2020 Religion Studies Subject Assessment Advice

Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the 2020 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:

* as noted in 2019, 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
* as noted in 2019, 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
* as noted in 2019, 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:

* as noted in previous reports, used dictionary definitions of religion and spirituality instead of showing evidence of more thorough research such as those from scholarly sources
* as noted in previous reports, 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 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:

* as noted in 2019, 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
* as noted in 2019, 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
* as noted in previous reports, 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:

* as noted in previous reports, 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. 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 explanations of concepts. For example, the afterlife beliefs of Christianity, Islamic understandings of God
* as noted in 2019, 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 or showed ignorance of particular religious beliefs. For example, ‘Jesus came from God and was reincarnated.’
* used dismissive language about religious groups when contrasting them with their own tradition. 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?
* as noted in previous reports, addressed all the specific features of focus in depth
* 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
* as noted in 2019, relied on a number of authoritative scholarly secondary sources such as the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Quran, scripture references (from diverse faith organisations) and current media interest such as the latest publications of magazines/journals, documentaries
* as noted in 2019, 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
* as noted in 2019, 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
* as noted in 2019, linked the question investigated to contemporary Australian socio-culture and religion’s place within it, thereby addressing 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 meet the performance standards at a high level and to address issues in any depth. Without a 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?’
* as noted in previous reports, choose topics that were more of a social/ethical issue rather than one that explored religious beliefs, perspectives and concepts. For example, Holy War, military activism based on ethical motivation. As a result, responses dealt with the social and statistical implications and neglected the religious or spiritual influences
* as noted in previous reports, contained wide-sweeping generalisations and made stereotypical/opinionated/biased statements without any primary or secondary source of substantiation
* as noted in previous reports, resorted to exceedingly generalised expression of issues which was often more description than analysis and evaluation
* investigated topics/questions that were teacher-selected/suggested topics rather than an issue of appeal for the student, leading to formulaic investigations
* wrote about a religious belief by choosing to concentrate on one area of the religion. For example, the work of St Vincent de Paul only, or the spirituality and work of Marcellin champagne without providing the reader with any clear detail about why the work is important for the Christian variant of Catholicism and how it linked into the faith of the people and the communities where it is practised
* as noted in 2019, needed to take advantage of the full word length for either the 10-credit or 20-credit program to fully explore the investigation of choice
* used inappropriate sources. For example, Wikipedia, blogs, anecdotal conversations with people without authority or qualifications
* referred to sources with no clarification of the relevance of the primary source used. For example, why the person was interviewed
* overused footnotes making it challenging to locate the student voice
* had a limited bibliography of primary and secondary sources
* as noted in 2019, tended to recount or be comparative in nature (listing similarities and differences) 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 2019, lacked expert primary sources, relied on student-led surveys where, in most cases, the respondents to the survey did not have the requisite qualifications or knowledge to enable the student to address the performance standards at a high level. For example, surveys in which classmates are interviewed are rarely conducive to ‘appropriate investigation methods, including highly productive use of inquiry skills’ (IA1)
* needed to make effective use of the word count together with the mechanical aspects of the written expression. This affected the ways in which meaning was shaped to produce key points and statements that were in essence difficult to discern.