

TOK Essay Cliches

(from May 2014 Subject Report, p. 7)

1. The Tuskegee syphilis experiment
2. Kevin Carter and his photograph of a starving Sudanese girl and a vulture
3. Marco Evaristti and his installation of goldfish in blenders
4. Günther von Hagens's Body Worlds exhibition
5. Guillermo Vargas and his installation of a starving dog
6. Andres Serrano's Immersion (Piss Christ)
7. Nick Ut's photograph of Phan Thị Kim Phúc in Vietnam
8. Arne Svenson's The Neighbors - photographs of unsuspecting people in their houses
9. Catcher in the Rye (Salinger), Huckleberry Finn (Twain), The Awakening (Chopin)
10. Banksy graffiti
11. Fritz Haber: ammonia that can be used for production of fertilizers or weapons
12. PETA position on testing of pharmaceuticals and cosmetics on animals
13. The legality of stem cell research in the USA
14. Nazi experiments on concentration camp inmates
15. Atomic theory from Dalton to Schrödinger (or more often Bohr)
16. The myth of the flat earth (the "myth" sometimes presented as the fact that the earth is not flat rather than the fact that it is often erroneously claimed that most people thought it was!)
17. Heliocentrism, Copernicus and Galileo
18. Spontaneous generation and the experimental work of Louis Pasteur
19. JFK assassination and various conspiracy theories
20. Lobotomy and bloodletting as outdated medical practices
21. The belated discrediting of thalidomide as a treatment for morning sickness and its rehabilitation as a treatment for leprosy
22. The realization (often presented as an astonishing revelation!) that Columbus was not the first foreigner in America
23. The planetary status of Pluto: the reclassification often presented as a "discovery"
24. Three Cold War theories: traditional, revisionist, post-revisionist
25. The treaty of Versailles compared with the Marshall Plan
26. The phlogiston hypothesis and the discovery of oxygen
27. Phrenology and its demise
28. Euclidian and non-Euclidean axioms and geometries
29. Japanese history textbooks concerning culpability for events in China during WWII

(May 2015 Subject Report, p. 7)

1. The work of Elizabeth Loftus and John Palmer on the effect of the wording of questions
2. The question of when World War I started with reference to the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand
3. The Rape of Nanking and the disparity of questions that are asked in China and Japan
4. The original and modified formulations of the question for the Scottish independence referendum of 2014
5. Deciding how to measure the rate of photosynthesis in a leaf (as an example of having to choose a question to investigate)

7. Edward Jenner's pioneering work on immunology involving both observation and experimentation
8. Alexander Fleming and the discovery of penicillin (as an example of observation, although strangely sometimes as an experiment – illustrating how “help site” examples can easily be misconstrued)
9. Louis Pasteur and the experimental refutation of spontaneous generation
10. Malcolm Gladwell's account of the kouros statue in the Getty museum – as an illustration of the power of intuition as a different way of knowing
11. The work of Thomas Edison and Albert Einstein as different examples of the use of imagination as an alternative to observation and experimentation
12. Thought experiments – often described using the German term “Gedankenexperimente”
13. Albert Bandura's “bobo doll” experiment interpreted as an example of the influence of shared knowledge on individuals
14. Solomon Asch's classic experiment on conformity (and Stanley Milgram on obedience, and Philip Zimbardo on situational factors in the Stanford prison experiment)
15. Vincent Van Gogh's “Starry Night” as an illustration of the ambiguity relating to artist's intentions and audience interpretation
16. Female nudes painted by Renaissance masters as illustrations of the power of shared cultural and aesthetic standards that influence the work of individuals
17. Nazi art as an example of the way shared knowledge can sometimes undermine moral rectitude
18. The Heaven's Gate mass suicide as example of the dangers of “knowing” one's meaning and purpose
19. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs
20. Various convoluted accounts involving Alan Turing and the “purpose” of his life to acquire “meaning” – presumably from the Enigma cypher!

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1. The NASA Mars rover Curiosity and curiosity itself as a motivation for knowledge!
2. Pablo Picasso's style of painting as a “model”
3. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
4. The multi-store memory model and the case of Clive Wearing
5. Neoclassical and Keynesian models in macroeconomics
6. James Watson and Francis Crick's model of DNA
7. The fluid-mosaic model of membrane structure
8. Stanley Prusiner and the discovery of prions
9. Andrew Wakefield and the movement his discredited work triggered against vaccination
10. The epidemiology of Ebola in West Africa
11. Myers-Briggs personality tests
12. Wilfred Owen's Dulce et Decorum Est
13. Alexander Fleming and the discovery of penicillin
14. Ludwig van Beethoven and his deafness as the lack of a “way of knowing”
15. Vincent Van Gogh's Starry Night – seems to have become the default example for almost any claim about the visual arts

(From May 2016 Subject Report, p. 7)

1. Serendipitous discovery of penicillin by Alexander Fleming
2. Mark Rothko and environmental influences on his work
3. String theory and the role of evidence in the sciences
4. Margaret Mead's perspective during fieldwork in Samoa
5. The human aspects of the story of the discovery of DNA and of its structure from Friedrich Miescher to James Watson, Francis Crick and Rosalind Franklin
6. Bloodletting as an example of an obsolete practice in medical science
7. The value of the Enigma code and the work of Alan Turing
8. Alchemy as the necessary precursor to modern chemistry
9. Pablo Picasso and Guernica
10. Vincent van Gogh and Starry Night
11. Leonardo da Vinci, the Mona Lisa and Vitruvian Man
12. Isaac Newton and the compatibility of his scientific achievements and his religious orientation
13. Persistence of "anti-vaxxers" despite the exposure of Andrew Wakefield's claims in relation to MMR vaccine as fraudulent
14. The applications of imaginary numbers
15. Ludwig van Beethoven's deafness and reliance on "feeling"
16. Rounding of numbers (eg pi) as examples of simplification and inaccuracy in mathematics
17. Polynomials, factorisation and complexity
18. Music therapy as an application of knowledge in the arts
19. Different notations and ways of doing differentiation from Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz
20. Thomas Edison and the invention of the light bulb
21. The Hiroshima bomb versus nuclear fission reactors with respect to the value of knowledge
22. Work in number theory by Pythagoras, Pierre de Fermat and Andrew Wiles
23. Membrane structure from Davson/Danielli to Singer/Nicholson and the fluid mosaic model
24. Galileo Galilei's house arrest and Pope John Paul II's admission of error in 1992
25. Friedrich Wöhler's blow to vitalism with the non-biological synthesis of urea
26. Atomic theories from John Dalton to JJ Thompson to Ernest Rutherford to Niels Bohr to Erwin Schrödinger
27. Elizabeth Loftus and John Palmer on language and eyewitnesses
28. Francesco Redi, Louis Pasteur and the disproof of spontaneous generation
29. Alfred Wegener and continental drift
30. Lera Boroditsky's article on Australian aboriginal orientation
31. Caloric vs kinetic theory with respect to "natural selection" in scientific knowledge
32. Leonhard Euler's equation allegedly having value without application
33. Development of heliocentrism from Aristarchus to Copernicus
34. Thalidomide prescribed for morning sickness and leprosy
35. The outcomes of the work of Fritz Haber for fertilizer and explosives
36. The Riemann hypothesis, large primes and Internet security
37. The Treaty of Versailles and the subsequent rise of Nazism in Germany

38. George Orwell's perspective as presented in Animal Farm
39. Thomas Young's double-slit experiment and wave-particle duality in physics
40. The ethics of Edward Jenner's work on smallpox and vaccination
41. August Kekulé's dream and the structure of benzene
42. Antonio Damasio and somatic marker theory
43. Fritz Fischer and the alleged causes of WWI
44. Occam's razor with respect to Albert Einstein's special relativity and Hendrik Lorentz's ether
45. Gregor Mendel and overly neat experimental results for segregation and independent assortment (also Robert Millikan and determination of the electric charge on the electron)
46. Jackson Pollock's art and the use of WOKs
47. The Amish and rejection of modern technology
48. The Phillips curve and transient accuracy in economics
49. Lock-and-key and induced fit models of enzyme action
50. Spherical and hyperbolic geometries as perspectives in mathematics
51. Confirmation bias and persistent error in the accepted human chromosome number
52. CERN and the Higgs boson as applied knowledge
53. Standard rival interpretations of the Cold War: traditional, revisionist, post-revisionist
54. Albert Einstein and the cosmological constant
55. Edwin Hubble and expansion of the universe
56. Ignaz Semmelweis and childbed fever
57. Conventional current and electron flow
58. The Nanjing massacre and perspectives
59. Alfred Adler and schemas in psychology as the basis for perspectives
60. Biston betularia and industrial melanism as an example of natural selection
61. Detection of gravitational waves in accordance with predictions from Einstein's theory of general relativity
62. Feynman diagrams and quantum electrodynamics with respect to simplicity and understanding
63. Physiology from Galen to the discovery of blood circulation by William Harvey
64. The complexity of the chemistry of photosynthesis as presented at various stages of education
65. The patient's "perspective" in connection with the use of placebos in medical testing
66. Heinrich Hertz and the subsequent application of radio waves