Exercise walk-through

1.6
The TOK essay

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Theory of Knowledge

The essay on a prescribed title

- Unpack: an expert is a person with training who is trusted by a community; "important" can mean useful, or necessary.
- Natural sciences: peer review by experts catches mistakes before results are accepted.
- **Counterclaim**: experts rejected Marshall's evidence for years; in the end the evidence, not the experts' opinion, decided.

Sources for this lesson

- International Baccalaureate, *__Theory of Knowledge__ guide* (first assessment 2022), including the specimen prescribed titles and the 35 __exhibition__ prompts.
- International Astronomical Union, Resolution B5, "Definition of a Planet in the Solar System" (24 August 2006).
- B. Marshall and J. R. Warren, "Unidentified curved bacilli in the stomach of patients with gastritis and peptic ulceration", *The Lancet* (16 June 1984), and the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 2005.

Key terms

- **Knowledge question**: an open, general question about knowledge itself, not about the subject matter.
- **Perspective**: the point of view, shaped by language, culture, education and interests, from which a knower sees.
- **Confirmation bias**: noticing evidence that supports what we already believe and ignoring the rest.

Exercises 2.1·2.2

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]



Exercises 2.1·2.2

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

2.1

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

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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]



2.2

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

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Exercises 2.3·2.4

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]

Exercises 2.3·2.4

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

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

Exercises 3.1·3.2

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]

Exercises 3.1·3.2

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]



3.1

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

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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