

TOK essays examiner's comments

Mark awarded	10
Marks available	10

Example A

This is an excellent essay that manages a nuanced account of the natural sciences and the human sciences, offering evidence for the different claims to be regarded highly and also their interdependence. Links to areas of knowledge are strong and clear and they are well characterized in the essay, first in a simple manner and then with more subtlety. For example, the essay points out that the robustness of the natural sciences in production of knowledge that is objective and achieves a degree of certainty incurs a cost in terms of tighter conditions on evidence, and the requirement of measurability and replicability. The example of the atomic mass of carbon is nicely linked to this argument and supports the claim that these are good reasons to regard the natural sciences highly. This is a clear and coherent line of reasoning that links directly with the PT. A different point of view is offered by the human sciences which do not seem to proceed according to an experimental method with carefully controlled variables and replicable scenarios. Determining the relevant variables may be not such a simple matter and a brief example from political science illustrates this nicely. However, the candidate realizes that this distinction is too black and white and builds an argument from recent work in theoretical economics that shares many of the stated characteristics of the natural sciences. This is, again, a subtle evaluation of a point of view, namely the candidate's own. The candidate then gives an explanation of why many would go—without reflection—for the natural sciences as being more highly regarded in the comparison despite the critical arguments offered in the essay. This is insightful and sophisticated, especially as the candidate considers the practical implications of the latter for humankind as a whole. This is a wonderfully lucid and insightful piece of work, despite there being the odd small blemish such as the unlikely claim that scientists are “continually testing theories”. This is overstated; once theories are sufficiently established, scientists and their funding move on to other things. Also, the final comment about questioning the standard model in physics is unclear. Though not perfect in every aspect, the essay deserves top marks.