Theory of Knowledge: Understanding Knowledge Issues, published by IB in 2009, is a very valuable document in explaining and giving examples of Knowledge Questions and introduces key ToK terms for use by students. It has not been revised for the new syllabus, however. This is a document with the goal to bring out key points from that document for use under the current ToK syllabus.

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RDFZ
Key terms
This section is an update of the footnotes on pages 3 and 4 of the Understanding Knowledge Issues publication; updated to reflect the move away from “justified true belief” and towards the concept of knowledge as map and model. It has also been updated to reflect the new groupings of AoKs and WoKs.

Please consider these “working definitions” – these are not official, and are subject to debate. Yes, the WoKs and AoKs have these names, but, for example, IB places psychology under the AoK of Human Sciences – is this the best place for it? These are starting points for conversation, not justified true final answers!

Real World Situation: ToK has the tendency to veer into the rather lofty heights of philosophy and lose a lot of its relevance. ToK should always be connected to a real world situation in order to ground the theory discussed in specific, real world situations. Real World Situations are often used as something to be analyzed, to extract the ToK from it, or as a mode of evaluation of ToK analysis – how do your ToK conclusions impact the understanding of the real world? Real world situations must NOT be hypothetical, and should not be trite or cliché – keep Steve Jobs, Galileo, and any example learned from XDF for a SAT essay far away. They may be personal, but should always be meaningful – you should be able to easily explain why a particular RWS is of interest to you personally, and link it to the ToK world.

Knowledge Claim: When someone tells you something, that is a knowledge claim. Knowledge claims are subject to ToK analysis in many ways; please look under the “verbs” section to see more on this! ToK examines how different Knowledge Claims are treated under different circumstances.

Knowledge Question: The heart of ToK analysis, a good question directly about knowledge. Big official-from-IB section below on this.

Ways of Knowing (WoKs): Our tools for gaining knowledge. They are used in different ways by different Areas of Knowledge. The WoKs are memory, imagination, emotion, reason, intuition, sense perception, language, and faith.

Areas of Knowledge (AoKs): Our different maps, or models, for gaining knowledge. Different AoKs use different methodologies in order to gain and justify different types of knowledge. The AoKs are Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Human Sciences, History, The Arts, Ethics, Religious Knowledge Systems, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Areas of Knowledge often contain different disciplines, which have their own unique ways of thought and work.

Methodology: The way in which a particular Area of Knowledge (or knowledge community, or discipline) works with knowledge.

Paradigm: A framework or perspective for understanding the world.
Kinds of knowledge, and things we do with knowledge (useful verbs!)

**Personal Knowledge:** Stuff you know yourself, in your own head. You have personal knowledge about your favorite ice cream flavor. Stuff you have learned and really understand could also be considered personal knowledge. Personal Knowledge also contains *experiential knowledge*, which is unfortunately outside the scope of ToK class – this refers to things you know because you did them! You learned how to ride a bike by riding a bike, for example.

**Shared Knowledge:** I may know your favorite ice cream flavor, but I don’t really have personal knowledge of your experience of it, only what you can share. Likewise, when I learn that 2+2=4, I was taught this – the knowledge was shared to me. I do not have the deep math knowledge to prove this is true. Shared knowledge is this sort of knowledge that is accepted within a knowledge community; different knowledge communities may share knowledge in different ways – consider Natural Science peer review process, compared to the diffusion of indigenous knowledge through a community.

**Knowledge Community:** A group of individuals who share a common perspective on knowledge. This can look a little like Russian nesting dolls – all natural scientists share an understanding of the Scientific Method, for example, which makes them a knowledge community. But chemists and physicists don’t do exactly the same thing – they are also smaller knowledge communities within the bigger one. Astrophysicists, quantum physicists, and engineers also do very different things with physics – these are even smaller knowledge communities. And even within quantum physics, there are arguments over string theory – different knowledge communities within that one!

*Knowledge can be...*

...generated or created. (What is the process of gaining it? Creating it?)
...acquired (As a student, are you “creating” or “acquiring” knowledge? The process is different!)
...shared. (Personal knowledge becoming shared knowledge.)
...accepted or rejected. (Why?)
...changed or lost. (How?)
...judged or justified. (How do we know a knowledge claim is really knowledge? How do we critically assess knowledge? Can we have different levels of certainty of a knowledge claim?)
...prioritized. (How can we say what piece of information is more important? What happens when our sense of following rules conflicts with our sense of fairness or justice, for example?)
...assumed. (Do our assumptions of certain facts limit our ability to gain knowledge, or are assumptions sometimes necessary?)
...questioned, or doubted, or undermined (what leads to a person questioning previously accepted knowledge?)
The Knowledge Framework

*This section did not appear in the original document, but an understanding of the knowledge framework at the start of the course, and for easy reference, has helped my current classes a great deal.*

The **Ways of Knowing** are our tools for interacting with knowledge. The **Areas of Knowledge** use these tools in different ways to generate knowledge. The **Knowledge Framework** is what we use to describe different AoKs and disciplines, and gives us a way to analyze them.

**Scope and Application** describes and analyzes “what counts” as part of that AoK, and importantly, what doesn’t! We can also use this to think about what practical, real world “problems” that this AoK or discipline is attempting to solve. This can also include current open questions in the field. Also of interest: this is where ethics intersects with every other AoK – do ethical considerations limit the scope of inquiry at all in this AoK?

**Concepts and Language** describes and analyzes the role of language in accumulating and transmitting knowledge. Does the language of Math look like the language of history? This also helps us identify the *conventions* of an AoK or discipline – what is important enough to create its own vocabulary? Does the language of an AoK show its conceptual assumptions?

**Methodology** describes and analyzes the methods or procedures the AoK uses, and analyzes how those methods can lead to the generation of knowledge. It also asks us to examine and question those methods and procedures – what is assumed? And, also of interest – while there may be an ideal methodology, what actually happens in the real world, with real, working human beings in each field? The ideals are sometimes not always lived up to – why?

**Historical Development** describes and analyzes the key points in the development of the AoK – what makes the AoK what it is today? This is sometimes difficult for students to keep in mind, but the subjects you learn in school are all relatively young in terms of intellectual history, or at least how we think about them are products of our own time. How did we get to where we are, and how does the history of a subject shape it?

**Links to Personal Knowledge** forces us to remember that all AoKs are the products of human beings being human. What contribution can an individual make to this field? If you gain knowledge in this AoK, does it bring with it certain responsibilities? What are the implications of knowledge for your own perspective? Does your own perspective influence your own knowledge of this AoK?
Knowledge Questions

The following is reproduced from Understanding Knowledge Issues (2009). Material referring to the previous assessment instrument has been elided.

Knowledge issues are issues about knowledge. They can apply to any aspect of knowledge and may refer to the acquisition, production, shaping, classification, status, and acceptance or rejection of knowledge. Knowledge issues range from the extremely general (“Can a fact exist without a context?”, “What constitutes good evidence?”) to the specific (“How can we distinguish between valid and invalid deductive arguments?”, “What should the role of emotion be in the justification of ethical decisions?”). Both extremes are appropriate focuses for TOK discussions and both can and should be explored in a TOK course. However, not all knowledge issues are equally appropriate for assessment purposes.

Knowledge issues for assessment purposes

Students are required to address knowledge issues in both their essays and their presentations. In both cases it is helpful for students to be able to explore and analyse knowledge issues that will demonstrate their understanding. Given the vast range of knowledge issues that could be addressed, it is appropriate to offer guidance as to what types of knowledge issue are most likely to support high levels of achievement in both essays and presentations.

Knowledge issues that are most likely to support high levels of achievement are:

- open-ended questions that admit more than one possible answer
- explicitly about knowledge in itself and not subject-specific claims
- couched in terms of TOK vocabulary and concepts: the areas of knowledge, the ways of knowing and the concepts in the linking questions—belief, certainty, culture, evidence, experience, explanation, interpretation, intuition, justification, truth, values
- precise in terms of the relationships between these concepts

Note that these conditions are not formal requirements and that marks should always be awarded according to the criteria in the Theory of knowledge guide (March 2006). Experience suggests, however, that knowledge issues that satisfy these conditions are more likely to support success under the assessment criteria. It is important to clarify that although (for presentation purposes), “poor” knowledge issues may be relevant and so may attract credit..., they are unlikely to support the focused exploration and development required for the award of high marks... The development of a “good” knowledge issue is, therefore, advisable for assessment purposes.
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<th>Level</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Example A</th>
<th>Example B</th>
<th>Example C</th>
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| Good  | • An open-ended question  
• Explicitly about knowledge  
• Couched in terms of TOK vocabulary and concepts  
• Precise in terms of relationships between these concepts | How can reason be used to justify religious beliefs? | To what extent can the human sciences use mathematical techniques to make accurate predictions? | What is it about a scientific explanation that makes it convincing or unconvincing? | ??? |
| Intermediate | May be:  
• an open-ended question  
• explicitly about knowledge | Are religious beliefs reasonable? | How do we use models to predict crime waves? | How can we decide if acupuncture works or not? | Should we believe paranormal claims? |
| Poor  | May be:  
• a closed question  
• implicitly about knowledge | How do religious people come to their beliefs? | Will predictions on teenage smoking turn out to be correct? | Does acupuncture work? | Does the paranormal exist? |
| Not a Q | May be:  
• a statement or a description of a situation  
• a closed question  
• a subject-specific topic or question rather than about knowledge in itself | Physics and God | Stopping teenagers smoking | Traditional medicine | What is the sixth sense? |
| RLS | This could be the real-life situation for the presentation or an example in the essay: | Article on Science and religion | A new government policy | My uncle went to an acupuncturist. | A film about ghosts | Your own topic! |