

# Knowledge and the Knower: Personal Memory vs Shared Memory

## Lesson 4: Writing a TOK Essay

**Focus:** Develop a focused, well-structured body paragraph (Claim → Example → Counterclaim → TOK Link) in the context of historical narratives, addressing questions of power, bias, and ethical responsibility.

Objectives	<p>Write a coherent TOK essay paragraph that explores a knowledge issue related to historical narratives. Incorporate real-world examples and counterclaims to deepen the argument.</p> <p>Engage critically with TOK concepts (e.g., perspectives, bias, power, justification).</p> <p>Practice a structured approach to the TOK essay assessment.</p>
Steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>1. Introduction (5 mins):</b><p><b>Guiding Question:</b> "How do we develop a strong argument in a TOK essay?"</p><p><b>Recap:</b> What makes a TOK essay unique?</p><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focus on knowledge (not merely opinions).</li><li>• Use real-world examples drawn from multiple Areas of Knowledge (AOKs).</li><li>• Include counterclaims.</li><li>• Refer to TOK concepts (e.g., perspectives, bias and power, justification).</li><li>• Reflect on the implications and limitations of your argument.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Teacher Tip: Show a quick visual of the TOK essay structure (introduction, body claims, conclusion), highlighting where this developed paragraph fits in.</li></ul></li></ul></li><li><b>2. Examining a Strong TOK Essay Claim (10 mins)</b><ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Break down an example paragraph of your choice with students. Ask them to annotate:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Claim – The stance or argument addressing the TOK prompt.</li><li>• Example – A real-world situation supporting or illustrating the claim.</li><li>• Counterclaim – A contrasting perspective that challenges the claim.</li><li>• TOK Links – Explicit connection to TOK concepts and reflection on how knowledge is produced or validated.</li></ul></li><li>b. Discussion Questions:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How does the example strengthen the claim?</li><li>• Which Ways of Knowing (WOKs) or Areas of Knowledge (AOKs) are relevant here?</li><li>• Does the counterclaim effectively challenge the claim, encouraging deeper exploration?</li></ul></li></ol></li><li><b>3. Writing Task: Drafting a TOK Paragraph (15 mins)</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Select a prompt: Provide students with a list of essay prompts to choose from. These could be prompts that you've prepared (e.g., "To what extent can censorship and bias distort our understanding of historical events, leading to unreliable historical narratives?") or a prescribed title from the official IB list that ties to memory/history.</li><li>• Students plan the paragraph, including notes on:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Claim: Deliberate censorship by those in power often leads to significant gaps in recorded history, shaping what future generations perceive as 'truth.'</li><li>◦ Example: Governments restricting access to war archives, creating skewed accounts of victories and suppressing evidence of atrocities (e.g., classified WWII documents withheld for decades).</li><li>◦ Counterclaim: Even in the absence of direct censorship, historians' cultural and personal biases can subtly color narratives, indicating that distortion isn't exclusive to official suppression.</li><li>◦ TOK Link: Historical knowledge critically depends on who controls the evidence and how it is curated. Within the AOK of History, corroboration and acknowledgment of bias are essential to mitigate the effects of censorship and partial accounts.</li></ul></li><li>• 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"><li>◦ Teacher Tip: Ensure students reference relevant AOKs (e.g., how the Sciences interpret discoveries and assign credits and contributions).</li></ul></li></ul></li><li><b>4. Peer Review &amp; Refinement (10 mins)</b></li></ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students exchange their writing in pairs or small groups, and use the <a href="#">essay checklist</a> to give feedback. Use the following discussion points to help students develop their feedback: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Claim: Is it clearly stated, and does it tie back to the prompt?</li> <li>Example: Is it concrete, relevant, and well-explained?</li> <li>Counterclaim: Is it meaningfully different or just a weaker version of the claim?</li> <li>TOK Link: Does it show awareness of how knowledge is justified, constructed, or challenged?</li> <li>Language and Clarity: Are there any vague statements or unclear references?</li> </ul> </li> <li>If time permits, students revise immediately based on peer feedback.</li> </ul> <p><b>5. Reflection &amp; Discussion (5-10 mins)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What was the most challenging part of writing this?</li> <li>How do different perspectives influence debates on power and bias?</li> <li>How does this practice help prepare for the TOK essay assessment?</li> </ul> <p><b>6. Extension / Homework</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Option A: Expand the paragraph by adding another real-world example or a deeper analysis of the counterclaim.</li> <li>Option B: Research a different context (another region or era) to see if the claim holds universally or changes with cultural/political conditions.</li> <li>Option C: Draft an introductory or concluding paragraph linking the argument to a broader TOK theme.</li> </ul>
<b>Reflection</b>	<p><b>Reflection (10 mins):</b> Discuss the following reflection questions in open discussion or exit ticket format:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What was the most challenging part of writing this?</li> <li>How does this practice help prepare for the TOK essay assessment?</li> </ul>
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lesson Slides</li> <li>TOK Essay Checklist</li> <li>Example TOK Essay prescribed titles</li> </ul>
<b>TOK Concepts</b>	<p><b>Perspectives:</b> How do we sort through diverse viewpoints to decide what "really" happened?</p> <p><b>Power:</b> Who decides on the "official" version of events?</p> <p><b>Justification:</b> What counts as evidence for reliability?</p>
<b>Critical Thinking Concepts</b>	<p><b>Confronting Biases and Assumptions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questioning Whose Stories Are Prioritized: Students reflect on how example selection can privilege certain cultural or institutional voices while omitting marginalized perspectives.</li> <li>Examining Assumptions in Claims: Students identify the underlying assumptions behind their own claims and counterclaims, and consider how these shape the direction of their TOK argument.</li> </ul> <p><b>Exploring Contexts and Expert Opinions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluating Historians as Knowers: Students consider how the status of "historical expert" is constructed and whether authority always equates to reliability.</li> <li>Contextual Framing of Claims: Students assess how political or cultural context influences the persuasiveness and interpretation of a TOK claim.</li> </ul> <p><b>Responsiveness and Flexibility of Thought:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrating Peer Feedback: Students revise their paragraph by addressing critique, refining their claims and counterclaims accordingly.</li> <li>Balancing Perspective and Clarity: Students practice expressing complex or uncertain knowledge claims in a way that remains coherent and focused.</li> </ul> <p><b>Extrapolation and Reapplication of Principles</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Linking Essay Writing to Knowledge Construction: Students consider how building a TOK essay parallels how knowledge is created, negotiated, and justified in the real world.</li> </ul>

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Extending TOK Tools Across AOKs: Students apply concepts like bias, justification, and power from History to other AOKs (e.g., Ethics, the Human Sciences) to deepen analysis.</li></ul> |
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