

**Grade 11 Final TOK Exam**  
**Essay titles and their corresponding IBDP subject reports**

**1. To what extent is truth different in mathematics, the arts and ethics? (M10)**

Three examples of Knowledge Issues that *could* be addressed in this title:

1. Does the word 'truth' have different meanings in different contexts?
2. What is the role of reason (or emotion) in trying to reach 'truth'?
3. Are mathematical statements true because we *define* them to be so, or because we discover them to be so?

The most successful essays used the three areas to explore the concept of truth in general, using the three areas as a platform for analysis. Weaker essays simply discussed the three areas in isolation without attempting a comparison as demanded by the title, and sometimes without a strong focus on truth. Many students claimed certainty was apparently easy to achieve in Maths because  $1 + 1$  is always 2, and did not address alternative views. Similarly, many claimed that we cannot reach truth in either art or ethics, without serious, or often any, consideration of alternatives. The very commonly given argument was badly flawed; that *because* there are differences of opinion, *therefore*, there can be no truth in art or ethics. The conclusion is, of course, defensible, but the argument is not, and one examiner writes, "candidates seem ill equipped to go beyond banal descriptions of relativism".

**2. "Tell me how you're conducting your search and I'll tell you what you're looking for." To what extent do the methods used in different Areas of Knowledge determine the scope of the research and the conclusions you can reach? M06**

This question attracted very few essays, and examiners felt that the essays were often either very strong or very weak. Some strong essays considered possible relationships between science and religion, with explicit reference to the extent of the reach of empirical inquiry. In weaker essays there was a tendency to concentrate on methods without exploring how these methods link to the scope of research and the conclusions. Such essays ended up as uncritical descriptions of, for example, the scientific method. In other cases students seemed willing to conflate 'methods' with 'ways of knowing' and to narrowly assign these 'methods' to specific areas of knowledge in a list-like manner.

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**3. Evaluate the role of intuition in different areas of knowledge. M08**

This was a fairly popular title. The issue of definition (mentioned above) was a common one, though some chose to define it as a mysterious process about which little can be said, and were then unable to do more than list examples; this was the unhelpful definition *par excellence*. Weaker essays were largely descriptive and took 'intuition' as unproblematic and transparent; stronger ones used the differences in areas of knowledge (of which Natural Sciences and the Arts were the most commonly chosen) to motivate a discussion of intuition in relation to ways of knowing. A common problem was evaluating the role; a few of the very strongest essays noted that evaluation required standards against which to measure the role of intuition, and explored possibilities for these standards.

**4. "This rubber tree won't yield latex—the biologist blames the sapling, the geologist blames the soil, the contractor blames the unskilled labourer and the owner says it is fighting back at being controlled." (Amitav Ghosh) If different Ways of Knowing or Areas of Knowledge yield contradictory statements about the world, on what basis do we choose among them? M04**

While the stronger essays relied on some of the possible conflicts between Ways of Knowing, for example emotion and reason or reason and perception, weaker answers tended to concentrate strictly on the prompt, explicating the example or at best providing other similar examples without tackling the question that follows at all. "How we choose" was sometimes taken literally, with some candidates speculating on the psychological and biographical factors that might cause someone to choose as he or she does and thus missing entirely the opportunity to explore issues of justification in different Areas of Knowledge and through different Ways of Knowing.