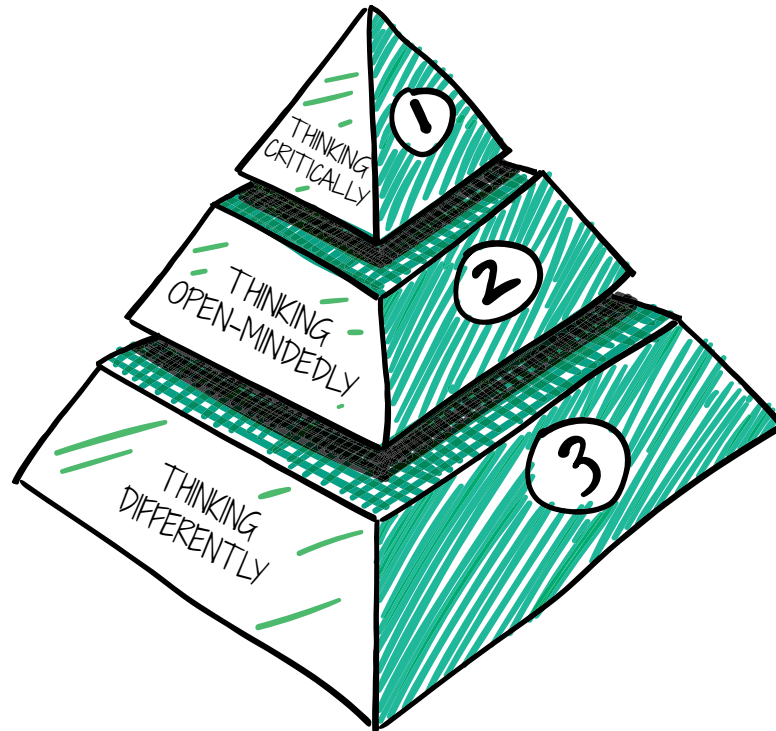
The aims of TOK

You can't motivate people without giving them a sense of purpose, and purpose only comes with identifying a clear set of aims that you are collaboratively working towards. You're already on tricky ground with TOK - it's a new type of subject for your students, they have no choice over taking it, it's assessed in an unfamiliar way, and it offers far fewer points than the other subjects - so it's vital to state and explain the aims of TOK from the very beginning.

The IB itself bases the aims of TOK within its role as one of the three elements of the DP core, referring to TOK 'supporting, and being supported by, the academic disciplines', 'fostering international mindedness', and 'developing self-awareness and a sense of identity'. It also explains how the aims of TOK fit in with the 10 different learner profile attributes.

However, you might want to narrow down these aims a little, and make them more appealing to students. Here is a suggestion for a clearer, more digestible set of aims of TOK, based on the IB aims, which could be considered in one of your introductory lessons to the course.

Aims of TOK



AIM 1: Thinking *critically*

TOK is the key element of the IB Diploma that hones students' critical thinking skills, getting them to question and compare the sources of knowledge, and what knowledge is used for.

AIM 2: Thinking *open-mindedly*


By highlighting that there are often very different approaches to valid knowledge (particularly now that indigenous knowledge systems is an AOK), students will learn to be open-minded when it comes to different cultures and academic traditions.

AIM 3: Thinking *differently*

New knowledge and ideas are often produced via startling leaps of the imagination, something that is only possible if you are willing to view the world via fresh, original paradigms. By shedding our assumptions about how the world works, we allow ourselves to gain extraordinary insights about the world.

It's also worth referring to the fact that the course brings together the different strands of the IB Diploma, (which we explore in more depth in the '[Integrating TOK](#)' section), by getting students to question the nature of knowledge in their different courses, and think more critically in them. This is often what distinguishes a top-level IA or examination response, so those 1.5 TOK points, that seem measly and unproportionate to the effort required to earn them, are actually worth considerably more than that. Looking at TOK in this way makes you realise that it's actually a course that represents a lot of Diploma points.

Finally, it's definitely worth mentioning the fact that universities love TOK! TOK provides students with clear evidence that they have developed tools to handle the challenges of a 'post-truth world', and are discerning, sophisticated thinkers, something that can prove to be a huge advantage when it comes to marketing themselves to universities. We discuss this in a lot more detail in the '[TOK and university](#)' section, looking at exactly how students can make the most of their TOK experiences when they come to apply for a university place.



The mechanics of a great TOK lesson

A great TOK lesson should be similar to any other great lesson - have a clear learning objective, be well structured and organised, contain varied engaging assessment tasks that can all be measured and which are aligned to the learning objective, and fit in clearly with the theme or topic of the learning unit. However, there are a number of specific considerations to bear in mind when you are planning a TOK lesson.

1. **TOK can be a concept-rich, challenging, and unfamiliar course.** It's vital to make individual TOK lessons digestible and approachable, so that students can move confidently towards an understanding of the bigger concepts (such as perspectives, context, implications, and so on). It's important to build in questions and activities that are answerable for students, particularly at the beginning of lessons, so that you enfranchise students quickly and effectively.
2. **There's no concrete curriculum in TOK,** so you can be more creative with what you deliver. Although this undoubtedly represents you with an opportunity, it can also be a burden - first, you don't have anything quite so specific as an exam to aim at; second, the sky's the limit in terms of what you bring into the lesson, so you can never justify your learning tasks or sources with the excuse, "It may come up in the exam, so you have to know this"!
3. **The heart of TOK is second order knowledge - how we know about the world,** rather than what we know about the world - and failing to get this across to your students can give them the wrong idea about the nature of TOK. Sometimes teachers who are accustomed to non-TOK teaching can have trouble reprogramming their brains to fully realise this difference. So, debating the pros and cons of euthanasia, asking students to research how the brain perceives colour, considering the key moments in the history of philosophy; all of these activities are interesting, but only relevant to TOK if they lead on to a consideration of how we form our ethical views, whether cultural perspectives shape the way we see reality, and the role philosophy plays in artistic expression (or second order questions along these lines). For more advice on second order knowledge, [see our guidelines to Knowledge Questions](#).
4. **Every statement or argument made in TOK by both you and your students should be supported by examples,** which come in the form of real-life situations. These should be as fresh, original, and as engaging as possible, which means, ideally, not just taking them from a textbook. You should constantly be encouraging students to justify their opinions and ideas, which is not only important for the assessment tasks (and TOK as a whole), but life in general.
5. **Students' own experiences are a key part of TOK.** They should be bringing in their experiences based on IB Diploma lessons, CAS projects, researching and writing their EE, and also life beyond the school gates, such as cultural experiences, reactions to local and global news, and formative events. The more you give them an opportunity to include their own take on the world, the more engaged they will be, as well as realising that they are the knower in the centre of the TOK diagram! This factor is also a great reason why you should consider running TOK events in your school, something we discuss [here](#).

You can see all of these points in action in this [TOK lesson presentation](#). You'll find annotations to explain how this was crafted.

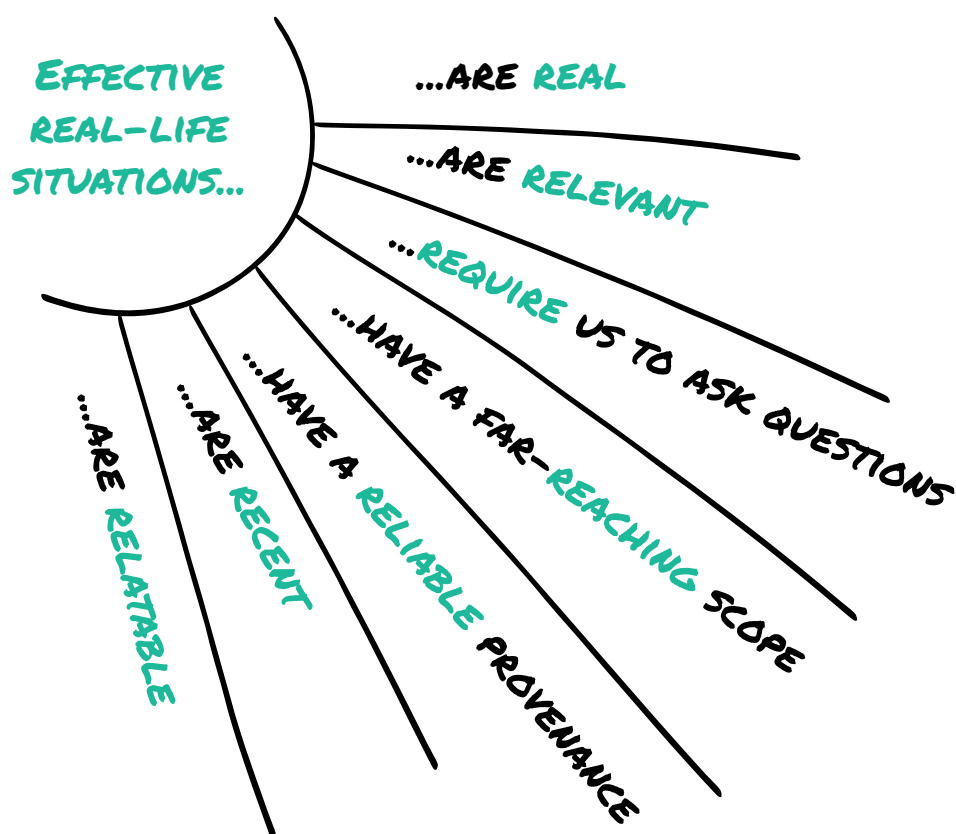
Driving your course with real-life situations

If 'knowledge questions' are the heart of TOK, real-life situations could be said to be the course's soul. Using up-to-date, engaging, and significant RLSs to drive your lessons is crucial to ensure your students are kept switched on, and able to demonstrate what the presentation specifically assesses: that TOK concepts can have a 'practical application' in the real world.

In our [exemplar lesson](#), we show how to embed various RLSs in a lesson, both outside RLSs (i.e. ones that exist independently of the students), as well as ones drawn from the students' own experiences (in this lesson, how they draw on memory in order to produce knowledge). This can provide a model for the type and number of RLSs that work well in a lesson. In addition, below is a list of characteristics of effective RLS.

Note that you can't expect to tick all these boxes with every RLS you use (indeed, once in a while it's necessary to draw on RLSs that might be criticised for being rather clichéd in the essay or presentation, such as Copernicus's paradigm shift of scientific thinking, or the mathematical axiom of $1 + 1$, or the way our analysis of the causes of the Cold War has been revised over time).

Effective RLS



Here are our '7 Rs' of effective real-life situations. Great RLSs...

1. ...are **real**. This may sound obvious, but students are often tempted to rely on hypothetical, fictional, or anecdotal examples. It's important that you lead by example, and use situations which take place in a specific time, place, and involve knower/s. This is one way in which TOK is very unlike philosophy (to which it is often erroneously compared) - hypothetical 'thought experiments' play no role in providing us with the justification for arguments.
2. ...are **relevant** to TOK. Not only should you be able to quickly identify a question from a RLS, you should also be able to use the language of TOK - in other words, the AOKs and WOKs - in order to articulate those questions. Again, if you have to struggle to link it to TOK, then the likelihood is that it won't work.
3. ...**require** further questions. All RLSs should prompt us to ask second order questions about knowledge. Although it takes a little practice to identify KQs, ultimately the acid test of a RLS's validity is how easily you can do this. If you have to work really hard, then it may be that it won't work in this context.
4. ...have a **far-reaching** scope. RLSs can take place on any level - personal, local, global - but they must touch on universal themes or topics, and be applicable to other situations, rather than being highly specialised and specific. So if they are personal real-life situations, they should be ones we can all recognise (i.e. the use a student has made of a way of knowing); if they deal with a local issue, this should be one that we can apply to other places.
5. ...have a **reliable** provenance. There are great media sources, and there are ones that are not. As one of the key [aims of TOK](#) is to hone students' critical thinking, this is a key element to get right. We have provided a list of recommended sources within the 'Setting up the TOK course' section, which is a good starting point. But acknowledging from the outset that all sources have an agenda, and are therefore biased, is a great way of highlighting the need to never take information at face value.
6. ...are **recent**. You should be trying as much as possible to show the relevance of TOK to your students, enabling them to show this to the examiner, and there's no clearer way of doing this than basing your exploration of TOK on up-to-date RLSs. Sure, there is a place in the course for thinking about why Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection can't be replicated, or how experiments carried out at the end of the 1920s in the Hawthorne Factory illustrate the 'observer effect', but the majority of the RLSs you use during the course - and the ones you encourage your students to consider - should come from much more recent dates, ideally, the last 12 months. This is also one of the best ways of keeping your students engaged.
7. ...are **relatable**. Students need a 'way in' to each RLS they explore, and this is made easier if it has a relatable context, for example in terms of culture, academic tradition or language. Yes, we are trying to make them think 'open-mindedly', but once students have taken ownership of the RLS, by understanding it and identifying one or more KQs, it can be compared and contrasted to other RLSs that might exist within a more distinct context.

Sample RLSs

The following RLSs all manage to match up to these characteristics. We include the link where they are described by a reputable media source.

[A 'flat earth' convention.](#) This is a great story about the first ever flat earth convention in the UK, and examines the justifications used by the attendees to explain their belief. It prompts knowledge questions about the limitations of skepticism, what evidence should be used in the natural sciences, and the different ways of knowing (reason, intuition, sense perception) we use in making judgements about world. (Source - The Conversation)

[A human scientist on the collapse of civilisation.](#) The article is an interview with Paul Ehrlich, the Stanford University biologist, who predicted the "collapse of civilisation" in a book published 50 years ago. It prompts knowledge questions like the viability of predictions in the human sciences (and other areas of knowledge), and the reliability of knowledge in general. (Source - The Guardian)

[The online reaction to This is America.](#) This article discusses the way in which the huge hype surrounding Childish Gambino's disturbing video and song was due not to art critics, but to ordinary fans. It prompts knowledge questions related to who is now the expert when it comes to artistic knowledge, and what the implications are of the 'death of the critic'. (Source - Wired)

[The discovery of black holes in our galaxy.](#) The article looks at how we've had the data for this discovery for many years, but it's only now, via what is effectively crowdsourcing, that we realise the full extent of the discovery. This prompts knowledge questions linked to the implications of democratizing knowledge in science, and whether there are upsides as well as problems with doing so. (Source - Salon)

[A historian on the integrity of movies as historical sources.](#) The distinguished historian, Antony Beevor, discusses his favourite - and worst - war movies. It prompts knowledge questions such as the extent to which films 'based on true events' can provide us with knowledge about the past, and whether this is a major source of most people's understanding of history. (Source - The Guardian)

[Indigenous concepts helping to guide scientific knowledge.](#) This article looks at how knowledge about birds of prey is helping zoologists to understand their behaviour. It prompts knowledge questions concerning the relationship between indigenous knowledge systems and the natural sciences, and what approaches to knowledge we should follow when acquiring scientific understanding. (Source - The Smithsonian Magazine)

c.

Overseeing the assessment tasks

TOK assessment skills scaffold

Although TOK should be seen as a subject that is much greater than the sum of its parts, ultimately students are assessed on how well they can 'understand' and 'assess' knowledge questions (for the TOK essay) and create 'a well-formulated knowledge question' that 'succeeds in showing that TOK concepts have a practical application' (for the presentation). We discuss the concept at the heart of the two assessments '[Knowledge questions](#)' here. In this section, we'll consider how to develop the skills students require to get to this point.

This Skills Scaffold ranges from the ability of being able to spot an interesting real life situation, to being able to fully explain the implications of issues related to knowledge acquisition and usage, and assess the extent to which perspectives alter how we understand and interact with the world. We model this process via a real life situation, [a 'flat earth' convention](#), that is unpacked and analysed in a progressively more sophisticated way.

THE STUDENT CAN... Identify interesting real life situations (RLSs)	THIS MEANS... Telling the difference between the kind of event, issue, and experience that leads onto meaningful questions about knowledge, and those that do not	IN THE CONTEXT, OF A RLS, THIS LOOKS LIKE... The flat earth convention is an interesting story about what should be an anachronistic event - people discussing a scientific concept that has long been discredited by the scientific community. It touches on shared and personal knowledge.
Ask questions about RLSs	Being interested and engaged enough	This event makes us want to ask a lot of questions, of varying sophistication; where did it happen? What did they talk about? Why were they there? How many people attended? Why do they believe this? Who organised it?
Distinguish between first and second order knowledge questions	Understanding that we're more interested in asking questions about how we know about the world, rather than what we know about the world	However, what we interested in are questions about how the conference-goers arrived at their beliefs, what evidence they use to justify them, whether they can reveal anything valid about scientific knowledge.
Discuss KQs using TOK terminology	Using the AOKs, WOKs, and other TOK concepts to phrase a valid second order KQ	Is there a limit to the usefulness of skepticism when we are acquiring scientific knowledge? Which ways of knowing do we use when producing scientific knowledge? To what extent do (and should) we place our faith in scientists? Is scientific knowledge always gathered objectively? Is science about 'believing in what we see'?
Consider KQs via different perspectives	Considering how different perspectives can lead us to a different understanding of this KQ	Perspectives that could be considered include the level of 'expertise' of the knowers - professional vs amateur scientists, and whether these terms accurately indicate a different amount of knowledge, and the socio-economic position of the knower - those with power are supposedly using knowledge to consolidate their position; those without, are kept in place by their uncritical acceptance of the flat-earth worldview.
Assess the implications of their arguments	Evaluating why this KQ matters, and how it might apply to other contexts	By believing everything we see, we risk developing a very superficial and incomplete understanding of the natural world; by being overly skeptical, we may not be able to construct any functioning assumptions about the natural world, and be left unable to build any kind of developed knowledge; by seeing patterns where there are no patterns, we end up developing a superstitious and pseudo-scientific worldview.

In [Building Assessment Skills](#) we look at tasks and activities that you can use to develop these six different skills.

Building assessment skills

In the TOK Assessment Skills Scaffold we identified six skills used within the TOK course. These are:

1. Identifying interesting RLSs
2. Asking questions about RLSs
3. Distinguishing between first and second order KQs
4. Discussing KQs using TOK terminology
5. Considering KQs via different perspectives
6. Assessing the implications of arguments

The first two of these skills should be regarded as entry-level skills that students should possess the very beginning of the course; the next four skills will all be required to carry out their essay and presentation effectively. In order to hone these skills, small tasks should be set within the context of individual lessons, or as homework assignments, and you should also set more demanding formative assessments that will apply a rubric similar (or the same) to the assessment instrument used for the essay and presentation. You should be ready to give detailed feedback so students have a clear idea of their strengths, where they are going wrong, and how to improve.

Here are four ideas of formative assessment tasks that you could use to build the skills for success in TOK, and help to prepare students effectively for the essay and presentation.

Task	Description	Guidelines for overseeing this task
TOK Journals	<p>Writing a TOK journal is a great opening assessment task for students. It:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduces students to the concept of RLS • Encourages them to begin asking questions about our knowledge • Gets them articulating their ideas via AOKs/ WOKs <p>The journal is also a format that they will probably have first-hand acquaintance of, either from their personal life, or assignments that they have done in other courses.</p>	<p>Introduce the journal by introducing the idea of RLSs, demonstrating to students the kind of event, issue, or topic that interests us in TOK. Run through the characteristics of effective RLSs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recent • Significant • Leading naturally onto questions about knowledge Linked to AOKs / WOKs • Based on any level (personal, national, or global) <p>Draw a distinction between real and hypothetical or anecdotal situations, emphasising the importance of only ever focusing on the first of these.</p> <p>Run two or three journal tasks in the first year of the course, making the assessment demands more complex for each one :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The assessment of journal 1 can be based on honing the two 'entry-level' skills (identifying interesting RLSs, and asking questions about them) • Journal 2 can include the concept of second order knowledge • Journal 3 can be about perspectives and implications

<p>Essay Introductions and Conclusions</p>	<p>It's important to ease students into the essay slowly, because, as we point out, it's one of the hardest things they'll do during the IB Diploma.</p> <p>Asking them to write TOK essay-style introductions (and conclusions) will help them to master one of the most important elements of this task.</p>	<p>Each unit you begin, particularly if your units are based on questions or theme, can be accompanied by asking the students to write a TOK essay-style introduction to outline what will be covered in that unit.</p> <p>Explain the purpose and importance of a TOK essay introduction, and the elements it should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A hook to engage the reader • An explanation of the key terms of the question (ie the unit title) • An outline of how the question will be explored (AOKs/ WOKs) <p>Do the same at the end of a unit, asking students to write a conclusion summing up key points, offering a personal opinion, and leaving the reader with the impression that they have had their understanding deepened.</p>
<p>Essay plans</p>	<p>Essay plans get students used to a more conceptually difficult writing task without requiring them to spend vast amounts of time to complete it. They will help them to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interlink the different AOKs and WOKs • Structure an essay properly • Get to grips with perspectives and implications 	<p>Essay plans can be written with a full-length introduction and conclusion, but with a shortened main body.</p> <p>Claims and counterclaims should be stated, with a bullet points outline indicating:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How they'd develop this discussion • The way in which perspectives might shape our answer • RLSs that could be used to support their arguments • Implications of what their arguments <p>Students should based their essay plans on two or more interlinked AOKs</p>
<p>Mini presentation</p>	<p>Mini presentations serve a similar purpose to essay plans: getting students used to a complex final assessment task, without demanding that they spend excessive time creating it.</p>	<p>Ask students to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form groups (an important part of the process) • Identify an effective main RLS (building on their journal-writing skills) • Extract a central KQ • Explore this both within the context of the main RLS, and via subsidiary KQs and RLSs <p>Assess using a rubric very similar, or the same, as the assessment instrument. This will encourage students to incorporate a consideration of different perspectives, and the significance of their arguments.</p> <p>If there is time, you can also provide time after the presentation for questions from audience members, getting them used fielding questions.</p>

Knowledge questions

At the heart of TOK is the concept of 'knowledge questions' (KQs). These are, just as the name suggests, questions about the ways we produce and use knowledge. They are extracted from real-life situations, or explored via real-life situations. For the TOK essay, students will be assessed for how well they 'understand' and 'assess' knowledge questions (two separate assessment strands), and their presentation should be based on 'a well-formulated knowledge question' that 'succeeds in showing that TOK concepts have a practical application'.

The key to understanding KQs is to divide them into two different types - primary and secondary order KQs, based on the type of question. The table below shows the basic differences between first and second order KQs.

KQ	Scope	What they ask	How they are worded	Context in which they are asked
First order	Narrower - related to a specific field within an area of knowledge	Questions directly about the world	'What do we know?'	DP subjects
Second order	Wider - can encompass one or more entire areas of knowledge and ways of knowing	Questions about the ways in which we acquire and use knowledge about the world	'How do we know?'	TOK

There's no quick route to fully understanding KQs (just like there is no quick route to fully understanding what makes a good RLS). Instead, it takes a lot of practice for students to successfully write the essay and presentation. However, here are a few examples of first and second order knowledge questions from different areas of knowledge. It also shows a simple pathway towards identifying the second order knowledge question.

RLS (source & description)	Links to	First order KQ	Second order KQ
An article about the relationship between faith and scientific understanding (GMOs)	The natural sciences, faith, religious knowledge systems	What is the evidence for GM food being harmful to health?	How does religious faith influence the way we produce scientific knowledge?
An article about how an ethical algorithms for self-driving cars is being developed	Ethics, mathematics	How are algorithms created?	Are ethical decisions more reliable when they are calculated via mathematical algorithms?

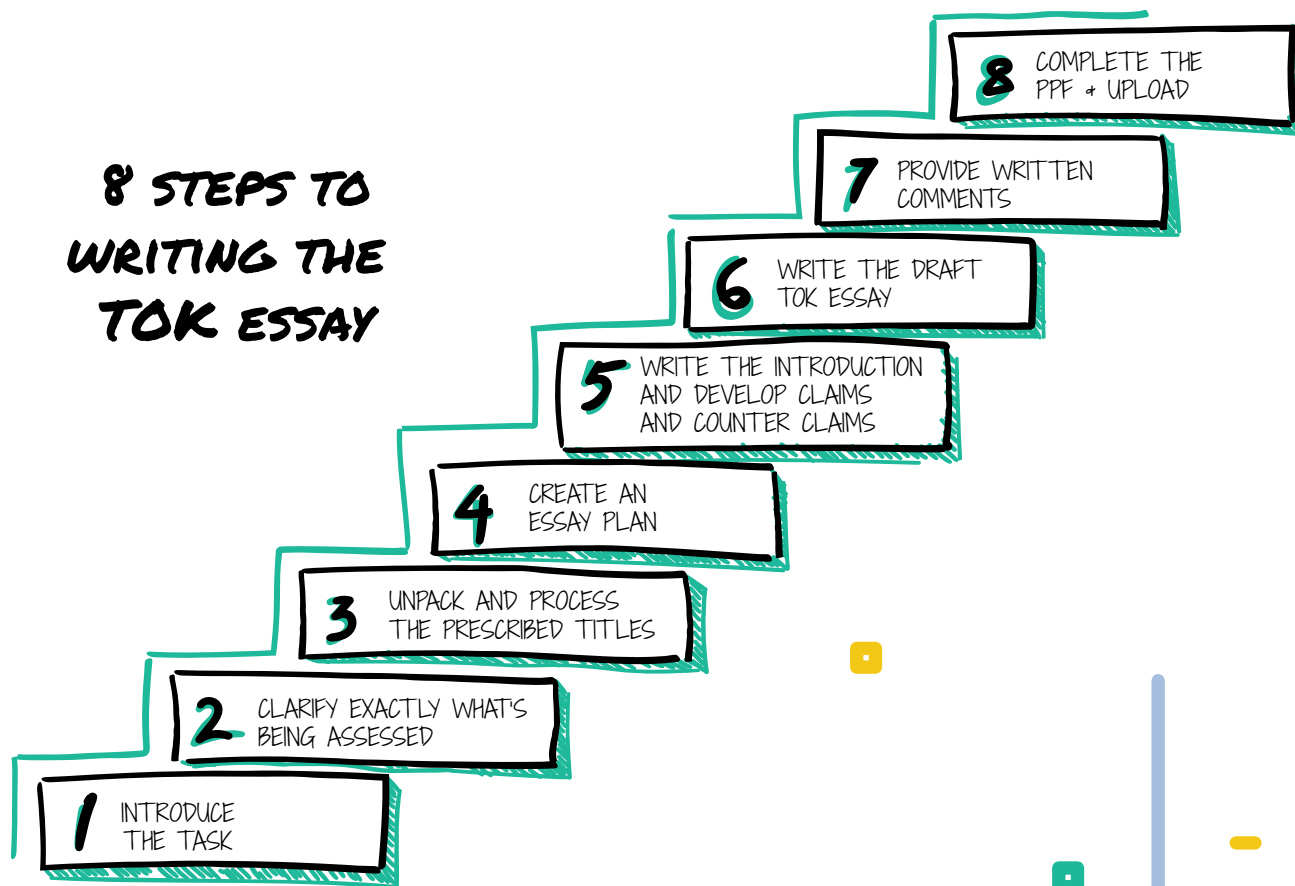
An article about the way chocolate is being claimed to be a new health food after a new study	The natural sciences, language	What are the active ingredients found in chocolate?	What constitutes a reliable scientific study?
An article about how the 2008 financial meltdown could happen again	The human sciences	Why were economists unable to predict the 2008 financial disaster?	Does the purpose of the human sciences influence the reliability of its knowledge?
An article about the 100th anniversary of World War	History	Which country was responsible for starting World War I?	Why do historians arrive at different opinions about the past?

Writing the essay

Writing a TOK essay is one of the most difficult challenges students face in the whole IB Diploma. The prescribed essay titles are conceptually difficult to grasp and the assessment 'instrument' is not fully clear or comprehensive (meaning that examiners are often looking for things that are not explained on the rubric). At 1600, the word limit is restrictive, so although this is not a test of endurance writing like the extended essay, it can be tricky for students to incorporate all their ideas. Not only that, but your students are probably also doing a heap of other internal assessments, and beginning to think about the impending final exams, so stress levels will be high.

However, if you take the essay writing process step-by-step, and make full use of ManageBac, the process will be considerably easier. Here's a suggestion of how that could work in practice. It assumes that you have prepared students for the essay by building their assessment skills.

8 STEPS TO WRITING THE TOK ESSAY



INTRODUCE THE TASK

Introduce the essay task by outlining the following elements:

- Practical requirements (wordcount, format, etc.)
- The nature of the prescribed titles (generally two AOKs, conceptually-based)
- Claim vs. counterclaim structure
- Importance of perspectives and implications
- Supporting ideas with RLSs
- Central role of second-order KQs

The success of this first step of the essay-writing experience will depend on the extent to which you have managed to include all of these concepts in the course that, and whether your students have written practice introductions, conclusion, essay plans, and so on. This is a balancing act: the more you drill your students, the less you will engage them; but under preparing them will mean they feel lost when it comes to taking on the assessment tasks.

CLARIFY EXACTLY WHAT STUDENTS WILL BE ASSESSED ON

Primarily, this comes from the assessment rubric, so go over this document carefully with your students. Be warned - rubrics tend to have a soporific effect on students! Get students to distinguish between:

- **Understanding** KQs (the relevance of discussion, different perspectives, and making links to AOKs and WOKs)
- **Analysing** KQs (offering clear arguments, supporting points with RLSs, including counterclaims, considering implications)

Examiners will be looking for qualities and characteristics that are not explicitly stated in the rubric, but are found in the subject guide. Some of these elements are practical:

- Word count
- Type of font
- Using the right title (students often shorten or even paraphrase PTs)
- Including a bibliography

However, some relate to the construction of the essay, and the way KQs are approached:

- KQ discussion all needs to be second order
- RLSs should be there to support what has already been discussed, not explain or (worse) introduce a claim or counterclaim
- AOKs should be compared and contrasted
- The student's own perspective as a knower should be included (experiences, observations, and opinions)

One further piece of advice should be emphasised to students: the way the assessment instrument is worded can prompt students to believe that they have to identify a different KQ to the one in the PT.

This is not the case. In a recent examiners' report, the IB accepted that they had perhaps misled

STEP 3

students and teachers by referring to the 'identification of KQs', and stressed that the central KQ should come from the PT itself. So, students should on no account refer to a different knowledge question that "this essay will explore", no matter how connected to the PT it is.

UNPACK AND PROCESS THE PTS

Begin your unpacking session by asking students to go with their gut - intuitively evaluating the titles, and selecting ones they like the 'feel' of, and ones that seem less approachable. You can keep a tally of this, in order to compare judgements after you have gone through each title in detail.

Then, try to identify the following aspects of the different PTs:

- Key terms and words in the titles that need pinning down
- What the title is looking for
- Concepts that might seem antagonistic (for example, in the November 2018 session, one title referred to 'existing classifications systems' producing 'new knowledge')
- Assumptions that could be challenged (for example, in the same session, a title asked whether our reliance on 'incontrovertible facts' was 'overestimated'. There are two assumptions here - first, that we do rely on incontrovertible facts, second, that people overestimate this)
- Which areas of knowledge would work best

Ask students to reevaluate their impressions of the PTs:

- Do certain titles now seem more (or less) 'doable'?
- Do any PTs inspire further questions?
- Do any RLSs suddenly spring to mind that would work well with a PT?
- Do your unit titles fit well with any of the PTs?

Students need to process thoroughly what the different PTs are asking, even if that leads to a rejection of one or more of them.

STEP 4

CREATE AN ESSAY PLAN

The subject guide specifies that there should be three teacher/student interactions, which means a considerable amount of one-to-one guidance for the essay writing. This guidance is key to student success in the essay.

The IB guidance regarding the three interactions is slow-paced, and you might want to speed the process up given the demands of the DP for both students and teachers. For example, the first interaction is recommended to be a discussion of the PTs. But if you've had a good unpacking session, students should come to you with their choice of PT already formed, meaning that you'll be ready to help them create an essay plan (which is what the IB recommends should happen in the second interaction). Explain to them:

- What they should be doing with their introduction (see below)
- How to create and develop claims and counterclaims from the PT
- The role of RLSs in supporting this discussion
- How perspectives and implications play a role in answering the question

STEP 5

WRITE THE INTRODUCTION & DEVELOP CLAIMS AND COUNTERCLAIMS

The TOK essay introduction should:

- Engage the reader, incorporating a 'hook' to interest them, such as an appropriate quote, arresting statements, or original opinion
- Explain the key words and terms of the title. These shouldn't just be dictionary definitions - students should come up with their own interpretations of the different ideas contained within the title
- Give an outline of their essay. This doesn't have to mean declaring the thesis of the essay; rather, the AOKs that will be explored, and a mention of how these different contexts affect the way the title is approached

But the introduction does something much more important than these three aims - it gets students started. The essay is a conceptually challenging task, and many students will be confused how to begin it. Getting the introduction done is a massive step forward, with implications that go beyond the TOK course, making them feel better about the DP as a whole.

Check these introductions in your second interaction, as well as ensuring that they know where to go next, in other words, how to -

- Develop claims and counterclaims
- Consider different perspectives (including their own)
- Assess the implications of what they are discussing

You are not permitted to give any written feedback yet; instead, your students should note the points you discuss, which they can then transfer into the second interaction field of ManageBac.

They should not worry if they haven't found RLSs for their claims and counterclaims at this stage; indeed, it may even be an advantage that they don't have RLSs at this point. Claims and counterclaims need to be discussed in general terms first, before being supported by RLSs; getting this right ensures that the essay is analytical and insightful rather than descriptive and superficial.

STEP 6

WRITE THE DRAFT TOK ESSAY

Students need plenty of class time to create their draft essays, although they will also need a lot of encouragement to keep the words flowing. Think about the choice of learning environment in which they work: consider allowing them to choose their own workspace around the school, and be on hand to field any specific questions, such as the appropriateness of RLSs.

Stress to students that drafts should be as complete and polished as possible - virtually a finished product. This will enable you to give meaningful written feedback, rather than asking them to re-write big chunks of their essay (which you are not permitted to give any further written feedback on).

STEP 7

PROVIDE WRITTEN COMMENTS

You are required to provide written comments on the essay draft, offering what the IB refers to as feedback of a 'global nature'. This means you can provide guidance on:

- Arguments that work, and ones that don't
- Effectiveness of RLSs used to support arguments
- How articulately ideas have been expressed
- You are specifically not allowed to mark or edit the draft.

Use the essay checklist thoroughly with students in your third interaction to give a full idea of what they still have to do to complete the essay.

Again, students can record this final meeting on ManageBac.

STEP 8

COMPLETE THE PPF & UPLOAD

You're now nearly there! Students should not be provided with any further written guidance, but they may still consult you for advice on specific points within their essay. When they have finished the essay, you should give it a final check, paying attention not only to the content, but also the practical aspects - word count, font, spacing, and referencing (which should be consistent and use the citation system of your school). Once you are satisfied that the essay meets all these requirements, then it is ready to be uploaded. It's good practice to run essays through a plagiarism checking programme such as Turnitin to ensure that there aren't any accidental or deliberate infringements of academic honesty. This can be done automatically via ManageBac.

Your comments for the TOK essay won't be directly used to determine or moderate the grade, but still serve to indicate that you have given students sufficient support. Your comments can be based on:

- The student's role as a knower, and the perspective that they have brought to the essay writing process
- The process of writing, rather than what has been written
- Significant conversations that you have had during the interactions
- Challenges they may have faced
- Key achievements within the essay

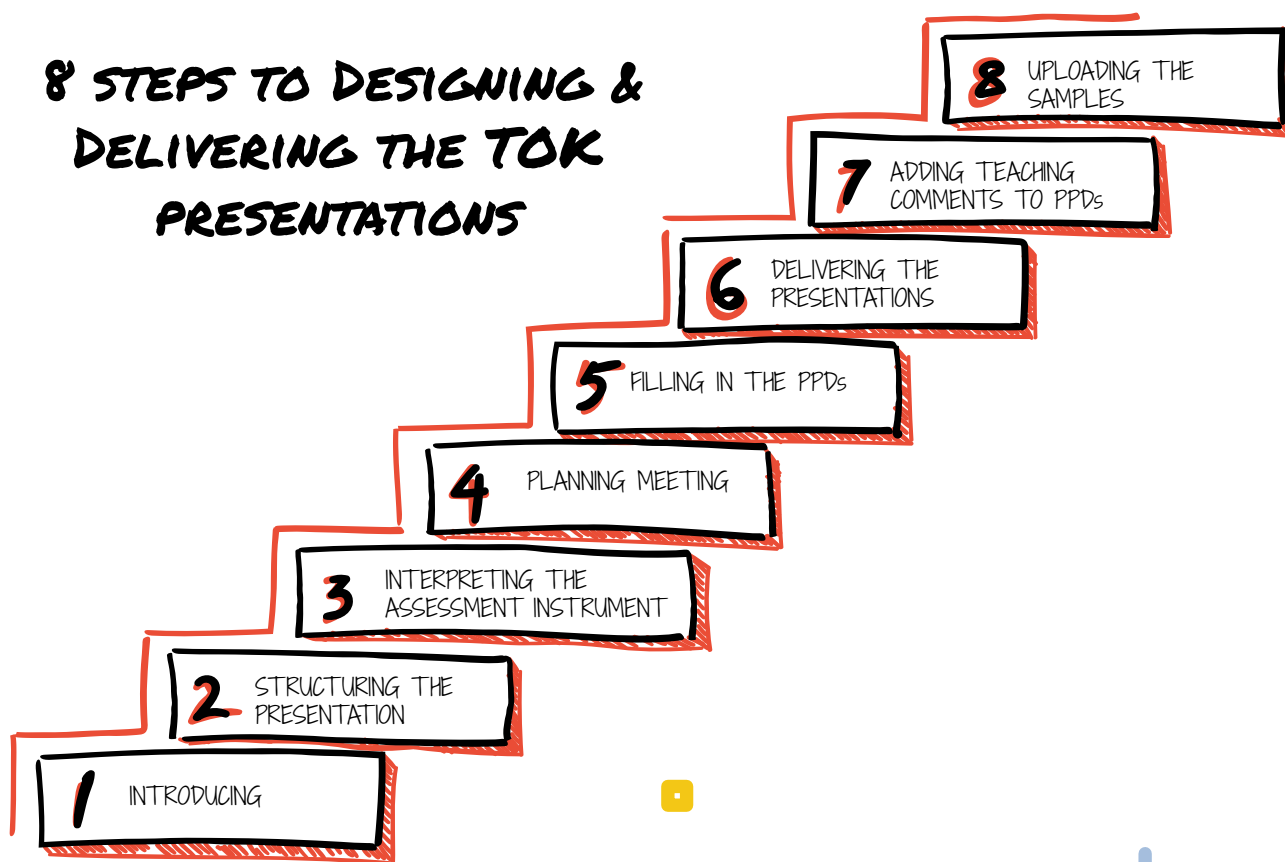
Uploading the essay should be done plenty of time before the final deadline, as it's common to run into technical issues. After you have uploaded the essays, do a final check to see that you have uploaded the correct documents, then it's time to submit both the essay and the PPF.

Designing & delivering the presentation

Many students find the TOK presentation a more empowering assessment task than the essay, as they are able to focus on any topic and knowledge question. Of course, this openness brings its own challenges, but you are able to provide a lot of support to students, and guide them through the steps of designing and delivering their presentations.

As with the essay, you can make full use of ManageBac during the process of designing and delivering the presentations, and overseeing the task in clear, consecutive stages. Here's a suggestion of how that could work in practice. It assumes that you have prepared students for the essay by building their assessment skills.

8 STEPS TO DESIGNING & DELIVERING THE TOK PRESENTATIONS



INTRODUCE THE TASK

Unlike the TOK essay, students will come to the presentation with a clear idea of what the end product should look like. This can be an disadvantage as well as a advantage - you need to stress to them that although their presentation needs to include certain qualities, and be structured in a certain way, they should try to be creative with the product they create. As the subject guide says, presentations can take the form of "lectures, interviews or debates... Students may use multimedia, costumes, or props to support their presentations." Role-plays, reenactments, and other creative expressions of ideas are all acceptable, and indicate that the students' are engaged with the topic they are exploring.

Deal briefly with the structure the presentation should take (even if it isn't being delivered as a traditional presentation) :

- A main RLS
- A central KQ
- An exploration of this KQ via subsidiary KQs & RLSs.

Then outline how it will be assessed: presentations need to show that "TOK concepts can have a practical application". You'll revisit both structure and assessment later, so don't go into much more detail at this point.

If they are not working individually, students should now decide on their presentation groups. They have the option of working in twos or threes, but they should understand that all group members will receive the same mark, regardless of the role they play, so they need to work with people they know and trust.

STRUCTURING THE PRESENTATION

The diagram in the IB TOK subject guide (seen below) is quite abstract, but it's a good focus point for discussion.

- The starting point for the presentation is a main RLS, that should be a "substantive real-life situation" that can be "a local domain of personal, school, or community relevance, or from a wider one of national, international or global scope."
- From this, they should extract a relevant central KQ, which is explored within the context of the main RLS, and then applied to other RLSs, possibly by considering subsidiary, related KQs.
- As with the essay, it's important to consider different perspectives as this exploration is carried out.
- Students should also link the "outcomes of the analysis" back to the original RLS, and the other ones that they have identified.
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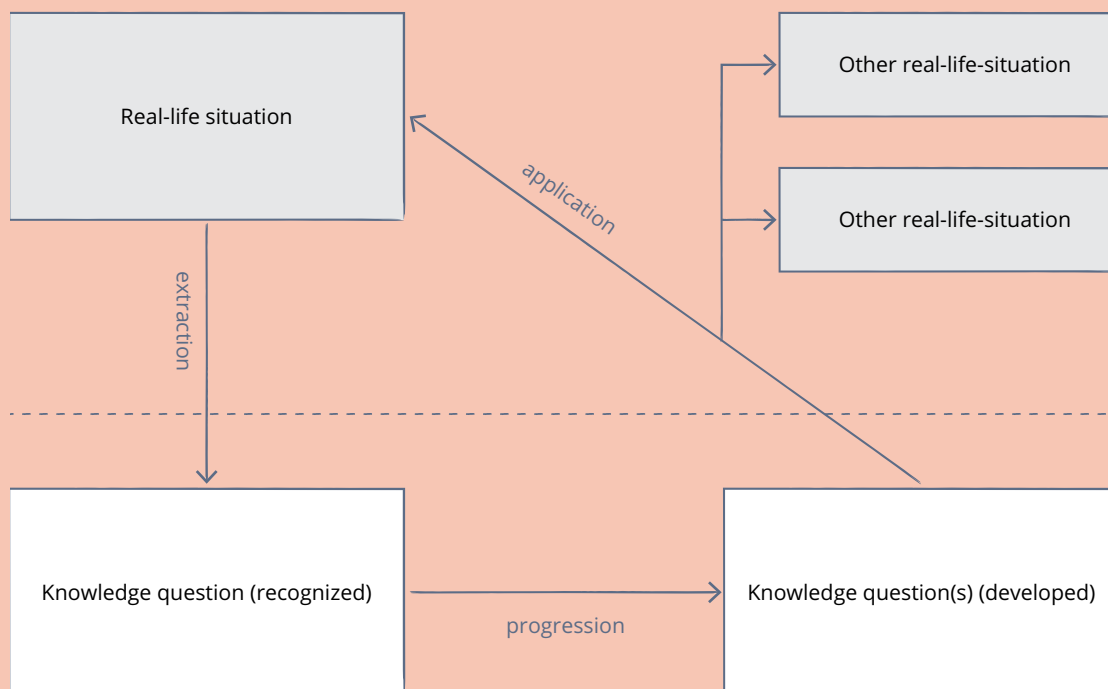


Figure 19

If this sounds complicated, then that's because it is; students will most likely not grasp how this works until you work with them individually to discuss with them instead of show how their chosen main RLS and central KQ will be explored in this framework.

STEP 3

INTERPRETING THE ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT

Once students have an initial understanding of the structure of the presentation, it's time to go over how it will be assessed. We suggest giving the students the original assessment instrument, and asking them to try to identify separate aspects that will be assessed. After they have shared their ideas, you can offer them the TOK presentation checklist, which not only focuses on the assessment instrument, but also includes aspects that are in the subject guide. Students can use this checklist throughout the process of creating their presentation, and bring it with them to planning meeting/s to refer to as you talk to them about their progress.

STEP 4

PLANNING MEETING/S

You are obliged to meet with individuals or groups just once during the process of creating the presentations, but two further meetings are specified as being acceptable. In practice, you need to have a detailed discussion with them to make sure they have identified a suitable main RLS and central KQ, and then check in with them regularly during class time to ensure that what they are going in the right direction, and exploring the central KQ both within the context of the initial RLS, and further RLSs, and identifying subsidiary KQs.

A good presentation will be set within different AOK contexts, so the central KQ should allow this flexibility. Perspectives and implications are as important as in the essay; so you should be checking to see whether students are considering their KQs via concepts such as culture, gender, time, and so on, and whether the 'results of their analysis' indicates the significance of the main and subsidiary RLSs.

Encourage them to practice the presentation thoroughly before delivering it, getting the timings right, familiarising themselves with the content, and generally feeling confident about what they will be delivering. If they feel there is still something that doesn't quite work, they may consult with you in order to solve any last-minute problems. Practice could involve -

- Ensuring that duration of the presentation is correct (approx. 10 minutes per student)
- Delivering it in front of an audience (eg family and other friends)
- Filming the presentation, and watching how it looks and sounds
- Anticipating questions that might arise in the Q&A section
- Checking to see if any handouts to be used make complete sense
- Other props, costumes, etc. add to the efficacy of the presentation

STEP 5

FILLING IN THE PPD

The presentation is marked internally, and moderated externally. Moderation judgements are based on the way the PPD is filled in by both teacher and student, so the 'Candidate's section' really needs to be done properly. Students are asked to provide the following details:

- Describe their real-life situation
- State their central knowledge question
- Explain the connection between their real-life situation and their knowledge question
- Outline how they intend to develop their presentation, with respect to perspectives, subsidiary knowledge questions and arguments
- Show how their conclusions have significance for their real-life situation and beyond

ManageBac facilitates this process, and enables you to check to see that they have completed the sections well before time. The more time you have to consult their PPD, the more effectively you will be able to assess their presentation.

STEP 6

DELIVERY OF THE PRESENTATIONS

If your students have made a good job of designing their presentations, and filling in the Candidate's section of the PPD, then they have already done the hard work of the presentation. Now you should provide them with final advice and reassurance, such as:

- Emphasising that they've done the hard bit - the research and design of the presentation
- Reminding them that it's the content of the presentation, rather than the style of delivery, that's assessed, so they shouldn't worry about stumbling over lines or seeming nervous.
- A recommendation that they speak slowly and take plenty of deep breaths
- A clarification that the Q & A section is there not to catch them out, but to allow them to clarify any sections that didn't come across clearly

STEP
7

Schools have different protocols when it comes to presentations. Some like to organise a specific 'presentation day' when all students deliver them, which has the advantage not only of dealing with all the presentations on a single date, but also of turning this final, summative assessment into an 'event'. Others schedule them during class time over a period of one or two weeks. However it is done, presentations should last for the requisite time (10 minutes per group member - and you should keep track of this) and the audience (and teacher) should be given the opportunity to ask questions afterwards.

ADDING TEACHER COMMENTS TO THE PPDs

The purpose of the 'Teacher's section' of the PPD is to allow you to justify the marks you have awarded the presentation. Just as in the 'Candidate's section', it's vitally important to get this right, because if examiners don't understand your logic, or agree with what you have written, the marks for your whole cohort of students could be moderated down.

You should make sure that your comments are not just a narrative of the presentations you have seen, but instead, very concretely, show how you have arrived at your marks. Refer closely to the assessment instrument, quoting directly from it where you can; note also the points on the Presentation Checklist that are not directly found on the rubric itself. Some of the comments could potentially be added before you have seen the presentation - for example, the extent to which the central KQ is 'well-formulated', and how effectively it links to the main RLS.

After you have finished your comments, make sure they are consistent with what the students have written on the form (see step 5). Obviously, their outline of their presentation should match closely what you based your marks on.

STEP
8

UPLOADING SAMPLES

As soon as you have entered the marks for your presentations, the IB assessment platform will generate a selection of presentations for moderation. This will likely involve the top and bottom marks, and one or more presentations in between. Upload these samples, check to see that you have the right documents, and submit them to the IB. Using ManageBac will facilitate this process.

You have now completed the second assessment task of TOK!

Next →

PART 2

Introducing excellence into
your TOK department