2019 Religion Studies Subject Assessment Advice

Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the previous year’s assessment cycle, gives an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, and the quality of student performance.

Teachers should refer to the subject outline for specifications on content and learning requirements, and to the subject operational information for operational matters and key dates.

School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Sources Analysis

Students apply their knowledge and understanding of religion and/or spirituality by analysing various sources/stimuli in response to questions set by the teacher. They apply their understanding of the concepts, theories, and definitions of religion and spiritualties; the nature of ‘the sacred’ and ‘the profane’; case studies of religion in society; religious issues; or contemporary trends that have been studied.

Student responses may be in a variety of forms such as a debate, writing, a discussion, a lecture, a forum, or a visual or multimodal presentation.

For this assessment type, students provide evidence of their learning *primarily* in relation to the assessment design criteria: *knowledge and understanding*; *analysis and evaluation*.

The more successful responses commonly:

* were derived from well-developed task questions and relevant stimuli/sources (such as religious art, cartoons, school liturgies/masses, contemporary films, television, radio podcasts, excerpts from articles, journals, books) allowing students to provide higher order thinking skills to meet the assessment design criteria of Knowledge and Understanding, and Analysis and Evaluation and their respective features to a high standard
* focussed on a narrow range of specific assessment design criteria features which allowed students to explore concepts in some depth
* provided critical evaluation of the definitions of religion and spirituality
* discerned what information to include and succinctly evaluate and analyse within the maximum word limit
* provided the opportunity (for students studying the 20-credit subject) to visit sacred sites different from their own experience (for example, Buddhist Temples, Islamic Mosques, Christian Churches) which sparked their curiosity and as a result tended to demonstrate greater depth of responses and higher order thinking skills
* demonstrated the students’ awareness of the complexity of religious and spiritual ideas and concepts and avoided superficial generalisations.

The less successful responses commonly:

* as noted in 2018, used dictionary definitions of religion and spirituality instead of showing evidence of more thorough research such as those from scholarly sources
* as noted in 2018, were descriptive in nature rather than an analysis of the various sources in which to apply their understanding of the concepts studied
* were those where students were required to undertake the task under timed supervised conditions, limiting their ability to refer to resources to support their responses
* needed to link religious and spiritual ideas with the societies in which they operate.

Assessment Type 2: Folio

Students undertake folios assessments from the core topic and option topics.

For this assessment type, students provide evidence of their learning in relation to the assessment design criteria: *knowledge and understanding*; *investigation and application*; *analysis and evaluation*; *reflection*.

The more successful responses commonly:

* had sophisticated guiding questions (e.g. Explain the relationship between . . .; To what extent can you justify . . .) relating to specific aspects of the core or option topic — often through essay or report modes of assessment
* explored a variety of perspectives on an issue
* provided opportunities for students to explore the pace of religion in the contemporary world
* used a variety of secondary sources including credible books, journals and relevant websites produced by experts in the field as well as expert primary sources
* demonstrated a wide variety of evidence and examples to support the key ideas and concepts being explored. For example, folio tasks that focussed on the eight phenomena of an organised religion provided scope for students to build knowledge and to engage with personal learning of core areas of study i.e. Christianity — visiting a church; Islam — visiting a mosque
* demonstrated explicit evidence against the performance standards i.e. students and teachers had clearly turned their minds towards the performance standards and ensured their responses addressed them
* as noted in 2018, targeted a few specific features in each folio task
* provided opportunities for students to reflect on the personal significance of religion to the adherents of the religion, for example, where a Chinese Uyghur could reflect to the students about their Islamic faith and how they are free to practice Islam in Australia.

The less successful responses commonly:

* as noted in 2018, were a result of poorly designed tasks or questions such as short answer and/or description based, limiting high order thinking skills to address the specific features of the assessment design criteria
* provided superficial understanding of concepts, such as Christianity and Catholicism interchangeably or over-simplifying belief systems
* used description of practical activities such as visits to religious sites or participation in masses/liturgies without analysis and evaluation of the religious significances of the religious sites/masses/liturgies
* relied on general knowledge which often contained inaccuracies
* as noted in 2018, misinterpreted ‘personal significance’ (R1) as their own personal opinion rather than research stemming from scholarly, expert opinion and use of credible resources. As a result, students found it difficult to distance themselves from their own point of view.

External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

Students choose a religious or spiritual phenomenon, or a religious issue linked to Australian or global society for investigation. They undertake preliminary background research into the phenomenon or issue before seeking more contemporary and contextual information using, for example, interviews, questionnaires, and *current* media sources.

Students must provide evidence of *knowledge and understanding* (KU1 and KU2), *investigation and application* (IA1, IA3 and IA4), *analysis and evaluation* (AE1 And AE2) and *reflection* (R2 and R3).

The more successful responses commonly:

* developed a focus question that allowed scope for exploration based on an issue of a religious or spiritual nature linked to Australian or global society that sparked student interest. For example:
* To what extent does Christian music influence the faith and practices of Christians in Australia?
* Is the implementation of women’s ordination in the Catholic Church a viable option in the 21st century?
* How do the views of afterlife influence an individual’s beliefs and behaviours?
* How relevant is the concept of pilgrimage to Australian Muslims?
* Is the treatment of women in the Quran acceptable or is it outdated?
* To what extent have Islamic religious texts been manipulated to indoctrinate followers?
* All rituals act to connect one to the spiritual context. To what extent do Catholic death rituals achieve this?
* How have various World religions initiated support for the environmental crisis in the 21st century?
* Should the Seventh-day Adventist Church alter its views on pacifism?
* To what extent do religious schools contribute to social cohesion in contemporary Australian society?
* addressed all the specific features of focus in depth
* used a wide variety of valid, reliable and useful sources and integrated these throughout the report, especially primary sources that provided religious insights regarding doctrines, beliefs, use of sacred texts. For example, a personal interview with a scholar or expert such as a Bhikkhu if the investigation is focussed on Buddhist beliefs, community surveys that include wider views than those given by their peers
* used secondary resources such as scripture references (from diverse faith organisations) and current media interest such as magazines, documentaries and journals; the use of this variety of sources enabled evidence of the performance standards which require, for example, ‘in-depth knowledge/investigation’ and being ‘well-informed’
* structured the investigation with an introduction that placed the issue/question into context, sub-headings that addressed relevant aspects of the issue succinctly (especially given the shorter word length for a 10-credit course) and a succinct and clear conclusion that drew all the key points, all lines of investigations and discussion together to arrive at well-informed and perceptive reflections
* included a range of different perspectives about an issue which allowed for greater depth of analysis and evaluation
* were mindful to analyse the relevance and importance of the issue to Australian religious or spiritual communities where global society was explored so that AE2 was addressed
* considered topical technology-based topics to research such as how online dating apps were influencing beliefs about celibacy in young people and how the church could respond
* showed sophisticated use of topic vocabulary.

The less successful responses commonly:

* as noted in 2018, choose topics that were more of a social issue rather than one that explored religious beliefs, perspectives and concepts. For example, military activism based on ethical motivation, legislation of euthanasia. As a result, responses dealt with the social and statistical implications and neglected the religious or spiritual influences
* as noted in 2018, were responses to broad statements, whereas the use of the specific question format helps to focus to responses
* as noted in 2018, used information obtained through research to describe rather than analyse
* needed to take advantage of the full word length for either the 10-credit or 20-credit program in order to fully explore the investigation of choice
* included inaccuracies or contradictory evidence, particularly regarding religious doctrine
* needed to ensure full coverage of the question’s research focus
* tended to recount or be comparative in nature which thereby limited capacity to demonstrate in-depth understanding, investigation and analysis. For example, baptism in Catholicism vs Greek Orthodox, the steps of a sacramental ritual
* as noted in 2018, included personal opinions or those of their peers which is not a requirement of this component of the subject
* as noted in 2018, reflected limited referencing skills
* required greater coverage of religious content of the phenomenon and/or dogmas
* drew few, if any, inferences from the research which subsequently limited their ability to analyse, evaluate and reflect on their findings
* used limited surveys (of, for example, 10 fellow students), or interviews with people without expertise or authority (such as a teacher commenting on an issue outside their expertise) as part of their investigative methods.