

# Theory of knowledge prescribed titles

November 2008 and May 2009

## Instructions to candidates

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Your theory of knowledge essay for examination must be submitted to your teacher for authentication. It must be written on one of the ten titles (questions) provided below. You may choose any title, but are recommended to consult with your teacher. Your essay will be marked according to the assessment criteria published in the *Theory of Knowledge* guide. Remember to centre your essay on knowledge issues and, where appropriate, refer to other parts of your IB programme and to your experiences as a knower. Always justify your statements and provide relevant examples to illustrate your arguments. Pay attention to the implications of your arguments, and remember to consider what can be said against them. If you use external sources, cite them according to a recognized convention.

Note that statements in quotations in these titles are not necessarily authentic: they present a real point of view but may not have been spoken or written by an actual person. It is appropriate to analyse them but it is unnecessary, even unwise, to spend time on researching a context for them.

Examiners mark essays against the title as set. Respond to the title exactly as given; do not alter it in any way.

Your essay must be between 1200 and 1600 words in length.

- 1 “Science is built of facts the way a house is built of bricks: but an accumulation of facts is no more science than a pile of bricks is a house” (Henri Poincaré). Discuss in relation to science and at least one other area of knowledge.
- 2 When should we trust our senses to give us truth?
- 3 Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of reason as a way of knowing.
- 4 “Seek simplicity, and distrust it” (Alfred North Whitehead). Is this always good advice for a knower?
- 5 “In expanding the field of knowledge we but increase the horizon of ignorance” (Henry Miller). Is this true?
- 6 Compare and contrast our approach to knowledge about the past with our approach to knowledge about the future.
- 7 “Moral wisdom seems to be as little connected to knowledge of ethical theory as playing good tennis is to knowledge of physics” (Emrys Westacott). To what extent should our actions be guided by our theories in ethics and elsewhere?
- 8 To understand something you need to rely on your own experience and culture. Does this mean that it is impossible to have objective knowledge?
- 9 “The knowledge that we value the most is the knowledge for which we can provide the strongest justifications.” To what extent would you agree with this claim?
- 10 “There can be no knowledge without emotion... until we have felt the force of the knowledge, it is not ours” (adapted from Arnold Bennett). Discuss this vision of the relationship between knowledge and emotion.