

# TOK: Knowledge Issues

Using our Areas and Ways of Knowing, we have been working on some knowledge issues in class. We have also spent some time working with some of the essay questions, developing examples and identifying knowledge issues. Now it's time for you to practice on your own.

## TOK Essay Title #10

A model is a simplified representation of some aspect of the world. In what ways may models help or hinder the search for knowledge?

For the question above, identify three possible examples and real-life situations. Next, identify a knowledge issue which fits the "poor" descriptors as found in the "Understanding Knowledge Issues" publication. Then develop a knowledge issue from each of these examples which fit the criteria for "good". Create a chart similar to this one on a page in your Source Book labeled: 5. TOK Essay Title #10 Chart.

Example / Real-Life Situation	"Poor" Knowledge Issue	"Good" Knowledge Issue

Then write an Extended Journal that addresses this question. Each Extended Journal entry should be typed and have the following:

1. Question written at the top of the page
2. A concrete, personal, specific example / real-life situation
3. 300 words or more
4. Use our Ways and Areas of Knowing that we have investigated

## Knowledge issues, knowers and knowing

"The time has come," the Walrus said,  
"To talk of many things:  
Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—  
Of cabbages—and kings ...."

Lewis Carroll

People know many things: they know when they are cold, or sick; they know if they are sad or happy, lonely or in love; they know how to make fire; they know that the sun will set and rise.

Nonetheless people rarely stop to think about the processes by which knowledge is produced, obtained or achieved, nor about why, under what circumstances, and in what ways knowledge is renewed or reshaped by different individuals and groups at different times or from different perspectives or approaches.

The questions in this guide are meant to provide opportunities to pause and reflect upon the complexity and richness of knowledge and the process of knowing, on the scope and limits of knowledge, as well as on the roles and responsibilities that knowledge may bring to us as individuals, groups or communities. As such, these questions focus on knowledge issues. The use of this term "knowledge issues" is an expressly wide one, the purpose of which is to allow students to undertake an exploration of a diversity of TOK questions that are relevant to them in their specific context. Precisely because of its breadth, however, it is important to provide guidance for teachers and students as to what is and, importantly, what is not a knowledge issue.

## 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. These issues are intended to open to inquiry and exploration not only problems but also strengths of knowledge. Students sometimes overlook the positive value of different kinds of knowledge, and the discriminatory power of methods used to search for knowledge, to question it, and to establish its validity. Knowledge issues can reveal how knowledge can be a benefit, a gift, a pleasure and a basis for further thought and action, just as they can uncover the possible uncertainties, biases in approach, or limitations relating to knowledge, ways of knowing, and the methods of verification and justification appropriate in different areas of knowledge.

Two examples:

- Consider the question, “What is the value of distinguishing between what we know and what we don’t know?” In the context of problems of knowledge, the emphasis is likely to be on the good reasons we have for doubting whether the lines we draw between the two are as clear as we sometimes suppose them to be. In contrast, in the context of knowledge issues, the reasons we have to maintain the legitimacy and usefulness of the distinction are likely to come to the fore.
- Alternatively, consider the question, “Is there one way of knowing that is best for acquiring knowledge?” In the context of problems of knowledge, the emphasis is likely to be on why over-reliance on or confidence in each way of knowing would be unwise; in the context of knowledge issues, reasons for relying on or trusting ways of knowing should also be considered.

In the broadest understanding of the term, knowledge issues include everything that can be approached from a TOK point of view (that is, in accordance with the TOK aims and objectives as they are formulated) and that allows a development, discussion or exploration from this point of view. For example, a simple question that is often raised by students, “Are teachers’ course handouts and textbooks always right?”, can be treated as a knowledge issue when correctly framed in the context of TOK aims and objectives. On the contrary, it can be the prompt for entirely trivial answers that have little or nothing to do with TOK.

It is to be expected that a good treatment of many knowledge issues will necessarily deal with several aspects described above and that these can be interwoven in different, equally relevant ways. For this reason the treatment of knowledge issues can be distinguished from other issues that might arise in the context of a particular subject area. For example, a consideration of sense perception exclusively from the point of view of the psychology or biology of perception is not a TOK treatment of a knowledge issue.

