

TOK Essay Guide

**An essay of 1200-1600 words begins with a single letter.**

**~Sun Tzu on the ToK Essay**

DO NOT LOSE ME.   
Ever.   
Or, at least until you graduate.

**What is the Essay?**

Each student must submit for external assessment an essay on any one of the ten titles prescribed by the IB for each examination session. The titles for the May 2012 session are included in this booklet.

The titles ask generic questions about knowledge and are cross-disciplinary in nature. They may be answered with reference to any part or parts of the TOK course, to speciﬁc disciplines, or with reference to opinions gained about knowledge both inside and outside the classroom.

The titles are not meant to be treated only in the abstract, or on the basis of external authorities. In all cases, essays should express the conclusions reached by students through a sustained consideration of knowledge issues; claims and counterclaims should be formulated and main ideas should be illustrated with varied and effective examples that show the approach consciously taken by the student. Essays should demonstrate the students’ ability to link knowledge issues to areas of knowledge and ways of knowing.

The chosen title must be used exactly as given; it must not be altered in any way. Students who modify the titles may gain very few or no points, since the knowledge issues that essays treat must be relevant to the titles in their prescribed formulation.

The essay must be well presented, clearly legible, and, where appropriate, include references and a bibliography.

**Acknowledgments and references**

Students are expected to acknowledge fully and in detail the work, thoughts or ideas of another person if incorporated in work submitted for assessment, and to ensure that their own work is never given to another student, either in the form of hard copy or by electronic means, knowing that it might be submitted for assessment as the work of that other student.

Factual claims that may be considered common knowledge (for example, “The second world war ended in 1945”) do not need to be referenced. However, what one person thinks of as common knowledge, within a particular culture, may be unfamiliar to someone else, for example, an assessor in a different part of the world. If in doubt, give an authoritative source for the claim. Even the most carefully argued case is weak if its foundations are not secure.

The principle behind referencing in TOK is that it should allow the source to be traced. The simplest way to achieve this is to use consistently an accepted form of referencing.

A particular difﬁculty arises in the context of class notes or discussion. Reference to factual claims or ideas originating from these sources should be as precise as possible (for example, giving the name of the speaker and the date of the discussion). In cases where factual claims are fundamental to the argument of an essay, high academic standards demand that such claims should always be checked and a proper, traceable source supplied.

**Bibliography**

The TOK essay is not a research paper but, if speciﬁc sources are used, they must be acknowledged in a bibliography. The bibliography should include only those works (such as books, journals, magazines and online sources) consulted by the student.

**As appropriate, the bibliography should specify:**

* Author(s), title, date and place of publication
* The name of the publisher or URL (http://….)
* The date when the web page was accessed, adhering to one standard method of listing sources.

A guide for writing a bibliography has been provided in this booklet.

**Essay length**

The essay on the prescribed title must be between 1,200 and 1,600 words in length. Extended notes or appendices are not appropriate to a TOK essay and may not be read.

**The word count includes:**

* The main part of the essay
* Any quotations.

**The word count does not include:**

* Any acknowledgments
* The references (whether given in footnotes or endnotes) any maps, charts, diagrams, annotated illustrations and tables
* The bibliography.

**Students are required to indicate the number of words on the essay cover sheet**

**Authenticity**

Essays must be the student’s own work. If there is doubt, authenticity should be checked by a discussion with the student about the content of the essay submitted and a scrutiny of one or more of the following:

* The student’s initial proposal and outline
* The ﬁrst draft of the essay
* The student’s references and bibliography for the essay, where appropriate
* The style of the writing, which may reveal obvious discrepancies.

**Students will be required to sign a written declaration when submitting the essay, to conﬁrm that it is their own work**

**May 2013 Titles**

**Instructions to candidates**

Your theory of knowledge essay for examination must be submitted to your teacher for authentication. It must be written on one of the six titles (questions) provided below. You may choose any title, but are recommended to consult with your teacher. Your essay will be marked according to the assessment criteria published in the Theory of Knowledge guide. The **focus** of your essays should be **on knowledge issues**. Where appropriate, **refer to other parts of your IB program and to your experiences as a knower**. Always **justify** **your statements** and provide **relevant examples** to illustrate your arguments. **Pay attention to the implications of your arguments**, and remember to **consider what can be said against them**. If you use external sources, **cite** them according to a recognized convention (MLA or APA).

Note that statements in quotations in these titles are not necessarily authentic: they present a real point of view but may not be direct quotes. It is appropriate to analyze them but it is unnecessary, even **unwise, to spend time on researching a context for them**.

Examiners **mark essays against the title as set**. Respond to the title **exactly as given**; do not alter it in any way.

Your essay must be between 1200 and 1600 words in length, double-spaced and typed in size 12 font.

**Choose One:**

1. In what ways may disagreement aid the pursuit of knowledge in the natural and human sciences?
2. “Only seeing general patterns can give us knowledge. Only seeing particular examples can give us understanding.” To what extent do you agree with these assertions?
3. “The possession of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility.” Evaluate this claim.
4. The traditional TOK diagram indicates four ways of knowing. Propose the inclusion of a fifth way of knowing selected from intuition, memory or imagination, and explore the knowledge issues it may raise in two areas of knowledge.
5. “That which can be asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence.” (Christopher Hitchens). Do you agree?
6. Can we know when to trust our emotions in the pursuit of knowledge? Consider history and one other area of knowledge.

**Essay Assessment Criteria**

**Criterion A: Understanding Knowledge Issues**

This criterion is concerned with the extent to which the essay focuses on knowledge issues relevant to the prescribed title, and with the depth and breadth of the understanding demonstrated in the essay.

A **relevant** knowledge issue is one that directly relates to the prescribed title undertaken, or one that the essay has shown is important in relation to it.

**Depth of understanding** is often indicated by drawing distinctions within ways of knowing and areas of knowledge, or by connecting several facets of knowledge issues to these.

**Breadth of understanding** is often indicated by making comparisons between ways of knowing and areas of knowledge. *Since not all prescribed titles lend themselves to an extensive treatment of an equal range of areas of knowledge or ways of knowing, this element in the descriptors should be applied with concern for the particularity of the title.*

* Does the essay demonstrate understanding of knowledge issues that are relevant to the prescribed title?
* Does the essay demonstrate an awareness of the connections between knowledge issues, areas of knowledge and ways of knowing?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Achievement level** | **Descriptor** |
| 0 | Level 1 is not achieved. |
| 1 - 2 | The essay includes very little treatment of knowledge issues that are relevant to the prescribed title and demonstrates little understanding of them. If present, areas of knowledge and/or ways of knowing are merely mentioned. |
| 3 - 4 | The essay includes some treatment of knowledge issues that are relevant to the prescribed title and demonstrates a rudimentary understanding of them. Some links to areas of knowledge and/or ways of knowing have been attempted but they are largely ineffective. |
| 5 - 6 | For the most part the essay treats knowledge issues that are relevant to the prescribed title, and demonstrates some understanding of them. Some effective links are drawn between areas of knowledge and/or ways of knowing. |
| 7 - 8 | The essay consistently maintains as its focus knowledge issues that are relevant to the prescribed title. Effective links and some comparisons between areas of knowledge and/or ways of knowing are drawn, so that the essay demonstrates a good understanding of the knowledge issues under consideration. |
| 9 - 10 | The essay consistently maintains as its focus knowledge issues that are relevant to the prescribed title. Effective links and comparisons between areas of knowledge and/or ways of knowing are elaborated, so that the essay demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the knowledge issues under consideration. |

**Essay Assessment Criteria**

**Criterion B: Knowers’ Perspective**

To what extent have the knowledge issues relevant to the prescribed title been connected to the studentʼs own experience as a learner?

* Does the student show an awareness of his or her own perspective as a knower in relation to other perspectives, such as those that may arise, for example, from academic and philosophical traditions, culture or position in society (gender, age, and so on)?
* Do the examples chosen show an individual approach consciously taken by the student, rather than mere repetition of standard commonplace cases or the impersonal recounting of sources?

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| --- | --- |
| **Achievement level** | **Descriptor** |
| 0 | Level 1 is not achieved. |
| 1 - 2 | The essay shows no evidence of independent thinking about the knowledge issues related to the prescribed title. There is limited personal engagement with the knowledge issues and no attempt to acknowledge or explore different perspectives. There are no appropriate examples. |
| 3 - 4 | The essay shows very little evidence of independent thinking about the knowledge issues related to the prescribed title. There is some personal engagement with the knowledge issues. Different perspectives may be mentioned but there is no attempt to explore them. Examples chosen are sometimes appropriate. |
| 5 - 6 | The essay shows some evidence of independent thinking about the knowledge issues related to the prescribed title. The student has shaped the essay in a way that shows personal engagement with the knowledge issues. There is an awareness that different perspectives may exist, although there may be little attempt to explore these. Examples chosen are appropriate, although there may be little variety in their sources. |
| 7 - 8 | The essay shows adequate evidence of independent thinking about the knowledge issues related to the prescribed title. The student has shaped the essay in a way that shows thoughtful, personal engagement with the knowledge issues and some self-awareness as a knower. There is an acknowledgment of different perspectives and some attempt to explore these. Examples chosen are effective, with some variety. |
| 9 - 10 | The essay shows much evidence of independent thinking about the knowledge issues related to the prescribed title. The student has shaped the essay in a way that shows both a personal, reﬂective exploration of the knowledge issues and signiﬁcant self-awareness as a knower. There is serious consideration of different perspectives. Examples chosen are varied and effectively used. |

**Essay Assessment Criteria Criterion C: Quality of Analysis of Knowledge Issues**

* What is the quality of the inquiry into knowledge issues?
* Are the main points in the essay justiﬁed? Are the arguments coherent and compelling?
* Have counterclaims been considered?
* Are the implications and underlying assumptions of the essayʼs argument identiﬁed?

This criterion is concerned only with knowledge issues that are relevant to the prescribed title. Analysis of knowledge issues that are not relevant to the prescribed title is not assessed.

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| --- | --- |
| **Achievement level** | **Descriptor** |
| 0 | Level 1 is not achieved. |
| 1 - 2 | There is no inquiry into knowledge issues, only description. There are very few attempts at justifying the main points of the essay. There is very little evidence of any awareness of counterclaims. |
| 3 - 4 | The inquiry partly explores, but largely describes, knowledge issues. There is some justiﬁcation of main points and some coherent argument. Counterclaims are implicitly identiﬁed. |
| 5 - 6 | The inquiry explores knowledge issues. Most points are justiﬁed; most arguments are coherent. Some counterclaims are considered. |
| 7 - 8 | The inquiry explores with some insight, in some depth and/or detail, knowledge issues. All, or nearly all, main points are justiﬁed and arguments are coherent. Counterclaims are explored. Implications of the essayʼs argument are identiﬁed. |
| 9 - 10 | The inquiry explores with a high degree of insight, in considerable depth and/or detail, knowledge issues. All main points are justiﬁed and arguments are coherent and compelling. Counterclaims are explored and evaluated. Implications and underlying assumptions of the essayʼs argument are identiﬁed. |



**Essay Assessment Criteria**

**Criterion D: Organization of Ideas**

* Is the essay well organized and relevant to the prescribed title?
* Does the use of language assist the reader's understanding and avoid confusion? Are central terms explained or developed clearly in a way that assists comprehension? Note: This task is not a test of “ﬁrst language” linguistic skills. No account should be taken of minor errors unless they signiﬁcantly impede communication.
* When factual information is used or presented, is it accurate and, when necessary, referenced? “Factual information” includes generalizations.
* If sources have been used, have they been properly referenced in a way that allows them to be traced (Internet references must include the date on which they were accessed)?

Note: Not all essays require sources or references. An essay that fails to meet the word limit of 1,200–1,600 words will not score above level 4 on this criterion. An essay that has no relevance to the prescribed title will score 0 on this criterion.

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| --- | --- |
| **Achievement level** | **Descriptor** |
| 0 | Level 1 is not achieved. |
| 1 - 2 | The essay on the prescribed title is very poorly structured, with little overall organization. It is difﬁcult to understand what the writer intends. Factual information used to support arguments may contain signiﬁcant inaccuracies. Sources of information and ideas may not be acknowledged and there is no attempt at referencing. |
| 3 - 4 | The essay on the prescribed title is poorly structured, with limited overall organization. It is sometimes difﬁcult to understand what the writer intends. There may be some attempt to explain or explore the meaning of terms but this contributes little to conceptual clarity. Factual information used to support arguments is not always reliable (there may be minor inaccuracies; sources of more important information may be missing or unreliable). Some sources of information and ideas are acknowledged; there is some attempt at referencing but it is not complete, nor sufﬁciently precise to permit tracing of sources. |
| 5 -6 | The essay on the prescribed title is satisfactorily structured, with adequate overall organization. In general, concepts are used clearly: if concepts are explained, explanations are generally adequate. Factual information used to support arguments is mostly correct. Most sources of information and ideas are acknowledged; most referencing permits tracing of sources, although some precision may be lacking. The word limit has been met. |
| 7 - 8 | The essay on the prescribed title is well structured, with a clear overall organization. Concepts are used or developed clearly: some explanations are included, where appropriate. Factual information used to support arguments is correct. Sources of information and ideas are acknowledged; most referencing permits tracing of sources. The word limit has been met. |
| 9 - 10 | The essay on the prescribed title is very well structured, with an effective overall organization. Concepts are used clearly and, where appropriate, reﬁned by helpful explanations. Factual information used to support arguments is correct. Sources of information and ideas are acknowledged; all referencing permits tracing of sources. The word limit has been met. |

**About ToK Writing**

ToK writing is unlike normal essay writing in a few key areas. To achieve a good mark in a ToK essay, **you must explicitly demonstrate** the speciﬁc ToK skills listed in the marking criteria.

If you donʼt, your essay wonʼt get the marks you think it deserves. ToK essay writing involves careful planning and takes time. Use the following guidelines to help you write effectively in ToK.

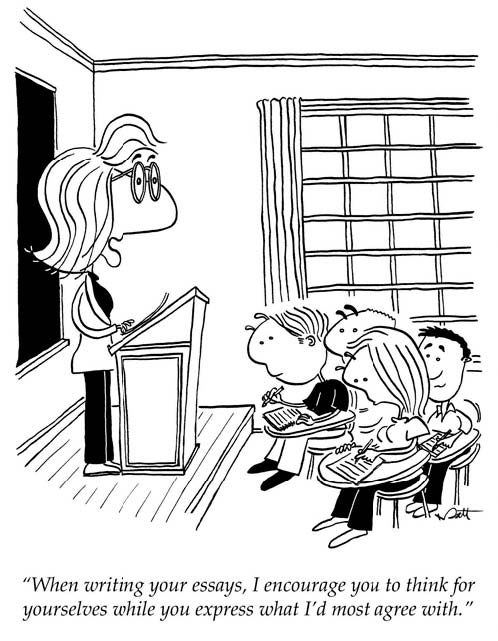
**The 8 Stages of ToK Essay Writing**

1. Picking a topic
2. Identifying knowledge claims
3. Identifying knowledge issues
4. Developing analysis
5. Choosing appropriate examples
6. Applying appropriate structure
7. Writing the essay
8. Reﬁning and reﬂection

**Before You Start**

As mentioned TOK essays are unique essays in a number of ways. ToK essays are: ­

* Written from the **perspective of the knower** (this means you!!) i.e. “I think...”, “In myopinion...”, “I believe...” etc
* **Not like** English or History essays
* Reliant on **analysis** (not description)
* Are **personal** and **cross-cultural**



**Avoid this:**

**1 - Picking a Topic**

You must pick from one of the prescribed titles. In picking your title, it is essential that you can:

* Understand the topic - what does it mean in a TOK context?
* Identify knowledge claims associated with the topic
* Identify appropriate knowledge issues
* Generate appropriate analysis
* Find appropriate examples to support your analysis

**If do cannot do any one of the above**, you should **re-choose** your title.

**Do not pick a topic just because you think that it is the easiest!!**



**Often the titles that appear easy are the hardest to be treated adequately within the word limit!**

**2 - What are knowledge claims?**

Knowledge claims are something that we think that we know, ie:

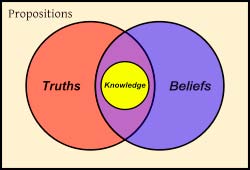
believe to be true

want to evaluate to determine the level of validity

The aim of TOK is to ask the question:

How do we know (what we know)?

We can often justify knowledge claims in the following ways:



|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| intuition s.perception  evidence | authority  group consensus  divine revelation |
| reasoning  memory  creativity  faith | common wisdom education  imagination  emotion |

**3 - Knowledge issues**

“knowledge issues are questions that directly refer to our understanding of the world, ourselves and others in connection with the acquisition, search for, production, shaping and acceptance of knowledge” *(TOK Guide Page 9)*

**But what does this mean?**

* Knowledge issues are the aims and objectives of the course demonstrated in a practical way.
* They are not necessarily negative aspects of the information in question
* They are usually framed as questions but can be statements
* They are based on the knowledge claims and are used to generate analysis and implications.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Knowledge Issue** | **What ToK students are expected to be able to do** |
| • | What are the assumptions in the knowledge claim? What does this claim mean if we apply it to other areas? | Critically analyze knowledge claims, their underlying assumptions and their implications. |
| • | Who is making the claim? What do they hope to achieve? What are the different points of view involved in making these claims? | Demonstrate an understanding of different perspectives on knowledge issues. |
| • | Can we compare & contrast our knowledge claims with others? How valid would our comparisons be? | Draw links & make effective comparisons between different approaches to knowledge issues |
| • | Asking questions about knowledge claims. What is it we think we know? What can we do with the claim to judge its validity? | Generate questions, explanations, conjectures, hypotheses, alternative ideas and possible solutions |

In other words you should be able to pick out the following issues with knowledge claims: ­

* Limitations
* Assumptions
* Bias
* Context
* Alternative cultural & linguistic perspectives
* Problems with justiﬁcation or proof
* Different deﬁnitions
* Problems of logic
* Alternative sides to an issue
* Differences in perception
* Relational questions
* Philosophies or theories



**4 - Developing analysis**

Analysis is what you do with your knowledge issues throughout your essay. This includes:

* Effectively using the knowledge issues identiﬁed in the essay and identifying any assumptions
* Justifying the main points
* Considering counter-claims
* Generating valid implications

**What are implications?**

During the essay you will draw conclusions from your analysis of the title. Implications involve applying a conclusion to another area of knowledge:

“what if we apply our conclusion to another area of knowledge? Does the conclusion still hold true?”

**Evaluated implications** are investigating the implications & asking questions such as:

* Is the result still valid?
* How justiﬁed are our conclusions?
* Is it possible to make the same conclusion if we apply this to another area?

**Things to avoid in your analysis:**

* Making assumptions & assertions eg: Some people say that... Experts say that.....
* Unreferenced claims (anything other than common knowledge or personal experience)
* Making token cross cultural examples

**5 - Examples**

Examples are the key to a well written essay. Because you have a limited word count, examples need to be:

* Individual / unique (no more Mona Lisa or The Last Supper)
* Able to serve multiple purposes ie counter - claim, implication
* Personal & cross - cultural (not token)

The criteria for evaluating your ToK paper set by the IBO, calls for using numerous speciﬁc examples, “drawn from a variety of sources” making sure to incorporate your own experience.

The criteria also ask that you use a “high degree of cultural diversity”; therefore, when writing about ways and areas of knowing, make sure you include not only your own experience but also examples from outside your immediate culture.

America, Australia, England all represent a western view. Show us math, history, art, literature, and science from other world perspectives as well. Read newspapers from other countries to obtain a foreign slant on breaking headlines.

As International Baccalaureate students you are to think globally. Often when a student does take care to use international examples, they are frequently all negative while their own habits and customs are contrasted as somehow liberated or more informed.

**6 - Appropriate structure**

TOK essays must be structured tightly given the limited number of words. You must still have an:

* Introduction
* Body Paragraphs (Each based around a key point)
* Conclusion

**Paragraph structure Introduction**

* Deﬁnitions (not dictionary only)
* Sets the parameters of the essay (what you will cover / wonʼt cover/ in what context)
* Clearly sets out the main knowledge issues for the issues
* Identiﬁes conclusion

**Body paragraphs**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Option 1** | **Option 2** |
| • Knowledge issue / claim • Counter - claim • Example • Analysis & discussion • Implications • Conclusion | • Knowledge issues identiﬁed in introduction • Each paragraph does 1 aspect i.e: knowledge claims / issues, counter-claims, examples, analysis& implications • Conclusion |

**7 - Writing the essay Planning is the key!**

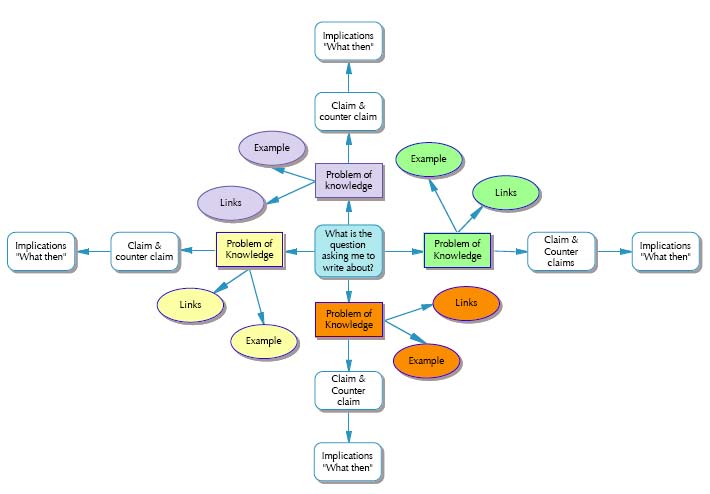


You cannot start your essay the night before and expect a quality result.

1200 words of quality is better than 1600 words of fluff. Work to be concise, with each paragraph and each sentence serving a definite function.

You must plan with the marking criteria & skills in mind.

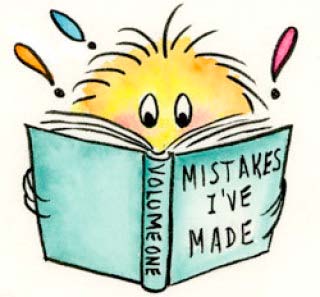
**Planning with Mind Maps 8 - Reﬁning & reﬂection**

* Plan the essay well in advance (prepare a planning document)
* At least 1 week before due, write the essay and leave it for a few days
* ****Read again with a clear head and explain the essay to someone else. Can they clearly understand the

knowledge issues involved?

**Last tips**

* Just because the instructions to the candidate allow for a minimum 1200 word paper, such short   
   papers rarely make the top grade. Though some students may be able to write so succinctly that their   
   1200 word paper is equal to or even greater than another 1600 word paper, such dense, quality-laden   
   papers are few and far between. Try for this, but remember that more detail, more examples, and   
   more analysis is usually better. This is not a license to “fluff,” though.
* Content that displays a deeper analysis while examining counterclaims in detail takes time and space   
   to develop.
* Unreferenced essays will not be accepted! If in doubt, CITE!
* If you don’t understand something, ask!
* Read widely & keep an example bank!
* Enjoy the process!!



**ToK Assessment Model**

The assessment model in Theory of Knowledge (ToK) comprises two components, both of which should be completed.

**Part 1 External assessment (40 points)** -Essay on a prescribed title (1,200–1,600 words)

**Part 2 Internal assessment (20 points)** - The Oral Presentation

Though they may change slightly, these are the grade boundaries:

**Overall Grade Boundaries (IA+EA):**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Grade** | A | B | C | D | E |
| **Mark Range** | 48 - 60 | 38 - 47 | 29 - 37 | 19 - 28 | 0 - 18 |

**Essay Grade Boundaries:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Grade** | A | B | C | D | E |
| **Mark Range** | 30 - 40 | 22 - 29 | 17 - 22 | 11 - 16 | 0 - 10 |

**Oral Presentation Grade Boundaries:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Grade** | A | B | C | D | E |
| **Mark Range** | 19 - 20 | 16 - 18 | 13 - 15 | 9 - 12 | 0 - 8 |

**The band descriptors are as follows**:

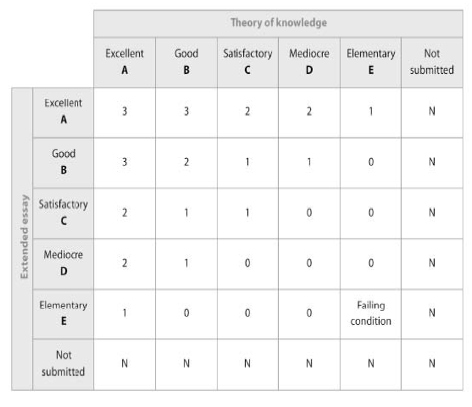
A = Work of an **excellent** standard B = Work of a **good** standard C = Work of a **satisfactory** standard D = Work of a **mediocre** standard E = Work of an **elementary** standard

**Those Three Important Points**

The matrix below illustrates how the ToK grade is combined with the Extended Essay grade to calculate the additional three points to make the Diploma Score out of 45. Often the opportunity to gain these additional points are lost by students who make only a token effort at their ToK presentation / essay and / or their Extended Essay.

For example: ­

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Subject Score (six subjects only)** | **International Avg. Rating** | **Plus ToK / EE points** | **International Avg. Rating** |
| 24 | 71.40 | 3 | 81.75 |
| 28 | 84.80 | 3 | 91.30 |
| 32 | 93.00 | 3 | 95.30 |
| 36 | 96.00 | 3 | 99.35 |
| 40 | 99.80 | 3 | 99.95 |

**ToK / Extended Essay Matrix:**