



ToK Day at NCH

The anatomy of the TOK essay

NEW THINKING FOR AN OLD PROBLEM

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- ▶ Identify common weaknesses in student ToK essays
 - ▶ Construct a model of the structure of an effective ToK essay
 - ▶ What processes need to be in place to enable this structure to be realized
 - ▶ Examine some existing ToK essays.

Let's work backwards

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1. Choose prescribed title
 2. Define key terms
 3. Extract knowledge questions
 4. Produce arguments to support answers to knowledge questions
 5. Find examples to back up arguments
 6. Assess arguments
 7. State conclusions

Tok essay development

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Tok essay development

1	40 ToK Essay types								
2	Name	Description	Analysis	Typical mark	Unpacking	Examples	Generalisation	Evaluation	Conclusion
3									
7	Loose examples	Analysis not linked effectively to PT	Local analysis of examples good but not clear what connection is to PT	4 - 6	Poor	interesting examples	Could be good	Poor?	Usually not supported
8	Medium depth	Good treatment but sidesteps obvious knowledge questions	Not enough critical reflection.	4 - 6	Could be good	interesting examples	Poor	Poor	supported for narrow range of examples only
9	Superficial	Links to PT are tenuous. Conclusion might contain new material and answer to PT is surprising given previous discussion	Largely descriptive	2 - 4	Poor	Not linked well to PT	Poor	Poor	Not supported
10	Limited WoKs	Limits purview to specific woks purely in abstract terms but then linked to examples.	Woks treated in isolation. "My woks are ..." in introduction	2 - 4	Narrow unpacking	Examples require broader treatment	Poor	Poor	Not supported outside narrow treatment
11	Naked Abstract WoKs	Discussion of WoKs purely in abstract terms.	WoKs treated in isolation. "Reason is more reliable than sense perception".	2 - 4	Narrow unpacking	WoKs not linked to examples	Usually unjustified generalisation	Poor	Usually not supported
12	Clothed isolated WoKs	A discussion of real world examples using WoKs independently of each other.	Analysis of examples - generalisation not supported	2 - 4	Narrow unpacking	Examples linked to single woks.	Poor	Poor	Only supported by given examples
	Platitudinous WoKs	Essay that accepts naïve assumptions about the relations	Shallow analysis characterised by the word 'use'. "The natural sciences use	1 - 3	Narrow unpacking	Examples linked to	Usually unjustified	Poor	Usually not supported

What I do in my spare time (sad)

	Name	Description	Analysis	Typical mark	Unpacking	Examples	Generalisation	Evaluation	Conclusion
3									
	So WoK	Uses WoKs in description of AoKs or folk knowledge but assume that if WoKs are used then the result is knowledge.	Tends to make statements such as: 'X uses sense perception therefore X is knowledge'	1 - 4	Narrow unpacking	Very limited links to argument	Usually unjustified generalisation	Poor	Usually not supported
14	Bad concepts	Misunderstanding the idea of concept.	A classic version of this type is essays that confuse concepts with WoKs.	1 - 4	Misunderstands key terms	Examples tend to push the argument further off track	Usually unjustified generalisation	Poor	Usually not supported
15	Trivial pursuit	Essays that just refer to folk knowledge	Analysis might be adequate but its target is not always knowledge	3 - 6	Could be good	No examples taken from AoKs	Unjustified generalisation	Could be good	Usually not supported
16	Level changers	Essays that mix up first and second order questions	Passages about past events rather than an analysis of History as an AoK	2 - 4	Poor	Examples are often of the wrong type	Unjustified generalisation	Poor	Not supported
17	Personal Knowledge	Essays that assume only personal knowledge exists	Tends to be descriptive	1 - 5	Poor	Anecdotal examples	Unjustified generalisation	Poor	Only supported by given examples
18	Pedagogical	The essay where the candidate translates all statements about knowledge into statements about learning	Analysis tends to be of textbooks and learning styles	2 - 5	Poor	Examples tend to be personal	Unjustified generalisation	Poor	Usually not supported
19	Bias	Essays that make the inappropriate claim that all X's are biased	Failure to identify that use of word 'bias' assumes some unbiased true state	2 - 4	Poor	Historians are often singled out as	Unjustified generalisation	Poor	Not supported

What I do in my spare time 2 (still sad)

Most of the essays in the list are pathologies... ways in which the essay goes wrong

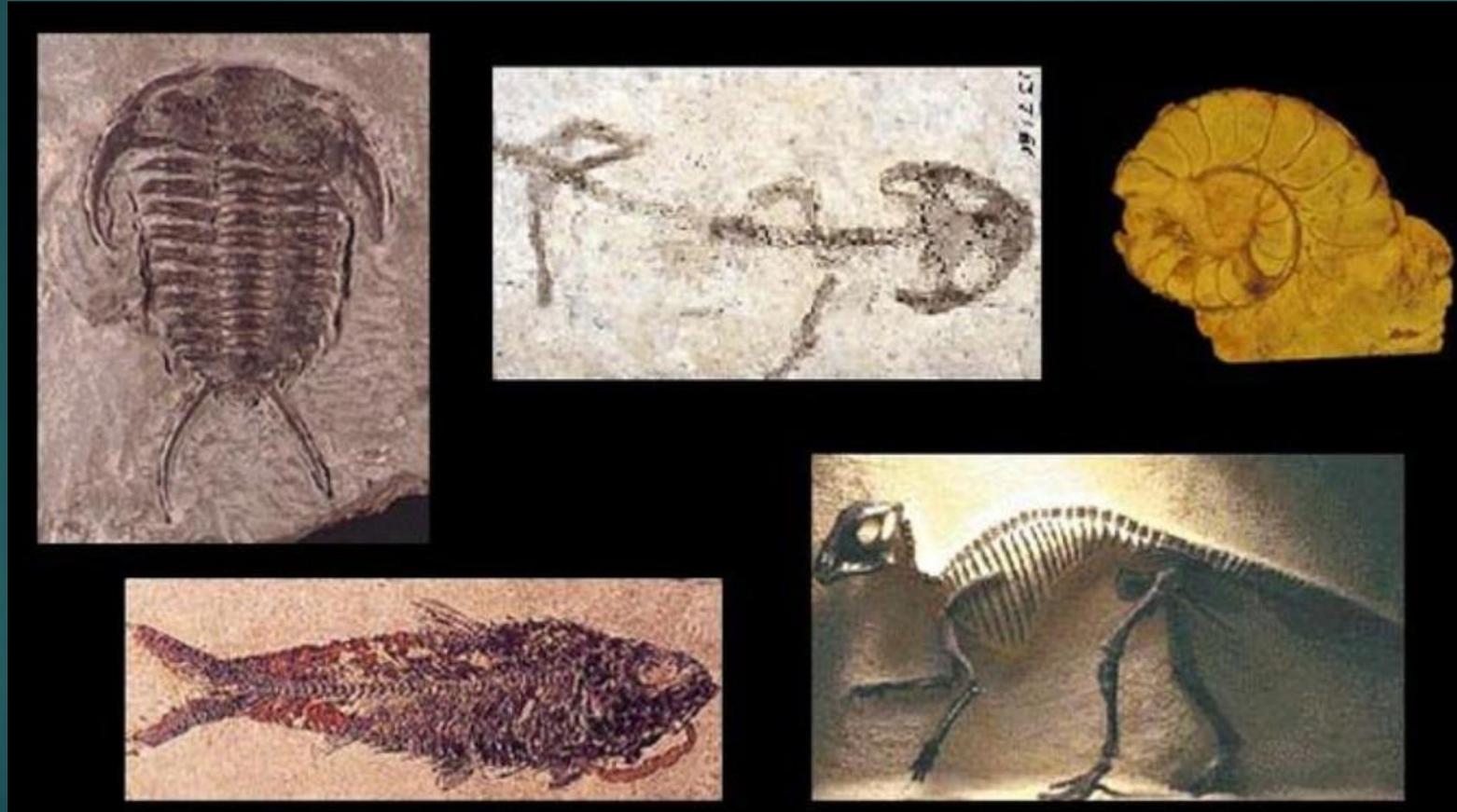


A theory...

- ▶ These problems are not so much to do with how ToK content is taught in the classroom (though some of them are – such as those associated with WoKs)
- ▶ The majority of these problems are to do with how the ToK essay is developed.

Hence... the good news: It is not necessary to change the whole ToK course at your school to improve the ToK results (although some small tweaks will give additional help).

Some generic types of problem



- 
1. There is a failure to unpack the prescribed title, use of dictionary definitions not connected to the rest of the essay. Knowledge questions stated up front bear little relation to the PT.
 2. There are no examples or examples are described but not analysed. Examples are not connected to the PT.
 3. Examples are expected to stand on their own – but there is no attempt to show why the examples are important, significant or typical – there is no generalisation from analysis of examples.
 4. There is little or no evaluation in the essay. Different lines of argument are not assessed.
 5. The essay does not answer the question in the prescribed title.

Familiar problems?

- 
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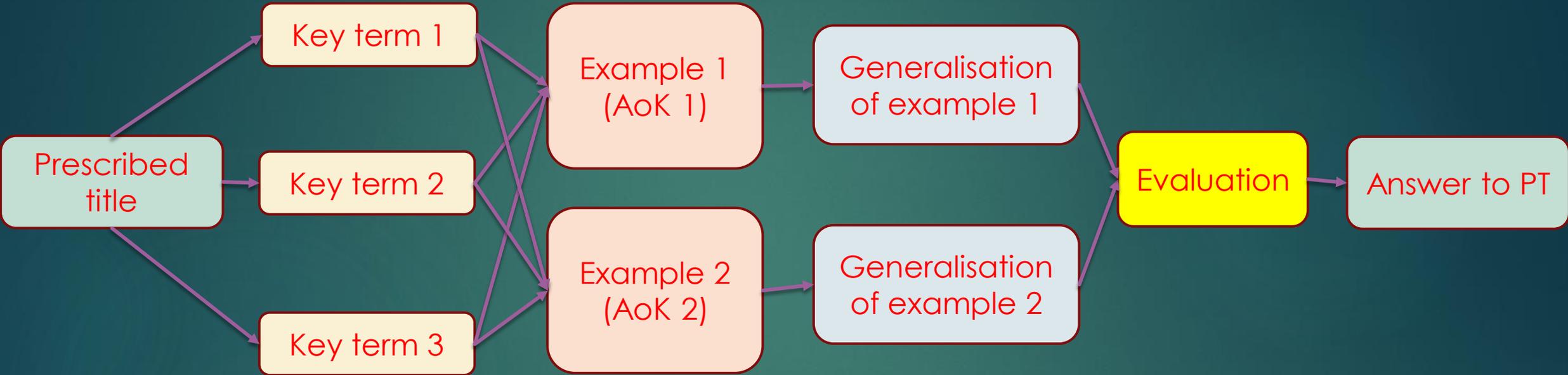
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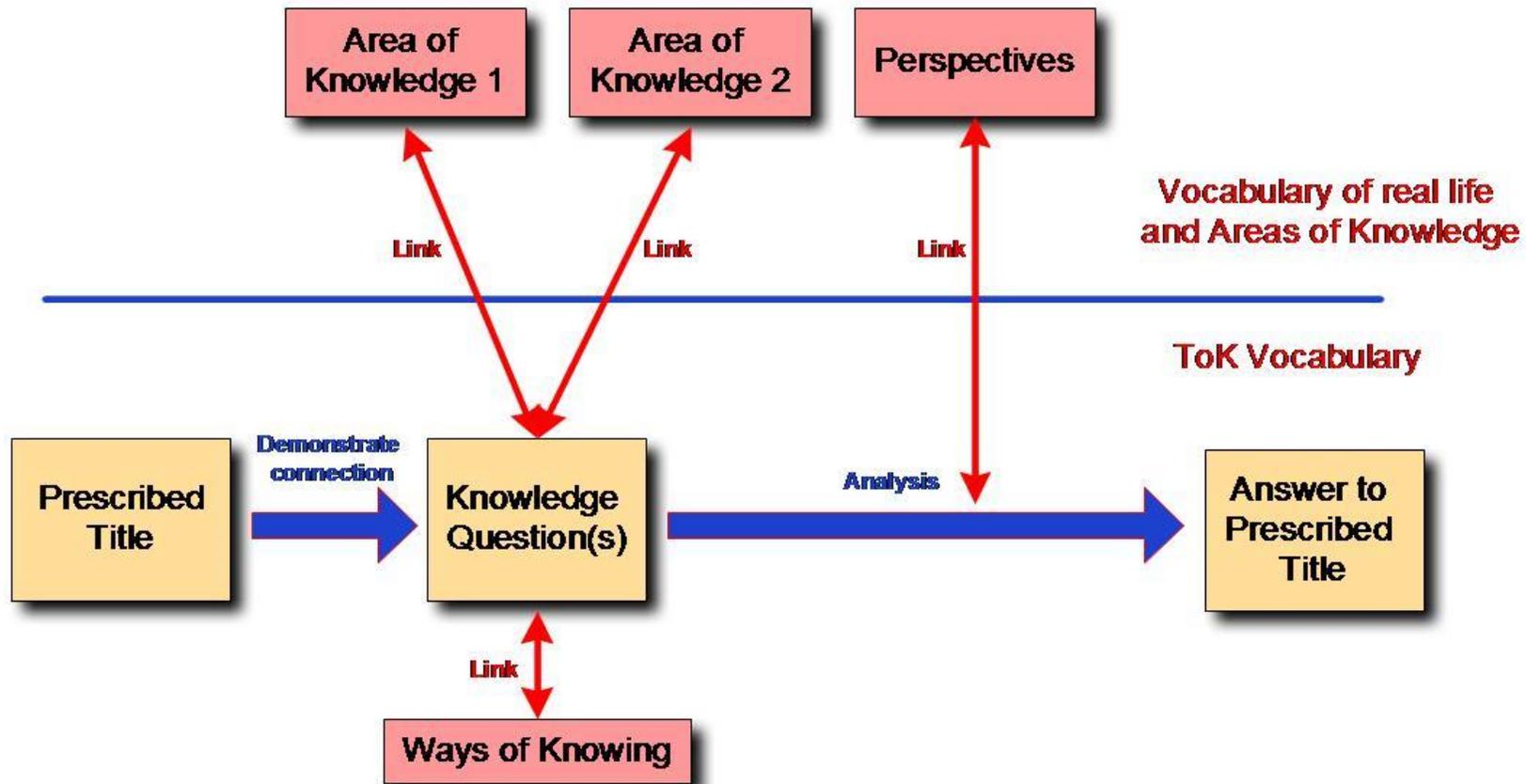
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 5. The essay does not answer the question in the prescribed title. **CONCLUSION**

Familiar problems?

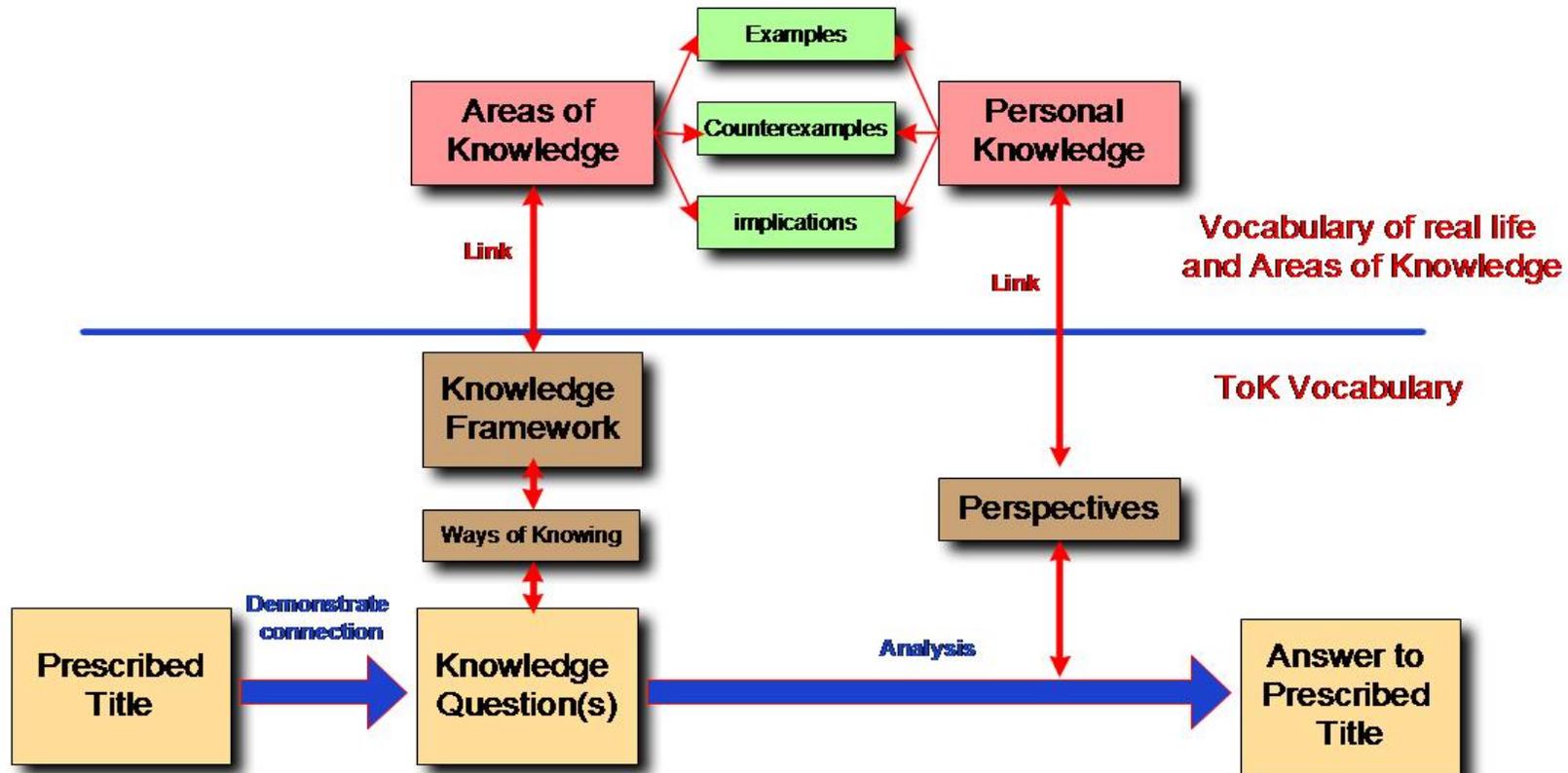


A new diagram for an old problem

Structure of the ToK Essay



Structure of the ToK Essay





The pt needs to be unpacked and a response needs to be constructed



The main components in the unpacking are concepts named by key terms in the question

How can we (the student) arrive at understandings of key terms?

- ▶ **Not:** abstractly – thinking like a dictionary (or a philosopher!)
- ▶ **But:** by finding examples that seem to fit the PT and then examining them closely to see how the key terms relate to the example.

- 
- ▶ The process of relating examples to the PT creates understandings of key terms.
 - ▶ The process of relating examples to the PT helps to produce knowledge questions.

key central ideas

Decomposition and generalisation.

- ▶ Decompose the example into parts and identify which parts correspond to the key terms in the PT.
- ▶ Do this with a second example.
- ▶ Generalise to an example based definition of the key terms.

1. "It is only knowledge produced with difficulty that we truly value." To what extent do you agree with this statement?
2. "Facts are needed to establish theories but theories are needed to make sense of facts." Discuss this statement with reference to two areas of knowledge.
3. Should key events in the historical development of areas of knowledge always be judged by the standards of their time?
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?
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.
6. "Humans are pattern-seeking animals and we are adept at finding patterns whether they exist or not" (adapted from Michael Shermer). Discuss knowledge questions raised by this idea in two areas of knowledge.

M2017 Prescribed titles

- ▶ What are the key terms in the question?
- ▶ Find a number of examples drawn from different areas of knowledge that seem to fit your PT.
- ▶ What, in your examples, corresponds to these key terms?
- ▶ Are there any difficulties that emerge in understanding these key terms? Write them down (these are likely to be knowledge questions).
- ▶ Write down rough definitions of the key terms.
- ▶ Write down alternative ways of understanding these terms (refer to your examples).
- ▶ Write down any problems you have encountered in understanding these key terms. (these are likely to be related to knowledge questions)
- ▶ Write down a first set of knowledge questions that relate to the title.

Structured brainstorm

The structure of the essay

Beginning

Introduction

- introduces topic/context
- states argument
- outlines main points

Middle

Body – paragraphs

- series of paragraphs that develop the argument
- contains one main idea in the topic sentence
- each topic sentence links directly to the argument

End

Conclusion

- restates argument
- sums up
- relates to broader context

Introduction – state question
Clarify key terms

Reasons linked with examples

Counterclaims and counterexamples

Evaluation

Conclusion

Implications

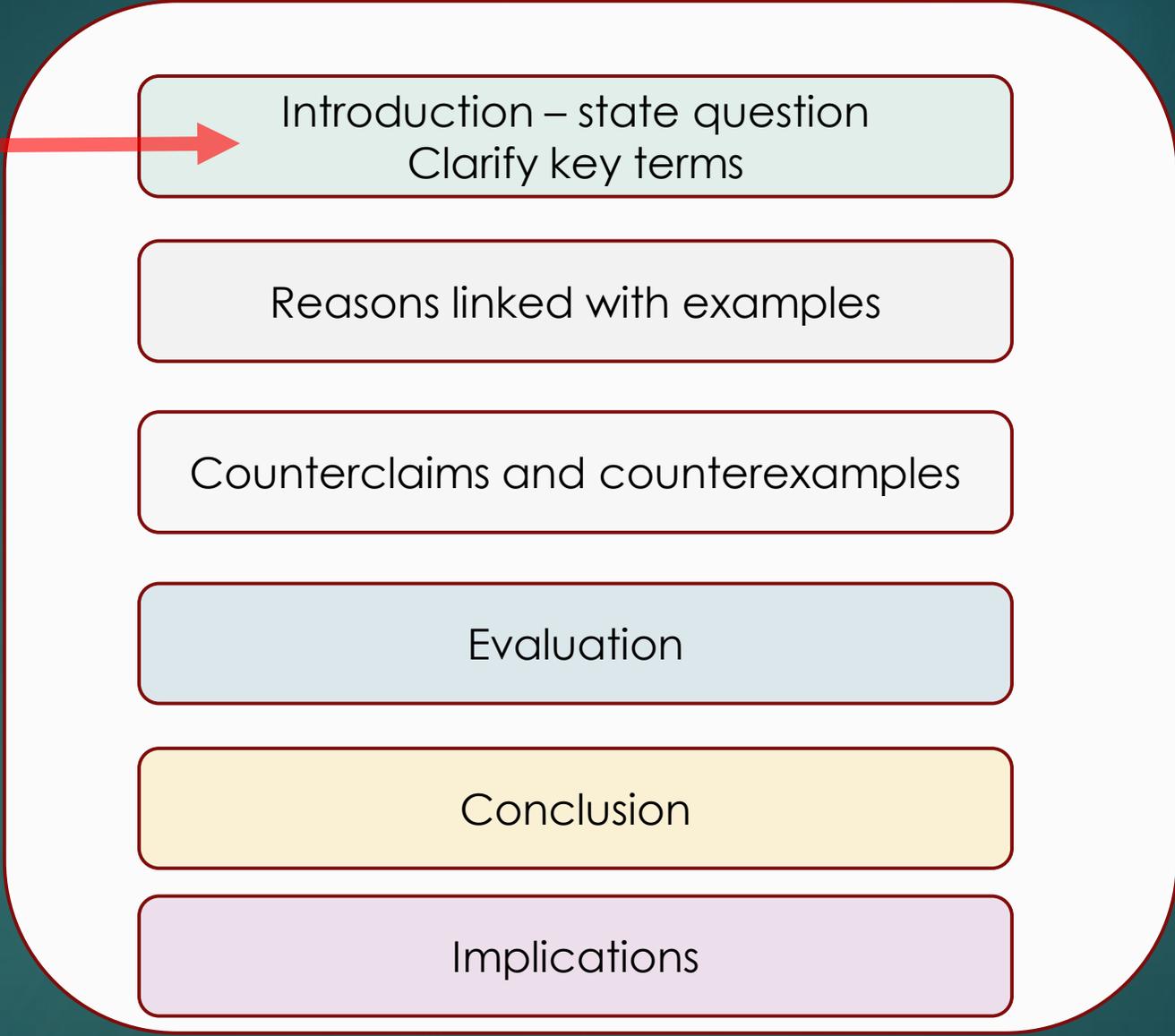
outline

Topic sentence
(mini thesis)

Supporting sentences
(reasons)

Concluding sentence

Paragraph structure



Introduction – state question
Clarify key terms

Reasons linked with examples

Counterclaims and counterexamples

Evaluation

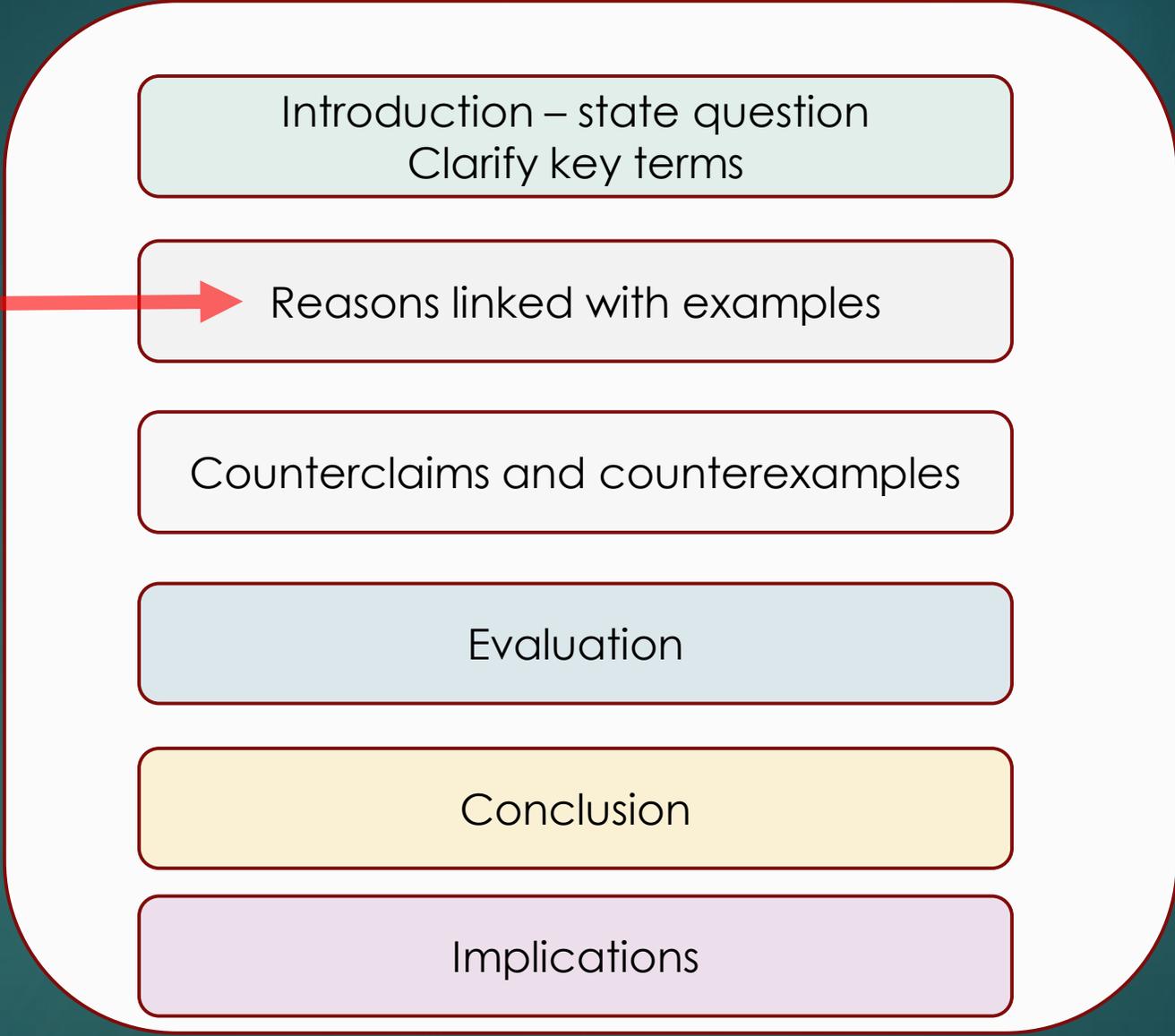
Conclusion

Implications

introduction

- ▶ State thesis: “This essay will argue that ...”
- ▶ Give a roadmap of the essay: “Evidence from X and Y will be considered”. “Alternative approaches such as Z might look attractive for reason A”. “Upon evaluation, however, it seems that W is the case giving support to our thesis”.
- ▶ Unpack key terms.
- ▶ You might want to use language like “X could mean” or, more personally, “by X I mean ...”, “Y can be thought of as ...”

introduction



Introduction – state question
Clarify key terms

→ Reasons linked with examples

Counterclaims and counterexamples

Evaluation

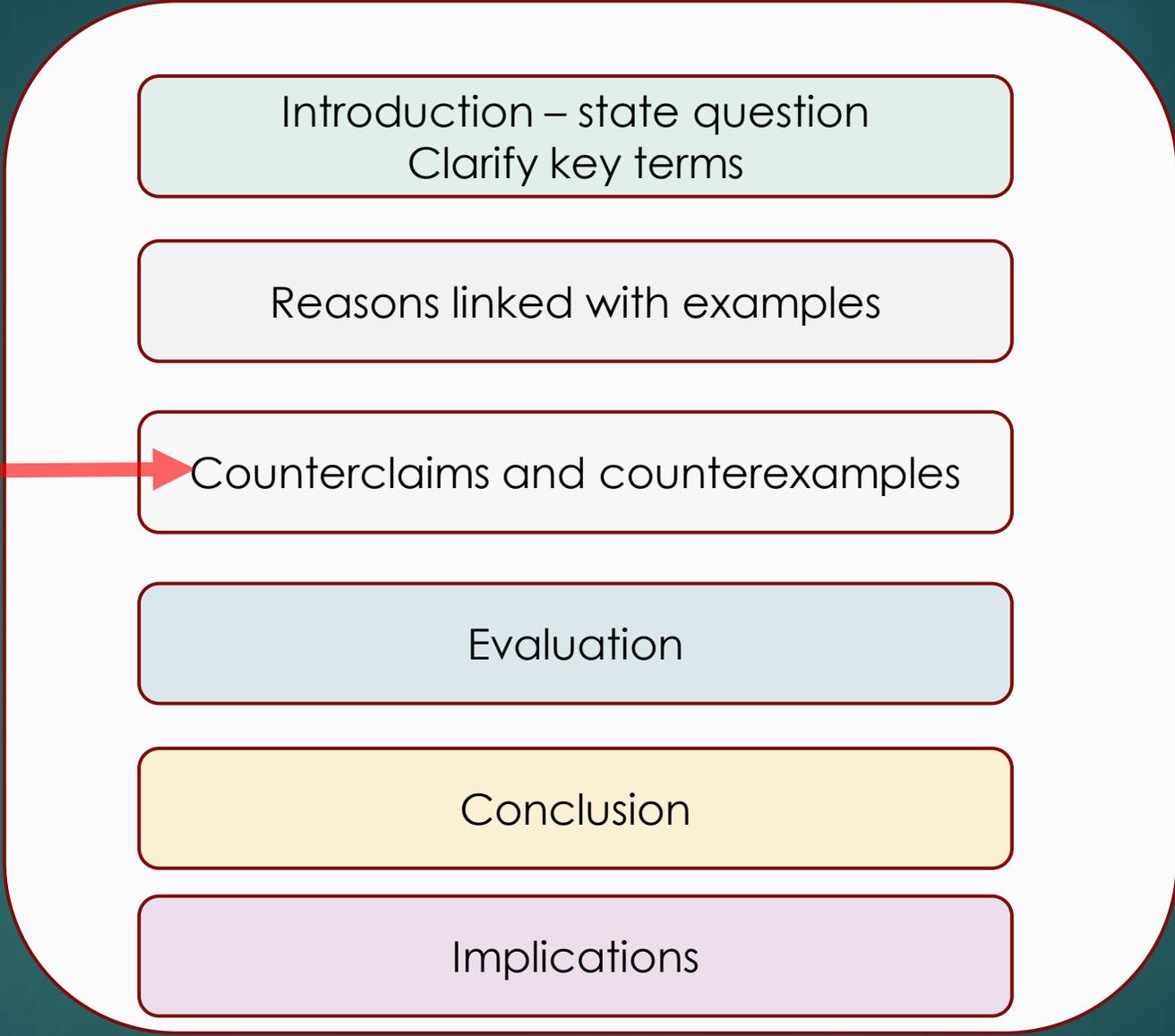
Conclusion

Implications

Body 1

- ▶ First paragraph of the body – give the best argument for your thesis.
- ▶ State and analyse example to back up your claims. This means showing how the key terms in the question unpacked in the intro fit the example.
- ▶ Give an argument to show how the examples you have chosen are somehow typical – this will need more abstract language and will allow you to generalise from them
- ▶ ToK technical terms should be used here (deduction, induction, observation, adequate evidence, inference, explanation, inference to the best explanation etc.).

Body 1



Introduction – state question
Clarify key terms

Reasons linked with examples



Counterclaims and counterexamples

Evaluation

Conclusion

Implications

Body 2

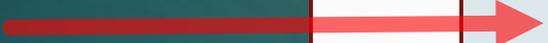
- ▶ Give possible counterexamples to your claims – this might call upon the analysis of a second example
- ▶ Use the principle of charity so try to come up with the strongest arguments against your thesis that you can imagine (this is the opposite of the straw man fallacy)
- ▶ Try to identify weaknesses in your thesis based on the counterclaims or counterexamples you have identified.
- ▶ You can use counterclaim transition signals here “On the other hand ...”, “Against this, it can be argued that...”, “Alternatively, ...”, “However, ...”, “There are objections to this line of thinking such as ...”

Body 2

Introduction – state question
Clarify key terms

Reasons linked with examples

Counterclaims and counterexamples



Evaluation

Conclusion

Implications

evaluation

- ▶ This is where you weigh up the reasons for your thesis and those against it.
- ▶ Your thesis must win (otherwise you must change your thesis – this is why you plan the essay first before you write it).
- ▶ Each counterclaim or counterexample has to be dealt with.
- ▶ Since you tried to make the counterclaims and counterexamples as strong (and disruptive to your thesis) as possible you might find that the best way to avoid these counterexamples is to narrow your thesis by restricting the domain in which it is valid - hedging.
- ▶ This is good critical thinking – realising that your thesis works well within a narrow range of examples but not outside them. Be sure to define the range of examples in which your thesis works.
- ▶ Good evaluation phrases are: “on balance it seems that ...”, “While (counterexample) suggests that (thesis) does not hold universally we can see that it does hold in (special cases)”, “The problem with the view that ... is that ...”.

evaluation

Introduction – state question
Clarify key terms

Reasons linked with examples

Counterclaims and counterexamples

Evaluation

Conclusion

Implications

conclusion

- ▶ A short snappy conclusion summarises what you have discussed in the evaluation section. This paragraph should be relatively short.
- ▶ The conclusion should answer the PT.
- ▶ Useful conclusion phrases “In conclusion, ...”, “To conclude, ...”, “Therefore, ...”, “The previous analysis suggests that ...”.

conclusion

Introduction – state question
Clarify key terms

Reasons linked with examples

Counterclaims and counterexamples

Evaluation

Conclusion

Implications

implications

- ▶ Some authors like to append this section to the conclusion paragraph. I prefer it to be a separate paragraph.
- ▶ Here you should try to answer the question “so what?”, “what is the big deal?”. You should try to show how your conclusion might relate to the wider world, to other related situations or topics.
- ▶ Useful conclusion phrases “The broader implications are ...”, “This means that ...”, “This conclusion is significant because ...”, “This analysis is relevant to ...”, “These findings raise questions about ...”.

implications

Topic – what the example will show

Description of example

Analysis of example showing which features correspond with the keywords in the question.

Conclusion – state what the example showed and how this fits into the structure of the essay

The anatomy of an extended example

Introduction

Unpacked
Keywords in PT

Topic – what the example
will show

Description of example

Analysis of example
showing which features
correspond with the
keywords in the question.

Conclusion – state what the
example showed and how
this fits into the structure of
the essay

Linking examples to PT

Introduction

Example preview
1

Example preview
2

Conclusion
preview

Example 1

Example 2

Conclusion

Roadmapping...

- 
- ▶ Finalise the examples that you will use in the response to the PT
 - ▶ Given a particular understanding of the terms in the question (relative to your examples) produce an argument that leads to an answer to the question.
 - ▶ Formulate a counterargument to this thesis (support the counterargument with examples)
 - ▶ Explain why the argument beats the counterargument
 - ▶ Diagram the final essay showing details of the argument counterargument, extended examples and evaluation.

In groups – essay diagrams

Conclusions

- ▶ Unpacking key terms in the PT is best done in the context of concrete examples.
- ▶ Finding knowledge questions is best done in the context of concrete examples.
- ▶ Diagramming the essay is a useful tool for producing structure and coherence.