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Essay Grading (TOK Essay 3.1)

Post 7/15



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The Essay Rubric

It's obviously worth taking a bit of time to talk about the rubric. I've included a copy below, if you haven't seen it yet. You'll see that the rubric only has two areas (understanding knowledge questions) and (quality of analysis of knowledge questions) and the descriptors for these are also pretty general. (Continued under the image...)

TOK essay assessment instrument

Does the student present an appropriate and cogent analysis of knowledge question				
Aspect	Level 5 Excellent	Level 4 Very good	Level 3 Satisfactory	Level 2 Basic

[Source](#)

The good news

What you should notice first is that if you follow the basic method structure, your essay is already going to have a clear logical development. As long as your claims and counter-claims are thought-out and explained and backed up with evidence you should already be well on-track to achieving above a 6. The first 6 marks are going to be pretty easy for any student who develops a clear KQ (that fits with the PT) and follows the method.

The bad news

The hard marks are going to be those last four. And I know, for most of you, those are the ones you want the most. To get those ones you need to make sure you're pushing the envelop a little bit with your thinking. Your essay cannot read like the 99 other essays your marker is reading. Those last 4 marks take some guts to earn because you need to take some small risks and try to say something new. And this is not at all to say your writing needs to be confusing. To the contrary. Your writing needs to be as clear as possible. The risks you need to take involve your choice of claims, counter-claims and evidence. It's extremely tempting to write the obvious responses to

questions --choosing obvious claims and counterclaims and using the most obvious evidence. And that's why you need to make several drafts of your planning document - so you can notice all the ways you're preparing to write a very average/boring essay and then change your plan.

Mastery Tip

Sometimes it's surprising what kind of essay actually gets a good mark. Uniqueness/originality go a long way. **We just want to see "a really interesting conversation about knowledge."** (I put that into quotation marks because I said that and I think it's the most useful thing I ever said about Tok!) Think about what you're writing. Is it actually interesting? Or does everyone know most of the things you're writing down? Be original. Be interesting. Push the boundaries of what you already know. This 'reaching a bit further' is the key to good writing.

In the downloads section below you'll find two sample essays along with the examiner comments for each of them.

I would recommend reading each of them, having a go at marking them each yourself (using the rubric above) and then checking how the examiner marked it, so you can see how close your marking is.

The examiners' feedback on these is written just below here, but don't look at it until you've read and marked at least one of the essays. Okay? ;)



Essay I—Level 3 (5 marks)

The introduction to the essay is relevant but not well focused. The almost immediate focus on passive experimentation before any real exploration of the main concepts raised in the title detracts from the quality of the essay. The treatment of passive observation within the arts has basic relevance and shows a typical level of analysis. The treatment of active experimentation in Chemistry and the subsequent analysis shows a slightly better understanding. The case is then made for a continuum which is reasonably well-handled by the student. The conclusion is very typical of essays at this level. The candidate focuses implicitly on some knowledge questions, but this needed to be more convincing. Counterclaims are identified rather than analysed. There is a limited understanding of the areas of knowledge chosen by this candidate and it does not succeed in developing any different perspectives – it is a one track essay. Overall this is a mainstream and adequate essay, which addresses the basic ideas of the title and demonstrates some analysis. It is in the level 3 descriptor but at the lower end.

Essay D—Level 5 (9 marks)

There is a sustained focus on knowledge questions confirming and contradicting that “doubt is the key to knowledge”, as the prescribed title demands. A clear approach using different perspectives shown in real-life examples related to different areas of knowledge can be easily identified.

The first examples, regarding mathematics move from a personal example on how the student visualizes her own learning in class to a more sophisticated topic like the way conjectures are dealt with, emphasizing effective links to ways of knowing, especially reason.

Then there is an insightful investigation about religion, viewing it from different perspectives, focusing on Christianity, Islam and a way of proving that God exists, showing how doubting in that context might be a key to knowledge and how not.

Arguments are carefully and clearly developed. Every assertion is effectively evaluated giving a proper place to authority, experience, the search of truth, among other relevant TOK issues. The student definitely acknowledges the implications drawn in each of the examples.

It is worth pointing out that in spite of the effective and well-supported examples, the fact that they were not fully evaluated resulted in a mark of 9 being awarded instead of the highest possible mark of 10.

Essay M—Level 5 (10 marks)

The essay has a clear introduction which indicates the scope of the essay. The essay is fully focused on the title and the distinction between personal and shared knowledge along with the idea of shared knowledge influencing personal knowledge is very much at the forefront of the essay. This means that the essay is not structured through the areas of knowledge and ways of knowing; nevertheless an understanding of these is still very much in evidence.

This is an example of a very personal and highly insightful response from a candidate which still retains credibility – for example the treatment of ethics is clear and engaged with the title, even though the candidate does not relate this through formal theories of ethics. Knowledge questions are not explicitly stated but the clarity of the response indicates that there is a sustained focus on the answers to knowledge questions. The essay deals well with counter claims. In this case, by choosing to structure the essay through shared and personal knowledge a little depth is lost in the analysis of the areas of knowledge, which in part stops this essay from being awarded the highest grade. This essay is also slightly flawed by the fact that the candidate does not fully explore the implications of what is being said. Nevertheless the highly personal voice of the essay combined with a strong focus on the title and good analysis makes this a lucid and compelling level 5 essay, but at the lower end of the band.

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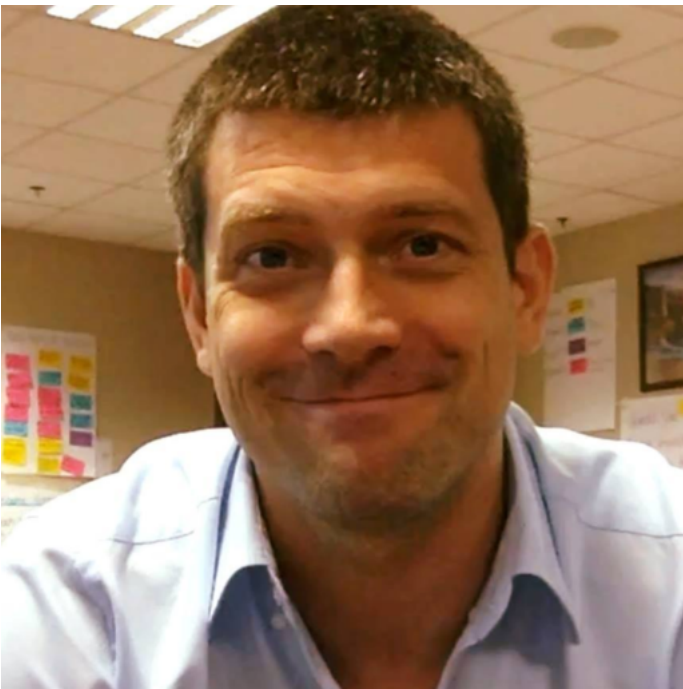
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Start Writing (TOK Essay 3.2)

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