



International Baccalaureate

Theory of Knowledge prescribed titles

November 2005 and May 2006

Instructions to candidates

Your Theory of Knowledge essay for examination must be submitted to your teacher for authentication. It must be written on one of the ten titles (questions) provided below. You may choose any title, but are recommended to consult with your teacher. Your essay will be marked for proficiency in the six domains which are described in the assessment criteria published in the Theory of Knowledge guide. Remember to centre your essay on problems of knowledge and, where appropriate, refer to other parts of your IBO programme and to your experiences as a knower. Always justify your statements and provide relevant examples to illustrate your arguments. Pay attention to the implications of your arguments, and remember to consider what can be said against them. If you use external sources, cite them according to a recognized convention.

Note that statements in quotations in these titles are not necessarily authentic: they present a real point of view but may not have been spoken or written by an actual person. It is appropriate to analyse them but it is unnecessary, even unwise, to spend time on researching a context for them.

Examiners mark essays against the title as set. Respond to the title exactly as given; do not alter it in any way.

Your essay must be between 1200 and 1600 words in length.

- 1 There are many different authorities, including academics, politicians, global organizations and companies, who make knowledge claims. As an experienced TOK student, what criteria do you use to distinguish between knowledge, opinion and propaganda?
- 2 “Tell me how you’re conducting your search and I’ll tell you what you’re looking for.” To what extent do the methods used in different Areas of Knowledge determine the scope of the research and the conclusions you can reach?
- 3 Statistics can be very helpful in providing a powerful interpretation of reality but also can be used to distort our understanding. Discuss some of the ways in which statistics can be used or misused in different Areas of Knowledge to assist and mislead us, and how we can determine whether to accept the statistical evidence that is presented to us.
- 4 To what extent do personal attributes affect Ways of Knowing and why, if at all, does answering this question matter in the first place?
- 5 Do questions like “Why should I be moral?” or “Why shouldn’t I be selfish?” have definitive answers as do some questions in other Areas of Knowledge? Does having a definitive answer make a question more or less important?
- 6 If education means learning to see through the clichés of one’s time, how does learning in the different Areas of Knowledge and in TOK contribute to this education?
- 7 Some people say that religious beliefs can be neither justified nor refuted by reason. However, while sometimes this claim is used as a reason for rejecting religious beliefs, at other times it is used to conclude that these beliefs are established by faith. To what extent is faith a legitimate basis for knowledge claims, in religion and different Areas of Knowledge?
- 8 Arthur Eddington noted that an ordinary view of the world, one “which spontaneously appears around me when I open my eyes” is “a strange compound of external nature, mental imagery and inherited prejudice” (Sir Arthur Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World*, 1928). How accurate a description is this of everyday experience?
- 9 Compare and contrast knowing a friend to knowing how to swim, knowing a scientific theory and knowing a historical period. What conclusions about the nature of knowledge can you reach?
- 10 Sometimes we hear reasoned arguments that oppose a view to which we are emotionally committed; sometimes we hear a passionate plea for a view we have good reason to reject. Bearing this in mind, discuss the importance of reason and emotion in distinguishing between belief and knowledge?