

The TOK presentation

Your presentation serves two purposes. While the assessment purpose will probably loom largest in your mind, it is important that you do not lose sight of the other: your presentation is an integral part of the TOK course. Your classmates should learn more about TOK from your presentations, as you should learn from theirs. Although you will not be marked on your presentation skills, do have a thought for your classmates and try to make it an enjoyable as well as an intellectually stimulating experience!

The presentation process

You might be tempted to grab the first likely looking topic and start writing a script, but we suggest that you approach the task in four stages:

Choose your focus → **Brainstorm** the elements to include
→ **Plan** out the presentation → **Give** the presentation

We will concentrate mostly on the first of these stages for two reasons. First, we believe that if you choose your focus carefully, developing the real-life situation and knowledge issue from it thoughtfully, then you are very likely to do a good job of the rest. Second, the brainstorming and planning steps are similar to those for the essay, so you can look back at our advice for them in "Chapter 4".

Before you read on, you might like to watch one or more of the presentations on the DVD that accompanies this book. That will give you an idea of how other students have approached theirs, and our advice might then make more sense to you.

Choosing your focus

Your first idea for the focus of your presentation can come to you in a variety of forms. Maybe you already have a knowledge issue in mind, or a topic from your academic studies or the broader social world. Perhaps you have identified a real-life situation that you think has TOK implications. Whatever your starting focus, the IB requires that you develop that focus in a particular way. Your presentation must identify and explore a knowledge issue raised by a substantive real-life situation that

is of interest to you. Note the two important elements: what the nature of the situation you use is, and how you must develop and deal with a knowledge issue arising from that situation. We'll start with the nature of the real-life situation.

Interesting: find a situation that involves issues that matter to you. If you are working alone, look at your own interests. You may be fascinated by different people's attitudes to heavy metal music, or love the powerful use of language by your favourite poet. If you are working in a group, look for what you have in common: take time to discuss possibilities, so that every member can make a positive contribution. For example, one group might find that they all have parents who work in health-related fields (some mainstream, some alternative) and hence decide on exploring the efficacy of homeopathy. Another might be made up of residents of the school's boarding house, and decide to investigate how to live harmoniously in close quarters with others who are different.

Substantive: your situation should have substance, so that it raises an important knowledge issue. Trivial knowledge claims are unlikely to lead to deep TOK considerations. It is hard to be clear cut here, because some people can find a serious knowledge issue in even the most unpromising-looking situation, but you are unlikely to get much out of the claim in your primary school mathematics book that $1 + 1 = 2$, or the Louvre's catalogue claiming that the *Mona Lisa* is art. Better related situations might be a mathematical savant's claim that numbers have colours and personalities, or a claim that the graffiti that appeared on the school's wall is art.

Real-life: the situation should not be one you made up just for the TOK presentation. "Real-life" should not be interpreted to rule out such sources as incidents in novels or films: you and your classmates see these in your real lives. Rather, the situation must be one you have come across in your own experience that has implications for how you, and others, act in your own lives. Your own experience here is widely understood to include your personal life, your studies at school, your reading of books, papers or magazines and watching of other media and so on. Literature, films, songs, TV programmes and so on frequently raise knowledge issues of central concern in our real lives. On this interpretation, Shakespeare's depiction of Romeo's suicide because he "knows" Juliet is dead is as real life as George W. Bush's claim of victory in the war in Iraq, or your witnessing of a homeless boy stealing food from a big supermarket.

Situation: when you actually give the presentation, you should start with specific happenings or events, and not with an abstract question or issue. If what your group decides to look at is something like "is emotion the enemy of reason?", then find

an appropriate situation to initiate your presentation, rather than starting it by asking this question. So, even if your interest is first sparked by a large issue such as the relation of emotion to reason, look for a specific incident, news story or similar to ground it in real life, such as a news story of environmentalists being injured trying to stop a whaling ship from killing whales. Although it is by no means essential, there is a good case for finding a situation in which you have been personally involved. Come back to the situation regularly in your presentation, to illustrate how the knowledge issues you are exploring relate to real life.

When you sit down to plan your presentation, it can be difficult to think of real-life situations to use, or even a topic that will lead you to a good real-life situation. Therefore, we recommend that, whenever you come across an interesting or puzzling situation, which makes you think “there is TOK in that!”, you should make a note of it as a possible presentation starter.

What interesting, substantive real-life situations might make a good presentation for you?

Dealing with your presentation

“Don’t just state facts!” (Jaclyn)

“My last presentation didn’t dig deep enough; it was just giving out some surface information but not much of our own thinking.” (Malcolm)

Once you have the real-life situation, what do you do with it? Maybe you have made presentations to your classes in the past. Note carefully: the expectations for the TOK presentation probably differ markedly from these in one important respect. In those, you were quite likely to be imparting information or maybe arguing for one side of a controversial issue. In TOK it is different: you will be exploring knowledge issues. We’ll illustrate this point with a couple of examples: the building of the pyramids; and the ethics of a starving person stealing food.

In a standard informational presentation, your job would be to find out as much as possible about the building of the pyramids, and then to tell the class. You might describe in detail the ways the large blocks were moved, how the slaves were fed and what the purpose of the pyramids was.

A TOK presentation on the same topic would be marked low if this was all you did. Only a small, introductory section of your presentation needs to give us information like this: just enough so that we know what your topic is about. In our example, you might show a few minutes of a documentary of the building of the pyramids where claims about the moving of blocks, the slaves and the pyramids’ purpose are made. This will set up your knowledge issue concerning how reliable the information in the documentary is. You might state it as: Are there equally compelling alternative interpretations of historical evidence?

In a standard presentation on a controversial issue, you would most likely argue for the answer with which you agree, or maybe even-handedly mention pros and cons. So, you might say a starving person ought to be allowed to steal food without punishment, mentioning their distress, the profits made by big supermarkets and so on. In a TOK presentation, you need to identify a knowledge issue, such as: In ethics, how can we know when it is acceptable to punish someone?

Clearly stating the knowledge issue you identified in your real-life situation is essential to meeting criterion A. The rest of your presentation should then explore this knowledge issue. During this second phase of the presentation, you need to show how you meet the remaining three criteria. You need to be able to discuss (in the first example) the underlying standards of adequacy of evidence, or (in the second) rationales for punishment, that could be advanced on both sides, and analyse them for adequacy. You are aiming to understand the knowledge issue and strive for at least tentative or partial answers.

Note that, since this phase ought to be the bulk of your presentation, you should not choose a topic that requires extensive information before your classmates can appreciate what the knowledge issue is. Indeed, reasonably common, well-known or easy to grasp situations are often the best for a presentation.

The relationship between the real-life situation, the identification of the knowledge issue, and the developing of approaches to the knowledge issue is shown well in the following diagram.

How will you make sure that your presentation explores a knowledge issue?

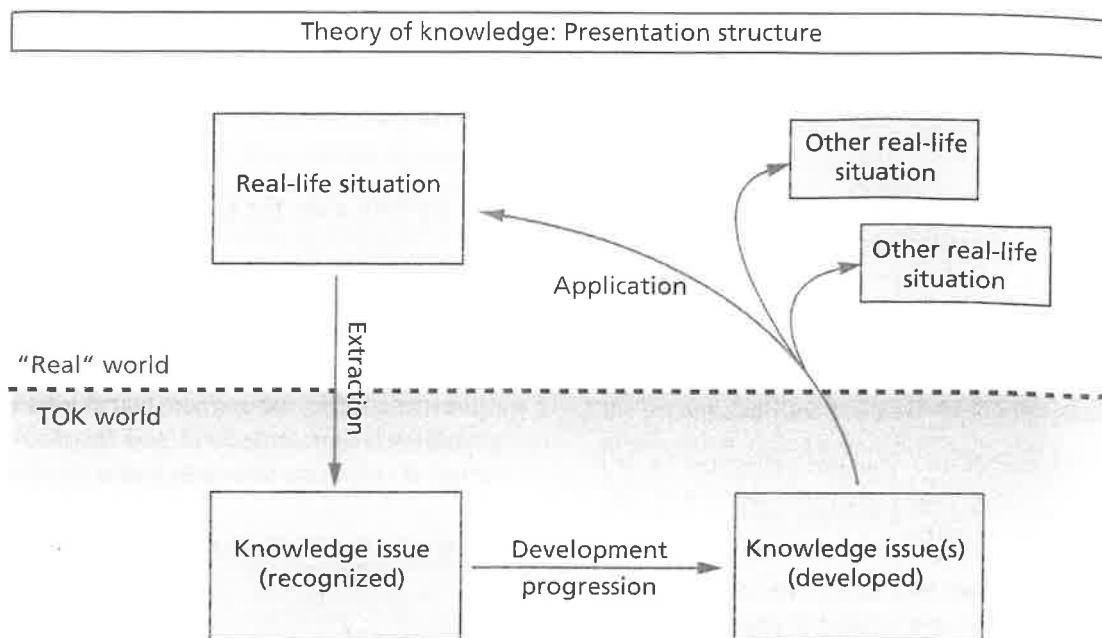


Figure 5

Unpacking the presentation assessment criteria

As is the case in regard to the essay (see "Chapter 4"), you need to have a sound understanding of the demands of the assessment criteria if you are to make sure your presentation meets them. Indeed, on the *Presentation marking form* (see the TK/PMF in "Appendix 2"), you will be asked to mark yourself against the four criteria straight after your presentation and to justify your mark briefly, so you had better know what they mean! Samples of these forms from previous students are given below (with the commentaries on the sample presentations). Your teacher will also mark you against the criteria and, after considering your self-marking, will decide on the mark to forward to the IB. You can score from 0 to 5 on each of the four criteria, for a total mark out of 20.

Please note that the forms used here are from the 2009 examination sessions. They may be altered for future examination sessions.

Criterion A assesses how well you have **identified a knowledge issue** that arises naturally and centrally from your real-life situation. You are allowed to consult with your teacher about the suitability of your planning, and nowhere is this more important than in choosing a good real-life situation and focusing on a good knowledge issue that arises from it.

Your presentation is part of the TOK course for the rest of the class: if you choose a sharp, fruitful knowledge issue, then the presentation is likely to strengthen their understanding and enjoyment of TOK.

- Pick your real-life situation carefully, and show clearly how your knowledge issue arises from it.
- Remember the hint that a knowledge issue can often be phrased "How do we know that ... ?" (see also "Chapter 3" on knowledge issues).
- Given the time constraints, focus clearly on one knowledge issue (as you develop it, you may possibly include a few closely related ones that it raises).

Criterion B is about how well you have **shown your understanding** of the knowledge issue you have identified (and any related, subsidiary knowledge issues) through developing and exploring it. Link your knowledge issue to relevant knowledge considerations you have gained during the course. Some examples are:

- the influence of the knower's attributes on their interpretation of your situation
- the role of relevant WOKs in creating knowledge about the situation

- the methods used by several AOKs in handling your situation.

This criterion is similar to the essay criterion A, so check out the advice we gave there for demonstrating the depth and breadth of your understanding.

For **critterion C**, ensure that your presentation **draws on your own experiences and reflective insights**. After all, you were free to choose the topic, so you ought easily to be able to personalize it.

- Show why the situation, and the knowledge issue, you have chosen is so important to you.
- Construct your arguments from your own reflections (or, in a group, discussions), rather than merely borrowing ones you have heard or read elsewhere.
- Choose examples from your own experience, including your everyday life, your studies, your reading and so on.
- Demonstrate why your audience ought to care.

This criterion covers similar territory to part of the essay criterion B, so look there for more advice.

Finally, for **critterion D**, you need to develop in some detail **more than one way of looking** at the knowledge issue. Here are some suggestions (you may not need to cover them all).

- Remember that you are looking for different approaches to the knowledge issue, rather than different opinions about the real-life situation.
- Consider how someone different from you might approach the knowledge issue: if you are presenting in a group, then you may find the differences between you.
- Explore any differences that using other WOKs or AOKs as tools of inquiry would make.
- If you are tempted to turn your inquiry into a debate between two opposing perspectives, remember that most knowledge issues are more complex than that. Aim to explore the similarities and differences of different approaches to the knowledge issue and seek to establish a broader understanding that might resolve or reconcile them.
- Show the wider implications by looking beyond the specific situation you started with to other related ones.

Again, essay criterion B includes a similar section.

Be prepared

Whether your initial idea for your presentation is a real-life situation, a topic or a knowledge issue, when you are planning

your presentation, keep in mind the following structure.

- Make sure that you find an **interesting, substantive real-life situation**, and start your presentation by briefly outlining it.
- Next, explicitly **state the key knowledge issue** that you will explore, explaining how it arises from your situation.
- Finally, use most of your presentation time to **explore the knowledge issue** in relation to your real-life situation: demonstrate your understanding of the issue, drawing on your experience yet making sure that at least one other perspective is represented well. Link this discussion back to the real-life situation and other similar situations.

Individual or group?

“For presentations, it is really important to have a group of students who are diverse in their ways of thinking and who can contribute clashing and supporting ideas, because TOK is not solely about who is right but more about paradigms and ways of viewing certain issues.”
(Jaclyn)

Each presentation can be given individually or in a group. Which will you go for? There are advantages and disadvantages in each. Weigh them up and find what suits you.

If you are thinking of giving an individual presentation, consider whether you:

- already have a strong personal interest in a topic, probably arising from your own experience
- have thought through a distinctive, personalized approach, and can already talk about it spontaneously
- can cover different perspectives and arguments by yourself
- are sure that your situation and knowledge issue can be handled adequately in about 10 minutes, which is the maximum time per student in a presentation. If you think you will need longer, you really should look for a classmate (or several) who shares your interest.

If you are thinking of joining in a group presentation, consider these points.

- More participants mean more input and different perspectives are available within the group to work from.
- You will have a longer time to go into more depth: 20 minutes for a pair, and 30 minutes maximum if your group has three or more in it.

- You can set up skits, role plays or similar where different perspectives are presented by different participants (but avoid ending up with an “is so”—“is not” debate).
- The larger the group, the more you will have to negotiate and compromise, as you are sharing control, and the harder it might be to develop a coherent presentation that holds your audience’s attention.
- Finding a real-life situation you all want to work with can be more difficult.
- Ensure that every group member has a substantial input to a unified presentation (over both planning and presenting)—don’t just chop it up and give everyone a piece to do.

Which do you think would suit your strengths better: an individual or a group presentation?

Brainstorming and planning

Once you have chosen what your presentation will be about, you need to brainstorm and plan. As with your essay, the quality of your presentation will reflect how well you have planned it, and the process is similar. We have talked above about the shape and features your presentation ought to have, but you will have to fill in the details. As outlined at the start of the chapter, remember that there are many modes you can use to put across your ideas—lectures, role plays, questions for (or participation from) your audience, audio-visual supports and many more—but that you are not allowed merely to read out a pre-written text. Brainstorm which modes of presentation might make your presentation informative and engaging. Brainstorm which elements of your TOK course are most relevant to your real-life situation, and what detailed points you may want to make. Consider possible examples and counter-examples, arguments and counter-arguments. Think about what your overall line of argument will be. Look back at the brainstorming section of “Chapter 4” for some further clues to what you should consider.

Now you can plan. Decide which bits of your brainstorm materials are good ones. Put all this material into a coherent order.

What method of planning—a mind map, a spider diagram, a planning tool in a word processor, scribbling on scraps of paper, or some other—will suit you best?

You need to complete, and hand your teacher, a *Presentation planning document* (TK/PPD, see examples with some of the presentation commentaries below) **before** you give the presentation. Going over a draft with your teacher much earlier is a very good idea. Preparing your TK/PPD will aid you in your planning, making sure you are on the right track. This is not a script but a summary of your plan. It needs to make your thinking clear: the situation you are analysing, the specific knowledge issue, and an outline of the main points you will make, in one A4 page.

Your teacher can also use the document to assist in their marking should your presentation for any reason—overenthusiastic questioning from the audience, equipment failure etc—not go according to plan.

Be prepared

- Choose whether you will give an **individual or group** presentation, keeping in mind the advantages and disadvantages of each.
- **Brainstorm** and **plan** your presentation carefully.
- **Complete a planning document** that summarizes the specific points you will make.
- Remember, you are not being assessed on how slick and professional your presentation skills are, but on the **quality of your TOK inquiry** into the knowledge issue raised by the situation you have chosen.