

2025 ASSESSMENT REPORT REL315124 STUDIES OF RELIGION

General Comments

The overall performance of students was disappointing. On average, students wrote around two pages for each section. This is insufficient to show depth of knowledge and understanding. There is a great deal of content in this course, and it needs to be fully committed to memory. There were a small number of very brief or non-attempt responses, which points to a lack of time management in the exam setting or a lack of preparation.

Committing knowledge and terminology to memory is essential for success in this course. Candidates must continue to look at memory techniques to assist in this regard.

Handwriting was legible, overall, and students presented their work in clear paragraphs.

In general, spelling and grammar were of a reasonable standard under exam conditions. A few candidates had TASC-approved reasonable adjustments for markers to ignore spelling and grammar. Candidates should certainly be made aware that they can apply for these adjustments.

A focus on Criterion 6, 7 and 8, which are only assessed once, is vital. They required critical evaluation and deeper analysis. This requires the candidate to draw together some summary and evaluative comments in their concluding paragraphs.

A small number of candidates responded to both Question 4 (Religious responses to an ethical issue) and Question 7 (Religious ethics). It is clearly stated in the examination booklet that candidates are not to respond to both of these questions. It is important that students are exposed to past and sample exam papers to familiarise themselves with the structure and requirements of the examination. Candidates who did respond to Questions 4 and 7 received the ratings for their stronger response and no ratings for the weaker response.

Section A

Responses have improved from the first year of the course. With discipline, refinement and greater inclusion of evidence, it should continue to improve.

Candidates must be aware that there is considerable variance in belief within traditions. The term 'Protestantism' is deceptive and simplistic. Nuanced understanding needs to be taught. Protestantism is an umbrella term used by Catholics to cover all non-Orthodox, non-Catholic Christian adherents. That all protestants have the same beliefs and that only Catholics are conservative is incorrect.

Question 1

The majority of candidates responded to this question.

This is a very complex and layered section of the paper. First, there is the unseen stimulus quote, and then there are the multiple parts to the question. The question was strong and really guided students to answer the question and address the criteria.

The responses for Islam were cleaner in naming the issue of leadership, which divided Sunni and Shi'i Muslims. Clear were the differences in rituals within the pillars and the strong similarities in belief and practices. There were some attempts to discuss cooperation and conflict within Islam with scope for greater discussion of cooperation for future students.

The largest number of responses were on Christianity. Students focused too much on Church history; feeling compelled to discuss the break from Judaism, the Great Schism, and the Reformation, including Calvin, Luther, Anglican and Methodist. Stronger responses limited themselves to the divide between Western and Eastern Orthodox churches, with depth to their discussion of the differences in beliefs and practices.

Stronger responses worked from the practices in Christianity, such as Baptism and Eucharist, and were able to draw out the differences in practice and belief from there. This approach of working from the practices ensured the practices were discussed sufficiently.

The naming of periods of historical fighting between variants of Christianity was strong. As was the naming of specific ecumenical movements and shared prayer, with appropriate supporting evidence.

Question 2

This question provided a good base for ensuring that practices were discussed. Candidates were required to name the differences in practices between the major variants of a tradition and then supplement that knowledge with the beliefs or teachings that explain the divergence in practice.

Most candidates examined Christianity and used Baptism and Eucharist as their chosen practices. This is a good approach and enabled students to work from practices and then link in the nuanced difference in beliefs. Weaker responses 'rambled' on about the historical rejection of Papal authority, the selling of indulgences, and Martin Luther.

There were fleeting references to conflicts and some good discussion or reference to ecumenical movements and shared prayer.

Section B

Question 3

Most candidates selected Judaism to respond to this question, with a much smaller number choosing Buddhism.

Whilst there were some excellent responses to the question, a stronger revision focus on the Key Knowledge and Criteria Standards of the course would have assisted many candidates. Key Knowledge tells candidates what they may be required to write about in the examination. Criteria Standards tell candidates what they will be examined on.

Key knowledge relevant to this question in the examination includes: beliefs about the divine, the metaphysical, human nature, human purpose and the human condition; how these beliefs plus values and practices provide understanding of suffering and responses to it; and, how adherents find guidance or solace for their suffering, along with any practical means to alleviate suffering and any perceived purpose of suffering. Very few candidates addressed 'how' the tradition's 'understanding of human nature and purpose influenced its understanding of suffering and response to it,' despite the fact that this is Key Knowledge of the course. Future candidates should be aware of all of this as they cannot be certain which key knowledge the question will focus on.

The course also requires learners to undertake a case study of one tradition's response to suffering. This year most students who wrote on Judaism appeared to have undertaken a case study of the Holocaust. It should be noted that neither the course case study nor the examination question were interested in a lengthy recount of details about the Holocaust. Too many essays were 'history' essays on the Holocaust. The case study itself, and its relevance for the examination, is concerned with the tradition's response to the suffering that occurred (the Key Knowledge and the relevant Criteria Standards). The case study provides illustrations/examples of how the tradition's beliefs, values and practices helped adherents understand and cope with suffering (or not).

Students who wrote on Buddhism were stronger overall. This is due to the nature of the religion aligning more readily to the module. By simply outlining the basic beliefs and practices, they were essentially answering the question as far as both suffering and human nature are concerned.

Question 4

Only three candidates attempted this question, and all of those appear to have confused it with Section C, Question 7, with each discussing Christianity and/or ethical theories.

Section C

It is really important that students respond to the question related to their Depth Study, so they have the requisite information to write a successful response to the question.

Responses were, generally, too short and lacked detail. Most essays needed more evidence (or at least some). In particular, the use of sacred writings and/or authoritative sources. The questions specifically mentioned the use of sources.

Question 5

This question should only be answered by those students who studied this as their Depth Study topic. The discrepancy between those who had prepared well and those who had not was stark in this section as a consequence.

Stronger papers had a wealth of information on differing roles across branches or religious groups, reference to holy texts, activism within the faith and a clear exploration of consistency and coherence.

Weaker responses were generalisations on oppression in the world at large, often with no reference to any religion.

If students want to discuss the rights of women in the area of their ethics topic, these answers were better suited to the Ethics question.

Question 6

No candidates attempted this question.

Question 7

The majority of candidates responded to this question.

Closer attention needs to be paid to answering the question using the language and keywords of the question. Stronger responses addressed the idea of change or lack of change well. The introduction should at least refer to the student's topic and the religious tradition.

Stronger answers had references to support their positions, including references to rulings, holy texts, laws, and religious scholars' interpretations. In weaker responses practices were often missed out completely, and if they were mentioned, it was not at the critically analyse and assess range. This needs more explicit teaching.

Protestant Christians were considered homogenous, meaning statements were made which were grossly overgeneralised to the point of untruth.

The idea of Double Effect needs to be applied or explained as often it was not well used, or possibly not well-understood.

Students generally focused too much on Ethical Frameworks, not linking them to a religious tradition and variants well, or in some cases at all. Some essays even discussed frameworks like utilitarianism and Kantian ethics, which have no link to religious ethics. Teachers are strongly encouraged to move away from using ethical frameworks.

The majority of candidates had selected abortion or euthanasia as their depth study topic. Students are encouraged to explore other issues as a way of standing out from the 'crowd'.

Question 8

These responses were all written as if they were Question 7 Ethics questions, and topics such as genetic manipulation, gene editing or organ transplants worked well here. As such, the feedback for Q7 applies here also.

Weaker responses talked about science in general, had no facts or references to support their answer, little application to the religious tradition, if a religion was mentioned at all, and no mention of consistency or coherence.

Question 9

Aboriginal Spirituality is deep and complex, and this was not conveyed in the responses to this question.

This question was not on the topics of Aboriginal rights, sovereignty, the Stolen Generation, or Kevin Rudd's Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples speech. While these issues could refer to spirituality, that is not what was explored in the responses to this question.

Externally Assessed Criteria

Criterion 1

Criterion 1 expects a well-structured, logical, relevant response to the question. This well-structured, logical, relevant response should include a range of relevant terminology plus correct spelling, grammar and punctuation. Incorrect spelling of key religious terms impacted Criterion 1 for all sections and impacted ratings for this criterion. A few candidates had TASC-approved reasonable adjustments for markers to ignore spelling and grammar. Several other candidates should have considered applying for these adjustments too.

Question-specific essay writing was weak. The introduction must clearly articulate which question is being addressed and use strong referencing signposts to the question. It should lay out the thesis statement and points to be covered in the essay. Body paragraphs should begin with a topic sentence, which is then expanded upon and supported by evidence from an authoritative source. Finishing with a link back to the question and/or stimulus.

It's important to note that candidates must answer the question that is asked to do well on this criterion to meet the requirements for relevance and purpose.

It is also important to note that it is very difficult to credit irrelevant information, for the same reasons of relevance and purpose. These criteria are quite demanding, so future candidates should avoid lengthy recounts of details that are not relevant to the question asked. Historical details on the Holocaust, responses to the Holocaust from sources external to the tradition, and the life and times of the Dali Llama, are three examples from this year's responses where candidates wasted valuable time on unnecessary, unrewarding details.

Criterion 3

Practices are often missed out completely in all sections of the exam. If they are mentioned, it is rarely at the critically analyse and assess range. This requires much more explicit teaching. How beliefs and values shape people's lives and actions, and the significance of beliefs and practices on individuals and the collective needs 'hammering out' by teachers of the course. It requires moderation time.

This criterion requires analysis of how beliefs, values and practices shape or influence people's lives. In Question 3, that means how they influence understanding and responses to suffering. The criterion also requires different perspectives from within the tradition. There is, in addition, a knowledge element to the criterion. This year, many candidates missed the beliefs and values about human nature and purpose that was required by the question. Many candidates also glossed over or completely ignored the role of practices in helping adherents cope with or understand suffering.

In Section C, students did not address this criterion well, if at all. Much more explicit teaching needs to be done on addressing this criterion in relation to their Depth Study.

Criterion 6

Discipline is required given the scope of the history of the major religions and the demands of the question. Addressing the criterion elements will be the guide. Limiting responses to two variants will free candidates up to address all the demands of the question, specifically: origins of the variants, similarities and differences in doctrine, and conflict and cooperation between adherents of two variants.

Criterion 7

This criterion requires candidates to present a rationale for the religious tradition's understanding of and response to suffering or ethics, how the beliefs, values and practices reinforce the tradition's views on suffering or ethics, and how the tradition has responded to suffering or ethics. This is where the illustration from the case study can shine, by showing (1) why the tradition teaches particular responses to the issue concerned; or example, by explicitly linking response to belief, value or practice, and (2) how the traditions' teachings on the issue were applied or rejected, by adherents at the time or later.

Criterion 8

Candidates need to improve in this criterion. Students need to be better at addressing all aspects of the criterion, in particular, coherence and consistency of points of view.