

The DP theory of knowledge (TOK) course

The theory of knowledge

- is one of the three elements that make up the core of the Diploma Programme (DP)
- is a compulsory course of at least 100 hours focused on knowledge and the process of knowing
- explores the central question “how do we know?” in a variety of different contexts and situations
- encourages students to be more aware of their own perspectives and assumptions, as well as exposing them to different points of view.

The aims of the DP core are:

- to foster **international-mindedness** and encourage students to become responsible and actively involved global citizens
- to develop **students' self-awareness and sense of identity**, and provide an opportunity for reflection on their development of the attributes of the IB learner profile
- to enrich and add value to students' overall learning experiences through the core—**supporting, and being supported by, their academic studies** in the rest of the programme.



Knowledge and the knower

- Me as a knower and a thinker
- My perspective, assumptions and biases
- Where do my values come from?
- How can I navigate the world? How can I tell when I am being manipulated or “spun”?

Optional themes

- Knowledge and politics
- Knowledge and technology
- Knowledge and language
- Knowledge and religion
- Knowledge and indigenous societies

Areas of Knowledge

- History
- The human sciences
- The natural sciences
- Mathematics
- The arts

Example: Knowledge and technology

- To what extent is the internet changing what it means to know something?
- In what sense, if any, can a machine be said to know something?
- Do social networks reinforce our existing perspective rather than boosting our engagement with diverse perspectives?
- Can algorithms be biased?
- Should we hold people responsible for the applications of technologies they develop/create?

TOK assessment: Two tasks

The TOK exhibition: students create an exhibition of three objects that show how TOK manifests in the world around us.

The TOK essay: students write a 1,600 word essay on a prescribed title set by the IB. The key focus is on encouraging connections and comparisons across different disciplines and areas of knowledge.



Example TOK essay titles

- How important are the opinions of experts in the search for knowledge? Answer with reference to the arts and one other area of knowledge.
- Is the division of the natural sciences and mathematics into separate areas of knowledge artificial?

TOK across the curriculum

- TOK encourages students to reflect on the similarities and differences between their DP subjects.
- All DP subject teachers are required to make connections to TOK in their lessons.
- “The main focus of TOK is not on students acquiring new knowledge but on helping students to reflect on, and put into perspective, what they already know” (*TOK guide*)