

Theory of knowledge

*Theory of Knowledge Curriculum Review:
Update Report for Teachers (2019)*



Introduction

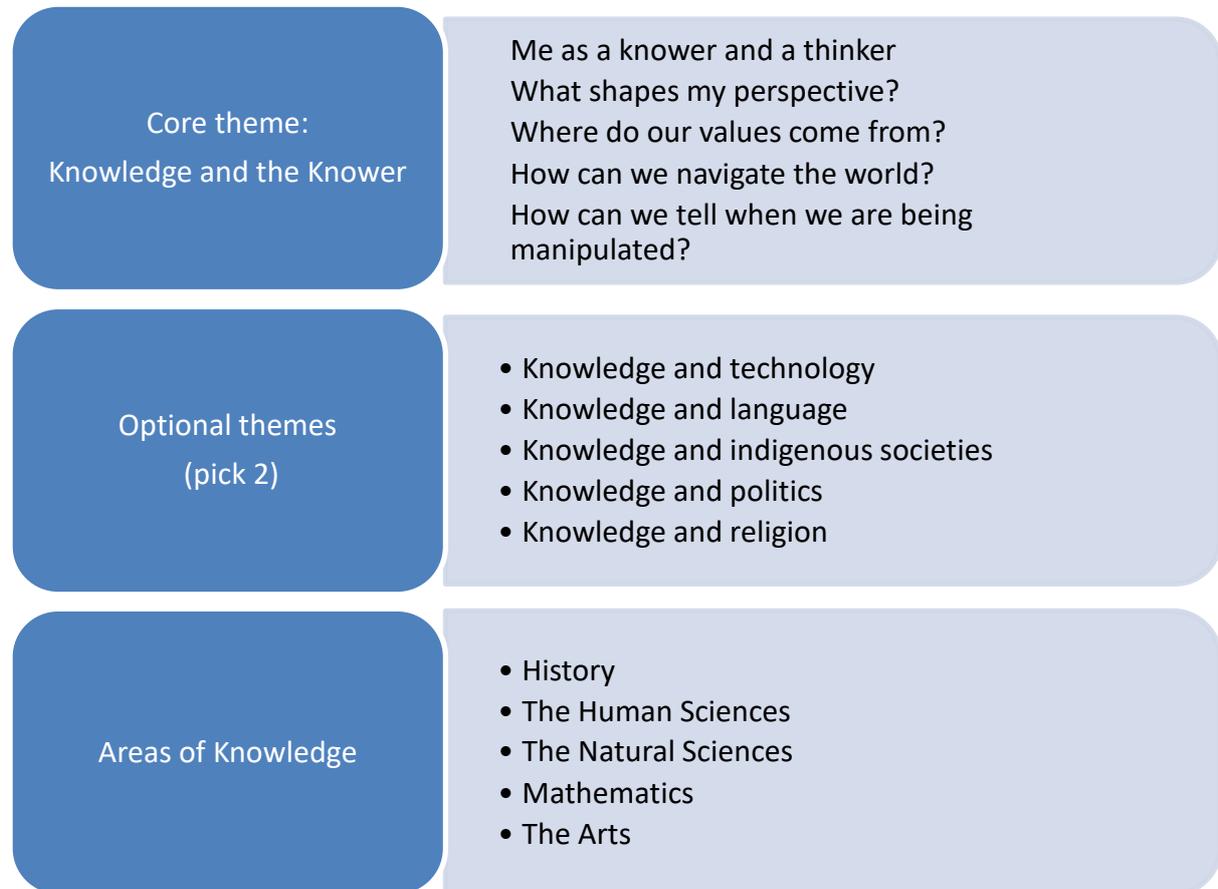
The TOK curriculum review is currently in its final stages, leading to a new course for first teaching in 2020 and first assessment in 2022. The new materials are currently being finalised and these will be published on the Programme Resource Centre in February 2020.

Please note: all TOK workshops during 2019 will be on the current TOK course. All workshops from February 2020 onwards will switch to being on the new TOK course. The new course workshops will begin with Category 3 Subject Specific Seminars – these are workshops that launch the new course in each region and are aimed at experienced teachers who want to find out what has changed in the new course.

Timeline for the TOK curriculum review

Year	Key Activities
2014 (Y1)	Research (review of the previous curriculum review, literature review, reports from external consultants, focus groups, document analysis, etc.)
2015 (Y2)	Research (teacher questionnaire, analysis of subject statistics, feedback from other IB departments, etc.); “Basecamp” online review discussion group set up; Completion of Curriculum Manager’s report (December 2015)
2016 (Y3)	Internal Review Meeting (Jan. 2016); External Review Meeting (Jan. 2016); First development meeting (October 2016)
2017 (Y4)	Second development meeting (March 2017); Report to teachers (August 2017); Third development meeting (October 2017); Internal assessment trial (December 2017)
2018 (Y5)	Fourth development meeting (February 2018); Second assessment trial; Fifth development meeting (October 2018);
2019 (Y6)	Final development meeting (January 2019); Third assessment trial (February 2019); Completion of draft guide and specimen assessments; Development of Teacher Support Material and new workshop materials; Workshop leader upskilling (September – November 2019)
2020 (Y7)	New guide and support materials published on the PRC (February 2020); Subject Specific Seminar workshops (February – May 2020); First teaching of the new syllabus (September 2020)

New curriculum model



A number of different curriculum models were discussed throughout the review process. Ultimately it was decided to structure the course into a **core theme, optional themes, and five compulsory areas of knowledge**. It is hoped that this structure will provide a balance in terms of continuity from the current course combined with some exciting changes and new features.

One key feature of this new structure is the new core theme “knowledge and the knower”. This is intended to provide a space for students to reflect on themselves as knowers and thinkers, providing strong links to the IB Learner Profile. It is also a reflection of a push in this curriculum review to try to find ways to make the TOK course feel more approachable, engaging and relevant to 16-year-old students.

Another key feature of this new structure is that it provides a clear valid space in the course for discussions that are not rooted in AOKs. In their feedback, many teachers commented that they currently want to bring in conversations about aspects such as politics and technology, but that the current format does not make it easy for them to do so. This new structure has been designed to provide more space for conversations about topical issues such as fake news, social media “filter bubbles”, etc.

Throughout the curriculum review, one issue that has been discussed in detail is moving religious and indigenous knowledge systems from being AOKs to being optional themes. This is in no way meant to signal a “demotion” in status. For example, in the case of indigenous knowledge systems it not only provides a dedicated space in the course for detailed discussions of this area, but it also opens up the opportunity to consider indigenous knowledge and perspectives within each of the areas of knowledge.

The creation of the optional themes reflects a desire to create a space for more in-depth conversations about areas that have a profound influence on people’s lives both inside but also importantly outside of the classroom. In turn, this also reflects a desire to increase the focus on comparisons and connections across a smaller number of compulsory AOKs that students will already be familiar with from their formal pre-DP studies. The creation of the themes is also a reflection of practical issues and considerations. For example, in the case of religion, the substantial sensitivities and even legal restrictions around this area in some countries mean that requiring all schools to engage with religious knowledge systems as a compulsory element of a compulsory DP component is simply not a feasible way forward. Throughout the review there has therefore been strong support for keeping religion as an option within the course, but not for making it compulsory.

The structure also tries to reflect pragmatic concerns about how many AOKs we can expect teachers to engage with within a 100-hour course, as well as trying to ensure that teachers who have invested time and resources into developing materials on religious and indigenous knowledge systems will be able to easily transfer these across into the new course.

Ways of Knowing

A key change in the new curriculum model is that Ways of Knowing are no longer listed as a separate element of the curriculum. Instead, suggested questions related to elements such as reason and imagination have been **built into the design of, and suggested knowledge questions for, each of the themes and AOKs.**

It is hoped that this change will encourage teachers and students to engage with interesting conversations about elements such as reason and perception where they are most relevant and meaningful, and to explore them within the context of a theme or AOK rather than as a standalone topic. For example, within their discussion of history as an AOK a teacher may decide to include exploration of knowledge questions relating to memory or eyewitness testimony, but they are not required to select a set number of WOKs from a set list, or to see WOKs as a thing in themselves. Instead, it is intended that they will become a natural part of the discussions of the different themes and AOKs.

This change is designed to address a number of issues with the current structure; for example, feedback from teachers suggests that there is a lack of clarity about the role and status of WOKs in the current course. There is also concern from examiners that they often see an extremely large number of very superficial discussions of WOKs, where general statements such as “in this way mathematics places a lot of emphasis on reason” are presented as if this is the end-point of students’ analysis.

Ethics

Another key change in the new curriculum model relates to ethics. A key area of discussion during the review meetings has been whether ethics should remain an optional AOK, become a compulsory AOK, or change from an AOK to a compulsory central thread throughout the course. Ultimately it was decided to **make ethics compulsory, but not to have it as a standalone AOK.**

There was strong support among the review team for making engagement with ethics compulsory, particularly given the mission of the IB. However, it was felt that the most effective way to engage students with ethics in TOK would be to infuse it throughout the course. The way that this has been achieved is that for each theme and AOK teachers will be required to ensure that they include discussion of four key elements: **Scope, Perspectives, Methods and tools, and Ethics.**

For each of these four headings, numerous suggested knowledge questions will be provided in the guide. However, these questions will not be suggestions only and will not be prescriptive. Teachers will have the freedom to use the suggested questions or to replace them with their own questions, as long as within their discussions of each theme and AOK they include exploration of the four required headings.

It is hoped that this change will increase engagement with ethics, by making it a high-profile compulsory part of all elements of the course. It is also hoped that it will help to clarify the role and status of the knowledge framework within the course, which feedback suggests can be a source of confusion and frustration for teachers with the current guide. In the new course the four headings will become compulsory, but teachers will be given a great deal of freedom to decide how they choose to explore these headings and which questions they choose to use to do so. It is also intended that having the same four headings run through all elements of the course will also encourage and support connections and comparisons across the different themes and AOKs.

Knowledge questions

A key issue for this curriculum review has been the role of knowledge questions within the TOK course. It has been decided that **knowledge questions should be retained as the key tool for teachers and students** to help guide their exploration of the themes and AOKs and ensure that their discussions remain focused on TOK concepts and issues. However, it has been decided that in the assessment tasks the focus should **shift from the formulation of knowledge questions to the exploration/ discussion of knowledge questions.**

This change reflects the fact that many teachers and students find the formulation of knowledge questions extremely difficult and they are currently the source of a great deal of anxiety. This is particularly problematic given that both of the current assessment tasks require students to formulate knowledge questions. It is hoped that by shifting this focus to seeing them as a teaching tool for the course and a stimulus provided for exploration in the assessment tasks, some of this anxiety will be eased. It is also hoped that this will reduce disagreement between teachers and moderators, as it should avoid the situation where disagreement over whether a question is really a knowledge question can contribute to significant disagreement in the marks awarded to student work.

Assessment: The TOK essay

Throughout the curriculum review discussions there has been a great deal of support for retaining the TOK essay. Other formats, such as a TOK examination or TOK portfolio, were considered, but there was overwhelming support from teachers, alumni and examiners for retaining the TOK essay on a prescribed title. It has therefore been decided to retain the essay, but to focus on making **improvements to the nature of the titles and the wording of the assessment instrument.**

One key change is that all essay titles will now be presented as knowledge questions, rooted in the Areas of Knowledge. Another key change is that there will be changes to the wording of the assessment instrument. Currently the marking instrument for the global impression marking approach is based around the question “Does the student present an appropriate and cogent analysis of knowledge questions in discussing the title?”. In the new guide, this question will be changed to **“Does the student provide a clear, critical and coherent exploration of the essay title?”**. In this way, the task will present students with a knowledge question as the title, and then will focus on assessing how well they respond to that question. It is hoped that this will simplify and streamline the expectations of the task.

Internal Assessment

Until 2014 the presentation was unmoderated, and the introduction of moderation has highlighted a number of problems with the oral presentation task. The current system of moderation (achieved through the moderation of the Presentation Planning Document) is also extremely unpopular with teachers and students.

Throughout the review discussions consideration was given to a wide variety of different ways forward in relation to the internal assessment task. These options ranged from removing the IA task completely to moving to having two internal assessment tasks, rather than one internally assessed task and one externally assessed task. Ultimately it was decided that we would retain an internal assessment task for TOK that retains a strong focus on how TOK manifests in the real world, but that we would **move away from the presentation and PPD format and create an entirely new format for the IA task.**

A number of different possible assessment formats for this new task were explored. From these discussions, a number of clear priorities emerged for the design of the new task:

- A task with a clear real-world focus
- A task that is less time-consuming to implement than the current IA (particularly for schools with large cohorts who are spending hours and hours sitting through PPT presentations)
- A task where the teacher and moderator see the same materials and where we can replace the current unpopular system of moderation via the PPD
- A task that is significantly different to the essay
- A task with an explicit focus on TOK
- A task where we avoid the situation where students cannot pick up any marks if they make poor initial choices
- Trying to avoid major or inconsistent disagreement between teachers and moderators.

From these discussions, the task that emerged as having the most potential to fulfil these priorities was the idea of a **TOK exhibition**. This new task was extensively trialled with students, teachers and examiner throughout 2018, and the feedback has been used to improve and refine the draft task. For this task, students will create an exhibition of 3 objects that show how TOK manifests in the real world.

One of the most significant changes that was made as a result of the trial feedback was the introduction of a set of IA prompts. These are high level knowledge questions, and a set of 35 of these questions will appear in the new TOK guide. These include questions such as: *Are some types of knowledge more useful than others? What counts as good evidence for a claim? Are some types of knowledge less open to interpretation than others? How can we know that current knowledge is an improvement upon past knowledge? Does some knowledge belong only to particular communities of knowers? What constraints should there be on the pursuit of knowledge?*

These prompts will remain constant for the life of the course, rather than changing for each assessment session. These prompts have been introduced to reflect the focus on exploration, rather than formulation, of knowledge questions within the new assessment tasks. In the trials, some students were still creating exhibitions that did not have any clear TOK links. It is therefore hoped that these prompts will help to make sure the exhibitions really are TOK exhibitions.

Summary of the new TOK exhibition process

Step 1:	<p>Students begin their exhibition by selecting one IA prompt and three objects, or images of objects, that show how this question manifests in the world around us.</p> <p>Students must select one IA prompt as the base for their exhibition. All three objects must be linked to the same prompt.</p>
Step 2:	<p>Students produce a single file containing their TOK exhibition. This must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A title clearly indicating their selected IA prompt • Images of their three objects • A typed commentary on each object. (In this commentary students identify each object and its specific real-world context, and justify each object's inclusion in the exhibition and links to the IA prompt.) This commentary should be a maximum of 950 words in total. • Appropriate citations and references. <p>Once complete, this file is submitted to the TOK teacher to be marked. Samples of student work are then submitted to the IB for moderation.</p>
Step 3:	<p>Teachers are required to provide all students with an opportunity for their completed exhibitions to be showcased and exhibited to an audience. As this does not form part of the formal assessment task, teachers have a great deal of flexibility as to how they choose to hold these exhibitions.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A class of TOK students could hold an exhibition within their regular TOK classes • A school could host a TOK exhibition for parents and other members of the school community • Students could display their TOK exhibitions in a “virtual exhibition” (by using an online virtual gallery space) • A school could host a combined event celebrating the Primary Years Programme exhibition, Middle Years Programme personal project, and TOK exhibition.

Next steps

- Finalisation of guide, Teacher Support Material, student samples and specimen assessments
- Development of workshop materials (January – July 2019)
- Workshop leader training (October/ November 2019)
- Publication of new materials on PRC (January 2020)
- Subject Specific Seminars and new workshops (February 2020 onwards)

Further information

If you have any questions or concerns about the new TOK course then you are welcome to get in touch any time. Please email dpdevelopment@ibo.org and indicate that your query is for the attention of the TOK curriculum manager.