

Theory of Knowledge

What is the theory of knowledge course about?

The theory of knowledge course is the flagship course of the IB in which students learn to think critically about knowledge. One of its purposes is to have students examine and evaluate the knowledge they acquire in their subjects of study and in the world around them.

In this course students will look critically at the claims that people and organisations make by asking such fundamental questions as:

How can we determine if something is knowledge? How can we assess if a claim is true, and how valid will such an assessment be? What are the differences between knowledge and belief? How do learners acquire knowledge in mathematics compared to how they acquire knowledge in the arts?

How does theory of knowledge fit in with the other subjects a student may study?

All the other subjects that a diploma programme student may study are chosen, within a framework of choice. However, theory of knowledge is a compulsory course, and along with two other compulsory elements—creativity, activity and service (CAS) and the extended essay (EE)—make up the core of the diploma programme. These three core elements are compulsory for diploma students.

Another way of answering this question is to say that the theory of knowledge course helps students make connections between the subjects they study in terms of the methodology used, the subject matter studied, or the way language is used in different subjects, among others. From these connections students learn about the nature of knowledge itself.

There are no levels of study in theory of knowledge, unlike the subjects a student may choose, which can be studied either at higher level or at standard level.

How are students assessed in theory of knowledge?

For their final assessment students are expected to make a ten minute oral presentation in front of the class and write one essay over a few months on a question chosen from a set of prescribed questions set by the IB. The essays written by the students are sent to the IB for evaluation.

There is no written examination.

Students need to obtain a minimum of grade D, in order to qualify for the IB diploma.

How will theory of knowledge help me later?

The IB and many reputed universities around the world believe that students should not be passive consumers of knowledge, but that they must question the sources of their knowledge, be aware of the changing nature of knowledge and consider the ethical implications of possessing particular kinds of knowledge. Students of theory of knowledge show a high level of college or university readiness, especially for life at universities that have elements of theory of knowledge built into their curricula.

And in a world where fake news is an everyday occurrence, and the social media is used to manipulate facts and disseminate a dangerous cocktail of falsehoods and half-truths at 'viral' speeds, the need for a course that gives students the tools to critically evaluate these throughout their lives cannot be overemphasized.