# 2018 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

By analysing various sources, students 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.

The more successful responses commonly:

* used a range of sources, including visits to sacred sites, art, contemporary religious cartoons, appropriate audio-visual film clips or extracts, contemporary religious articles, and photo essays and stimuli from appropriate texts which enabled students to meet the assessment design criteria
* were designed for students to respond to a maximum of two or three sources; contained a few questions beginning with questions to elicit knowledge and understanding, then included questions to elicit higher-order skills of analysis and evaluation; and did not ask for too many specific features to be demonstrated in the students’ evidence
* used analysis, rather than description, to explain how the concepts the students had learned were evident in, or could be applied to, the sources
* showed (as moderators noted) that, when students had visited sacred sites away from their own religious culture — such as the Quaker centre, a mosque, a Buddhist or Jewish temple, an Anglican cathedral, or one of the Orthodox churches — the students were clearly interested in responding to what they saw in great depth and included evidence that met the criteria of analysis and evaluation. These instances were predominantly from students undertaking the 20-credit subject, given that this Assessment Type deals only with the “Core Topic” for the 10-credit subject

The less successful responses commonly:

* originated from questions which required students to respond to five or more sources, to respond to cartoons of a political rather than a religious nature, to respond to old sources from past examinations or outdated articles
* were focused on describing what was in a source rather than higher-order thinking skills like analysis and evaluation
* engaged in superficial, often dictionary, definitions of religion and spirituality rather than engaging with scholarly (and competing) definitions, interpretations and explanations.

Teachers need to ensure that videos, songs, or articles that are used, allow students to address the assessment design criteria, which should also be selected sparingly to allow students ample opportunity to meet each performance standard in depth rather than several performance standards superficially.

Assessment Type 2: Folio

The more successful responses commonly:

* focused on one specific feature. A task such as a well-designed essay question that focused on just one specific feature was a very effective way of ensuring that students provided evidence above the C level. Some of these essay topics centred on a school’s’ community service programs, the place of religion in Australian history, or visits to places of worship of various traditions
* targeted just a few specific features. Well-scaffolded tasks that targeted just a few of the specific features of the assessment design criteria were the most successful in eliciting responses in the higher grade bands. This was especially evident when teachers had structured questions that almost demanded an analytical response. Many of these tasks also included a question that directed students to examine religion in local and global contexts and these were answered well
* demonstrated considered reflection. Some of the strongest evidence in demonstrating reflection was based on appropriate investigation into a religion or spirituality through listening to a guest speaker, visiting a religious site, or watching a documentary or YouTube clip, and then reflecting in a considered way on the personal meaning of that experience to the adherents
* recognised that often “clear and in-depth knowledge” or “well-informed” communication required a grappling with authoritative sources, and texts, with appropriate references, rather than proceeding on assumptions, generalisations, or what the student considered to be their generalised background knowledge
* came from well-designed questions which facilitated analytical responses through requiring for example, a reflection on a school liturgy that explained how the liturgy nurtured the religious culture of the school and affected the participants in a visible and tangible way.

The less successful responses commonly:

* consisted of responses to mainly short-answer questions that were assessing all of the specific features of the performance standards and gave no opportunity for any depth of knowledge and understanding and/or analysis in the responses
* relied on generalisations or stereotypes (or in some cases, misconceptions) in demonstrating the student’s knowledge and understanding of aspects of a particular religion rather than appropriate authoritative sources
* did not go beyond narrative, recount, or description. Often this was the result of poorly designed tasks which did not demand evidence of analysis or critical evaluation. Assignments that led to narrative, recount, or description often limited students’ achievement to the C grade or less
* were a narration of a student’s involvement in a liturgical event, rather than demonstrating features of the performance standards. Whilst some “liturgy tasks” did address the appropriate performance standards, there were also too many that did not go beyond description of the student’s involvement in the liturgy or included superficial analysis as to why certain features of a liturgy were included
* misinterpreted the assessment design criterion of reflection. Moderators saw that the criterion of reflection was often misinterpreted to mean ‘reflection on the student’s own personal experiences or opinions’. The performance standard at the C grade for the first specific feature of reflection is ‘Considered reflection on the personal significance of religions and spiritualties in traditional and contemporary societies’, which goes beyond the personal opinion of the student and asks for an explanation of the personal significance of religion or spirituality to adherents of the particular religion being studied.

# External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

Students are to choose a religious or spiritual phenomenon, or a religious issue linked to Australian or global society for investigation. Students are required to conduct research, referring to authoritative primary and secondary sources, to address their question/ topic in full. Students must provide evidence of knowledge and understanding, investigation and application, analysis and evaluation and reflection.

The more successful responses commonly:

* posed a question to investigate with an explicit religious focus, i.e., specific aspects of theology, dogma or religious or spiritual issues were investigated. This approach fared much better facilitating full coverage of each of the performance standards. For example:
* How is Mary, Mother of Jesus, depicted in modern art, and what does this mean to believers?
* What are the reasons for the rapid growth in Pentecostal churches?
* What is the significance of the diminishing priesthood in the Catholic Church?
* Why do Muslims fast during Ramadan and how easy is it for a Muslim to observe Ramadan in Australia?
* To what extent is street preaching effective in promoting the Gospel?
* Does the Greek Orthodox and Catholic Church share similar doctrines regarding iconography?
* How does the teaching of the Lutheran and Baptist Church differ in relation to eligibility and process of baptism? (Australian communities)
* selected an investigation focus/ question independently, rather than from a list suggested by the teacher. This created a heightened awareness of the social ramifications or significance of the chosen topic in Australia
* framed the investigation question well, avoiding a simplistic question that could be answered with limited investigation. Successful questions included wording such as “*how”* and “*to what extent”* rather than *“what is”*
* selected a question/ topic that was relevant to Australia
* demonstrated a depth of understanding whereby intelligent and reasoned conclusions could be drawn
* used focus questions throughout the investigation to avoid repetition. Subheadings generally led to well-written, relevant and structured investigations
* made direct links back to the investigation question throughout
* explored the investigation question in full providing an insightful answer/ resolution to the issue/ topic being explored
* included skilful use of subject/ topic specific vocabulary
* linked well to sacred texts and doctrine of relevant religions, demonstrating evidence of understanding and cross analysis
* provided evidence of ongoing analysis rather than a recount of information and then analysis
* synthesised sources, comparing the perspectives emerging from primary research with evidence provided by sound, current, and expert secondary sources
* provided evidence of a broad and comprehensive level of research, using a range of primary and secondary sources, illustrating depth of understanding
* conducted several interviews with professionals/ experts in the field or topic area, many of whom were in the wider community rather than in the immediate school community. For example: scholars, professors, clergy and other religious leaders
* did not survey class peers unless pertinent to the question
* adopted a formal and objective writing style throughout the investigation, making no reference to personal beliefs/ opinions
* used reputable and relevant secondary sources, which included books and published journals
* used capital letters when referring to religious texts (e.g. ‘the Bible’, ‘the Qur’an’)
* included a bibliography and correct referencing throughout the investigation
* adhered to the word-limit
* did not rely on teacher-generated formulas.

The less successful responses commonly:

* focused on aspects of society rather than aspects of religion or spirituality. Popular social issues included *terrorism, commercialisation of Christmas, same sex marriage and sport.* Covered medical based topics, such as Abortion, IVF and Euthanasia, and tended to focus on the biological and procedural processes. Often students wrote paragraphs making little, or no reference to, religion or spirituality and therefore, could not be assessed against the standards
* used broad questions which limited depth of research and analysis
* included some relevant key findings; however, these were lacking in development
* attempted to cover too much breadth, particularly for 1000-word investigations in a 10-credit subject (e.g. four different religions and their views regarding a particular topic)
* used the format of a descriptive text. This was mostly apparent when addressing questions which compared religious beliefs and teachings to topics such as afterlife, IVF, marriage and euthanasia
* overused certain sources (referred to the same source numerous times throughout one paragraph/ consecutive paragraphs)
* needed to address all of the specific features of performance standards listed in the subject outline
* were written in an informal way, using personal opinions. Insightful and critical reflection on the personal significance of religions requires more than simply personal opinion
* included tables and graphs that were placed out of context, or failed to include any discussion of, or link to the question
* often discussed the process of research at length rather than analysis of religious and spiritual ideas, concepts, and issues in selected sources
* included limited or incorrect evidence of referencing
* needed to use appropriate religious experts as primary sources. Frequently, faith-based questions were directed at people who were not members of a faith community
* relied too heavily on surveys as primary sources of information, which led to a lack of sophisticated knowledge and analysis
* were significantly below the maximum word-count
* spent too many words detailing how they were going to conduct their investigation and who their sources were.