Get an A in TOK Essay May 2026 Title #1 Guide

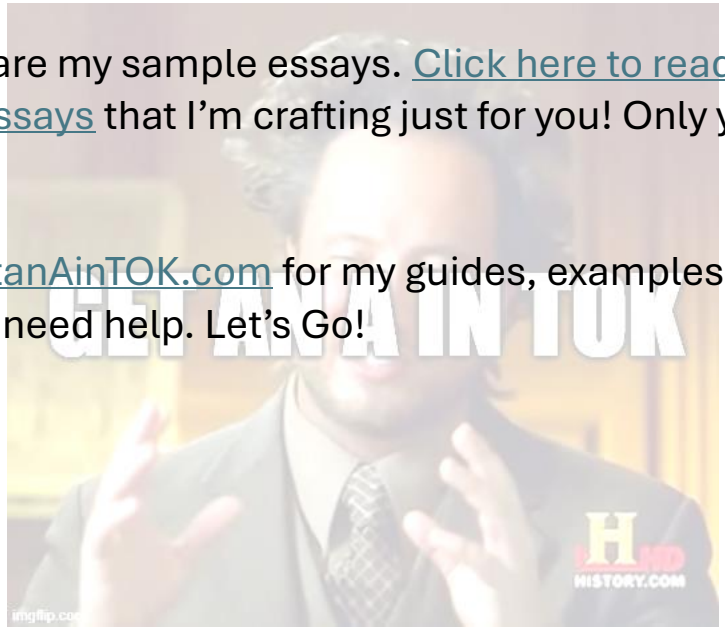
You need help. I got your back. Let's do this.

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!

Make sure to find all of my guides on my website here, and every title will have a guide on my YouTube channel.

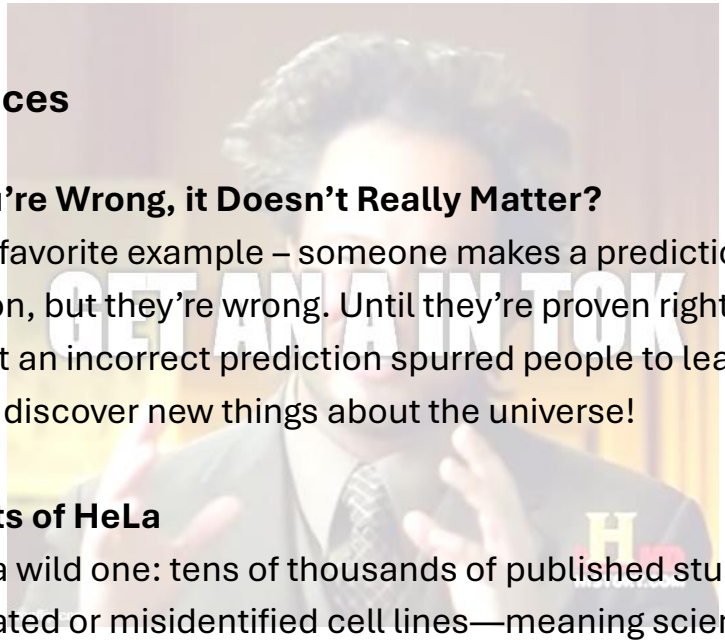
New for 2026 are my sample essays. Click here to read a bunch of sample TOK Essays that I'm crafting just for you! Only you. No one else.

Check out GetanAinTOK.com for my guides, examples, and sample outlines if you need help. Let's Go!



1. **The Simple One:** In the production of knowledge, does it matter that observation is an essential but flawed tool? Discuss with reference to the natural sciences and one other area of knowledge.

   Choose this if:
   - You want to find easy evidence
   - You want an easy organization
   - You understand methods and tools



Natural Sciences

1. **When You're Wrong, it Doesn't Really Matter?**
   This is my favorite example – someone makes a prediction based on observation, but they're wrong. Until they're proven right? This example shows that an incorrect prediction spurred people to learn more and ultimately discover new things about the universe!

2. **The Ghosts of HeLa**
   So here's a wild one: tens of thousands of published studies used contaminated or misidentified cell lines—meaning scientists thought they were studying, say, liver cells, when they were actually working with cervical cancer cells.
   If your entire experiment is based on a bad observation from the start, the knowledge built on top is like building a house on quicksand.

   Read the article here.

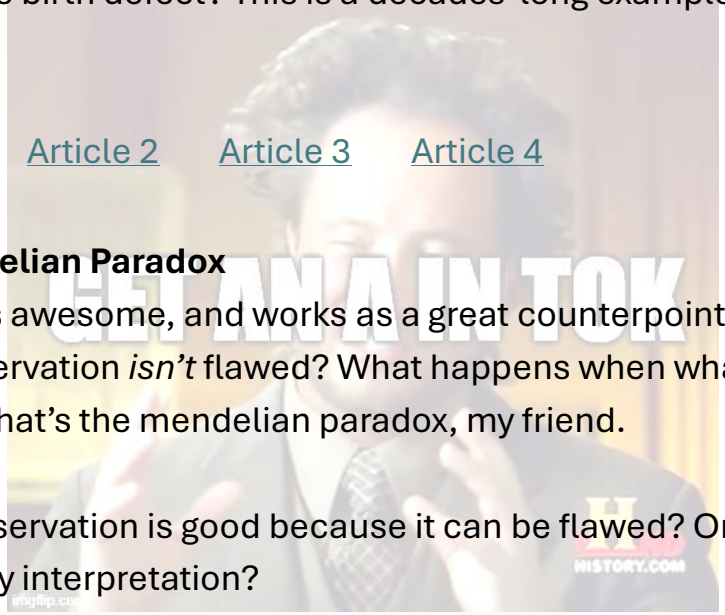
3. **The Decline Effect**
   What happens when a drug works…but then it doesn't? Or an experiment? This can connect to both the natural and human sciences, as it demonstrates how truth can wane over time.

It's not that the initial observations were fake—it's that they were fragile. And if our observations can't be repeated, then how solid was that "knowledge" in the first place?

Read the article here.

4. **The Benedictin Backfire**
   This is classic *correlation is not causation*. When we see birth defects, and pregnant women are using a drug, does that mean that the drug *caused* the birth defect? This is a decades-long example that will really work!

   Article 1 Article 2 Article 3 Article 4



5. **The Mendelian Paradox**
   This one is awesome, and works as a great counterpoint! What happens when observation *isn't* flawed? What happens when what we observe is perfect? That's the mendelian paradox, my friend.

   Maybe observation is good because it can be flawed? Or nuanced? Or affected by interpretation?

   Wikipedia on Mendel (scroll to paradox section for resources)

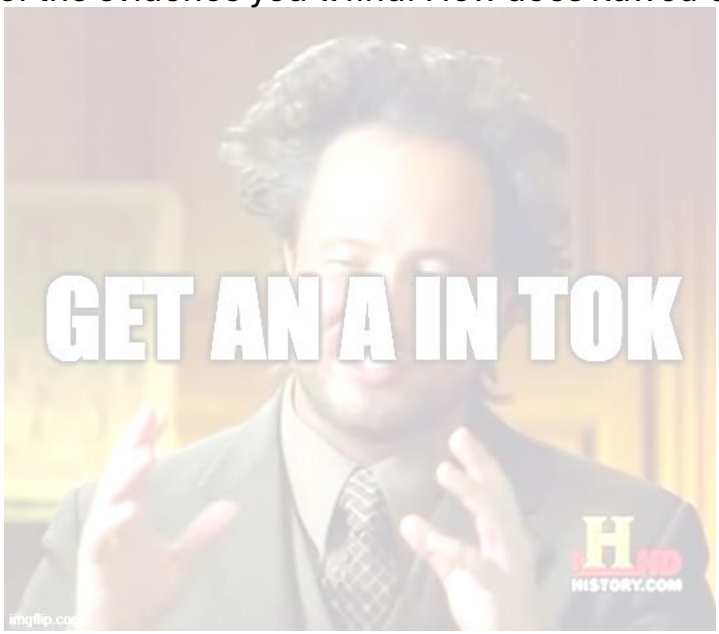
6. **What's Your Pathology?**
   Learn about Pathological Science – what happens when scientists forsake the scientific method and start looking to find what they already believe. This page has a bunch of examples. Pick one!

7. **Polywater**

   This example of Pathological Science was so funny I had to make a separate entry for it. It made me wonder – what else were they supposed to do besides observe? Did it matter that they had to start there? What other tool could they have used?

8. **Get an A in *Tiktaalik***

   Observation can also be included as a way to make predictions. Scientists made correct predictions about *Tiktaalik* before they knew it existed! This is pretty complex, but it's a great example that can contrast with most of the evidence you'll find. How does *flawed* come into play here?



The Arts

1. **What the Hetling?**
   When observation is an essential, but flawed, tool, what does that mean when all we can do is observe an artwork? Read about Frances Hetling, who is a fake artist that fooled a bunch of the art world!

2. **The Kurious Kouros Kase…oops**
   This example is from one of my favorite books: Blink, by Malcolm Gladwell. The Getty bought a statue for $10 million, and then no one could figure out if it was a fake or not. After observing it, some experts instantly knew it was a fake…but they couldn't say why! Who was right? Read to learn more! Here's another one!

3. **Snapping a Trombone**
   Sticking with Gladwell, what happens when musicians are blindly auditioned? Does it create a level playing field? This goes into observation with our ears, which could be fun. Read about it here, and check out other examples from Blink.

4. **How important is observation, really?**
   When we observe, is that really the most important thing? In Art, the interpretation may be more important than the observation. Look at this list of artworks that exaggerated history. Does this matter? What is the point of observing these if they're lies? Or is that the point??

Human Sciences

1. **The Vinland Map**
   A map claiming that Vikings discovered the Americas before the other white people was held to be true for a long time. Until it was proven by new tools to be wrong. This could go beyond a simple "observation is bad!!!!!11" to focus on how technology and physical tools are a vital part of the observational process. Read the article here.

2. **Batteries Not Included**
   Who needs technology anyway? Check out this fantastic example of where observation may not be flawed at all! What are the differences here in the aboriginal example with how other examples use observation?

3. **You Know Nothing, John Snow**
   This example demonstrates that it doesn't matter that observation is flawed, because it is rarely used on its own. John Snow discovered the cause of a cholera outbreak by beginning with observation, but continued learning through the use of other tools such as...well, read the article, n00b.

4. **Naturalistic Observation**
   Observation is an essential tool, and many great things have been learned from it – things that are proven and justified! When Jane Goodall, for example, observed primates acting in a certain way, observation *was* all that she needed. It wasn't really flawed. Learn more here.

History

1. **The Vinland Map**
   A map claiming that Vikings discovered the Americas before the other white people was held to be true for a long time. Until it was proven by new tools to be wrong. This could go beyond a simple "observation is bad!!!!!11" to focus on how technology and physical tools are a vital part of the observational process. Read the article here.

2. **A Bunch of Fakes**
   The Vinland map also comes from this source, but this article lists a bunch of other artifacts that were debunked over time. Pick one and figure out why observation was essential and flawed...or not! More importantly, what other methods or tools were involved? And, again, how was technology an important part (or not) of realizing it was a fake? Here's the list.

3. **The Hitler Diaries**
   This is a classic TOK example, but make sure that you're focused on the right things – the historian, Trevor-Roper, and the claims he made through observation. Read the article here.

4. **Do you like reading?**
   I found an amazing analysis of archaeologist V. Gordon Childe, who did a huge excavation in Scotland...and got it all wrong. This book describes, with many resources and quotes, what went wrong and why it happened. If you want to have a great example, choose this one. Begin with chapter 8.