

International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme Subject Brief

Diploma Programme core:

Theory of knowledge

First assessments 2015 – Last assessments 2021



The IB Diploma Programme (DP) is a rigorous, academically challenging and balanced programme of education designed to prepare students aged 16 to 19 for success at university and life beyond. The DP aims to encourage students to be knowledgeable, inquiring, caring and compassionate, and to develop intercultural understanding, open-mindedness and the attitudes necessary to respect and evaluate a range of viewpoints.

To ensure both breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding, students must choose at least one subject from five groups: 1) their best language, 2) additional language(s), 3) social sciences, 4) experimental sciences, and 5) mathematics. Students may choose either an arts subject from group 6, or a second subject from groups 1 to 5. At least three and not more than four subjects are taken at higher level (240 recommended teaching hours), while the remaining are taken at standard level (150 recommended teaching hours). In addition, three core elements—the extended essay, theory of knowledge and creativity, action, service—are compulsory and central to the philosophy of the programme.

These IB DP subject briefs illustrate four key course components.

- I. Course description and aims
- II. Curriculum model overview

- III. Assessment model
- IV. Sample questions



I. Course description and aims

Theory of knowledge (TOK) is a course about critical thinking and inquiring into the process of knowing, rather than about learning a specific body of knowledge. It plays a special role in the DP by providing an opportunity for students to reflect on the nature of knowledge, to make connections between areas of knowledge and to become aware of their own perspectives and those of the various groups whose knowledge they share. It is a core element undertaken by all DP students, and schools are required to devote at least 100 hours of class time to the course. The overall aim of TOK is to encourage students to formulate answers to the question "how do you know?" in a variety of contexts, and to see the value of that question. This allows students to develop an enduring fascination with the richness of knowledge.

The aims of the TOK course are to:

- make connections between a critical approach to the construction of knowledge, the academic disciplines and the wider world
- develop an awareness of how individuals and communities construct knowledge and how this is critically examined
- develop an interest in the diversity and richness of cultural perspectives and an awareness of personal and ideological assumptions
- critically reflect on their own beliefs and assumptions, leading to more thoughtful, responsible and purposeful lives
- understand that knowledge brings responsibility which leads to commitment and action.

II. Curriculum model overview

Component

Knowing about knowing

TOK examines how we know what we claim to know, 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. The distinction between shared knowledge and personal knowledge is intended to help teachers construct their TOK course and to help students explore the nature of knowledge.

Ways of knowing

While there are arguably many ways of knowing (WOKs), TOK identifies eight specific WOKs: language, sense perception, emotion, reason, imagination, faith, intuition, and memory. Students must explore a range of ways of knowing, and it is suggested to study four of these in depth.

Areas of knowledge

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: 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 to study six of these eight.

III. Assessment model

Having followed the TOK course, students will be expected to demonstrate the following:

- Identify and analyse the various kinds of justifications used to support knowledge claims.
- Formulate, evaluate and attempt to answer knowledge questions.
- Examine how academic disciplines/areas of knowledge generate and shape knowledge.
- Understand the roles played by ways of knowing in the construction of shared and personal knowledge.
- Explore links between knowledge claims, knowledge questions, ways of knowing and areas of knowledge.
- Demonstrate an awareness and understanding of different perspectives and be able to relate these to one's own perspective.
- Explore a real-life/contemporary situation from a TOK perspective in the presentation.

IV. Sample prescribed titles

- Using history and at least one other area of knowledge, examine the claim that it is possible to attain knowledge despite problems of bias and selection.
- "It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts" (Arthur Conan Doyle). Consider the extent to which this statement may be true in two or more areas of knowledge.
- In what ways may disagreement aid the pursuit of knowledge in the natural and human sciences?

Assessment at a glance

Type of assessment	Format of assessment	Weighting of final grade (%)
External		
Part 1: Essay on a prescribed title	One essay on a title chosen from a list of six prescribed titles.	67
Internal		
Part 2: Presentation	One presentation to the class by an individual or a group (max of three persons); approximately 10 minutes per student. One written presentation planning document for each student.	33

TOK contributes to the overall diploma score through the award of points in conjunction with the extended essay. A maximum of three points are awarded according to a student's combined performance in both TOK and the extended essay.

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