The most important part of the planning for the TOK presentation is the extraction of the knowledge issue. If you get this bit right then everything else falls into place and so it is a very good idea to check your knowledge issue through with your teacher right at the start of the planning process to make sure that you don’t head off in the wrong direction.

**What does ‘extraction’ mean?**

To extract means to ‘pull out’ – you might have had teeth taken out or extracted, especially if you had braces fitted and the TOK syllabus uses the word in exactly the same way. Essentially, you need to pick a Real Life Situation and pull a knowledge issue out of it.

**What’s a knowledge issue?**

There’s no definite, clear cut answer to this but really good knowledge issues will often come in the form of very high level questions that talk about knowledge or how knowledge works. In this sense it’s often helpful to think about Knowledge Issues as TOK questions.

**The Four Different Levels:**

One of the best ways of understanding what counts as a knowledge issue is to begin by picking out things which aren’t knowledge issues, or at least aren’t very good examples them, and working up from there. One helpful way to do this is by using the following table. The table on the left explains what is going on while the one on the right is an example:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Real Life Situation***(An event in the real world at either a global, local or personal level)*  |   | **Real Life Situation**The simulation of a Big Bang at the LargeHadron Collider at CERN.  |
| **Not A Knowledge Issue***(Often this will be a very factual question and will sound like something you will study in one of your subject lessons)* |   | **Not A Knowledge Issue**What is a Hadron?*(This sounds like a physics question)*  |
| **A Weak Knowledge Issue***(This will explore the current issue but will tend to lead to a GCSE style For / Against debate where one person argues one side of the case, their opponent argues the opposite and in the end they either compromise or agree to differ. Often weak questions will start with verbs like ‘will’, ‘can’, ‘do’, ‘is’, ‘have’, etc ...)* |   | **A Weak Knowledge Issue**Will the LHC destroy the world?*(Simple Yes / No debate style question)* |
| **A Medium Level Knowledge Issue***(This will begin to talk about knowledge more explicitly and will be a more open ended question without a simple for and against answer. Note however, that it is still tied too closely to the original real life situation )*  |   | **A Medium Level Knowledge Issue**How can we know the LHC is safe?*(The word know makes the focus more explicitly on knowledge and the question is more open, so it’s a good question, but we can take it one stage further.)* |
| **A Strong Knowledge Issue***(This should be a question that explores knowledge and how knowledge works in an open ended way at a very high level – it needs to be high level so that you can compare the same issue from the perspective of different AOKs orWOKs. Often strong questions will start with words or phrases like ‘how’, ‘to what extent’, ‘in what way’, etc …)*  |   | **A Strong Knowledge Issue**Is there any knowledge that it is too dangerous to pursue?*(Notice how this question seems to have taken a huge leap away from the original topic of the LHC and this is what enables you to compare different AOKs – there could conceivably be knowledge that it is too dangerous to pursue in the Natural Sciences, but can the same be said of the Arts, History or Math? Now this sounds like a really interesting question)* |

**Example Knowledge Issues**

Using the same four level grid as on the ‘Extracting Knowledge Issues’ page, here are some examples of Real Life Situations and a range of Knowledge issues that could be extracted from them:

|  |
| --- |
| **Real Life Situation**The threatened stoning of Sakineh Mohammdi Ashtiani in Iran*(A current, modern, global issue that will be quickly understood by the audience)*  |
| **Not A Knowledge Issue**Where does the idea of stoning as a punishment come from?*(This sounds like a history or cultural studies question?)*  |
| **A Weak Knowledge Issue**Is death by stoning a barbaric, inhumane and unacceptable form of punishment?*(Simple Yes / No debate style question)* |
| **A Medium Level Knowledge Issue**How can we determine what constitutes an acceptable form of punishment?*(The focus is more explicitly on knowledge and the question is more open)*  |
| **A Strong Knowledge Issue**Is it justifiable for one culture to impose its own values on standards on another?*(A very high level topic that can be explored across many different examples / AOKs)* |

|  |
| --- |
| **Real Life Situation**Applying to university and the UCAS tariff system for IB points*(A current, but personal issue that is particularly relevant to Year 13 students)*  |
| **Not A Knowledge Issue**What is the UCAS tariff system?*(This sounds like a question you would ask your careers counsellor?)*  |
| **A Weak Knowledge Issue**Is the UCAS tariff system an accurate way of comparing the IB and A-Level systems?*(Simple Yes / No debate style question)* |
| **A Medium Level Knowledge Issue**How can we be certain that an 45 points is equivalent to 6.3 A grades at A-Level?*(The focus is more explicitly on knowledge and the question is more open)*  |
| **A Strong Knowledge Issue**How do we measure knowledge?*(A very high level topic that can be explored across many different examples / AOKs)* |

|  |
| --- |
| **Real Life Situation**Butyrka prison in Russia is going to install tanning beds for its inmates*(A current, modern, global issue that will be quickly understood by the audience)*  |
| **Not A Knowledge Issue**How does a tanning bed work?*(This sounds like a science question?)*  |
| **A Weak Knowledge Issue**Should the Butyrka prison install sunbeds for its inmates?*(Simple Yes / No debate style question)* |
| **A Medium Level Knowledge Issue**How can we know that the prisoners deserve these additional comforts?*(The focus is more explicitly on knowledge and the question is more open)*  |
| **A Strong Knowledge Issue**What roles do reason and emotion play in deciding what is an appropriate punishment for a given crime?*(A very high level topic that can be explored across many different examples / AOKs)* |

|  |
| --- |
| **Real Life Situation**Watching i-Robot – computers with human-like intelligence*(An general issue raised by the specifically personal experience of watching a film)*  |
| **Not A Knowledge Issue**How does a computer work?*(This sounds like a computer studies question?)*  |
| **A Weak Knowledge Issue**Do computers only know what they are programmed to know?*(Simple Yes / No debate style question)* |
| **A Medium Level Knowledge Issue**How can we verify that computers actually know something?*(The focus is more explicitly on knowledge and the question is more open)*  |
| **A Strong Knowledge Issue**How far is it true to say that human beings and computers know in the same way?*(A very high level topic that can be explored across many different examples / AOKs)* |