1. **“Accepting knowledge claims always involves an element of trust.” (single concept question)**

**Discuss this claim with reference to two areas of knowledge.**

Key words: “**always**”, “**trust**”, “**accepting**”

* When anyone says that something ***always*** happens alongside something else, you should be immediately suspicious.

*Always?  On every possible occasion?  How do we know that that’s necessarily the case?*  *That would seem to imply a necessary, structural link between the two things in question, but how certain am I that such a link necessarily exists?*

* Then there’s the expression “***an element of trust***”, which is an everyday figure of speech that hides a lot within its words:

*Who is trusting whom, exactly?  Do all people mean the same thing when they talk about trust – what does it mean to you; what can it mean for others?  How big, precisely, is “an element of trust” anyway, and to what extent does it naturally vary from person to person?*

* What about the notion of “***accepting***”.   After all, what am I talking about here?

*What is this thing that allegedly, “always involves an element of trust”? Different people naturally have different criteria for acceptance than others – so how might that be explored?*

**Some Concrete Approaches:**

* Are there situations where the acceptance of knowledge claims don’t involve “an element of trust”?
* To what extent is trusting the opinions of authority figures the same sort of thing as trusting my sense perception or powers of reason?
* Are there some types of knowledge claims that I somehow feel more compelled to accept than others?
* In what ways does our knowledge of a subject affect our ability to accept subsequent knowledge claims?   If I’m a molecular biologist, say, how would that influence my acceptance of a newspaper reporting a proposed cure for the current pandemic?
* Do “acceptance of knowledge claims” differ between the mathematical sciences and the human sciences?
* Under what circumstances can the role of “scientific authorities” be compared to “religious authorities”?
* To what extent do subjective factors make “knowledge claims” in the arts similar to, and different from, those in history?

1. **Within areas of knowledge, how can we differentiate between change and progress? (two concept question)**

**Answer with reference to two areas of knowledge.**

Key words: “**change**”, “**progress**”

It is **a discussion of the objective/subjective distinction with respect to the quest for knowledge**:

*Who’s to say that, just because we are doing something differently than the way we did it before, we are now making genuine progress in our quest for knowledge?*

 This sort of reasoning naturally leads us to consider related notions of validity, truth, and verification. We start to distinguish between “mere change” and “genuine progress”. But while this is certainly an important component of this title, this is not the ***only*** aspect that needs to be focused on.

The notion of “**progress**” can involve a meta-structural and even sometimes moral component to it. For example, you can:

* examine whether or not specific changes made in the practice of psychology have enabled the field as a whole to generally “progress”.
* **OR**
* assess the changes brought about by a new economic policy or theory that increased the average level of societal prosperity while making the lives of the poorest sections much much worse – to what extent is this genuine progress?

As these examples demonstrate, it’s important to take some time to explicitly distinguish between two quite different aspects of the notion of “progress” associated with any given change:

1. Progress in terms of our levels of certainty that the change itself leads to an objective advancement in knowledge - “**knowledge progress**”.
2. Progress in terms of the extent by which some change—altering behaviour or introducing some new idea —can be seen as “the right approach”, and that the field in question is “making progress - “**domain progress**”.
3. **“Labels are a necessity in the organization of knowledge, but they also constrain our understanding.” (three concept question)**

**Discuss this statement with reference to two areas of knowledge.**

Key words: “**labels**”, “**constrain**”

The aspect here to be explored is not so much a matter of definition, but more of interpretation and personal belief.   **If we want to coherently structure our knowledge about the world around us it is necessary to group what we know into categories or areas. By carrying out grouping or labelling we will inevitably miss the development of further insight that would have increased our knowledge.**

Educational theorists have long promoted the importance of “interdisciplinarity” where we move beyond the so-called “fixed silos” of our knowledge frameworks and instead “make connections across them” to maximise our insight and understanding.

This title is not, it is worth emphasizing, asking us to judge whether or not we believe this. Rather it is asking us whether the need to develop such interdisciplinarity will ***necessarily always***be with us as a direct consequence of the ***inevitable*** act of structuring what we know.  Does labelling always mean we will limit our understanding and so need to develop interdisciplinarity as an educational approach?

**Further Analysis:** to agree with the statement, you need to believe that:

1. In order to organize knowledge one needs to put **labels** on things
2. An inevitable consequence of labelling our knowledge is **to constrain one’s understanding**

It’s *logically* possible to believe that knowledge can be “organized” without developing specific categories/label but such a thing is very difficult to imagine - having some sort of categorization structure is precisely what being “organized” means…which means this can’t be challenged easily

So statement 2 - can one imagine a situation where categorizing my knowledge *doesn’t* constrain or limit understanding? Maybe if one uses sufficiently flexible labels, understanding wouldn’t be constrained after all, so the question is more about *how* to label knowledge than *whether to label or not*.  Or perhaps those constraints only arise in some instances, like for particular AOKs in particular circumstances. After all, who’s to say that “constraining our understanding” is an established universally-agreed-upon concept anyway?  Perhaps one person’s “constraint” is someone else’s “insight”? You’re going to need some specific examples to help illustrate your views + working out what you actually believe will be the best starting point….

1. **“Statistics conceal as much as they reveal.” (two concept question)**

**Discuss this claim with reference to two areas of knowledge.**

Key words: “**conceal**”, “**reveal**”

It is key here to successfully grapple with the **subjective aspects of the acts of “concealment” and “revelation”.** Statistics in themselves, of course, are merely objective mathematical expressions, but the very act of interpreting and presenting these expressions to others—expressed here by the words “conceal” and “reveal”— clearly has the potential to veer decidedly towards the subjective side of things in a way that could well involve an array of both inadvertent and deliberate errors.

The first thing to recognize is simply that any statistical argument necessarily involves an *interpretation* of the mathematics, which will often bring in an array of subjective factors and judgements that we need to make explicit and question, ranging from which conclusions are valid to larger structural issues such as how the statistical study was initially designed.

But a quick glance at the title reveals that that is not, in fact, what it says but rather “statistics conceal as much as they reveal”.

To be able to justify such a claim, you not only have to explicitly tackle the thorny issues of what it means to “conceal” and “reveal” concepts related to statistics, but you are also being forced to demonstrate that in ***all* instances of statistics there is an equal amount of concealed or hidden information to somehow “counterbalance” what is alleged to be demonstrated by the statistics**.

Once again, that seems a pretty hard position to maintain, and certainly not one I subscribe to. But that’s not the point of a TOK title, of course… (I can’t just write: I disagree. I have to demonstrate exactly *why* I disagree in terms of what, specifically, I find objectionable about the claim.)  **In this case, there appear to be two separate issues to tackle no matter what your final position is:**

1. Discuss what exactly could be meant by the words “conceal” and “reveal” in terms of related concepts - interpretation, subjectivity, objectivity…
2. Evaluate to what extent you agree, or disagree, with the claim that the amount of “concealment” and “revelation” is *always* equivalent

Possibly the best way to go about making your case is to invoke specific examples of statistical reasoning, highlighting associated interpretative (subjective) aspects together with more objective ones.

1. **“Areas of knowledge are most useful in combination with each other.” (two combination question)**

**Discuss this claim with reference to two areas of knowledge.**

Key words: “(**most) useful**”, “**combination**”

This is a sort of “flip side” to PT3, as both deal with the notion of interdisciplinarity.   While PT3 maintains that the very act of grouping our knowledge into different categories necessarily inhibits our full powers of understanding, this title maintains that the *most useful* aspect of the categorization scheme of developing distinct “areas of knowledge” lies in its potential of combining them.

* What is meant by **“useful”** in this context?
* Under what circumstances can I assess the extent something is clearly **“most useful”**?

“Useful” here is something like “*leads to increased understanding*”, by AOK organisation setting the stage for future knowledge generation etc..

It’s when considering how can I know when something is *most useful*? — that the situation becomes difficult.

For instance, the AOK structure could be seen to be useful in many ways, *including* the associated opportunity to specifically investigate combinations of different AOKs, but is this notion of *combining* AOKs the *most useful* aspect of this structural organisation.

Or maybe the “most useful” factor of the entire AOK schema is not so much knowledge generation per se but rather appreciating what I already know through a comprehensive organizational structure, and the most important aspect of such a structure is the comprehensiveness, or flexibility, or something else entirely, of each of my AOKs individually rather than their combination.

Or maybe the effectiveness of my entire AOK knowledge structure depends on the individual’s choice of AOKs themselves, with the ‘most useful’ aspect of my framework sometimes lying in the power of the AOKs themselves whilst in others it rests with how they might be combined.

A successful exploration of this title will most definitely require you to plunge into an explicit analysis of the benefits of the “AOK organizational framework”.   And remember: it’s not enough to show that, however you define “useful” (and you must), combining AOKs is a useful thing to be doing.   **Your job here is to explore how the act of combining AOKs can be demonstrated to be—or not to be—or in some instances yes and in others no—the *most useful* aspect of the entire TOK knowledge framework.**

1. **“Avoiding bias seems a commendable goal, but this fails to recognize the positive role that bias can play in the pursuit of knowledge.” (three concept question)**

**Discuss this statement with reference to two areas of knowledge.**

This title asks us to consider **whether or not biases might sometimes serve a *positive* role in the knowledge process**.  To most students—and perhaps even many teachers—such a notion will initially seem quite startling.  After all, aren’t we all agreed that biases are generally a *bad* thing, representing a combination of closed-mindedness, pre-set expectations, and a needlessly blinkered world-view?  How can biases possibly be *good*things to have?

The entire point of this title is for you to come up with your own view.  But unlike many PTs where the onus is on the student to elaborate subtle shades of grey associated with specific words (e.g.  *“useful”; “element of trust”; “****always”****present?*), this title should appeal to those whose interests are naturally oriented towards a broader conceptual frameworks: **whatever can be possibly meant by a “positive bias”?**

Imagine a world where knowledge-seekers always start their investigations from a position of total ignorance, wholly uninfluenced by anything that has happened before.   Physicists would sit down to do their experiments ignorant of Newton’s Laws (or any others), historians wouldn’t have read (or at least remembered) any other text before they begin their analysis, anthropologists would judge every human society they encounter as the first one they’ve ever seen. The idea here is to flesh out two things:

1. *What would it take, exactly, for a knowledge-seeker to be completely without any biases whatever?*
2. *Assuming that could somehow be arranged, would it, in fact, be a good thing in terms of their ability to produce knowledge?*

For all practical purposes, it is inevitable that those involved in the pursuit of knowledge inevitably bring some biases to the table as they begin their inquiries.  Moreover, the more experienced and knowledgeable they are, the larger the number of biases they might have. Meanwhile, a world where knowledge-seekers were all strictly unbiased would be tremendously inefficient from a knowledge-generation POV.  Therefore a certain amount of bias in the knowledge process inevitable, but that seems to be a good thing.  But bias can also be significantly *detrimental* too.

One approach might be to make a distinction between “good” and “bad” bias, or “reasonable” and “unreasonable” biases….

Another might be to recognize that the problem with bias in this case isn’t so much that we will approach a situation with some pre-set expectations or inclinations but to ensure that we explicitly recognize what they are so that they don’t unduly prejudice our efforts.