2021 Religion Studies Subject Assessment Advice

Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the 2021 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, documentaries, excerpts from articles, journals, books, virtual tours) allowing students to provide higher order thinking skills to meet the assessment design criteria to a high standard
* focussed on a few specific assessment design criteria features which allowed students to explore concepts in some depth
* provided critical evaluation of the definitions of religion and spirituality; and ‘the sacred’ and ‘the profane’
* used a variety of secondary sources
* understood and applied the influences of religion and spirituality in a local and/or global context with specific references to the sources
* discerned what information to include and succinctly evaluate and analyse within the maximum word limit
* engaged with the source material, beyond that which was provided by the teacher, in a way that demonstrated depth of understanding of religious concepts and ideas
* demonstrated the students’ awareness of the complexity of religious and spiritual ideas and concepts and avoided superficial generalisations.

The less successful responses commonly:

* used dictionary definitions of religion and spirituality instead of showing evidence of more thorough research such as those from scholarly sources
* were descriptive or summary based rather than an analysis of the various sources in which to apply their understanding of the concepts studied.

Assessment Type 2: Folio

Students undertake folio 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
* demonstrated insightful analysis of the core topic and option topics, not simply recounting an excursion or religious tour
* 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 provided scope for students to build knowledge and to engage with personal learning of core areas of study i.e. Christianity — participating in virtual tours of a church and virtual excursions given Covid-19 restrictions
* targeted a few specific features in each folio task
* provided in-depth analysis of religious experience from the point of view of the believer.

The less successful responses commonly:

* required short answer and/or description based responses, limiting high order thinking skills to address the specific features of the assessment design criteria. For example, tasks that asked students to focus on the patron saint of their school or reflect on a liturgical experience or retreat experience, usually led to description with little scope for critical thinking
* provided simplistic and/or inaccurate explanations of religious concepts or beliefs
* used description of practical activities such as visits to religious sites or participation in masses/liturgies without analysis and evaluation of the religious significance of the religious sites/masses/liturgies
* used dismissive or disparaging language about religious groups, concepts or ideas. For example, ‘an Orthodox Church is littered with images . . .’

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 was highly specific and relevant for the student and thus, sparked interest. For example:
* Should the traditional beliefs of clerical celibacy in the Catholic Church be modified to prevent the decreasing number of Catholic priests in modern Australian society?
* To what extent does a life crisis encourage people to turn to religion/spirituality?
* To what extent can music within a place of worship assist a person to connect with God?
* To what extent can faiths/religions be celebrated within the restrictiveness of isolation and social distancing and what impact, if any, is it having on the adherents?
* To what extent has Islamic fundamentalism affected Australian attitudes towards Islam?
* To what extent is traditional Aboriginal spirituality relevant to modern day Aboriginal Australians?
* To what extent have beliefs in Christian fundamentalism increased in recent years?
* Does the continued use off Greek language for services in the Greek orthodox Church facilitate a sense of community?
* What does it mean to be schooled in the Catholic faith today?
* How relevant is the concept of pilgrimage to Australian Muslims?
* embraced the media saturation of Covid-19 pandemic related material — to their advantage and factored in recent articles/responses and data — locally, nationally and globally, that assisted their investigation
* sourced/reached out to pertinent and inspiring community members whose status and roles in society (experts in their fields) were key to answering their enquiry question. For example, interview with priests, deacons, monks, nuns or other religious leaders, community surveys that include wider views than those given by students’ peers. Interviews conducted by phone, email in lieu of personal interviews, in some investigations, given the social distancing requirement of Covid-19
* relied on a number of authoritative scholarly secondary sources such as the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Koran, scripture references (from diverse faith organisations) and current media such as the latest publications of magazines/journals and documentaries
* used a range of reliable, authentic and valid sources of information which enabled evidence of the performance standards requiring, for example, ‘in-depth knowledge/investigation’ (KU2) and being ‘well-informed’ (IA4)
* had a clear focal point. For example, a focus on a certain generation i.e. people under the age of 25 wanting something different from their formal religious experiences such as a change to Mass
* 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. In some investigations, the conclusion provided innovative ideas for the future, for growth/for change
* linked inquiry question to contemporary Australian socio-culture and religion’s place within it (AE2)
* made clear links between the religious phenomena and current day society
* demonstrated the diversity of religious views on a particular topic or issue which allowed for greater depth of analysis and evaluation.

The less successful responses commonly:

* responded to generic questions or a broad topic which limited the student’s ability to address issues in any depth and therefore meet the performance standards at a high level. Without a clear hypothesis or guiding question, investigations were simply presented as information without analysis or evaluation. For example, ‘Catholic perspective on Euthanasia’, ‘Christian prayer’ or ‘What is Ramadan?’
* explored issues that were more social/ethical in nature and focused on social and statistical implications, neglecting consideration of religious beliefs, perspectives and concepts.
* contained generalisations and stereotypical/ biased statements without substantiation
* described issues rather than analysing them
* investigated topics/questions that were teacher-selected/suggested topics rather than an issue of appeal for the student, leading to formulaic investigations
* focused on one expression of a religion without exploring/ explaining its context. For example, the life and work of St Vincent de Paul, or the spirituality of Marcellin Champagne, without contextualising these religious expressions within Catholic Christianity, and the broader influence of these religious expressions in faith communities today
* used unreliable sources. For example, Wikipedia, blogs, anecdotal conversations with people without authority or qualifications
* referred to interviews with primary sources with no clarity of their relevance/ expertise/ qualifications
* used footnotes for more than just referencing, making it challenging to locate the student voice
* drew on a limited number of primary and/or secondary sources
* were written as recounts or lists of similarities and differences
* relied on student-led surveys where, in most cases, the respondents to the survey were peers who were not a relevant target audience and/or did not have the requisite expertise to provide the information required to substantiate the students’ investigation as a primary source.