

## BEDFORD HIGH SCHOOL

### Theory of Knowledge

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**COURSE COMPETENCIES:** The following course competencies must be mastered before credit for the course is awarded. Mastery is demonstrated by passing grades in each competency.

- Students will analyze and assess information and strategies to explain and evaluate knowledge issues. (Problem Solving, 50%)
- Students will identify, analyze, and evaluate knowledge issues through listening and speaking, reading and writing, and media. (Communication, 50%)
- Students will demonstrate respect and responsibility while managing their personal time, conduct, and planning. (Self-Management, 1-7)

### TEXTS AND MATERIALS

Articles, excerpts, podcasts, and all required reading and listening will be provided, as we need them.

### COURSE OUTLINE

TOK encourages critical thinking about knowledge itself in order to help you make sense of what you encounter in life. At the center of this course is the acknowledgement of you as a *knower*. Most of you typically have 16 years of life experience and 10 years of formal education. You have accumulated a vast amount of knowledge, beliefs, and opinions from academic disciplines and your lives outside the classroom. In TOK you have the opportunity to step back from this acquisition of new knowledge in order to consider knowledge itself. This is done by studying four distinct ways of knowing: reason, language, emotion, and sense perception, and by studying the distinctions between how we know things within the academic disciplines. TOK aims to help you discover and express your views on knowledge issues. The course encourages sharing ideas with others and listening to and learning from what others think.

The Nature of Knowledge

Ways of Knowing: Language, Perception, Reason, and Emotion

Areas of Knowledge: Mathematics, Natural Science, Human Science, History, Art,

Ethics, Religion

Methods of Justification

Fallacies of Reason

Factors in Knowing

Knowledge Communities

Knowledge Issues

### GRADING POLICY

- This course will use a points system for grading, with the number of points assigned to an assignment determining its weight. For example, a minor

assignment might be worth 10 points while a final assessment might be worth 200 points.

- Each competency is given a weighted percentage that is used to determine the Quarter grades and Final grade for the course.
- Final assessment grades will be included in the appropriate competency in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter grades.
- Major areas of assessment: class discussions, oral presentations, and essays.

#### Self-Management:

Students are encouraged to practice good self-management by turning in all work on time. However, late work will be accepted in order to help students achieve competency.

- Within 3 class periods of the original due date, late work will have 20% of the total points of the assignment deducted from the grade earned on the assignment. Example: On a 65 point assignment, 2 students turn it in 3 class periods late, so each will lose 13 points from their grade. Student #1 received a 60, so his final grade on the assignment is a 47 out of a possible 65. Student #2 received a 55, so her final grade on the assignment is 42 out of a possible 65.
- Within 6 class periods of the original due date, late work will have 50% of the total points of the assignment deducted from the grade earned on the assignment.
- This 6 class period window is not available at the close of the course.
- A further extension may be granted for extenuating circumstances, as long as the student has communicated with the teacher about those circumstances.

**HONOR CODE:** Students will write and sign the following statement on all work submitted for grading: "I pledge my honor that I have not violated the honor code during the completion of this work."

## Assessment details

### Nature of the tasks

The two assessment tasks, the essay and the presentation, are seen as complementary opportunities for students to show the extent to which they have achieved the TOK course objectives.

Both assessment tasks have at their centre reflection on knowledge issues but this reflection is demonstrated differently in each. The emphasis in the TOK presentation is on demonstrating an understanding of knowledge at work in the world. It is thus distinguished from the TOK essay, where students are required to show their TOK thinking skills in the discussion of a prescribed title that may be primarily conceptual in nature. Concrete examples play an important role in the essay in illustrating the main ideas or taking forward the argument but the presentation is in a sense an extensive TOK reflection on a single example, albeit one that is necessarily of a particular kind.

Neither the essay nor the presentation is primarily a research exercise, although some factual information may need to be included. If so, its reliability needs to be established through proper checks and referencing.

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

#### General

Each student must submit for external assessment an essay on any one of the ten titles prescribed by the IBO for each examination session.

The titles ask generic questions about knowledge and are cross-disciplinary in nature. They may be answered with reference to any part or parts of the TOK course, to specific disciplines, or with reference to opinions gained about knowledge both inside and outside the classroom.

The titles are not meant to be treated only in the abstract, or on the basis of external authorities. In all cases, essays should express the conclusions reached by students through a sustained consideration of knowledge issues; claims and counterclaims should be formulated and main ideas should be illustrated with varied and effective examples that show the approach consciously taken by the student. Essays should demonstrate the student's ability to link knowledge issues to areas of knowledge and ways of knowing.

The chosen title must be used exactly as given; it must not be altered in any way. Students who modify the titles may gain very few or no points, since the knowledge issues that essays treat must be relevant to the titles in their prescribed formulation.

The essay must be well presented, clearly legible, and, where appropriate, include references and a bibliography.

## Acknowledgments and references

Students are expected to acknowledge fully and in detail the work, thoughts or ideas of another person if incorporated in work submitted for assessment, and to ensure that their own work is never given to another student, either in the form of hard copy or by electronic means, knowing that it might be submitted for assessment as the work of that other student.

Factual claims that may be considered common knowledge (for example, "The second world war ended in 1945") do not need to be referenced. However, what one person thinks of as common knowledge, within a particular culture, may be unfamiliar to someone else, for example, an assessor in a different part of the world. If in doubt, give an authoritative source for the claim. Even the most carefully argued case is weak if its foundations are not secure.

The principle behind referencing in TOK is that it should allow the source to be traced. The simplest way to achieve this is to use consistently an accepted form of referencing. Guidance on such matters is available in the Diploma Programme *Extended Essay guide* or on reputable web sites, for example <http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/Documentation.html>.

A particular difficulty arises in the context of class notes or discussion. Reference to factual claims or ideas originating from these sources should be as precise as possible (for example, giving the name of the speaker and the date of the discussion). In cases where factual claims are fundamental to the argument of an essay, high academic standards demand that such claims should always be checked and a proper, traceable source supplied.

## Bibliography

The TOK essay is **not** a research paper but, if specific sources are used, they must be acknowledged in a bibliography. The bibliography should include only those works (such as books, journals, magazines and online sources) consulted by the student.

As appropriate, the bibliography should specify:

- author(s), title, date and place of publication
- the name of the publisher or URL (<http://...>)
- the date when the web page was accessed, adhering to one standard method of listing sources.

## Essay length

The essay on the prescribed title must be between 1,200 and 1,600 words in length. Extended notes or appendices are not appropriate to a TOK essay and may not be read.

The word count includes:

- the main part of the essay
- any quotations.

The word count does not include:

- any acknowledgments
- the references (whether given in footnotes or endnotes)

- any maps, charts, diagrams, annotated illustrations and tables
- the bibliography.

Students are required to indicate the number of words.

### **The role of the teacher**

In relation to the student's essay on a prescribed title, the teacher has four principal responsibilities:

- to encourage and support the student in the writing of the essay
- to provide the student with advice on and guidance about the skills needed
- to ensure that the essay is the student's own work
- to complete the coversheet.

While the teacher is encouraged to discuss the prescribed titles with the students, they should be allowed to make the final choice of title and to develop their own ideas.

If a preliminary draft is produced, the teacher may read and comment on it, but is not permitted to edit it for the student. Only one draft may be presented to the teacher before the final essay is submitted. In general, teachers' comments should be about the essay as a whole, although it is acceptable to question or comment upon a particular paragraph. Where a student is writing in a second or third language, more flexibility may be appropriate: for example, the teacher may indicate that a particular sentence or word usage is difficult for the reader. However, here as elsewhere, it is the student's responsibility to correct mistakes and make improvements.

### **Authenticity**

Teachers must ensure that essays are the student's own work. If there is doubt, authenticity should be checked by a discussion with the student about the content of the essay submitted and a scrutiny of one or more of the following:

- the student's initial proposal and outline
- the first draft of the essay
- the student's references and bibliography for the essay, where appropriate
- the style of the writing, which may reveal obvious discrepancies.

It should be made clear to students that they will be required to sign a written declaration when submitting the essay, to confirm that it is their own work. In addition, students must be made aware that their teachers will also be required to verify the claim made in the declaration (see the relevant edition of the *Vade Mecum* for procedures).

## **Part 2 The presentation**

### **General**

Students must make one or more individual and/or small group presentations to the class during the course. The maximum group size is **five**. If a student makes more than one presentation, the teacher should choose the best one (or the best group presentation in which the student participated) for the purposes of assessment.

The TOK presentation requires students to identify and explore the knowledge issues raised by a substantive real-life situation that is of interest to them. Aided by their teachers (see below), students can select the situation they will tackle from a more limited domain of personal, school, or community relevance, or from a wider one of national, international or global scope.

It is important that the situation that is selected is sufficiently circumscribed, so as to allow an effective treatment of knowledge issues. For this reason, it is wise to avoid topics so unfamiliar to the class that a great deal of explanation is needed before the underlying knowledge issues can be appreciated and explored.

Presentations may take many forms, such as lectures, skits, simulations, games, dramatized readings, interviews or debates. Students may use supporting material such as videos, MS PowerPoint presentations, overhead projections, posters, questionnaires, recordings of songs or interviews, costumes, or props. Under no circumstances, however, should the presentation be simply an essay read aloud to the class.

Each presentation will have two stages:

- an introduction, briefly describing the real-life situation and linking it to one or more relevant knowledge issue
- a treatment of the knowledge issue(s) that explores their nature and responses to them, and shows how these relate to the chosen situation.

A good presentation will demonstrate the presenter's personal involvement in the topic and show both why the topic is important and how it relates to other areas (see assessment criteria for more details).

Approximately 10 minutes per presenter should be allowed, up to a maximum in most cases of 30 minutes per group. Presentations should be scheduled to allow time for class discussion afterwards.

Interaction and audience participation are allowed during the presentation, not just in follow-up discussion, but there must be an identifiable substantial input from the presenter(s) that is assessable.

Before the presentation, the individual or group must give the teacher a copy of the presentation planning document (see below). The document is not to be handed out to the audience.

## The role of the teacher

The presentation should be a positive TOK learning experience for the audience. With this goal in mind, teachers may assist students in the choice of topic (situation) for the presentation (or even supply it), and in a general way support their thinking about relevant knowledge claims, means of justification, the issue(s) to be posed, the perspectives to be addressed, and the connections that can be made. Often a variety of appropriate knowledge issues can be identified in the kind of real-life situations/contemporary problems most students will want to present. Teachers should help them concentrate their efforts on a clearly formulated one.

Each topic should be treated only once in a particular teaching group.

In summary, the teacher should give the presenter(s) every opportunity to construct a presentation that will advance the aims of the TOK course for the class as a whole. The teacher may support students by guiding them towards suitable approaches but should not do their work for them.

The date when each presentation is to take place should be given to students well in advance, to allow sufficient time for topics to be chosen and for material to be prepared.

## Internal assessment documentation

### Presentation planning document

Each student must complete and submit a presentation planning document. In a group presentation these may, but need not, be compiled individually. This document will summarize the thinking behind the topic, state the specific knowledge issues to be addressed, and present an outline of the intended treatment of them, in a maximum of one typed A4 page or equivalent. It should provide clear evidence of an inquiry in keeping with the aims and objectives of TOK, and meeting the requirements of the assessment criteria for the presentation. It must not be an essay, but should be in skeleton or bullet point form.

#### Content of presentation planning document

Please describe your planning for the presentation, either in the space below, or on an attached A4 word-processed page.

Your description must include:

- the knowledge issue that will be the focus of your presentation
- a summary in note form (for example, a bulleted list) of the way you plan to deal with knowledge issues during your presentation.

### Presentation marking form

Both students and teachers must fill in the presentation marking form (the reverse side of the presentation planning document). Student presenters award themselves an achievement level for each of the four assessment criteria and briefly justify the level they have given. If the teacher considers the student mark accurate, they may simply reproduce it. Both students and teachers are required to certify the authenticity of the presentation work.

Participants in a group presentation should be marked individually, although all may be given the same marks if they have contributed equally. In a group presentation, not every student need speak for the same amount of time, but all students are expected to make a contribution and to participate actively.

#### Content of presentation marking form

##### Presenter's assessment

Each presenter should give themselves an achievement level for each of the four assessment criteria. Presenters should briefly justify the level they have given, in the "Comments/evidence" space provided.

##### Teacher's assessment

In the "Comments/evidence" box, please indicate briefly why you have given each level.

Both students and teachers are required to certify the authenticity of the presentation work.

The marks that will be used towards the final grade will be those entered in the teacher section of the form and transmitted via IBIS.

## Verification of internal assessment

All schools must retain both the presentation planning document and the presentation marking form for each student until the close of session (15 September [15 March] for May [November] session schools).

In addition, some schools in each session will be required to record some or all of their presentations. These schools may be randomly chosen, or may be ones where a possible problem has been identified, for example, by analysis of the marks awarded in previous sessions. It is not necessary for schools to record presentations unless they are asked to do so, although it can be a useful exercise in order to standardize internal marking, where more than one teacher is involved.

Any adjustment (moderation) of the schools' internal assessment marks will take place on the basis of the evidence provided.

## Examples of presentation topics

It should be noted that these are merely examples, meant only to illustrate the kinds of topics appropriate for TOK presentations. In particular, they are included to provide a concrete sense of what is meant by "real-life situation/contemporary problem" and to show how a knowledge issue can be identified in it and then treated from different perspectives. As well as guiding the selection of appropriate topics, the examples also illustrate ways that topics may be treated in the presentation, in accordance with the assessment criteria.

### Real-life situation/contemporary problem: Global warming

- Knowledge issues: "Can we be certain that global warming is taking place?" or, "Does language (or the use of statistics, graphs, photographs) affect our view of whether or not the planet is undergoing global warming?"
- Format: Students analyse and critically evaluate video and newspaper clips involving the views of experts, politicians and activists who defend or dispute the notion that the planet is suffering from global warming. Each member of the group draws attention to different aspects of the evidence—the nature of the words used, statistics and graphs, photographs.
- Knower's (student's) point of view: As a group, students suggest that the evidence in favour of global warming seems compelling, but underline that in some cases it is difficult to separate some protagonists' positions and how they are formulated from the interest groups they represent.

### Real-life situation/contemporary problem: Intensive agriculture

- Knowledge issue: "How can we know whether intensive farming methods are always harmful?"
- Format: Inputs by students representing the views of farmers in different circumstances from different parts of the world, cross-examined by a presenter and members of the audience.
- Knower's (student's) point of view: It may be easy to take a view on (to think we know) what is right in our own situation. Looked at globally the question is much more complicated.



**Real-life situation/contemporary problem: Reliability of media reporting of science**

- Knowledge issues: "What constitutes responsible journalism? How can we know whether scientific conclusions are justified?"
- Format: Summary and analysis of a newspaper article reporting on a new scientific study showing that a diet that contains no fat can lead to more weight gain than a similar diet that contains some fat (the original stimulus). Discussion of the quality of the newspaper article (what information ought it to contain, so that we can make a good judgment about the reliability of the claims made?) and of the scientific study it describes (how can we tell whether the evidence cited in the scientific study justifies its conclusions?).
- Knower's (student's) point of view: It is easy to tell that some newspapers are more concerned with entertainment than with truth. How easy is it to tell how much credibility to give to more serious stories?

**Real-life situation/contemporary problem: What makes a work of art?**

- Knowledge issues: "What is it that distinguishes an ordinary bag of rubbish from a major work of art that just looks like a bag of rubbish? Can anything be art—and, if so, what makes it into art?"
- Format: Skit of a TV talk show discussion about an incident when an artwork in an exhibition, consisting of a plastic bag full of rubbish, was mistakenly thrown out by a cleaner. Students role-play the host of the show, the artist of the work in question, a visual arts critic and a gallery owner, all of whom offer other examples of contentious contemporary art and their ideas about what distinguishes these artworks from non-art.
- Knower's (student's) point of view: Why are people prepared to dismiss contemporary art without understanding much about it, while often blindly believing scientific claims, however outlandish and improbable?

**Real-life situation/contemporary problem: Demonstrations in China against the issue of a new history textbook in Japan**

- Knowledge issues: Who should decide, and on what grounds, what history should be taught in schools? What part does the notion of historical truth play here?
- Format: Arguments for and against the Chinese attempt to tell the Japanese what they should teach about the actions of the Japanese army in China during the second world war. Should other countries be able to have a say in what the **Chinese** teach their children? What, in general terms, should determine a history curriculum?
- Knower's (student's) point of view: Is history too important to be left to historians?

**Real-life situation/contemporary problem: What evidence is there about how dinosaurs looked and behaved?**

- Knowledge issues: Are the methods of paleontology more like a science such as physics, or more like history?
- Format: Showing and discussion of a clip from the TV documentary *Walking with Dinosaurs* on how dinosaurs lived, showing a detailed scene from the life of a particular dinosaur, with a commentary presented as if this were a real scene.
- Knower's (student's) point of view: How far is it legitimate for TV programmes to go, to make their subject matter entertaining?

## Theory of knowledge prescribed titles

November 2010 and May 2011

### Instructions to candidates

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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 according to the assessment criteria published in the *Theory of Knowledge* guide. Remember to centre your essay on knowledge issues and, where appropriate, refer to other parts of your IB 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. Consider the extent to which knowledge issues in ethics are similar to those in at least one other area of knowledge.
2. How important are the opinions of experts in the search for knowledge?
3. "Doubt is the key to knowledge" (Persian Proverb). To what extent is this true in two areas of knowledge?
4. To what extent do we need evidence to support our beliefs in different areas of knowledge?
5. To what extent are the various areas of knowledge defined by their methodologies rather than their content?
6. "There are no absolute distinctions between what is true and what is false". Discuss this claim.
7. How can we recognise when we have made progress in the search for knowledge? Consider two contrasting areas of knowledge.
8. "Art is a lie that brings us nearer to the truth" (Pablo Picasso). Evaluate this claim in relation to a specific art form (for example, visual arts, literature, theatre).
9. Discuss the roles of language and reason in history.
10. A model is a simplified representation of some aspect of the world. In what ways may models help or hinder the search for knowledge?