**How to Write a Good Essay**

Although there are some similarities to History and English essays, TOK essays are unlike any other essay that you will write and there are some specific things that the examiners are looking for and that you are going to have to do if you want to do well.

Some really good essays won’t score high marks because they don’t do exactly what it says in the mark scheme. So before you even put pen to paper you should read the mark scheme so that you know exactly what it is that the examiners are looking for, only then will you be able to give them what they want.

The mark scheme can be found on this page but, broadly speaking, to get full marks in the essay you will need to consider the following four key areas.

***In General:***

         think independently: don’t just base your answer on what your TOK teacher said, the ideas of famous philosophers or what is written in Wikipedia;

         identify and remain focused on the TOK issues raised by a given question, this can take time and be difficult at the start but you must do this before you do anything else as starting to write or even research before you know what the question is really ‘getting at’ can send you off in the wrong direction;

         offer personal definitions of key terms at the point in the essay at which they become relevant;

         include footnotes and a bibliography.

**Read your Question Carefully:**

         This may seem obvious but not answering the question as it is precisely set will mean low marks for analysis, TOK issues (as the may not be relevant) and Clarity (as the conclusion will not answer the question) – potentially meaning that up to 25 marks out of 40 could be lost. A good example of this is question 9 from 2004-2005 where the initial statement ‘All ethical statements are relative’ means just that – ‘all’ – and so discussing the relativity of some ethical statements will not be satisfactory;

         Pick out the key words from the title, but be aware that the key word is not always a TOK word, as in the above example it could just be a normal word like ‘all’.

**Write a Good Argument:**

         construct a well structured, detailed, coherent, logical and persuasive argument by having a series of 4-6 points that:

o        explain clearly the ***reasons*** ***for*** your position,

o        support these reasons for with ***convincing evidence***,

o        consider the ***arguments against*** you (the counter claims),

o        support these counterclaims with ***evidence***,

o        ***evaluate*** how serious / effective these counterclaims are and ***responds*** to them appropriately,

o        come to a balanced conclusion;

         support your argument with effective examples that come from a variety of sources, e.g. scientific ‘fact’, personal anecdote, examples from different cultures or thought experiments;

         identify the implications of your answer for different areas of life, for example if you are arguing that abortion is wrong on the basis that it is wrong to take life, does that affect your position on the death sentence;

         clearly identify any assumptions that you have made and on which your answer is based.

**Consider Different Perspectives:**

         demonstrate self awareness, e.g. don’t just state your opinion but comment on the reasons why you have the opinion that you do, explore the biases that affect the way you think, examine the things that have caused that bias and the things that you have done to try and minimise the effect that these biases have on your answer;

         consider how your perspective differs from the perspective of others on the question. Consider also what factors have caused them to have the perspective they have and what similarities and differences are there between your perspective and theirs.

**AOKs and WOKs:**

         make links between AOKs and WOKs by showing how the answer to the question varies across different AOKs or WOKs. For instance your essay question might be about the idea of beauty and you could argue that the concept of beauty in Maths (if it exists at all) might be quite different to the idea of beauty that we usually find in the Arts (if that exists at all). Alternatively, you may have an essay about how different WOKs can provide us with certainty and you could consider how both emotions and reason might be said to provide us with a kind of certainty, but that the certainty that can be provided by logical reasoning may be quite different to the kind of subjective certainty that can be provided by emotion.