

Theory of Knowledge – TOK

Nature of the Theory of Knowledge

Theory of Knowledge is one of the three core elements of the IB Diploma Programme (along with CAS and the extended essay).

“Knowing about knowing”: TOK is a course about critical thinking and inquiring into the process of knowing, rather than about learning a specific body of knowledge. The TOK course examines how we know what we claim to know. It does it by encouraging students to analyse 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.

At the end of the course, students complete two assessment tasks: an essay (externally assessed) and a presentation (internally assessed).

Teaching approach

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.

To do so, students are encouraged to think about how knowledge is arrived at in the various disciplines, what the disciplines have in common and the differences between them. Discussion forms the backbone of the TOK course. A number of strategies are used in the classroom to encourage this exchange, such as group activities and reflections, presentations, guest lectures or creative tasks.

Where does it lead to?

It is hoped that through this course students develop into “inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people (...) who become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.” (IB mission statement).

It is also hoped that from gaining knowledge and awareness of how individuals and communities construct knowledge and of personal and ideological assumptions, students will maintain a lifelong interest in the diversity and richness of cultural perspectives and critically reflect on their own beliefs and assumptions, leading to a more thoughtful, responsible and purposeful lives.

(from: OCC, *Theory of knowledge guide*, 2017)