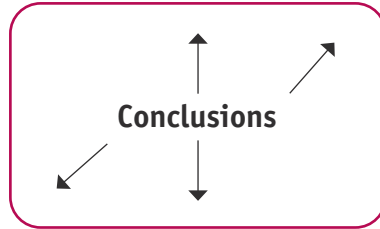
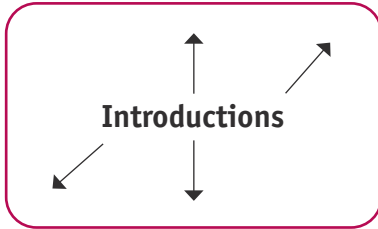


# Essay-writing: writing introductions and conclusions

We all know that writing introductions and conclusions to essays is tough (even in your first language – let alone your second and third). Maybe your English teachers expect that you already know how to do this, but you feel that you've never actually been taught it. Maybe you feel like you moved schools and so slipped through the cracks and missed this part of the curriculum. Maybe you're still feeling lost with this skill for lots of reasons.

So, let's start with a brainstorm: what does an introduction or conclusion actually need in it? You can do this on your own or with a friend:



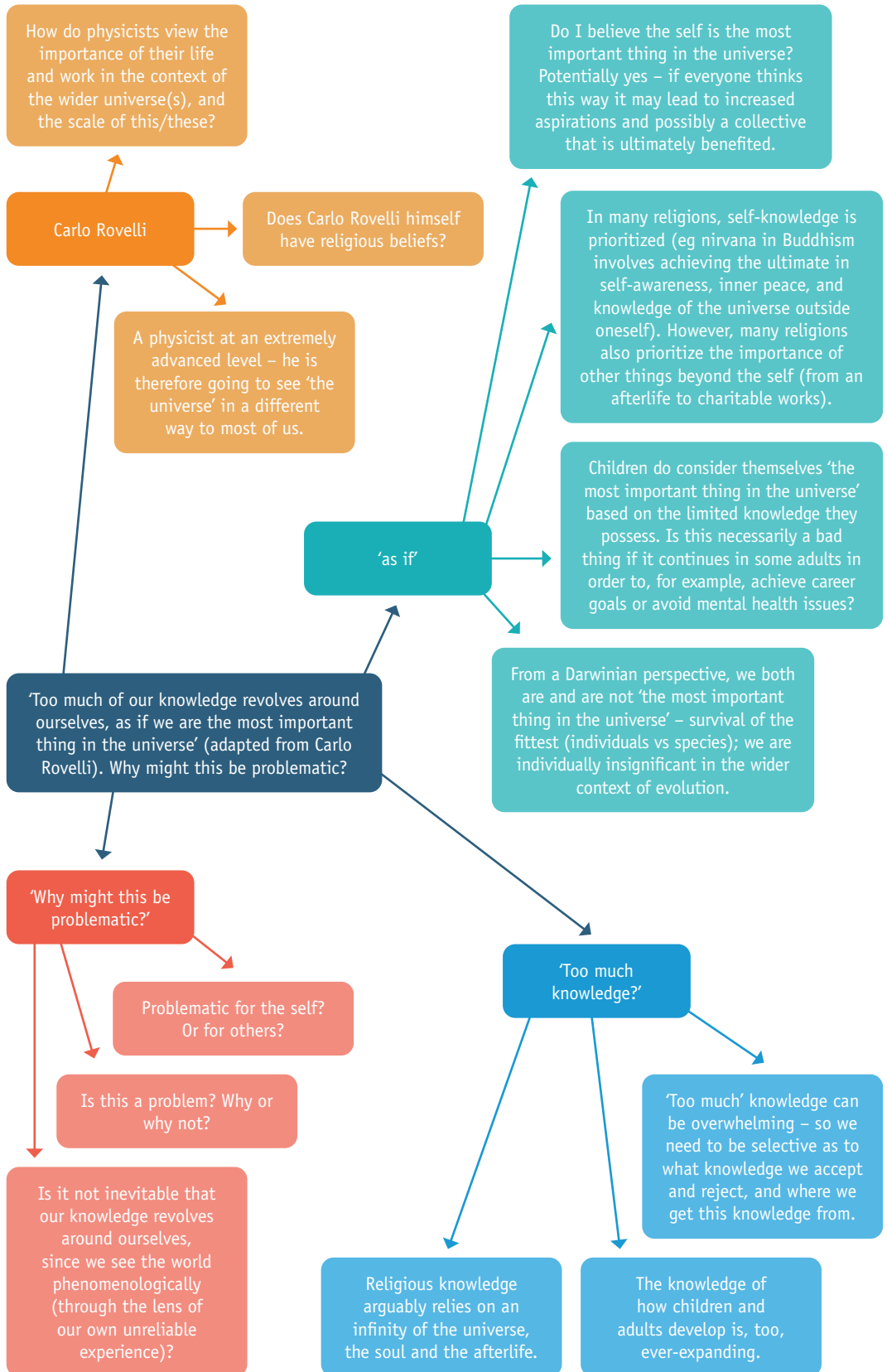
## Some suggestions

### Introductions (around 160 words)

- Show the examiner that you understand the question.
- Pick on any words in the question that may have more than one meaning, and explain how you will interpret them.
- Preview what you might discuss, giving a general overview (including any areas of knowledge you will consider). Like a movie trailer, just a little; don't give away too much!

### Main body (around 1280 words, split into 4–8 different sections/paragraphs of 160–320 words each)

- Explain each of your ideas one by one.
- Remember that shorter sentences and paragraphs can be better to help you get your ideas across clearly. You may wish to, for example, devote one paragraph to your claims about the essay title in relation to one area of knowledge, followed by one paragraph about possible counterclaims, before then doing the same for your second chosen area of knowledge.
- Remember to link back to the essay question regularly so that you don't lose focus. However, you should plan your essay before starting, so that you know how you want to group your ideas together and in what order they will make sense. (See diagram for more help with planning.)



### Conclusions (around 160 words):

- Restate your main ideas, using different words (you may want to work backwards through your essay to start with your most 'recent' idea in your conclusion – this can also give you a good 'bridge' between your final main body paragraph and your conclusion paragraph).  
(One good way of doing this can be to put your essay away, then try to write down your main ideas from memory, to try to work them together into a conclusion. Or, go and record yourself telling your mum/dad/sibling/best friend/anyone who will listen about what you have written in your TOK essay. You can then use this recording as a basis for your conclusion – especially if writing is tricky for you.)
- Once you have done this, think about the overall importance of these ideas. What brings them together? What do they tell us about knowledge and how we acquire it?
- Link back to the question and provide an overall answer.
- Don't provide any new information or examples at this point! Everything should follow on logically from what you said before.

### Let's try this with a past TOK essay question

"Present knowledge is wholly dependent on past knowledge." Discuss this claim with reference to two areas of knowledge.

*Step one: explain/show that you understand the question, using your own words.*

- Questions to ask ourselves before we begin:
  - What do we mean by "present knowledge"?
  - What do we mean by "past knowledge"?

*Step two: pick on any words in the question that have more than one meaning, and explain how you will interpret them.*

- Questions to ask ourselves before we begin:
  - What does "wholly" mean?
  - How am I going to interpret this?
  - How far do I agree that present knowledge is **wholly** dependent on past knowledge?

*Step three: preview what you will discuss, giving a general overview.*

- Questions to ask ourselves before we begin:
  - What claims will I make in relation to the question?
  - What counterclaims will I explore in relation to the question?
  - Which AOKs will the essay refer to?

### Examiner tip

Use our list of introduction sentence starters to help you!

Present knowledge can ...

However, past knowledge can ...

Similarly ...

Conversely ...

As such ...

Both present and past knowledge have certain limitations, such as ...

Furthermore, the adverb 'wholly' suggests ...

For these reasons, this essay will argue that ...

These ideas will be explored in relation to the areas of knowledge of ...

## Introduction to essay

Now try writing your practice introduction in the space below, answering the questions above.

“Present knowledge is ‘wholly’ dependent on past knowledge.” Discuss this claim with reference to two areas of knowledge.

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### Examiner tip

Develop your TOK lexicon! Look up any unknown words in this model introduction and write down their definitions in your own glossary, using your own words. These can also be made into a Quizlet or a physical stack of revision cards.

## Model introduction

*Present knowledge can be aided by our past knowledge of people and events. However, past knowledge can be unreliable depending on where we have got it from and depending on who has related that past knowledge to others. Similarly, the theory of indirect realism suggests that our own perception of our present knowledge and the world around us may be unreliable – potentially affecting the quality of both past and present knowledge. As such, both present and past knowledge have their own limitations. Furthermore, the adverb ‘wholly’ suggests that while present knowledge may depend on past knowledge to a degree, the present may contain knowledge that the past can ‘know’ nothing of. For these reasons, this essay will argue that present knowledge is not wholly dependent on past knowledge, as the latter can be just as unreliable as the former. These ideas will be explored in relation to the areas of knowledge of history and the natural sciences.*

### Self-assessment

How does my introduction compare to the model introduction? Have I covered all of the steps? Highlight the appropriate areas using pink, yellow and green highlighters.

## Conclusion to essay

Now for the conclusion. Here are some handy hints to help you cover all the bases:

- Work backwards through your essay, referring to the idea in your final main body paragraph first in your conclusion. This will help you form a bridge between your final main body paragraph and your conclusion. Your conclusion should end where you started the essay (ie with the main idea from your first main body paragraph).
- Cover up your essay and, on a separate piece of paper, write down the most important points from memory. Use these to help you write your conclusion. This can also be done by recording yourself talking about it on your phone, or telling a friend or relative before you write it down.
- Answer the question in one sentence.
- The ‘no surprises’ test: check each sentence and make sure it refers directly to something that you already said earlier in the essay. If it didn’t, it’s got to go! Everything you say in the conclusion should follow on directly from your introduction.
- Vocabulary check: make sure you use different words to re-express your ideas and draw logical conclusions. You don’t want to sound repetitive. Double-check the words you have used in your conclusion against those used in your essay, and use a thesaurus to help you find synonyms, if you need to.

## Examiner tip

This list is not exhaustive! Keep reading and writing a variety of texts to keep expanding your own personal 'bank' of introduction and conclusion phrases. Many university websites now also have essay-writing phrasebanks of their own that you can use to help you too.

## Vocabulary bank!

Use these words and phrases to help you form your conclusion.

This shows ...,

This means that ...,

Ultimately, ...,

While ...,

Even though ...,

Although ...,

Evidence from the field of X suggests that ...,

Exploration of the field of X enables us to see that ...,

It is evident that ...,

This demonstrates ...,

Overall, ...,

It can be concluded that ...,

It can be seen that ...,

This allows for the conclusion that ...,

This indicates that ...,

Examination of X therefore reveals that ...,

As such, ...,

Clearly, ...

## Model conclusion

Overall, the notion of 'wholly' is troublesome in the investigation of how far present knowledge is dependent on past knowledge. Its use ultimately suggests that past knowledge – and our perception of it – is reliable enough to help us make such a judgment. This essay's explorations of the fields of knowledge of history and natural sciences show that this is far from being the case. Not only does the theory of indirect realism potentially inhibit us from perceiving the world around us – and as such, past and present events – accurately, but also, it is necessary to consider that our past – especially from a colonial perspective – may have been presented to us only by a very narrow pool of people. This, therefore, necessarily affects our perception of the past, and thereby the present. Furthermore, our present knowledge deviates from past knowledge at times to such a degree that not only is our present knowledge not wholly dependent on past knowledge, it means that it is perhaps even in our best interests for this not to be the case.

## Self-assessment

How confident do I feel about writing introductions? Circle one.



How confident do I feel about writing conclusions? Circle one.



What is good about my introduction-writing? Write your answer into the space below.

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## Examiner tip

The words 'everything', 'nothing', and 'don't know' are banned. If you're not sure, ask a friend, family member or teacher to reread your practice writing and get their opinion.

What do I need to improve about my introduction-writing? Write your answer into the space below.

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What is good about my conclusion-writing? Write your answer into the space below.

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What do I need to improve about my conclusion-writing? Write your answer into the space below.

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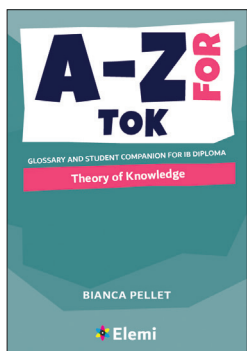
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This worksheet has been written by **Bianca Pellet** (the author of *A-Z for Theory of Knowledge* published by Elemi International School Publishers Ltd). It is intended to support educators and learners with practical ideas to help them achieve their best in their IB Diploma. Although this worksheet is standalone, if you find it helpful you may also like *A-Z for Theory of Knowledge*, a glossary and student companion for IB Diploma.



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