

**Southside High School**  
**An International Baccalaureate School**



Theory of Knowledge Handbook  
2023-2024

## **Introduction**

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Theory of Knowledge (ToK) is a part of the IB core. In addition to ToK, the IB core includes Extended Essay (EE) and Creativity, Action and Service (CAS). Students are provided a minimum of 100 instructional hours to meet the requirements of ToK. As a course, ToK is only open to students planning to pursue the full IB diploma. ToK is combined with Extended Essay to contribute up to 3 points in overall diploma scoring.

## **Theory of Knowledge at a Glance**

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TOK is a course about critical thinking and inquiring into the process of knowing, rather than about learning a specific body of knowledge. It is a core element which all Diploma Programme students undertake and to which all schools are required to devote at least 100 hours of class time. TOK and the Diploma Programme subjects should support each other in the sense that they reference each other and share some common goals. The TOK course examines how we know what we claim to know. It does this by encouraging students to analyze knowledge claims and explore knowledge questions. A knowledge claim is the assertion that “I/we know X” or “I/we know how to Y”, or a statement about knowledge; a knowledge question is an open question about knowledge. A distinction between shared knowledge and personal knowledge is made in the TOK guide. This distinction is intended as a device to help teachers construct their TOK course and to help students explore the nature of knowledge.

## **Nature of the subject**

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TOK plays a special role in the Diploma Programme by providing an opportunity for students to reflect on the nature of knowledge. The task of TOK is to emphasize connections between areas of knowledge and link them to the knower in such a way that the knower can become aware of his or her own perspectives and those of the various groups whose knowledge he or she shares. TOK, therefore, explores both the personal and shared aspects of knowledge and investigates the relationships between them.

The raw material of TOK is knowledge itself. Students think about how knowledge is arrived at in the various disciplines, what the disciplines have in common and the differences between them. The fundamental question of TOK is “how do we know that?” The answer might depend on the discipline and the purpose to which the knowledge is put. TOK explores methods of inquiry and tries to establish what it is about these methods that makes them effective as knowledge tools. In this sense TOK is concerned with knowing about knowing.

The individual knower has to try to make sense of the world and understand his or her relationship to it. He or she has at his or her disposal the resources of the areas of knowledge, for example, the academic disciplines studied in the Diploma Programme. He or she also has access to ways of knowing such as memory, intuition, reason and sense perception that help us navigate our way in a complex world.

It is easy to be bewildered by the sheer diversity of the knowledge on offer. For example:

- In physics, experiment and observation seem to be the basis for knowledge. The physicist might want to construct a hypothesis to explain observations that do not fit current thinking and

devises and performs experiments to test this hypothesis. Results are then collected and analyzed and, if necessary, the hypothesis modified to accommodate them.

- In history there is no experimentation. Instead, documentary evidence provides the historian with the raw material for interpreting and understanding the recorded past of humanity. By studying these sources carefully a picture of a past event can be built up along with ideas about what factors might have caused it.
- In a literature class, students set about understanding and interpreting a text. No observation of the outside world is necessary, but there is a hope that the text can shed some light upon deep questions about what it is to be human in a variety of world situations or can act as a critique of the way in which we organize our societies.
- Economics, by contrast, considers the question of how human societies allocate scarce resources. This is done by building elaborate mathematical models based upon a mixture of reasoning and empirical observation of relevant economic factors.
- In the islands of Micronesia, a steersman successfully navigates between two islands 1,600 km apart without a map or a compass.

In each case above there is clearly knowledge at work, although the collection as a whole illustrates a wide variety of different types of knowledge. The task of TOK is to examine different areas of knowledge and find out what makes them different and what they have in common.

At the center of the course is the idea of knowledge questions. These are questions such as:

- what counts as evidence for X?
- what makes a good explanation in subject Y? Nature of the subject Theory of knowledge guide 11
- how do we judge which is the best model of Z?
- how can we be sure of W?
- what does theory T mean in the real world?
- how do we know whether it is right to do S?

While these questions could seem slightly intimidating in the abstract, they become much more accessible when dealt with in specific practical contexts within the TOK course. They arise naturally in the subject areas, the extended essay and CAS. The intention is that these contexts provide concrete examples of knowledge questions that should promote student discussion.

Discussion forms the backbone of the TOK course. Students are invited to consider knowledge questions against the backdrop of their experiences of knowledge in their other Diploma Programme subjects but also in relation to the practical experiences offered by CAS and the formal research that takes place for the extended essay. The experiences of the student outside

school also have a role to play in these discussions, although TOK seeks to strike a balance between the shared and personal aspects of knowledge.

Recognizing the discursive aspect of the course, the TOK presentation assesses the ability of the student to apply TOK thinking to a real-life situation. The TOK essay gives the opportunity to assess more formal argumentation prompted by questions of a more general nature.

TOK is a course in critical thinking but it is one that is specifically geared to an approach to knowledge that is mindful of the interconnectedness of the modern world. “Critical” in this context implies an analytical approach prepared to test the support for knowledge claims, aware of its own weaknesses, conscious of its perspectives and open to alternative ways of answering knowledge questions. It is a demanding course but one that is an essential component not only of the Diploma Programme but of lifelong learning.

## **The Ways of Knowing**

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While there are arguably many ways of knowing, the TOK course identifies eight specific ways of knowing (WOKs). They are language, sense perception, emotion, reason, imagination, faith, intuition, and memory. Students must explore a range of ways of knowing, and it is suggested that studying four of these eight in depth would be appropriate.

The WOKs have two roles in TOK:

- they underlie the methodology of the areas of knowledge
- they provide a basis for personal knowledge.

Discussion of WOKs will naturally occur in a TOK course when exploring how areas of knowledge operate. Since they rarely function in isolation, the TOK course should explore how WOKs work, and how they work together, both in the context of different areas of knowledge and in relation to the individual knower. This might be reflected in the way the TOK course is constructed. Teachers should consider the possibility of teaching WOKs in combination or as a natural result of considering the methods of areas of knowledge, rather than as separate units.

## **The Areas of Knowledge**

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Areas of knowledge are specific branches of knowledge, each of which can be seen to have a distinct nature and different methods of gaining knowledge. TOK distinguishes between eight areas of knowledge. They are **mathematics, the natural sciences, the human sciences, the arts, history, ethics, religious knowledge systems, and indigenous knowledge systems**. Students must explore a range of areas of knowledge, and it is suggested that studying six of these eight would be appropriate.

The **knowledge framework** is a device for exploring the areas of knowledge. It identifies the key characteristics of each area of knowledge by depicting each area as a complex system of five interacting components. This enables students to effectively compare and contrast different areas of knowledge and allows the possibility of a deeper exploration of the relationship between areas of knowledge and ways of knowing.

## Course Set Up

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Theory of Knowledge (ToK) is offered as a half credit class the fall of 11<sup>th</sup> grade. The exhibition is completed in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. ToK is finished during 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The course is also a half-credit course and offered on opposite days as IB Literature HL-2.

## Course Outline

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Course Elements	Minimum teaching hours
<b>Core theme: knowledge and the knower</b>  This theme provides an opportunity for students to reflect on themselves as knowers and thinkers, and on the different communities of knowers o which we belong.	32
<b>Optional themes</b>  Students are required to study <b>two</b> optional themes from the following five options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Knowledge and technology</li><li>✓ Knowledge and language</li><li>✓ Knowledge and religion</li><li>✓ Knowledge and indigenous societies</li></ul>	
<b>Areas of knowledge</b>  Students are required to study the following <b>five</b> areas of knowledge:  History The human sciences The natural sciences The arts Mathematics	50
<b>Assessment</b>  Students are required to complete two assessment tasks.  ToK exhibition (internally assessed) ToK essay on prescribed title (externally assessed)	18
<b>Total minimum teaching hours</b>	100

## **Assessment**

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There are two assessment tasks in the TOK course: an essay and a presentation. The essay is externally assessed by the IB, and must be on any one of the six prescribed titles issued by the IB for each examination session. The maximum word limit for the essay is 1,600 words.

The presentation can be done individually or in a group, with a maximum group size of three. Approximately 10 minutes per presenter should be allowed, up to a maximum of approximately 30 minutes per group. Before the presentation each student must complete and submit a presentation planning document (TK/ PPD) available from the instructor. The TK/PPD is internally assessed alongside the presentation itself, and the form is used for external moderation

## **General Due Dates**

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Students will receive specific deadlines in class. The deadlines below provide a general outline of dates.

December 1, 2023: Internal Assessment Due  
December 6, 2023: ToK Exhibition  
December 19, 2023: ToK Prescribed titles due