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## Revision

# 9/11 theory of knowledge presentation

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A begins her presentation quite abruptly without any formal introduction before her introductory video. (This was merely a practice presentation, so offered in a slightly more informal tone than I would normally expect.)

## Identifying the real-life situation

A's use of the video to begin the presentation serves to contextualise her ideas and she prompts it well by giving us something to *do* while watching it. Rather than just letting us do the thinking she offers a short analysis of it afterwards and then segues into her real-life-situation (RLS), which is explicitly stated. The RLS is complex in that it has two dimensions, both the media coverage of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks ('9/11') *and* her own personal experience of visiting the 9/11 memorial museum.

## Extracting the knowledge question

She then extracts her knowledge question (KQ) and again explicitly states it:

'In what ways and to what extent does emotion affect memory?'

The KQ is well formulated in that it is open, it is decontextualised from the RLS and makes explicit use of TOK concepts. The KQ does imply that emotions' effect can somehow be *measured* and this is not well explained, which dampens the KQ's overall effectiveness. One way it might have been improved would be to link it directly to the *creation* of knowledge, perhaps 'In what ways and to what extent does emotion influence knowledge claims based on memory'.

## Exploring the WOKs and AOKs

Right away A develops an analysis based on memory's relationship to other ways of knowing (WOKs), in this case **sense perception (SP)** and **imagination**. This part of her analysis is a little confusing and unclear: she says that emotions will 'intensify' SP, but doesn't immediately explain how. Imagination, she says, fills in the gaps and alters SP, but again this is more stated than defended. She makes a good point when she says that we can't be sure exactly how much imagination is ultimately influencing our memories, and could have elaborated a bit. She ultimately uses the notion of 'flashbulb memories' from the area of knowing (AOK) of psychology to try to explain this and give a theoretical backing, and references a 9/11 study which helps show a good level of analysis. She should have referenced the study explicitly.

A shows a good understanding of structure when she sums up the argument so far:

‘Overall, emotion and imagination both play a part in how we perceive a memory.’

But, while a fair point, it is hardly surprising.

She then moves on to an exploration of reason as a WOK, offering a plausible definition and arguing that it is reason that *should* have told her that the branches of the tree in her example weren’t spaced as far apart as she remembers. Her reason, she claims, was ‘overcome’ by emotion and imagination and this resulted in a faulty memory. While this is plausible, it is not obvious that this is the fault of *reason*. She also says that reason adapts a memory to the emotions of our current situation, meaning it is reason that is colouring our memory, so there is a bit of confusion here — seemingly a contradiction which could have been cleared up with a little more time.

She again signposts the discussion by offering a sub-conclusion: concluding that her reasoning was based on ‘false premises’, which in this case were emotion and imagination altering the memory.

A then moves into the next major section of the talk, applying what she has said so far to history and natural science as AOKs. She does well to identify that really what we’re talking about when exploring the reliability of memory is history. She convincingly argues that remembering certain events will elicit different emotions and this will affect what we remember. She characterises this as ‘masking the true impact of the event,’ which is slightly misleading but still a good point.

She offers an explicit counter-claim to this point, suggesting that things in history like dates are not affected by emotion, but replies to this claim (thus strengthening her own point) by saying that this is not *really* what historians are concerned with, thereby showing some awareness of the methodology and scope of history as an AOK.

A then explores the alternative perspective of science, suggesting that science’s emphasis on reason ‘leaves less space for emotion’. While plausible, she states it relies on this claim in something of a superficial way — it would have been more convincing and she would have demonstrated more understanding of this point had she elaborated on it. She then resorts to another stereotype — this one less compelling — by suggesting that science is ‘progressively more accurate and adherent to reality’. For a TOK student, this is not a sophisticated claim about science, but perhaps she can be excused here because the presentation is really exploring the impact of emotion on science, so this point is slightly tangential. More relevant is the point about how science’s use of technology and ‘writing things down’ is why emotion tends to have a lower impact — though this point could have been strengthened by illustrative examples.

## Conclusion

She then moves into the final section of the argument by exploring ‘Why does it matter?’ She argues that because ‘memory is central to our existence’ and so that we can assess the extent to which we use it, we need to understand its shortcomings. This point would have been more effective had she supported the claim that ‘memory is central to our existence’ and perhaps tied it directly to an AOK.

She does, however, create links to another RLS, that of the rise of technology and how it affects our memory. She avoids a trap here, by not just raising *another* historical event and claiming that our memories about that are affected by emotion as well. She does very well to *extend* her point by adding new elements, namely how technology is in a sense *replacing* our memory and she ends by posing an intriguing dilemma: whether to accept technology’s influence and enjoy the added precision and reliability or to maintain our reliance on memory and accept the uncertainty that comes with it. Even though she might be committing the fallacy of false dilemma (‘It’s either this or that with nothing in

between'), she has shown that she can identify an interesting implication of the topic she has explored.

## Examiner comments

Overall, A has produced a solid TOK presentation. She has kept to a clearly discernable and effective structure, moving logically from the motivation and identification of her RLS and explicit extraction of a well-formulated KQ, to her analysis section where she explores the WOKs and AOKs involved, finally ending with a discussion of significance and implications and further questions. While her analysis was a little confusing and in need of stronger justification it was certainly *clear* what she was arguing and she demonstrated an ability to explore counter-claims and alternative perspectives, investigating them to some extent. She maintained a good relevance to her RLS throughout, though she might have improved it significantly by offering an explicit application back to the 9/11 event before moving into the final phase of the presentation. She also extended the outcomes of her discussion (that memory can be unreliable for a number of reasons) into importantly different contexts (technology's future effect on memory).

The essential question underpinning the global impression marking is: 'Do(es) the presenter(s) succeed in showing how TOK concepts can have practical application?' and A has certainly done this. Her arguments are *clear* but the confusions and need of further justification in the main analysis keep them from being *convincing*, thus preventing it from reaching level 5. The hidden assumptions about the ability to in some sense measure the effect of emotion and her resorting to some stereotypes and a number of places where she offers a plausible point, but without clear back up, suggests that it must lean towards level 3. So the final holistic mark is 7/10.

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