

Theory of knowledge IA Prompt

The TOK exhibition is one of the assessed components of the Theory of Knowledge course. It offers you a chance to explore how TOK concepts apply to real-world issues through the examination of three selected objects. While the task may initially appear abstract, the guiding prompts provided by the IB are designed to help you critically examine your surroundings through a TOK lens.

1. What counts as knowledge?

This prompt encourages you to explore whether things like feelings, opinions, or perspectives qualify as "knowledge." What criteria help define something as knowledge in your context? Are there cases where certain information is considered knowledge only in specific scenarios or to certain individuals?

2. Are some types of knowledge more useful than others?

Reflect on what makes knowledge "useful" and for whom. Is usefulness dependent on context or purpose? You can also consider the relevance of different kinds of knowledge in disciplines like science and art, and why we feel the need to label knowledge as useful.

3. What features of knowledge have an impact on its reliability?

Start by interpreting what "reliable" means. Then consider the aspects of knowledge that influence this — such as its origin, how it's communicated, or possibly other dimensions entirely.

4. On what grounds might we doubt a claim?

Consider what triggers skepticism about the information you encounter. Do you rely on prior knowledge or instinct to assess credibility? What leads you to question the factual basis of a claim?

5. What counts as good evidence for a claim?

Investigate how people justify their assertions. Do they lean on visual data, documentation, witness accounts, or the logical structure of the argument? Evaluate how different forms of evidence are interpreted.

6. How does the way that we organize or classify knowledge affect what we know?

Much of the knowledge we gain is structured in specific ways. Think about how categorization—such as labelling social groups or scientific species—shapes our understanding and perception of the world.

7. What are the implications of having, or not having, knowledge?

Gaining knowledge can bring both rewards and consequences. Sometimes it leads to social recognition, other times to isolation. Reflect on examples where having information affected individuals or situations positively or negatively.

8. To what extent is certainty attainable?

What does it mean to be certain about something? Explore what reinforces your sense of certainty and what introduces doubt. Can certainty and doubt coexist?

9. Are some types of knowledge less open to interpretation than others?

We often regard scientific knowledge as more rigid compared to subjective forms like emotions or art. What underlies this belief, and is the distinction valid?

10. What challenges are raised by the dissemination and/or communication of knowledge?

Sharing knowledge is beneficial, but does it compromise accuracy or reliability? Think about how methods of communication might affect knowledge's trustworthiness or clarity.

11. Can new knowledge change established values or beliefs?

At times, new discoveries prompt us to question or even overturn previous beliefs. But is this always necessary? What conditions must be met for new knowledge to reshape what is already accepted?

12. Is bias inevitable in the production of knowledge?

Define “bias” and examine where it originates. Are certain methods of acquiring knowledge more prone to bias? Are there ways to minimize it?

13. How can we know that current knowledge is an improvement upon past knowledge?

What does it mean for knowledge to "progress"? Consider how new ideas are tested, validated, and possibly replace old ones in fields like science or history.

14. Does some knowledge belong only to communities of knowers?

Can everyone access all knowledge equally? Or are certain experiences, like spiritual or emotional insights, unique to groups? Does empathy equal understanding?

15. What constraints are there on the pursuit of knowledge?

Our search for knowledge is limited by various factors—ethical, psychological, and even physical. How does being human set boundaries on what we can know?

16. Should some knowledge not be sought on ethical grounds?

Some information might be considered off-limits due to moral concerns—such as respecting someone's privacy. Explore the implications of seeking knowledge without regard for ethical consequences.

17. Why do we seek knowledge?

What drives humans to explore and learn? Is it innate curiosity, a need for usefulness, or simply enjoyment? Think about personal or societal motivations for acquiring knowledge.

18. Are some things unknowable?

While we often assume everything is discoverable, certain concepts—like love, the afterlife, or truth—seem beyond our grasp. Are these just temporary hurdles or inherently unresolvable?

19. What counts as a good justification for a claim?

Consider various ways to justify claims—logical reasoning, expert testimony, empirical data. How do you assess their strength, and does it vary across disciplines?

20. What is the relationship between personal experience and knowledge?

Personal experience can both contribute to and influence knowledge. Have your past experiences ever shaped how you viewed new information or judged its validity?

21. What is the relationship between knowledge and culture?

Culture plays a role in how knowledge is shared and understood. How do societal values or beliefs shape your perspective on what counts as valid or important knowledge?

22. What role do experts play in influencing our consumption or acquisition of knowledge?

Think about situations where expert advice shaped your beliefs. How do we decide who qualifies as an expert, and why do we trust them?

23. How important are material tools in the production or acquisition of knowledge?

Physical tools—from lab equipment to historical artifacts—often help create or support knowledge. How do such tools vary across disciplines, and how do they influence outcomes?

24. How might the context in which knowledge is presented influence whether it is accepted or rejected?

Does the format or setting in which knowledge appears impact our response to it? Explore how delivery methods—speeches, reports, media—affect the credibility or acceptance of information.

25. How can we distinguish between knowledge, belief and opinion?

These concepts often overlap, but they're not the same. When does an opinion become knowledge? What defines personal vs. shared knowledge?

26. Does our knowledge depend on our interactions with other knowers?

Knowledge-building is often collaborative. How do conversations, group projects, or expert feedback affect your understanding or acceptance of knowledge?

27. Does all knowledge impose ethical obligations on those who know it?

Some information comes with moral responsibility. Consider whether people have a duty to share or withhold certain knowledge depending on its impact.

28. To what extent is objectivity possible in the production or acquisition of knowledge?

Define objectivity and explore whether it is realistic or even desirable in different fields. Which areas of knowledge strive for it most—and why?

29. Who owns knowledge?

Is knowledge a shared human asset, or does it belong to individuals or institutions? Consider intellectual property rights and issues like plagiarism or cultural appropriation.

30. What role does imagination play in producing knowledge about the world?

Though imagination is often linked to creativity and art, it also drives progress in science, mathematics, and philosophy. How essential is imagination in your own process of understanding?

31. How can we judge when evidence is adequate?

Think about what makes evidence convincing. Does it depend on the quantity, the quality, the source or the way it's used in support of a claim?

32. What makes a good explanation?

Explanations should make ideas clearer. What characteristics make them effective—clarity, structure, simplicity? How do they vary by context?

33. How is current knowledge shaped by its historical development?

Knowledge is often a product of its time. Explore how past discoveries influence current research, understanding, or trends in any field.

34. In what ways do our values affect our acquisition of knowledge?

What we choose to explore is often influenced by what we value. Are there ideas we avoid because of ethical, cultural, or personal priorities?

35. In what ways do values affect the production of knowledge?

While the previous question focused on the knower, here consider the values of those who produce knowledge—scientists, artists, researchers. How do their beliefs affect what and how they create?

We hope this reframed guide to the TOK exhibition prompts provides clarity and inspiration as you plan your work. Remember to reflect on your own thinking processes—how you interpret, validate, and challenge knowledge. The more personally meaningful your exhibition is, the deeper your analysis will be.