

Theory of Knowledge Course Syllabus

Year I – Ms. Madill Year II – Ms. Stewart

Prerequisite: Students eligible for this course are enrolled as IB diploma students in the International Baccalaureate Programme.

Nature of the subject

The TOK course, a flagship element in the Diploma Programme, encourages critical thinking about knowledge itself, to try help young people make sense of what they encounter. Its core content is questions like these: What counts as knowledge? How does it grow? What are its limits? Who owns knowledge? What is the value of knowledge? What are the implications of having, or not having knowledge?

What makes TOK unique and distinctively different from standard academic disciplines is its process. At the centre of the course is the student as knower. In TOK students have the opportunity to step back from relentless acquisition of new knowledge, in order to consider knowledge issues. These include questions like: What do I claim to know [about X]? Am I justified in doing so [how?]? TOK activities and discussions aim to help students discover and express their views on knowledge issues. The course encourages students to share ideas with others and to listen to and learn from what others think. In this process students' thinking and their understanding of knowledge as a human construction are shaped, enriched and deepened. Connections may be made between knowledge encountered in different subjects, in CAS experience or in extended essay research; distinctions between different kinds of knowledge may be clarified.

The course is organized in four broad categories: knowledge issues, knowers and knowing; ways of knowing; areas of knowledge; and linking questions

Aims and objectives

Aims

The aims of the TOK course are to:

- Develop a fascination with the richness of knowledge as a human endeavor and an understanding of the empowerment that follows from reflecting upon it
- Develop an awareness of how knowledge is constructed, critically examined, evaluated and renewed by communities and individuals
- Encourage students to reflect on their experiences as learners, in everyday life and in the Diploma Programme, and to make connections between academic disciplines and between thoughts, feelings and actions
- Encourage an interest in the diversity of ways of thinking and ways of living of individuals and communities, and an awareness of personal and ideological assumptions, including participants' own

- Encourage consideration of the responsibilities originating from the relationship between knowledge, the community and the individual as citizen of the world.

Objectives

Having followed the TOK course, students should be able to:

1. Analyze critically knowledge claims, their underlying assumptions and implications
2. Generate questions, explanations, conjectures, hypotheses, alternative ideas and possible solutions in response to knowledge issues concerning areas of knowledge, ways of knowing and students' own experience as learners
3. Demonstrate an understanding of different perspectives on knowledge issues
4. Draw links and make effective comparisons between different approaches to knowledge issues that derive from areas of knowledge, ways of knowing, theoretical positions and cultural values
5. Demonstrate an ability to give a personal, self-aware response to a knowledge issue
6. Formulate and communicate ideas clearly with due regard for accuracy and academic honesty.

Part 1 - External assessment (40 points)

Essay on a prescribed title (1,200–1,600 words)

One essay on a title chosen from a list of ten titles, prescribed by the IBO for each examination session.

- A. Understanding knowledge issues
- B. Knower's perspective
- C. Quality of analysis of knowledge issue
- D. Organization of ideas

Part 2 - Internal assessment (20 points)

The presentation (approx. 10 minutes per student)

One presentation to the class:

- A. Identification of knowledge issue
- B. Treatment of knowledge issues
- C. Knower's perspective
- D. Connections

One written presentation planning document and presentation marking form, which will include:

- The knowledge issue that is the focus of the presentation
- A summary in note form of the knowledge issues to be treated during the presentation
- Achievement levels for each of the four assessment criteria, briefly justified, from both student and teacher.

IBO Assessment

Points awarded for the externally assessed component, part 1, the essay on a prescribed title (40 points), and for the internally assessed component, part 2, the presentation (20 points), are combined to give a total out of 60. The grade boundaries are then applied to determine the band (A to E) to which the student's performance in TOK belongs.

The band descriptors are:

1. Work of an excellent standard
2. Work of a good standard
3. Work of a satisfactory standard
4. Work of a mediocre standard
5. Work of an elementary standard

In-Class Assessment

40% Classroom assignments/projects/homework/classroom participation
20% Oral Presentation
40% Final Essay

Year 1 Topics:

- Introduction to Theory of Knowledge: What is Knowledge?
- What Does It All Mean: An Introduction to Philosophy
- Rationalism: The Use of Reason
- Empiricism: The Use of the Senses
- Feelings, Emotions and Intuition
- The Social Sciences
- Ethics
- Religion

Year II Topics:

- The Natural Sciences
- The Arts
- Mathematics
- History
- Paradigms and Culture
- Language
- Politics

The order in which these topics may vary.

Resources:

Alchin, Nicholas, *Theory of Knowledge*, 2003, John Murray (Publishers) Ltd, a member of the Hodder Headline Group

Nagel, Thomas, *What Does It All Mean*

Hoff, Benjamin, *The Tao of Pooh*

Gaarder, Hostein, *Sophie's World*, Translation copyright 1994, Paulette Moeller, Farrar, Straus & Giroux Inc.

Orwell, George, *1984*

Numerous print resources read (newspapers, Philosophy Now magazine, etc.)