

Get an A in TOK Essay May 2026 Title #6 Guide

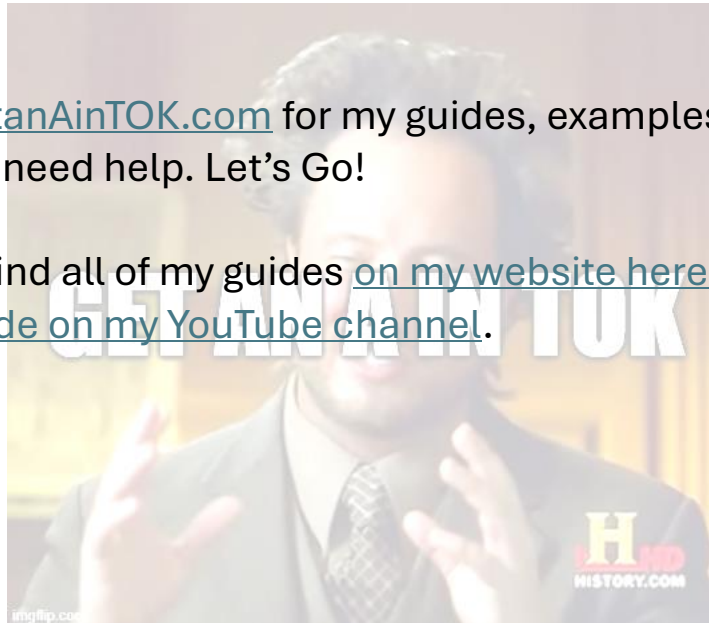
You need help. I got your back. Let's do this.

If you need extra help (and I know you do!) [click here](#) to send me your essay and I'll get your back! We can chat, zoom, and work together!

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6. The Basic One: To what extent is interpretation a reliable tool in the production of knowledge? Answer with reference to history and one other area of knowledge.

Choose this if:

- You don't want to do title #1
- You want to do history correctly
- You want to choose any AOK

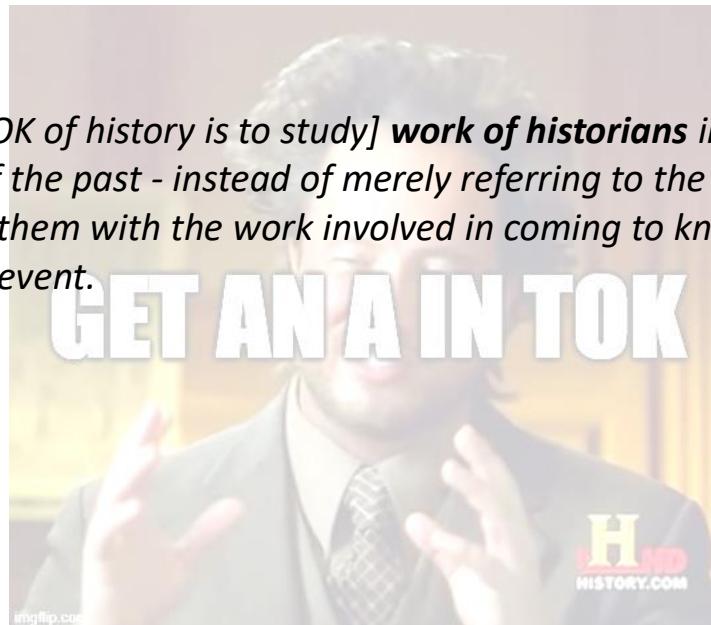


Important tips for about Title #6

It's always advantageous to talk about **Ways of Knowing** in TOK assignments. These are not a core part of the curriculum (or even required) but that doesn't mean these stopped being a part of how humans produce knowledge. Feel free to connect to these in any relevant way.



*[Studying the AOK of history is to study] **work of historians** in the production of knowledge of the past - instead of merely referring to the past events but not associating them with the work involved in coming to know or understand the event.*



History

Interpretation is as reliable as the source is

One way of looking at the reliability of a source is to look at *how* historians interpret what it means to be reliable. [This article by Marino](#) demonstrates that there are many variables and aspects of how a source might be interpreted to be reliable, unreliable, or untrustworthy. In this case, interpretation is based on many variables related to the text. Specifically, read pages 515-521.

Unwitting testimony and it's relationship to interpretation

Similar to an example from another title about Human Scientists studying people who give false answers, *unwitting testimony* is when historians can learn about a source from what *isn't* what they said. Instead, historians interpret the meaning of the words (and more) to understand the biases, angles, language, and missing information that may reveal more about the writer than what is actually written or spoken. This is a big connection to interpretation. [Marwick's The Fundamentals of History](#) gives good examples of how to approach this AOK, and section 8 explores how unwitting testimony works. [This study](#) by Soumya Kambhampati explores if studied slaves just told interviewers what they wanted to say. [The holocaust encyclopedia shows](#) how the interviews of holocaust survivors in Poland taught us about more than just what they spoke about – it taught about culture, humanity, and the interconnectedness of survivors. When they shared jokes and songs, for instance ([as TIME magazine writes here](#)) we are learning about more than lyrics.

Can interpretation go too far?

When it comes to infamous interpretations, holocaust deniers are the most hated. Are they demonstrating their biases? Or just interpreting things differently? [The legal situation of David Irving](#) and the lawsuit he brought against another historian (and her publisher) demonstrates that interpretation is also about what we choose to be relevant to be studied.

How do incorrect statements demonstrate the problems with interpretation?

Learn about Ramseyer's article, [Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War](#). This article disagrees with the common historical belief about comfort women in WWII. This article, and his methods, caused a huge controversy, [and there is a lot of information](#) to be found about why people think he interpreted incorrectly.

When interpretation is the only tool available does it matter how reliable it is?

There are many examples for times in which there was no corroborating evidence for a historical text. [One example of this is when Roger Casement, and Irish rebel, was portrayed as being a homosexual in what became to be called The Black Diaries](#). Were these diaries, purportedly by Casement, really his own words? Or were they part of a smear [campaign by the British government](#)? Look at how historians make the claims that they do. What is the truth and how do we know?

Human Sciences

Create Your Own Human Sciences Evidence

A great TOK essay can stand out by having evidence that other essays don't. One way of doing this is to conduct your own research or interview. Talk to your Psych teacher and quote them – or find a family friend who works in the mental health sphere! I did this and my psychologist friend gave me two great quotes:

If you're ever thinking "yeah I'm right..." that's when you are most likely wrong.

It isn't reliable, but it's one of the tools in my belt, which makes it OK that it's not reliable.

Interpretation can be very reliable in economics

Economics is often considered the most reliable discipline in the HS because it is the most mathematical. There are many examples of when interpreting results of economic studies can be considered. One article I found was ["Reliability and validity of behavioral-economic measures: A review and synthesis of discounting and demand."](#) The knowledge interpreted in this study is reliable because it can be repeated, the knowledge can be demonstrated in other contexts, and it is more quantitatively justified than qualitatively interpreted.

What causes unreliable interpretations?

In an article by Vowels called [Misspecification and Unreliable Interpretations in Psychology and Social Science](#), the author identifies three main practices that cause interpretation to be unreliable: Functional misspecification, structural misspecification, and unreliable interpretation of results. Maybe this was written for us?

Is prediction the same as interpretation?

If you say that prediction is just the interpretation of statistics, then we must look at Nate Silver, the most famous statistician in 2016, completely blowing the US Presidential elections. After being 100% correct in predicting the Obama win, he lost a lot of credibility when predicting Hilary Clinton. In this

article he explains why his interpretations, once reliable, [were not just four years later](#). [This article further explores](#) what human scientists might be getting wrong with statistical models.



Natural Sciences

A Case Study in Model Failure

[This fantastically titled article](#) talks about why so many COVID-19 prediction models were incorrect. When we are looking at events that may not have had much precedence, how do models and prediction work together to make helpful, and reliable, interpretations?

Using real world data/examples can make interpretation more reliable

When making public policy (so this could be HS as well) models can often be made by data that comes from clinical trials. [Developing Markov Models From Real-World Data: A Case Study of Heart Failure Modeling Using Administrative Data](#) demonstrates how effective it could be to use an interpretive model based on real world evidence rather than other kinds of evidence. [This article elaborates more](#) on the use of RWE and how it is used far less than you might think. When we think about interpretation, it matters what we are interpreting if we are discussing reliability. This example prompts us to ask *what are we interpreting?* when we want to fully address the title.

When interpretation is the only tool available to scientists

Similar to my point in history, when making big claims, such as the origins of the universe, there is often a lack of empirical data available that can justify and prove claims. Instead, [as this article about Cosmology demonstrates](#), a lot of interpretation is required in the void of other tools. But what's interesting is that as technology improves, [some of these interpretations can be justified!](#)

Interpretation may not be seen as reliable because it's *just* interpretation

A great example for TOK is Alfred Wegener, [who first proposed continental drift](#). Unfortunately, he didn't have any hard evidence (and was German) so he was mostly ignored. What reasons, besides unreliability, might we say that interpretation is not enough to justify a claim? This connects to sense perception, as well!