# TOK Essay May 2025 Overview

Here are all of my notes! Everything I've got! If you need extra help (and I know you do!) click here to send me your essay; I've got your back! You can do this!

Check out GetanAinTOK.com for my guides, examples, and sample outlines if you need help. And make sure to look at the other guides on my YouTube channel. If you haven't downloaded my outlines, what are you doing?! Click here for my download packet!

This document brings up my initial thoughts, tips, and outline suggestions for all the TOK Essay Titles for May 2025. Check out my other videos for the best examples and research ideas.

Click a title to jump to that section:

**Title #1:**

Do historians and human scientists have an ethical obligation to follow the directive: "do not ignore contradictory evidence"? Discuss with reference to history **and** the human sciences.

**Initial Thoughts & Tips**

Obvious but important – you're looking for contradictory *evidence*, not opinions, beliefs, or events. This is going to be a very common mistake.

By asking about historical *evidence* this may help students stay on track and talk about tangible pieces of evidence and discoveries, rather than historic *events*. Remember that the study of history as an AOK is a study of what historians have found and done to learn about the events and beliefs of past times – it is not just a report of things that have happened.

It's very easy to find contradictory evidence in both of these AOKs.

Make real connections to ethics. Don't try to fit different frameworks into this title that aren't authentic. It's pretty self-explanatory regarding what the ethical issue is, so find perspectives that actually relate.

Most students will find 2 times when it was OK to ignore contradictory evidence, and a time when it was not. Try to go beyond that by discussing the following:

- Why was it an ethical decision?
- What ethical framework guided the decision?
- Was the ethical justification justified? Or not? (Did others disagree?)

A sub-par example will just say that everything ended up OK when someone acknowledged contradictory evidence. That's not what the

title is asking. It's about *ethical* reasons for doing so. Just saying that someone didn't die, or that results turned out OK, is not sufficient.

With that said, *don't go overboard on ethics!* The focus of this paper is *how* scientists and historians approach contradictory evidence, and then their *justification* for doing so.

## Ideas for Outlines

This is a classic Yes/No title. It's OK to do that, and most students will. To be most effective, frame each answer with a *because…* statement.

**Yes, scientists have an ethical obligation to not ignore contradictory evidence because…**

…scientific history is filled with times in which ignoring contradictory evidence led to physical harm.

…scientific breakthroughs have such wide-ranging implications, and contradictory evidence allows for the claims to be double-checked.

…contradictory evidence can often identify mistakes made in knowledge production.

**Yes, historians have an ethical obligation to not ignore contradictory evidence because…**

…earlier evidence that is contradictory may be more reliable (test of time).

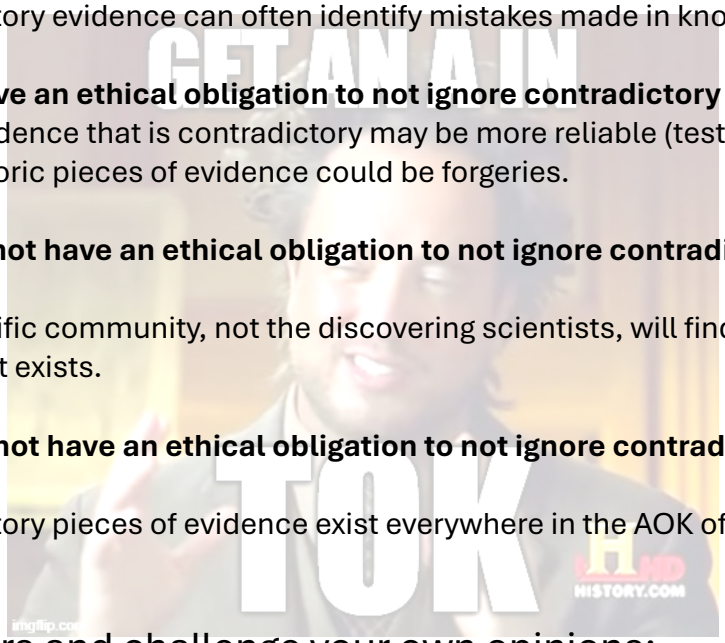
…novel historic pieces of evidence could be forgeries.

**No, scientists do not have an ethical obligation to not ignore contradictory evidence because…**

…the scientific community, not the discovering scientists, will find contradictory evidence if it exists.

**No, historians do not have an ethical obligation to not ignore contradictory evidence because…**

…contradictory pieces of evidence exist everywhere in the AOK of history.




Look for outliers and challenge your own opinions:

*Yes historians <u>do</u> have the ethical obligation to pay attention to contradictory pieces of evidence, <u>but in this case</u> it was OK not to because…*

Alternative Outline: Organize by Ethical Framework. Each of these could constitute half of your paper!

- Deontological Approach
- Utilitarian Approach
- Modern Scientific Community Ethics
- Historical Ethics in Communities
- Kantian

**Title #2**

Is our most revered knowledge more fragile than we assume it to be? Discuss with reference to the arts **and one other** area of knowledge.

**Initial Thoughts & Tips**

This is super interesting because it requires talking about the Arts, which I would not have expected. As with all TOK Essay titles that focus on the Arts, make sure that you're talking about artistic *knowledge* not artistic *works*. There is a huge difference here.

It's vital to show someone making the assumption that a revered piece of knowledge is robust, or not fragile . So much evidence that I see will talk about revered knowledge being fragile, and that's it. Make sure that you focus on people in each AOK assuming that revered knowledge is strong and robust, and then what happened.

Ask: how was this assumption made? Why? *Then* give examples that show both sides – times when it *was* more fragile than we assumed it was, then times when it *was not* more fragile than we assumed it was.

This title is going to be inundated with the classic TOK examples that you want to avoid: Galileo & the Catholic Church, Flat/Round Earth, Creationism/Evolution, Supply Side/Keynesian Economics and the like. Just searching for things that were proven wrong, or fragile, is not enough. Make sure that you focus on knowledge that was revered first, then how it stood up to scrutiny. If you just search for "revered knowledge" and choose the first thing, remember that your evidence will be the same as 25% of students.

Think about knowledge that *is* and *was* our most revered. While this title is obviously asking about things in the past and how they stood up to scrutiny and evidence, what about today's revered knowledge?

**Outline Ideas**

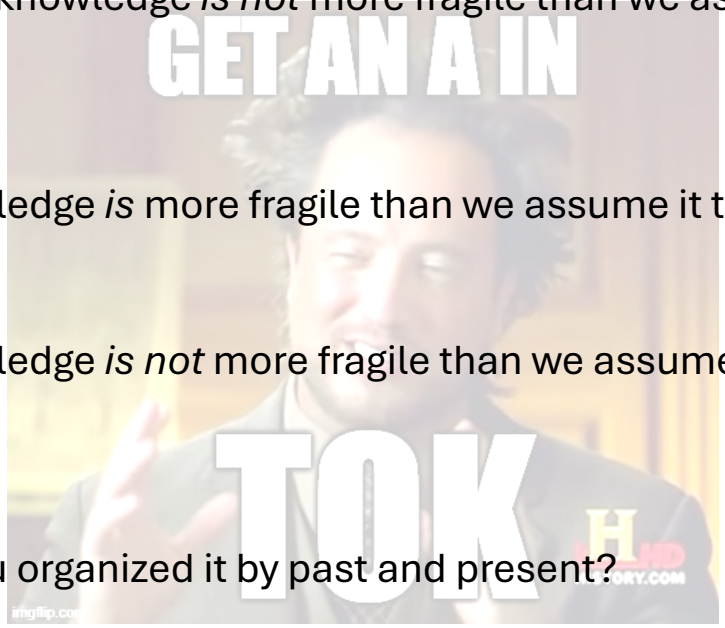
This is another Yes/No title. So you can easily organize it that way.

Arts:

Revered knowledge *is* more fragile than we assume it to be
Revered knowledge *is not* more fragile than we assume it to be.

AOK 2:

Revered knowledge *is* more fragile than we assume it to be
Revered knowledge *is not* more fragile than we assume it to be.




Or

Revered knowledge *is* more fragile than we assume it to be

Arts
AOK2

Revered knowledge *is not* more fragile than we assume it to be.

Arts
AOK2

But what if you organized it by past and present?

Past:

**Arts**: Art had to follow rules (Academies), Formal Techniques in Visual Arts,
**NS**: Miasma Theory, Smoking is Healthy,

Present:

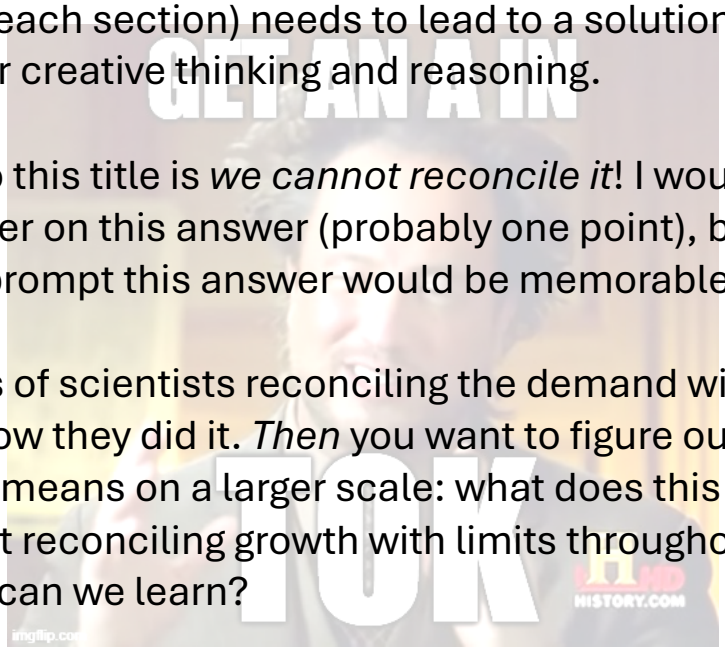
**Arts:** Anything can be art (this is opinion held as knowledge btw), Mona Lisa as greatest Artwork, Formal Genres in Music
**NS**: Evolution, String Theory, Nutrition, Relativity, Germ Theory

## Title #3

How can we reconcile the relentless drive to pursue knowledge with the finite resources we have available? Discuss with reference to the natural sciences **and one other** area of knowledge.

### Initial Thoughts & Tips

Similar to a title in 2024, this is asking a very narrow question: "how can we reconcile?" That means that each example inside each paragraph (or each section) needs to lead to a solution! This is an opportunity for creative thinking and reasoning.




One answer to this title is *we cannot reconcile it*! I would not base even half of my paper on this answer (probably one point), but using one paragraph to prompt this answer would be memorable and interesting.

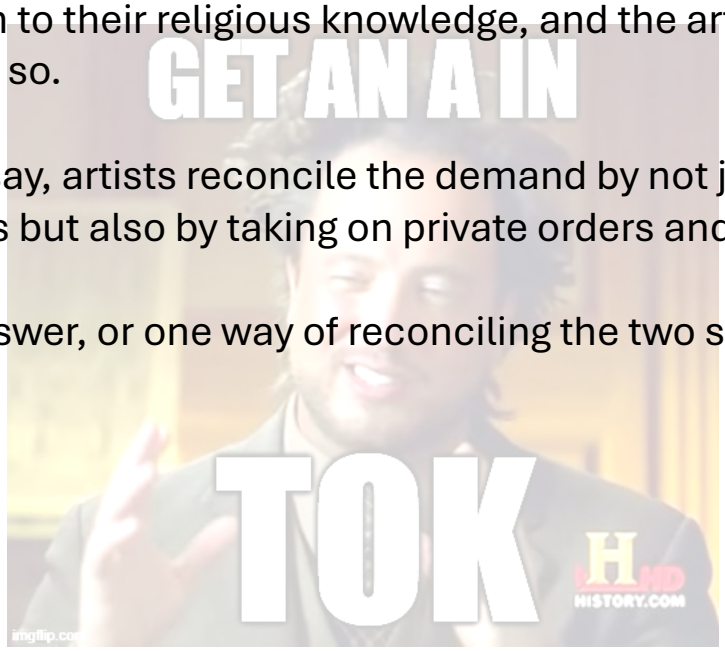
Find examples of scientists reconciling the demand with the limitation then extract how they did it. *Then* you want to figure out what this reconciliation means on a larger scale: what does this one instance teach us about reconciling growth with limits throughout the AOK? What lessons can we learn?

Many TOK teachers require explicit and formal definitions in the introductions. I do not think that this title prompts that – "the relentless drive to pursue knowledge" is pretty self-evident and can be demonstrated in the body paragraphs rather than defined in generic terms in the introduction. The same goes for "the finite resources we have available." Every example will detail these clearly, so you do not need to go into what this phrase means. Remember that introductions should be 150 words or less.

An example of reconciling the drive to pursue knowledge with the finite resources that we have:

Rembrandt is my favorite painter and he was a terrible manager of his money. Later in his life he filed for bankruptcy, which could be seen as a limit of resources. In order to keep himself afloat, he focused on commissioned portraits paid for by private customers.

Similarly, in the Renaissance, a lot of money came from commissioned art from the Catholic church. They desired to provide artistic representation to their religious knowledge, and the artists found it lucrative to do so.




So, we might say, artists reconcile the demand by not just creating art for themselves but also by taking on private orders and commissions.

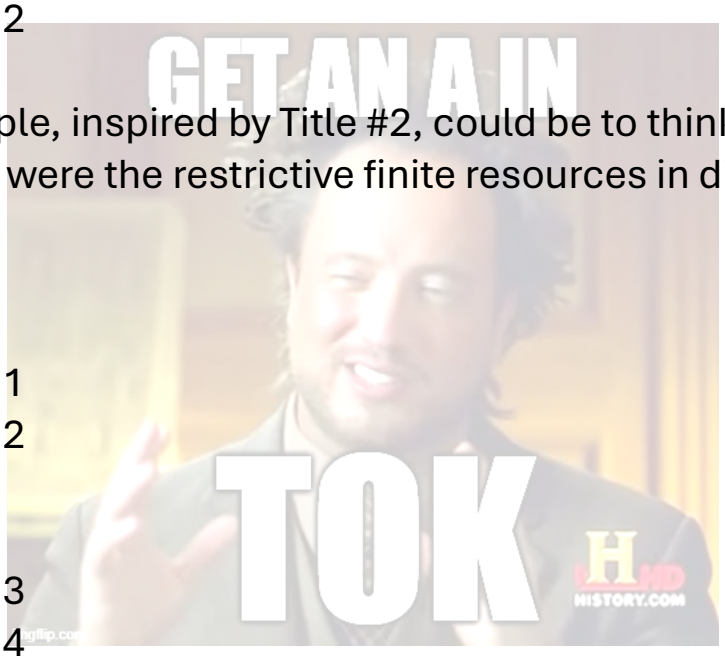
That is *one* answer, or one way of reconciling the two sides.

**Outline Ideas**

There aren't many similar thematic ideas to organize around, so most people will do an AOK-focused outline:

**AOK 1:**
- Example 1
- Example 2

**AOK 2:**
- Example 1
- Example 2




Another example, inspired by Title #2, could be to think about past and present. What were the restrictive finite resources in different eras? For example:

**1900's:**
- Example 1
- Example 2

**2000's:**
- Example 3
- Example 4

**Comparison/Conclusion**

What we can learn about the lack of resources and how we approach it.

**Title #4**

Do the ever-improving tools of an area of knowledge always result in improved knowledge? Discuss with reference to **two** areas of knowledge.

**Initial Thoughts & Tips**

This is the easy one that 50% of students will choose. It's easy to find a time when new technology did not lead to improved knowledge.

Keyword: *always*. Clearly the answer to this title is *no,* so you'll want to clearly answer it. If not *always,* then what? Often? Sometimes? Rarely? Usually? Only in modern times?

Make sure to clearly identify the new or improved tool in each example. This would be an interesting approach in art. Think about improved cameras in photography and film. Think about digital technologies in music. Though they're creating new kinds of creative works, are we seeing an improvement in knowledge production or sharing? I'm not so sure.

If you think about the new and improved tools in the AOK of history, I think you might come to the conclusion that the answer is nearly always. If you think about how technological tools lets us read un-rolled scrolls, look inside of tombs, and learn about things without touching them, how could the answer *not* be yes?

Thinking about the Human Sciences, the word *tools* can be defined a bit more creatively. An economic model, for example, can be a tool. So can a new method of learning about undiscovered people groups. A tool to a human scientist doesn't have to be a tangible object but rather something more like an author using the device, or tool, of foreshadowing. What does a human scientist use to gain knowledge?

What structures do they use to define and organize people? What business models are new and improved? These are all tools.

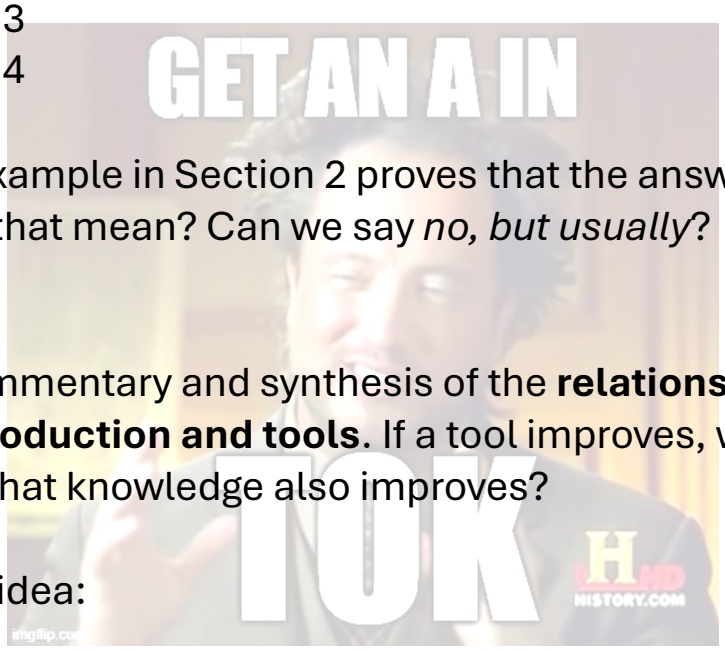
Finally, remember that the title does not talk about **new** tools, but rather **improved** tool. So, you don't have to look at technology, for example, that is brand new. Just look at the improvement and find the correlation between that improvement and knowledge.

**Outline Ideas**

I suggest quickly answering *no* in the introduction. The answer is not *always*, so then you can set up different sections of your essay that offer different answers.

Section 1: 2 times in which improved tools improved knowledge
- Example 1
- Example 2

Section 2: 2 times in which improved tools *did not* improve knowledge
- Example 3
- Example 4




Just the one example in Section 2 proves that the answer is not *always,* so what does that mean? Can we say *no, but usually*?

End with a commentary and synthesis of the **relationship between knowledge production and tools**. If a tool improves, what do we need to make sure that knowledge also improves?

Based on this idea:

Example 1: **No correlation** between improved tools & knowledge
Example 2: **Some correlation** between improved tools & knowledge
Example 3: An improved tool **created groundbreaking knowledge**
Example 4: An improved tool **hindered the AOK, was not helpful**

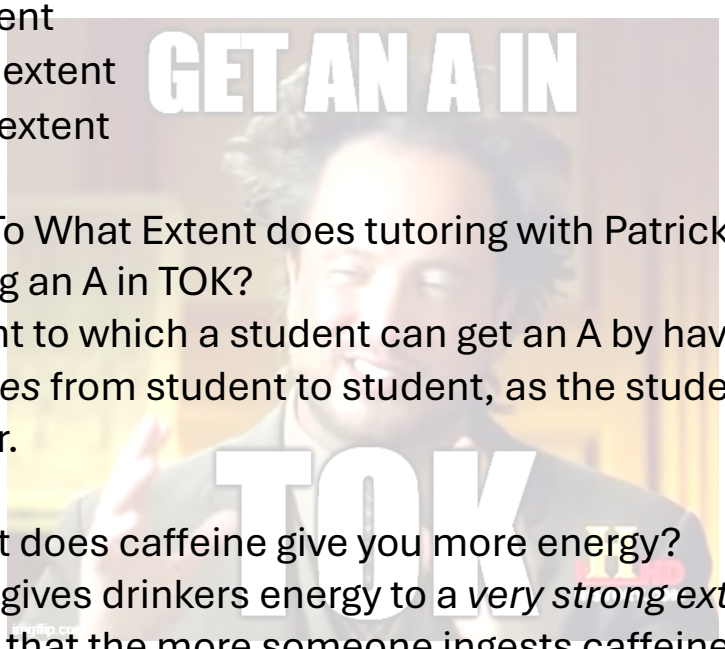
**Title #5**

To what extent do you agree with the claim "all models are wrong, but some are useful" (attributed to George Box)? Discuss with reference to mathematics **and one other** area of knowledge.

This is the *first and only* To What Extent title of 2025! What is going on? IB is not helping us keep the TOK memes alive!

The most important, yet most missed, part of scoring well in a TWE title is to actually address the extent. Some examples:

- To no extent
- To a high extent
- To some extent




For example: To What Extent does tutoring with Patrick correlate with actually getting an A in TOK?

> The extent to which a student can get an A by having Patrick as a tutor *varies* from student to student, as the students have to write the paper.

To What Extent does caffeine give you more energy?

> Caffeine gives drinkers energy to a *very strong extent*. But it must be noted that the more someone ingests caffeine the less effect it will have on them.

This title requires maths, which is good because I haven't talked about it at all!

The first thing that came to mind when I read this title was when I learned that all of maths is based on assumptions. Not facts, assumptions. These assumptions are called axioms, and without it, nothing works. I found this cool paper that outlines some of the assumptions in maths. You could easily say that these assumptions

work as models in maths. Are they wrong? It doesn't matter, because they're useful!

One thing I would *not* do here is talk about models in art. That's not what the title is talking about.

This title gives a good opportunity to talk about economic models. A lot of people last year made their entire human sciences paper, half of the paper, just about economics. This will happen a lot in this title, and I guess that's OK. If you're going to talk about economic models, however, think about these two tips:

- First of all, get past Supply Side and Keynesian economic theories. This is the most overused example. It's pretty much the 'Vaccines Cause Autism' of the human science world and the Marcel Duchamp of the Arts – the most overused example.
- Secondly, think about if there are any models from your own country that are used. Can you find a way to use your own country's economists as a way of standing out?

Remember that the title is asking the extent to which you *agree*. It's perfectly fine, and probably required, to provide examples that completely prove this point wrong. What is a model that is true and not useful? I'm not sure what that would be. But you definitely want to find different kinds of models that vary on their truthfulness and usefulness.

The conclusion here then formally answers the question. Do you agree that "*all* models are wrong…"? Of course not. This is the same as *always* in an earlier title. So how can you elaborate? What are we to do with models? What does your research teach us about models and *how* to use them? We will not stop using models, so what should we do about it?

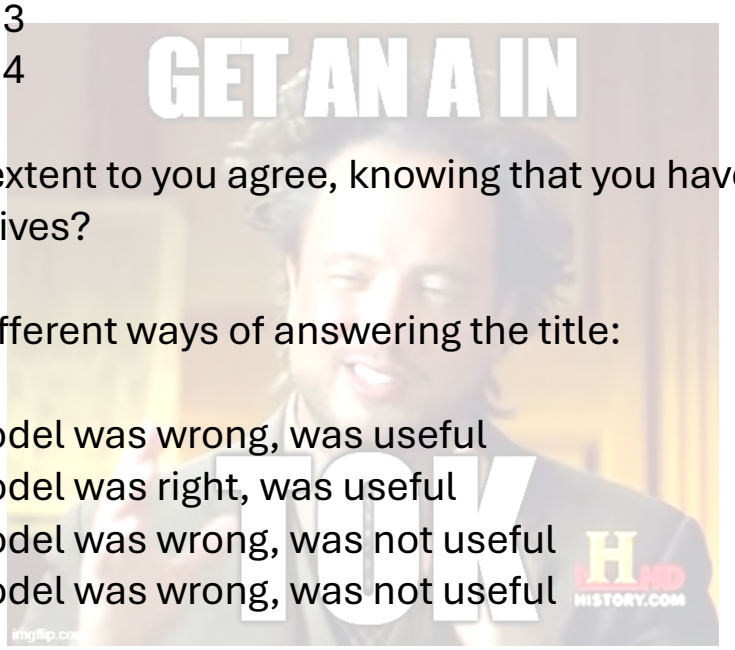
**Outline Ideas**

Being a TWE title, there are many ways to outline this. I would totally avoid an AOK organization here, as that's too basic and it's easy to organize creatively here.

Examples that cause me to agree
- Example 1
- Example 2

Examples that cause me to disagree
- Example 3
- Example 4

Conclusion
- To what extent to you agree, knowing that you have both perspectives?




Think about different ways of answering the title:

Example 1: Model was wrong, was useful
Example 2: Model was right, was useful
Example 3: Model was wrong, was not useful
Example 4: Model was wrong, was not useful

**Title #6**

Does acquiring knowledge destroy our sense of wonder? Discuss with reference to **two** areas of knowledge.

**Initial Thoughts & Tips**

There's always a weird one. This is the weird one for May 25.

The intro for this title is super easy – talk about something that gives *you* a sense of wonder. There's no need to define wonder. We all know it. Just show the wonder in each of your examples in the body paragraphs.

The challenging part of this title will be finding research and examples that clearly demonstrate *our sense of wonder*. A top paper will show how *others* experience wonder. A mediocre paper will just declare that an instance of knowledge acquisition destroyed a sense of wonder. Tangible examples are much more important than generalized statements using your own justification.

This title is asking us to think about the effects of acquiring knowledge – if, for example, acquiring a piece of knowledge *does* destroy our sense of wonder, then what is the wonder replaced with? Wonder is replaced by certainty? More knowledge? More questions? More answers? As I'll say in the outline section, go past the simple yes/no of this title and think about the effects and implications of what happens when we acquire knowledge.

Another way to interpret the title, and something related to the destruction of the sense of wonder, is that it might not necessarily be bad to destroy our sense of wonder. Wonder is inherently a good word, but what if our wonder regarding something mysterious is replaced with knowledge that creates helpful certainty? Wonder

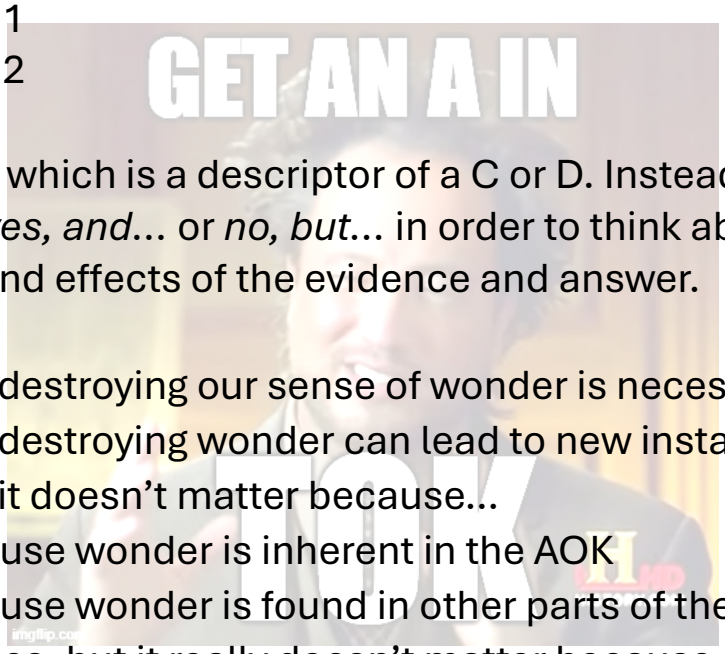
could be connected to a lack of knowledge, so when wonder is destroyed, we could be better off!

Similar to what I've said about the other titles, I would not define *wonder* in the introduction. That's obvious. Defining obvious terms is one of my most common tips when I'm grading essays. It's super common to waste 100 words on definitions that don't do anything to raise your score against the rubric. Instead of defining a word we already know, research examples of people who have wonder towards something and then describe what happened.

**Outline Ideas**

This is a Yes/No title so most people will just give a basic answer to the question:

Yes, acquiring knowledge destroys our sense of wonder
    Example 1
    Example 2
No, acquiring knowledge does not destroy our sense of wonder
    Example 1
    Example 2




This is simple, which is a descriptor of a C or D. Instead, lets think about saying *yes, and*… or *no, but*… in order to think about the implications and effects of the evidence and answer.

- Yes, and destroying our sense of wonder is necessary because…
- Yes, and destroying wonder can lead to new instances of wonder
- Yes, and it doesn't matter because…
- No, because wonder is inherent in the AOK
- No, because wonder is found in other parts of the AOK
- Sometimes, but it really doesn't matter because…

So start with an answer, but go further by thinking about cause and effects.