

Religion Studies

2012 Chief Assessor's Report



Government
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RELIGION STUDIES

2012 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

OVERVIEW

Chief Assessors' reports give 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, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Sources Analysis

The most successful sources analysis tasks allowed students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of different beliefs, perspectives, and experiences (KU1, the first specific feature of the knowledge and understanding assessment design criterion of the subject outline). They also gave students the chance to show they understood the religious and spiritual ideas, concepts, and issues in selected sources (specific feature KU2). In terms of the analysis and evaluation criterion, students needed to analyse religious and spiritual ideas, concepts, and issues from selected sources (specific feature AE1).

Moderators commented that students tended to be more successful when responding to tasks with a limited number of specific features of the assessment design criteria nominated for assessment.

Effective sources analysis tasks used specific sources that had been selected for students. Also, students were given the greatest opportunity to meet performance standards when the responses were structured (for example, the teacher had directed the responses using specific questions). The inclusion of the sources with the task sheets helped to confirm analysis and evaluation.

A variety of sources was used, such as:

- films with religious content
- site visits
- sacred objects
- photographs of icons, prayer positions, or symbols
- statistical data about religions
- media articles that addressed religious phenomena.

In accordance with the subject outline, the word-limit for this assessment type is 800 words if written or a maximum of 5 minutes if oral, or the equivalent in multimodal form. Most students adhered to these limits; however, teachers need to ensure that the limit is not exceeded.

Evidence which effectively showed student achievement included the recording of multimodal presentations and/or the transcript to accompany printouts of slides.

Assessment Type 2: Written Assignments

Written tasks were well designed in order to demonstrate evidence of learning at the higher levels of the performance standards. The most successful had clearly been planned by the teacher and structured in a way which assisted the students in meeting the criteria.

As with the sources analysis tasks, those tasks that nominated a limited number of specific features of the assessment design criteria provided opportunities for students to meet the standards at a higher level.

Those written tasks that were specific in terms of religious phenomena or denomination allowed for deeper analysis and evaluation in comparison to those that covered multiple religions or perspectives.

The least successful written tasks required students to meet all the specific features for this assessment type in each task, which did not give opportunities to demonstrate learning in any depth or detail.

Some of the kinds of written tasks included:

- response to a guest speaker
- a magazine article on a social justice topic
- a research essay (on the definitions of religion)
- an essay in response to a given question
- a mini-investigative report
- a letter to the editor
- a script of a speech to be delivered to an NGO forum
- script for a liturgy.

Some of the topics covered included:

- religious phenomena, such as sacraments
- definitions of religion
- ethical issues in two variants of a religious tradition or across two religions
- a particular time or era in a tradition's history
- prayer
- religious rituals
- scripture
- religious founders or holy people
- contemporary spirituality in Australia.

The most successful topics led to analysis and critical evaluation rather than narrative, recount, or description. Tasks that led to narrative, recount or description limited students' achievement.

Caution needs to be taken when referencing, and in consideration of the reliability of websites as sources.

Assessment Type 3: Practical Activity

The most successful practical tasks were those that allowed for investigation and application and reflection, as well as knowledge and understanding. Liturgies and some trips became recounts and only allowed students to demonstrate evidence of knowledge and understanding.

Successful practicals included teaching peers about a religious phenomenon or issue. Researching religious phenomena was also successful if appropriate sources were used. Trips that were planned specifically with the assessment design criteria gave students a clear structure for their responses and were also successful.

In group work, tasks that allowed for clear individual reflection and contribution gave the best evidence of achievement. Larger group sizes may limit the opportunity to provide evidence of learning against the performance standards for all members.

Responses that included evidence such as Powerpoints, transcripts and recordings enabled moderators to use the range of work to find evidence to support teachers' decisions.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 4: External Investigation

The most successful investigations utilised appropriate methods (interviews, observation, statistical analysis, action research, surveys) and used relevant sample groups (a range of representative groups and experts, as opposed to peers). The most successful investigations were presented as such and not as essays. They were appropriate and consistent in their referencing and showed evidence of credible sources. Focus questions were used throughout the investigation and provided direction. Markers found that those investigations that showed that the students had clearly completed initial research, backed this up with deeper and specific research, had come to their own conclusions and judgments by analysing their gathered information, and, finally, demonstrated an advancement in their knowledge, were most able to show evidence at the higher standards.

The least successful investigations had titles of just one or two words (such as 'Abortion', 'Sperm Donors', 'Divorce', 'Marriage', 'Ten Commandments', 'Witchcraft', 'War', 'Capital Punishment', or 'Sin'), making it difficult for the marker to understand the focus of the investigation and find evidence of any analysis or different religious perspectives as required by the performance standards. Other barriers to success were long, complicated hypotheses or guiding questions that were almost a paragraph long, consisting of several ideas that were impossible to explore and discuss in a 2000-word report (for the 20-credit subject, or a 1000-word report for the 10-credit subject). Such long hypotheses did not lead to a focused investigation.

Investigations that consisted of tables of data relating to surveys, with no explanation of their relationship to the focus of the investigation and no relevant analysis, were very limited in providing evidence of achievement against the specific features of the performance standards.

Similarly, surveys that had been distributed to the students' peers produced very limited evidence of knowledge and understanding of aspects of religion studies. It is

recommended that students seek out knowledgeable primary sources to interview who can provide specialist knowledge or in-depth material for analysis.

Some investigations were opinion pieces with no reference to sources. Statements such as 'all religions are dropping in numbers' must be verified by reference to an authoritative source, using an appropriate referencing system. Students should choose a religious or spiritual phenomenon or a religious issue linked to Australian or global society for investigation. Teachers and students are referred to the subject outline which states: 'Students should undertake preliminary background research into the phenomenon or issue before seeking more contemporary and contextual information through the use of, for example, interviews, questionnaires, and current media sources.'

Students are expected to keep a folio of their research so that the teacher can verify that the student has done the work for himself or herself; however, it is not required that this folio be handed up with the investigation. No appendices should be included with the written report. Markers cannot read beyond the stipulated word-limits of 2000 or 1000 words. Surveys and interview transcripts are of no value as evidence unless the student has incorporated them into the main text of the investigation and used them as part of their focused analysis.

Topics such as sperm cell donors, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, gay rights, IVF, exorcism, divorce, and environmentalism are not in themselves religious topics. Too often students focused on the scientific or sociocultural aspects of these topics and did not provide evidence of religious perspectives or understanding as required by the performance standards. The subject outline states: 'Students choose a religious or spiritual phenomenon or a religious issue linked to Australian or global society for investigation'. In so doing, students are expected to show evidence of explanation of religious beliefs, perspectives, and experience across traditions; understanding of religious and spiritual ideas and concepts; knowledge and understanding of religions and spiritualities; detailed explanation of religious and spiritual phenomena; analysis of religious and spiritual ideas; and definitions of religions and spiritualities.

More successful investigations focused on a specific aspect or phenomenon of religion such as:

- Buddhist concepts of the afterlife
- the importance of prayer
- the reason for celibacy in the Catholic priesthood
- Buddhist meditation
- how stewardship of the earth emerged as a religious concept
- the role of Mary MacKillop for Australian Catholics
- the importance of World Youth Day in revitalising religion
- the importance of music in Seventh Day Adventist churches
- the role of street preaching in promoting the gospel
- the expression of religion in East Timor
- infant baptism
- difficulties in finding a church for newly arrived refugees
- young children's changing perception of God
- youth ministry.

These topics allowed for more 'insightful knowledge' and deeper analysis than broader topics.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

Learning and assessment plans including the addendum (where applicable) and task sheets should be provided with the moderation sample.

Teachers may provide performance standards or details of how the final grade for the assessment type was determined.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Moderators commented on the improvement in tasks and the application of the performance standards this year in Religion Studies.

Further support materials have been gathered and will be available from the website.

Teachers are strongly encouraged to participate in assessment panels to gain further experience in the subject and assessment processes.

Religion Studies
Chief Assessor