

The TOK course at a glance

A one-page summary

The theory of knowledge (TOK) course provides students with an opportunity to **explore and reflect on the nature of knowledge and the process of knowing**. It is a core element of the Diploma Programme (DP) to which schools are required to devote at least 100 hours of class time.

In TOK, students reflect on the knowledge, beliefs and opinions that they have built up from their years of academic studies and their lives outside the classroom. The course is intended to be challenging and thought-provoking—as well as empowering—for students.

The course centres on the **exploration of knowledge questions**, which are a key tool for both teachers and students. These are contestable questions about knowledge itself, such as: “what counts as good evidence for a claim?”, “are some types of knowledge less open to interpretation than others?”, or “what constraints should there be on the pursuit of knowledge?”. While these questions may initially seem slightly intimidating, they become much more accessible when considered with reference to specific examples within the TOK course.

The TOK curriculum is made up of three deeply interconnected parts.

- **The core theme—knowledge and the knower:** This theme encourages students to reflect on themselves as knowers and thinkers, and to consider the different communities of knowers to which we belong.
- **Optional themes:** This element provides an opportunity to take a more in-depth look at two themes of particular interest to teachers and students. The given themes all have a significant impact on the world today and play a key role in shaping people’s perspectives and identities. Teachers select two optional themes from a choice of five: knowledge and technology, knowledge and language, knowledge and politics, knowledge and religion, and knowledge and indigenous societies.
- **Areas of knowledge:** The areas of knowledge (AOK) are specific branches of knowledge, each of which can be seen to have a distinct nature and sometimes use different methods of gaining knowledge. In TOK, students explore five compulsory areas of knowledge: history, the human sciences, the natural sciences, mathematics and the arts.

To help teachers and students explore these three parts of the TOK curriculum, guidance and suggested knowledge questions are provided. These suggested knowledge questions are organized into a **framework of four elements: scope, perspectives, methods and tools, and ethics**. This framework encourages a deep exploration of each theme and AOK. Having these common elements run throughout the different parts of the curriculum also helps to unify the course and helps students to make effective connections and comparisons across the different themes and areas of knowledge.

There are **two assessment tasks** in the TOK course.

- **The TOK exhibition** assesses the ability of the student to show how TOK manifests in the world around us. The exhibition is an internal assessment component; it is marked by the teacher and is externally moderated by the IB.
- **The TOK essay** engages students in a more formal and sustained piece of writing in response to a title focused on the areas of knowledge. The essay is an external assessment component; it is marked by IB examiners. The essay must be a maximum of 1,600 words and must be on one of the six prescribed titles issued by the IB for each examination session.

The TOK course can be structured in a variety of ways and can start from a variety of different entry points. Teachers are encouraged to exercise flexibility, creativity and innovation in the design and delivery of their TOK course, and to provide a diverse range of examples that meet the specific needs and interests of their own students. Further guidance and examples relating to the teaching, learning and assessment of TOK can be found in the *Theory of knowledge teacher support material*.