

Knowledge and Politics: Censorship and Whistleblowing

Lesson 4: Writing a 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., objectivity, perspective, power) Practice structured writing for the TOK essay assessment
Activities	<p>Introduction (5 mins):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● 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 (e.g., objectivity, perspective, power).○ Reflect on the implications and limitations of your argument.● Teacher Tip: Show a quick visual of the TOK essay structure (introduction, body claims, conclusion), highlighting where this developed paragraph fits in. <p>Examining a Strong TOK Essay Claim (10 mins)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● 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 (e.g., objectivity, perspective, power) and reflection on how knowledge is produced or validated.● 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? <p>Writing Task: Drafting a TOK Paragraph (15 mins)</p> <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., "Does the suppression of knowledge always reflect an abuse of power?") or a prescribed title from the official IB list that ties to censorship/whistleblowing.● 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., the Meta censorship case, Edward Snowden's revelations) that demonstrates the claim.○ Counterclaim: An alternative viewpoint or critique that challenges the initial argument.○ TOK Link: Exploration of how bias, power, or ethical considerations shape knowledge in this scenario.● Students could plan their essay section out on Kialo. The TOK essay checklist outlines a suggested approach.● 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 the Human Sciences interpret freedom of speech, or how History deals with archival records/censorship.

	<p>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 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 censorship debates? 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 (e.g., the reliability of testimony or the ethics of whistleblowing).
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lesson Slides TOK Essay Checklist Example TOK Essay prescribed titles
TOK Concepts	<p>Bias and Power: How do corporate or governmental interests influence what knowledge is presented?</p> <p>Ethics and Responsibility: Is it ethical to censor or leak sensitive information?</p> <p>Perspective: How do different cultural or ideological backgrounds alter interpretations of censorship?</p> <p>Reflection on Knowledge Construction: Are we always aware when knowledge is being shaped or suppressed?</p>
Critical Thinking Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confronting Biases and Assumptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questioning Assumptions: Students explore how censorship or whistleblowing debates often rely on implicit assumptions about power, truth, and the public's right to know. Exploring Contexts and Expert Opinions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyzing Disciplinary Frameworks: Students analyze how different disciplines — such as journalism, law, ethics, and history — influence what is accepted as credible, objective, or ethically justifiable. Responsiveness and Flexibility of Thought <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shifting Perspectives: Students explore how knowledge claims about censorship or whistleblowing 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 suppression or exposure of knowledge might influence future government policies, media ethics, educational standards, or their own stance on freedom of information.