

TOK Essay Outline

Introduction (200-250 words)

- Identify your Essay Question
- Create a KI with your Question
- Provide a thesis with an answer to the question. What is your overall position on the question?
- Provide a preview of the major points you are making (exploring 3 AOKs/WOKs, and use claims/counterclaims in relation to the essay question is best)
- Define terminology: **NO** dictionary definitions. What do the words mean in this context? What do these words imply in relation to the question (any other ideas/concepts they suggest)
- Transition to the body of the essay

Body (appx. 1200 words)

Paragraph 1 (An exploration of KI #1 using appx. 200 words)

- Provide your main reasoning why your thesis is true (using 1st WOK/AOK)
- Be sure to identify your 1st KI and question again
- Use a real-life example to justify your position (personal examples are encouraged)
- Remember to use TOK terminology (AOKs and WOKs)
- Transition to the next paragraph

Paragraph 2 (200 words)

- Provide a counter-claim to Point #1
- Give an example or 2 why your thesis is wrong (or why point #1 is flawed)
- Provide research to justify the counterclaim (outside examples are encouraged)

Paragraph 3 (An exploration of KI #2 using appx. 200 words)

Repeat paragraph 1 instructions but use a different KI

Paragraph 4 (200 words)

Repeat the counter-claim process

Paragraph 5 (An exploration of KI #3 using appx. 200 words) Repeat paragraph

1 instructions but use a different KI

Paragraph 6 (200 words)

Repeat the counter-claim process

Conclusion (200-250 words)

Paragraph 1

Explain the importance of your thesis and KIs covered in the essay
Provide an alternate perspective to your thesis. (i.e. how would someone else in a different culture view your thesis?)

Paragraph 2

Review your thesis
Review your main points
Sum up the argument

Breaking the TOK Essay down into stages

- interpret the title
- define the **key terms** (no dictionary definitions) and concepts in the title
- identify the **knowledge questions** that are central to the discussion
- state a position
- identify the **ways of knowing** that are most significant to the discussion
- identify the **areas of knowledge** that will be central to the response
- identify the significant **claims** and **counterclaims**.

Interpret the title

Don't:

- have a superficial understanding of the title
- produce wordy and descriptive essays because they are actually attempting to arrive at an understanding of the title. Instead: rephrase the title in their own terms, "I believe that this title is stating ..."

Define the key terms and concepts in the title . Essays that fail to consider the **central terms and concepts** also tend not to explore the knowledge questions raised by the title.

Strong essays will often produce **ongoing consideration of the key concepts** in the title, possibly establishing that what is true for one context such as ethics may vary from what is true in another.

Identify the knowledge questions that are central to the discussion

Formally identify the knowledge questions related to the title. Make effective use of the examples. Respond to the title as a discussion of knowledge claims and their implications.

State a position

In most instances TOK titles invite students to adopt a position with respect to the title:

- I agree
- I disagree
- I agree with reservations
- I disagree to an extent.

If students are required to adopt a position then they are better equipped to recognize their response as a discussion of knowledge that naturally invites counterclaims and they are less likely to gravitate to the format that remains most familiar to them, the opinion essay. Students who formalize their position are also less likely to produce lengthy, generalized and descriptive introductions that use up space in the essay and limit the likelihood of establishing a knowledge agenda.

Identify the ways of knowing that are most significant to the discussion

Some prescribed titles specify which or how many WOKs should be addressed. However, others leave it to the students to decide which WOKs to include. As the TOK essay is only a maximum 1,600 words, it is not possible to cover all of the WOKs in depth in a single essay. ***Students should be encouraged to identify which WOKs they will focus on from the beginning, as this tends to produce a more focused in-depth response. It is suggested that students should select two or three WOKs which allows for effective contrasts to be made.***

Identify the areas of knowledge that will be central to the response

Some prescribed titles specify which or how many AOKs should be addressed. However, others leave it to the students to decide which AOKs to cover. Essays that seek to address too many AOKs tend to become overloaded and consequently lose depth. For that reason, students can benefit from making an ***initial decision of which AOKs to include, perhaps the two AOKs they feel are most relevant and helpful to their response.***

Identify the significant claims and counterclaims

Students must be able to **develop claims in response to the knowledge questions** through **reasoned argument** and the use of appropriate **real-world examples**. Students may need help in producing argumentative essays. To access the highest markbands for the essay students must explicitly, and in detail, explore counterclaims.

Brainstorming and organizing ideas

Establish the parameters for discussion.

Complete it over a number of days. If more time is given to this then students are often able to generate more ideas, locate better examples, discuss the question with more people such as their parents, and eventually provide themselves with a better range of ideas to draw from.

It is important for students to put down all the ideas that they think they can use, even if they initially seem a bit strange. Students should be encouraged to avoid editing out ideas during this stage.

Researching examples

Some students will choose to do this as part of their brainstorming but it generally makes more sense for students to research their examples after they have decided on the points that they seek to make. One of the most common causes for weak essay responses stems from the poor selection of examples.

Planning and structuring the essay

Prepare a visual plan of the essay. An effective way to do this is to have students create text boxes that represent each paragraph of the essay, beginning with a declarative, knowledge-focused opening statement that links clearly to the title.

Editing and reviewing the essay

In addition to planning, an important stage in writing the essay that is often neglected is allowing sufficient time for editing or reviewing the essay. Students tend to edit most effectively if they are able to leave their essay for a while and come back to it with fresh eyes.