

FIRST AND SECOND-ORDER KQS

There are two types of KQs that we deal with in TOK.

- First-order knowledge questions. These are *direct* questions about the world, linked to specific area of knowledge.
- Second-order knowledge questions. These are questions that are concerned with *HOW WE ACQUIRE KNOWLEDGE* about the world.

Although during the course you'll look at both these types of KQs, in the essay their focus should be on second-order KQs. If students hand in an essay that contains mostly first-order KQs, it will end up sounding more like an essay written on psychology, or mathematics, or the arts – rather than on TOK.

Putting this in context, let's look at an example. Our subject matter is the role of Gavrilo Princip in the start of the First World War. A first-order KQ might be:

Were Gavrilo Princip's actions the reason for the start of the First World War?

This is a very interesting question that would prompt us to look at the evidence for his actions starting the war, and the evidence for other factors causing the war. It's an open question. And it clearly deals with one of the areas of knowledge – history. But this is not a valid KQ for TOK, because it is a first-order KQ. To explore this question, we'd use historical methods, rather than thinking about the nature of knowledge itself. This would give us a history essay rather than a TOK essay.

On the other hand, the KQ –

Why do people have different views and opinions of the past?

- is clearly a second-order KQ, as it is concerned with the different ways in which people acquire knowledge about history. In order to explore this knowledge question, we would consider much wider areas of knowledge than just history, and also look at the nature of knowledge itself.

Framing knowledge questions – CLAIMS AND COUNTERCLAIMS

The way to set up a discussion and justification of KQs is by splitting them up into knowledge claims and counterclaims. The knowledge claim proposes the knowledge question, and the counterclaim opposes the knowledge question, much in the same way as a debate is run.

The reason why KQ exploration should be set up in this way is because the IB Diploma in general, and TOK in particular, is all about being open to other ideas and considering different viewpoints, as much as it is about forming and offering opinions of their own. TOK essays need to reflect this.

Putting all of this into context, we can look at one of the PTs from May 2014:

6. "A sceptic is someone who questions any knowledge claim, and demands clear definitions, consistent reason, and sufficient evidence" (taken from Paul Kurtz, 1994). Explore this approach in relation to two areas of knowledge.

The question asks students to pick their own two areas of knowledge, so let's thinking about the natural sciences and history. The statement in the title refers to the skeptical method (which it helpfully defines for us – this made it a very good PT to choose), and asks us to evaluate this approach. This might lead us to this KQ:

How effective is the skeptical method in providing us with knowledge about the natural sciences?

Rather than state this as a question, though, you would need to present your knowledge question initially as a 'knowledge claim' – acting, as we have said, as a way of 'proposing' the KQ.

The skeptical method is a very effective way of acquiring knowledge in the natural sciences.

To avoid contradicting ourselves later on in the essay, though (because, of course, we're also going to consider the counterclaim), let's alter this so it's more open-minded:

Claim: In some ways, the skeptical method is a very effective way of acquiring knowledge in the natural sciences.

Now you are ready to discuss your knowledge claim, by offering your own thoughts, opinions, and arguments.

Your counterclaim is simply the alternative position to the knowledge claim you have offered. So for the one above, the counterclaim might be:

Counterclaim: **However, the skeptical method can sometimes hinder us from gaining knowledge about the natural sciences.**

It's good practice to include a linking phrase or sentence to distinguish it from what you have just been discussing. These could include the following:

- While others may think...
- Contrary to popular opinion...
- Although traditionally it is believed...
- Despite what is believed...
- Although it may be true that...
- On the other hand...
- A different view suggests...
- However, it might be the case that...
- Most people assume the opposite, but...

What Are 'DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES'?

The IB in general, and TOK in particular, place massive importance on considering different perspectives. Look at the TOK diagram, and try to recall what was said about the '/s' after 'knower': we don't just think about how knowledge related to *me*, we think about how knowledge is related to *all* knowers.

This means considering different perspectives, which again sounds more complicated than it is. Basically, it means they should simply try to consider how those looking from a different perspective might view the KQs in their essay. By 'perspective', we don't just mean a different opinion (that's what *they'll* be doing when they include their counterclaim) we mean something more fundamental. This could include the following:

- Gender
- Geographical location
- Religion/philosophical position
- Historical era
- Language
- Cultural tradition
- Socio-economic position

How Do You Include A CONSIDERATION OF IMPLICATIONS?

Integral to a good mark in the second criterion is a consideration of the implications of the essay's arguments. What this means is that not only should your KQs be meaningful and important, and their real life situations significant, they should also be explicit about why this is the case.

If you've chosen appropriate KQs, this should follow naturally. As we have seen, KQs should be big, open questions, and big open questions are generally significant ones. But they need to make sure they emphasize their significance, and demonstrate their awareness of this.

Consider implications the overall "SO WHAT" of your argument (claim and counterclaim together). Emphasize the "big picture" of how your arguments about knowledge affect the world