

Knowledge and Language: Lingua Franca

Lesson 4: Writing the TOK Essay

Focus: *How can knowledge users develop strong, structured arguments?*

Objectives	Write a fully developed TOK essay claim using the TOK essay structure. Apply real-world examples and counterclaims to support arguments. Engage critically with TOK concepts (e.g., power, culture, perspective). Practice structured writing for the TOK essay assessment.
Steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Introduction (5 mins) Guiding Question: <i>"How do we develop a strong argument in a TOK essay?"</i> Recap: What makes a TOK essay unique?<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on knowledge (not merely opinions).• Use real-world examples drawn from multiple Areas of Knowledge (AOKs).• Include counterclaims.• Refer to TOK concepts.• Reflect on the implications and limitations of your argument.2. Examining a Strong TOK Essay Claim (10 mins)<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Break down an example paragraph of your choice with students. Ask them to annotate:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Claim: The stance or argument addressing the TOK prompt.• Example: A real-world situation supporting or illustrating the claim.• Counterclaim: A contrasting perspective that challenges the claim.• TOK Links: Explicit connection to TOK concepts and reflection on how knowledge is produced or validated.b. Discussion Questions:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does the example strengthen the claim?• Which Ways of Knowing (WOKs) or Areas of Knowledge (AOKs) are relevant here?• Does the counterclaim effectively challenge the claim, encouraging deeper exploration?• Teacher Tip: Show a quick visual of the TOK essay structure (introduction, body claims, conclusion), highlighting where this developed paragraph fits in.3. Writing Task: Drafting a TOK Paragraph (15 mins)<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Select a prompt: Provide students with a list of essay prompts to choose from. These could be prompts that you've prepared (e.g., Should English be the dominant language for global communication and knowledge systems? To what extent does language shape what knowledge is considered valid? How does the language we speak influence the knowledge we access or produce?) or a prescribed title from the official IB list that ties to the prevalence of a single language.• Students plan the paragraph, including notes on:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Claim: A statement connecting directly to the prompt.○ Example: A real-life scenario (e.g., Wikipedia bias, Ruiyuan Yuan's TEDx talk, Latin American research exclusion, Arabic content moderation) that demonstrates the claim.○ Counterclaim: An alternative viewpoint or critique that challenges the initial argument.○ TOK Link: Exploration of how power, culture, or perspective shape knowledge in this scenario.• Write the paragraph: Emphasize clarity, coherence, and the TOK focus (not just describing the event but analyzing how it affects knowledge).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teacher Tip: Ensure students reference relevant AOKs — e.g., how Mathematics interprets language for common understanding, or how Art creates and translates its own language and how that differs among cultures. <p>4. Peer Review and Refinement (10 mins)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students exchange their writing in pairs or small groups and use the TOK essay checklist to give feedback. Use the following discussion points to help students develop their feedback: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Claim: Is it clearly stated, and does it tie back to the prompt? ○ Example: Is it concrete, relevant, and well-explained? ○ Counterclaim: Is it meaningfully different or just a weaker version of the claim? ○ TOK Link: Does it show awareness of how knowledge is justified, constructed, or challenged? ○ Language and Clarity: Are there any vague statements or unclear references? ● If time permits, students revise immediately based on peer feedback.
Reflection	<p>Reflection (10 mins): Discuss the following reflection questions in open discussion or exit ticket format:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What was the most challenging part of writing this? ● How do different perspectives influence debates on having a lingua franca? ● How does this practice help prepare for the TOK essay assessment? <p>Extension / Homework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Option A: Expand the paragraph by adding another real-world example or a deeper analysis of the counterclaim. ● Option B: Research a different context (another region or era) to see if the claim holds universally or changes with cultural/political conditions. ● Option C: Draft an introductory or concluding paragraph linking the argument to a broader TOK theme.
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lesson Slides ● TOK Essay Checklist ● Example TOK Essay prescribed titles
TOK Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Power: Who decides which languages carry authority in global knowledge systems? ● Perspective: How does language shape the lens through which we interpret truth or knowledge? ● Culture: How does linguistic dominance impact the survival and transmission of cultural knowledge?
Critical Thinking Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Confronting Biases and Assumptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Questioning Assumptions: Students explore how assumptions about language — such as the neutrality of English, the universality of translation, or the accessibility of dominant knowledge systems — can shape or distort what is considered valid knowledge. ● Exploring Contexts and Expert Opinions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Analyzing Disciplinary Frameworks: Students analyze how the goals and methodologies of different disciplines — such as linguistics, history, science, or philosophy — shape what is accepted as credible, objective, or inclusive knowledge. ● Responsiveness and Flexibility of Thought

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Shifting Perspectives: Students adapt their reasoning, and explore how knowledge claims about language are shaped by context, purpose, and worldview.● Extrapolation and Reapplication of Principles<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Identifying Wider Implications: Students consider how the essay's conclusions about language and knowledge might influence future educational policies, research accessibility, or cultural representation in global discourse. |
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