

# Essay Tips: Introductions

## ■ Advice from senior examiners

The following suggestions may be helpful – though note that you really need to read the whole essay for the points to fully make sense.

### Example 1

This is a very good introduction.

- Clear focus on KQ: 'does certainty mean different things in different AOKs?'
- Clear language
- Structure is easy to follow and there is a clear sense of direction.
- The example is personal, original (could be better used) and reasonably used.
- The distinctions that are to be made in the essay are clearly indicated, and in the final lines there is a clear thesis which is, presumably, to be explored in the body of the essay.
- The term 'certainty' is clarified concisely without a dictionary.
- It is interesting.

### Example 2

This is a very poor introduction.

- This could be said to be focused on the KQ of the question, but as it is simply reiterating rather than exploring the issues, there is little credit; one would need to see some development.
- The use of a dictionary adds nothing to the essay; there is no indication that the student understands what these quotes mean.
- There is no specific direction for the essay. It says little more than 'I shall answer the question'.

### Example 3

This is a good introduction.

- Clear focus on the KQ in the question
- The initial juxtaposition is thought-provoking and original, though the smoking example needs a reference.
- Clear language
- Original, personal example is very well used.
- It is certainly possible to use the term 'true' in addressing this title, but using this problematic term in line 4 as if it were clear, only to say in line 13 that it will not be discussed in the essay, is unwise and confusing.
- The direction of the essay is clearly outlined in the last three lines, but these really say no more than 'I shall investigate the question'. Some more detail, or a thesis, would help.
- It is interesting.

### Example 4

This is a good introduction.

- Clearly focused on the KQ of the question, but while it does explore (cf. Example 2), it does not explicitly develop the ideas (cf. Example 1). Of course, this development may come later in the essay.
- Clear, simple language
- Excellent personal voice
- Shows a clear and direct understanding of the title
- It is interesting.
- The last sentence does hint at a direction '... should we want to ...' but there is room for a little more in this respect.

# Essay Tips: Knowledge Questions

## ■ Advice from senior examiners

The following suggestions may be helpful – though note that there are other possible knowledge questions that might be considered; this is not meant to be an exhaustive analysis. Note also that these paragraphs are not meant to be exemplars for detailed analysis and development of ideas, even when the paragraph is clearly addressing a knowledge question; analysis and development often takes several paragraphs and cannot be shown in a brief document like this.

### Example 1

The paragraph has a response to a knowledge question embedded in it, but it is not clearly expressed or easy to extract.

- The paragraph addresses issues centred on culture, emotions and moral knowledge. It is not entirely clear what these issues are, and the paragraph does not stay 'tight' on an issue but gestures towards issues rather vaguely.
- The example is potentially excellent, but it is not used to develop analysis effectively.
- It is not entirely clear how emotion and moral decisions are linked; the terms are used but no real progress is made.

### Example 2

The paragraph does not address any knowledge question.

- This is superficially a very good paragraph which has details of a fine example, and a clear student voice. However, none of the many possible knowledge questions has been addressed even implicitly.
- Issues that could have been addressed using this as a platform might be:
  - To what extent can someone from one culture understand knowledge about another?
  - Do language issues prevent us from knowing another culture? (This refers to the apparently single meaning 'fisherman' in English, which did not match up with the Tamil language).
  - How might our interpretations about unfamiliar situations in the social sciences be undermined by hidden assumptions in the premises of our reasoning?
- Despite its general attractiveness, this is barely a piece of TOK writing, though it has considerable potential for analysis.

### Example 3

The paragraph addresses a good knowledge question.

- The knowledge question is 'To what extent can we justify moral decisions through inductive logic?' which clearly fulfills the criteria for a good knowledge question.
- Despite the clear focus on the knowledge question, the issue is not developed in a useful way, and the example is not explained in a way that supports the analysis.

### Example 4

The paragraph has a knowledge question embedded in it, but it is not clearly expressed or easy to extract.

- The paragraph addresses an issue centred on language and meaning. It is not entirely clear what the question is; perhaps something like 'what impact do problems of translation have for sharing knowledge with speakers of different languages?'
- The knowledge question does not clearly fulfil the criteria for a good knowledge question, but it is nevertheless couched in the language and ideas of TOK.
- One wonders if the student would be able to identify the question; it is rather implicit.

### Example 5

The paragraph explicitly addresses a good knowledge question.

- The paragraph addresses the question 'What kind of "truth" can be conveyed by non-literal language such as that found in literature?' This fulfils the criteria for a good knowledge question.
- The knowledge question is not treated in the abstract but embedded in a specific situation via an original example.
- Despite the clear focus on the knowledge question, further detail and development is needed.
- There is an awareness of multiple perspectives built into the analysis (even though the 'atheist' perspective is rather throwaway and unnecessary).

# Essay Tips: Examples

## ■ Advice from senior examiners

The following suggestions may be helpful – though note that examples can be used in different ways for different purposes and need to be adapted to the forms and structure of the essay.

### Example 1

This is a weak use of examples – *even though the basic point may be sound*.

- The mathematics example,  $1 + 1 = 2$  is clichéd; worse, it does not really tell us anything about mathematical truth. It does not support analysis.
- While it may be true that  $1 + 1 = 2$  is always mathematically definite and factual, the example of the books is not helpful; we can find examples from the physical world, where such truths do not hold (one raindrop plus one raindrop equals one bigger raindrop). So this example seems to have been chosen without actual care for the complexities of the situation.
- The line from the poem, while fresh and presumably from the student's own reading, is used to support the claim that literature is 'ambiguous and subjective', but it does not really allow the reader to understand the claim any better. That is, it too does not *support* analysis but simply acts as description.

### Example 2

This is a good use of an example.

- The example is clearly from the student's own educational experience.
- As well as original, the example shows a clear sense of reflection and self-awareness on the part of the student.
- The use of the quote is good; it bridges from the example in maths to ethics, via the concept of 'imagination'.

### Example 3

You cannot really tell how good these examples are.

- This was an introductory paragraph; the examples have clearly been chosen to contrast and to immediately illuminate the problem of distinguishing between fact and interpretation. As such they are successful, but if these are not referred to again then they are undeveloped and have rather a 'throwaway' feel to them.
- If the essay revisits these examples and develops them then they might provide a narrative thread on which to hang analytical points; this might be an excellent structuring device for a very open essay title.

### Example 4

This is a very good use of an example.

- What immediately stands out is the way the student does not say 'here's a TOK point and here's an example of that point'. Rather the example is *integrated* into the point being made, and it is not clear where the example ends and the analysis starts.
- The example is used as a mechanism to compare different areas of knowledge; as such it supports and furthers the analysis, and is used to move the essay forward, rather than just punctuate it.

### Example 5

This is a very poor use of an example.

- It is hypothetical, not real.
- It is an extreme example, and lacks all nuance and understanding of subtlety.
- The example is completely contrived to support the point that emotion can overpower reason.
- Even though contrived to do so, the example completely fails to demonstrate that emotion can overpower reason. One might equally argue from this example, that the father's reason told him to steal the food, and his emotion (fear of being caught?) told him not to steal it.

# Essay Tips: Conclusions

## ■ Advice from senior examiners

### Example 1

This is a very weak conclusion.

- The argument of the essay is clear; that though it is imperfect, 'Maths has the most justification'; so there is, at least, a knowledge issue addressed.
- Poor use of language means it is vague: 'most justification', 'pondering', 'ratios', 'uttermost', 'conceivable'.
- There is no sense of stepping back from the content and looking (critically) at the arguments (it might be worth asking students what that might be; possibly that 'this conclusion is surprising given that we rely on justifications all the time and tend to take them for granted'. Obviously this point could be made at varying levels of sophistication).
- The final sentence attempts a flourish, but slips into pomposity and the grandiose.

### Example 2

This is a very good conclusion.

- Clear, simple language
- Good summary of the argument; directly addresses the knowledge issue in the question. Notice that though the answer is complex (it depends on the nature of the conflict and how we approach it), the points are not simply reiterated at length (cf. Example 3). This is an example of stepping back from the essay, though there is room for more in this respect.
- The durian example was made in the introduction and has been used to make the flourish that wraps up the essay.

### Example 3

This is a good conclusion.

- Clear personal voice; the way she is aware of how she has come to see things differently after writing and thinking about them
- Clear knowledge issue focus
- Rather verbose
- Reasonable summary, but in contrast to Example 2, there is too much detail. Lines 3–8 ('Even an area ... is gained') get into too much detail.
- The final five lines do address the big picture; they step back and address the 'so what' question. She is saying 'OK, so I agree it's impossible to have objective knowledge in Art or Ethics, but you know, that's OK; I believe that Culture and Experience *should* play key roles in these areas.'

### Example 4

This is a good conclusion.

- Clearly addresses the question, but qualifies the question by referring to specific distinctions. Note that this sort of original distinction is an analytical way of showing personal voice (examples are a more obvious but often less effective way of doing this).
- Summarizes the argument clearly
- Clear focus on the knowledge issue in the question
- There is some evidence of stepping back from the arguments of the essay ('This does not matter greatly ...', though there is room for more in this respect.