May 2017 prescribed TOK Essay titles unpacked (updated)

1) “It is only knowledge produced with difficulty that we truly value” To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Key issues - tie titles knowledge framework.

Produced - methodology

“true value” - personal knowledge

“produce with difficulty” - AOKs have different levels of difficulty - may be subjective / less rigorous. Environment is difficult, ethical knowledge is challenging personally, maybe nature of subject - scope / application…

WOKs - looked at and there affect

“truly value” - take away truly does that change

KQ - How do we measure / determine value in a particular AOK? (value - justified)

“We” who is the we - chemists, humankind

“ONLY” is that a red herring

What is knowledge that is easy to produce - counter claim. Does knowledge simply arrive - prodigies Arts/Maths. If easy is it less or more value. Value - is it related to individual or societies viewpoint. Historical period of time - when was it of value?

Suggestion - students should make sure TWO wide AOK are chosen and utilised. Look at things that are closely related as well as not closely related e.g. reason and emotion.

What is the role of experts - when new knowledge is produced - we value new studies better than older ones. What does this mean for knowledge - new (difficult) re reinforced knowledge (easier).

Ethical knowledge - is very easy to produce but we truly value this more than other areas as it can fit within our own moral frameworks.

RKS – founders of religions, producing religious knowledge and acquiring religious knowledge (cults)
2) “Facts are needed to establish theories but theories are needed to make sense of facts.” Discuss this line statement with reference to two areas of knowledge.

Interrelationship - between facts and theories, influence of time on all of this, a broad question which worries some TOK teachers.

Challenging students to link facts and theories – then moves on to theories making facts, split the statement and analysis of each.

Evidence is not referenced in the question

‘BUT’ is a scary word – implies judgment, inviting you to see both sides

Choose AOK which come up with opposing relationships:
Human Sciences – how reasoning works,
Natural Science and Mathematics – what we have yet to know, Art – Conceptual Arts
Arts (Music) – Facts and theories versus Mathematic facts and theories

AOKs where facts and theories can be very interrelated – be warned

Command term - DISCUSS? Look deeply into how this relationship is working - pitfalls and potential

Bogus quote - quite a usual type of question. Must look at multiple perspectives - from different knowers point of view.

**Experienced TOK teachers** – felt that as long as you knew what you were doing – fine, a lack of English in a student could help as the objective is Discuss not TWE., but in true TO fashion this was not 100% the case.
3) Should key events in the historical development of areas of knowledge always be judged by the standards of time?

Created for the knowledge framework – which works if you have looked at this area within teaching. Attractive because it is broad and open which can be as much a gift as a pitfall.

Paradigm Shift!!!!

“ALWAYS” - needs to be looked at

“Key Events” - prediction, theory, fact? Turning point

‘Should…’ - be warned – ‘should’ versus ‘always’

‘Historical’ – in contrast to… what is behind the question – in the future?

AOK - Ethics - real life example / Psychology use of human subjects for experimentation

AOK - History / Economics

AOK - Natural Sciences - certain theories

AOK - Arts - examples genres of art (Paradigms change) - e.g. Andy Warhol (have we lost what was innovative?) - if you are not able to go back to the 60’s you will not understand or be able to judge. Art critics have their own set of judgement criteria.

AOK – IKS as counter claim – don't have to talk about time you are talking about just the judgments – a different paradigm, IKS valid because it does not change with time

“ALWAYS” - needs to be looked at

“Key Events” - prediction, theory, fact? Turning point

Revisionist

Presentism

Judgement - Right or Wrong / acceptance / verification / accuracy - (shared knowledge - consensus) or about other types of judgement: Reliability of the judgement (Accuracy). Judge historical developments - regarding current standards e.g. middle ages and what they did was ‘silly’. Bias to own ways of doing things. Colonialism - “their heart was in the right place” example Uncle Toms Cabin and how you can teach them…
What are the criteria for judgement?? By whom? Shared / personal knowledge - zone of exchange - “standards of our time” does suggest shared knowledge. Personal Bias / Emotion - Faith / Role of authority -

Key terms for students - standards

“Is one of our standards of our time to not judge.” Relativist - what can you do BUT judge by the standards of our time.

Standards of the time - re standards of the area of knowledge. Standards of different cultures - e.g. engineered mainland chinese knowledge. Indigenous knowledge systems - a good way in? How can we judge that culture…religious knowledge systems against scientific knowledge advances another way.

AOK History - Content and Methodology both change with time…

Practice History - argument that post colonial viewpoints have been accused of presentism …. 

Possible Knowledge Questions -

- What kind of insights are lost if historical events are judged by our current values? To what extent does it matter if we judge events by are own values? When it matters - when it matters …

- To what extent are there risks about judging historical events by our own standards? (Two sides to the argument - sometimes you should step inside someone else’s shoes)

- How we decide when judging by our own standards is okay? (Universal standards - freedom is always better than the opposite. Judge the holocaust by a Universal standard. OR are current standards with universal standards.)

- What’s lost when we judge? (Who is the knower - who is judging) Advancing knowledge in a particular age in a particular domain - normally relies upon particular current standards. E.g. Marxism. But now we can judge by many lenses.

Economics another good example - neoliberalism accepted universally/ keynes - be careful of saying our current standards are superior
4) “In the production of knowledge, traditions of areas of knowledge offer correctives for ways of knowing.” To what extent do you agree with this statement?

“Production of knowledge” - personal to shared knowledge…

“traditions” - concepts / language - traditions can change

Areas of knowledge where methodology affects the knowledge - Scientific methodology

Intuition - natural sciences leads to scientific methodology

WOK - different levels to the AOK’s - religious knowledge could be a counter claim

“Correctives” - what does the mean - the policies of ways of knowing…
Correction is more possible in some areas of knowledge than others

Natural Sciences – scientific method,– correctives for sense perception by repeating expts, peer review, language can limit this?

History – evidence is key – follows the patterns, rules for evidence/source collection, but humans affect it (WOK) without knowing it,

Economics – traditions of economics, logic, reason – ( behavioural economics) have found out the process was flawed, game theory

WOKs creating traditions – revolutionary science, dominate paradigm – counter argument stronger

Dominant paradigm of history - religion moving towards a new scientific traditions? How many of us are brave enough to make correctives? How many make a majority to be a corrective?

DO NOT TEACH TOK through the ways of knowing but through the AOK. Danger with this question - students just talking about ways of knowing only.
5) Given access to the same facts, how is it possible that there can be disagreement between experts in a discipline? Develop your answer with reference to two areas of knowledge.

Started about facts - in Maths, History and the Arts. Question - did the word fact mean different things. Some AOK are not based on facts at all.

What kind of facts - results with conclusions (production of knowledge), two different theories - which would we go for… (judgement - interpretation). Knowledge as a map, the facts are the territory.

Distrust of experts who can not agree – Brexit – politicians distrust of them

AOK – Maths – everyone agrees? Not always, don't always make assumptions, how do 2 mathematicians come to 2 different conclusions? Facts are the numbers.

AOK – Natural Sciences – methodology – Einstein – Newton

AOK – Human Sciences – mental health expert sees a patient and diagnoses something different from another doctor in another country – misdiagnosis based on expert testimonial – links to culture. Depression is called a western phenomenon by Koreans and Chinese -

AOK – History – versions of D Day – events seen in different contexts based on success of different landings, emotion that effects the historian, different realities from same facts + different facts on same thing – Cold War sources: which facts do we choose?

Different standards of proof in different fields - can you be an expert dancer? Physics experts? Agree on facts but disagree on their interpretation.

Common framework to understand facts - standards of understanding the facts are different.

Personal and shared knowledge framework.

“Expert” - doubt the word expert - what does it mean and by whose standards? Usain Bolt an expert in running? Experiential knowledge versus academic knowledge

Teachers as experts versus google as the expert!! Role of the teacher in your culture.

Looks easy - but not easy at all.

“Discipline” - within in areas of knowledge

Issue - disagreement re with methodology, context, production etc…
6) Humans are pattern seeking animals and we are adept at finding patterns and whether they exist or not” (adapted from Michael Shermer)
Discuss knowledge questions in two areas of knowledge?

Concept of what is a pattern? Are patterns more certain in some areas of knowledge? Trap - how patterns give us knowledge in two areas of knowledge. Pattern as a metaphor? Very much links with our personal knowledge and RLS.

2 pronged question/ 2 statements – we are pattern seeking animals/ we are adept at finding patterns whether they exits or not?

Scientific historian - thesis needs to be discussed - biologically driven to find patterns - hardwired…Sheerer thesis. Youtube.

Trap - how patterns give us knowledge in two areas of knowledge.

Accept or deny the prompt - most will accept the prompt - we are pattern seeking…

Are patterns more certain in some areas of knowledge -

Human sciences - patterns are according to laws and then are not always certain - factors can influence

Visual Arts

Economics – Chaos theory, predictions in climate change

History - revolutionary patterns - causes of war? How certain can we be they are valid.

AOK – Ethics – disciplinary case – too quick to categorize people and events – new information forms new patterns, imprinting patterns onto people – picturing people

KQ - To what degree can we know in the absence of patterns?

How significant is patterns within knowledge in our two areas of knowledge …. paradigm shifts invalidate patterns often.

They have to recognise we are driven biologically by patterns - but understand our judgement can be invalid…

Frameworks of knowledge - we rely on those patterns to make predictions e.g. sciences. Whereas Historians should avoid patterns and judge evidence and sources. Look at methodology - LOOK at the FRAMEWORK.

A knowledge question drives each paragraph…GENERAL principle focus on title, stumble across knowledge questions that then should be able to interpret
the question.

Testing leads to patterns the theories / Predictions lead to patterns…

KQ - What justifies a knowledge pattern?

Patterns of Nature, Invented patterns…

Faulty models / established models / metaphors - analyse literature and find what pattern seeking can mean in that subject.

STUDENTS should choose AOK they are strong in - and then seek what patterns mean in those areas.