1.6 The TOK essay

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 30 marks**

KEY WORDS prescribed title • claim • counter-claim • area of knowledge • implication

Objective

Prepare the **TOK essay** : choose one of the **six prescribed titles**, unpack it, build **claims and counter-claims** with **real examples** in two areas of knowledge, and reach a reasoned conclusion (1,600 words at most; 10 marks; two thirds of the TOK grade).

You must be able to:

- unpack a prescribed title: key terms, assumptions, scope
- develop claims and counter-claims in two areas of knowledge
- choose specific, real examples
- evaluate and reach a conclusion with implications
- plan within 1,600 words

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

Unpacking a title

Sample title (written for practice): **"The more evidence we have, the more certain we can be." Discuss with reference to two areas of knowledge.**

- **Key terms**: *evidence*, *certain*: define them for your essay.
- **Assumption**: more evidence always means more certainty.
- **Scope**: two areas of knowledge, e.g. natural sciences and history.

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Structure (about 1,600 words)

part	words (guide)
introduction: terms, approach	150
AOK 1: claim, example, counter-claim, example, mini-conclusion	600
AOK 2: the same	600
conclusion: answer, implications, other perspectives	250

Good examples

Specific and real, not "for example, a scientist…". *Natural sciences*: in 2011 the OPERA experiment reported neutrinos faster than light; more checks found a loose cable, so more evidence *reduced* certainty in the first result. *History*: new archives after 1991 changed Cold War history.

Worked counter-claim. "Yet more evidence does not always help: in history, new sources such as the Soviet archives raised new disagreements, because evidence must still be interpreted."

2 Practice

2.1 Identify **one** assumption in the title "The more evidence we have, the more certain we can be." [2]

2.2 The essay limit is 1,600 words. Using the guide in the panel, calculate the share of the essay given to the two areas of knowledge together, and explain why the conclusion should not be cut short. [3]



2.3 Explain how the **OPERA neutrino** result (2011) can be used as an example in the essay. [4]

2.4 Write a **claim**, **counter-claim** and **mini-conclusion** for history and the title above. [6]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 *(Essay-style.)* Write a full plan for: "The more evidence we have, the more certain we can be." Discuss with reference to **two** areas of knowledge. [10]



3.2 Explain **two** mistakes that weaken TOK essays. [5]

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Solutions

Marking: **M1** a correct method, **A1** the correct answer, **B1** an independent mark.

Each answer shows the steps, then the **result**.

2.1

that certainty increases with the amount of evidence; and ignores quality, interpretation and bias of evidence

2.2

$(600 + 600)/1600 \times 100 = \mathbf{75}\,\%$; the conclusion answers the title and shows judgement, which examiners reward; it should also state implications and the significance of other perspectives

2.3

OPERA reported neutrinos apparently faster than light; further checks found an equipment fault, a loose cable, and the result was withdrawn; shows that more evidence can reduce certainty in an earlier claim; and that science corrects itself through testing: a counter-claim to the title

2.4

a claim with a specific historical example, e.g. more sources increase confidence in basic facts; a counter-claim with an example, e.g. new archives produce new interpretations; a mini-conclusion weighing both; clear link back to the title

3.1

Mark with the TOK markbands (out of 10): [9-10] excellent: clear, focused, convincing links, well-chosen examples, implications explored; [7-8] good: focused, mostly clear links, relevant examples; [5-6] satisfactory: some focus, links partly explained; [3-4] basic: limited links, description more than analysis; [1-2] rudimentary. Points that may be included: key terms defined and the title unpacked; a claim in AOK 1 with a specific example; a counter-claim in AOK 1 with an example; a claim and counter-claim in AOK 2 with examples; evaluation leading to mini-conclusions; a conclusion with implications

3.2

any two, explained: generic or hypothetical examples: they cannot be tested and show little knowledge; writing about the subject, not about knowledge: e.g. explaining a science topic instead of how it is known; no counter-claims: the essay becomes one-sided; not answering the title in the conclusion (maximum 5)

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