

1 How to start?

Starting the process can be a real challenge — where do you begin? My usual suggestion is to start with a real-life situation (RLS) that is interesting to you — something that has captured your attention. Brainstorm as many as you can before choosing the best. Otherwise you can start with an issue about knowledge. Have there been interesting questions or topics in your course that you would like to revisit? Again, brainstorm as many as you can before choosing the best.

2 Get your knowledge question right

The main reason why good presentations go bad is that the knowledge question (KQ) is poorly formulated. KQs must be first and foremost about knowledge. Questions posing an ethical dilemma, or questions about the psychological processes of learning, or questions about how ways of knowing work, are not knowledge questions. You must focus on questions about the construction or nature of knowledge. Discuss your plans with your teacher early so you can get advice on your KQ. The presentation is too short to start off in the wrong direction and hope that you can get back on track. The moderators can see your KQ, so make it a good one.

3 Choose a good real-life situation

By good, I mean concrete, real and one that is genuinely interesting to you. You might consider investigating something you encountered during your extended essay research, something from an internal assessment or something relevant to what you hope to study at university. Just make sure that it serves as the source of a good question about how specialists in a discipline construct knowledge.

4 Turn off PowerPoint

It's crucial for you to make some initial decisions before you begin worrying about slides. You have to know what you are going to present before you can think about how you are going to present it. That means that the PowerPoint must wait. First you must spend time working out just what you think about your KQ. Develop your arguments and consider the implications and significance of your positions. Once you have developed your ideas, then you can start thinking about how you want to present them. The skills needed to develop your ideas successfully and the skills needed to present them in an effective way are quite distinct.

5 An AOK might not be TOK

Many mediocre presentations simply take an issue and explain what an area of knowledge (AOK) would say about it. However, just using the AOKs doesn't mean that you are doing TOK. Explaining how the AOK might approach an issue amounts to little more than a first order explanation of what an AOK would say in some situation or another. It only becomes TOK when you compare the AOKs' approaches (both similarities and contrasts) to constructing knowledge. The best advice would be to use the knowledge framework (see IB Review, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 42) as a comparative tool to help structure your analysis.

6 Teach them something

Your TOK presentation is a real part of everybody else's TOK learning. Most students present to an audience of their class members — they are therefore hoping to learn something from you. If you think of it as a lesson for them, you will need to take responsibility for it and make a genuine effort to teach them something.

10 Fill in the PPD correctly

The presentation planning document (PPD) can be quite useful (see IB Review, Vol. 2, No. 4, pp. 20–21). The various sections of the PPD ask you to identify key elements of the ideas you are presenting. First you must identify the real life situation and the KQ, then explain how they are related. Your 'outline' section then briefly explains the main argument you're making (and must contain genuine content, not just signposting phrases like 'then I will discuss my next AOK' without telling us what it is or what your discussion is about). The final 'show' section then needs to explain how what you've argued applies to your initial RLS. As the PPD is also used to help moderators find evidence that your teacher's marks are deserved, it is very important that you fill it in fully — it will help the whole process.

9 Practise

You'd be surprised how many students move straight from the copying-out-the-notecards stage to the presenting stage. Once you've worked out how you want to present, you need to practise. Practise in front of the mirror, or in front of your cat. Then video it and watch it. Present to your parents or your neighbour. Ask for feedback — if they don't understand what you're talking about, the message isn't getting through. Are you sure that the news debate format explains the ideas clearly? Do you really need to be in a toga? If your audience hasn't learned any TOK, then you've not done your job.

8 Research effective presentations

There are all sorts of websites, books and TED talks about the giving of presentations. Don't assume that your natural charm will be enough to keep the audience enthralled. Have a look through these resources and pick up a few pointers. Many come out of the world of business, and advice on how to be concise, effective and motivating might be helpful.

7 You are the presentation

There's nothing worse than looking at the back of a student's head as he or she turns away to read the slides. Students too often think that they're just along for the ride when it comes to presentations. You must remain in control of the material and use any slides to support what you want to do with the material. You should also consider the option of not using slides — I've seen fantastic presentations using no visuals at all. One memorable presentation included students taking turns constructing a mindmap on the whiteboard recording their main ideas. At the end the class had a lovely visual. The only think you can't do is read an essay. But don't get gimmicky: your ideas must be clearly and convincingly offered — if your teacher doesn't know what you're on about, you can't get good grades. Finally: avoid Prezzi — it makes anyone over the age of 24 really nauseous.

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Top ten tips for your TOK presentation

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