



Rewarding Learning

**ADVANCED SUBSIDIARY (AS)
General Certificate of Education
2025**

Religious Studies

Assessment Unit AS 8

assessing

An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion

[SRE81]

FRIDAY 6 JUNE, MORNING

**MARK
SCHEME**

General Marking Instructions

Introduction

The main purpose of a mark scheme is to ensure that examinations are marked accurately, consistently and fairly. The mark scheme provides examiners with an indication of the nature and range of candidates' responses likely to be worthy of credit. It also sets out the criteria which they should apply in allocating marks to candidates' responses.

Assessment objectives

Below are the assessment objectives for **GCE Religious Studies**

Candidates should be able to:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of religion, including:
 - religious, philosophical and/or ethical thought and teaching;
 - influence of beliefs, teachings and practices on individuals, communities and societies;
 - cause and significance of similarities and differences in belief, teaching and practice; and
 - approaches to the study of religion and belief (AO1); and
- analyse and evaluate aspects of, and approaches to, religion and belief, including their significance, influence and study (AO2).

Quality of candidates' responses

In marking the examination papers, examiners should be looking for a quality of response reflecting the level of maturity which may reasonably be expected of a 17 or 18-year-old which is the age at which the majority of candidates sit their GCE examinations.

Flexibility in marking

Mark schemes are not intended to be totally prescriptive. No mark scheme can cover all the responses which candidates may produce. In the event of unanticipated answers, examiners are expected to use their professional judgement to assess the validity of answers. If an answer is particularly problematic, then examiners should seek the guidance of the Supervising Examiner.

Positive marking

Examiners are encouraged to be positive in their marking, giving appropriate credit for what candidates know, understand and can do rather than penalising candidates for errors or omissions. Examiners should make use of the whole of the available mark range for any particular question and be prepared to award full marks for a response which is as good as might reasonably be expected of a 17 or 18-year-old GCE candidate.

Awarding zero marks

Marks should only be awarded for valid responses and no marks should be awarded for an answer which is completely incorrect or inappropriate.

Mark schemes for tasks or questions which require candidates to respond in extended written form are marked on the basis of levels of response which take account of the quality of written communication.

Levels of response

In deciding which level of response to award, examiners should look for the 'best fit' bearing in mind that weakness in one area may be compensated for by strength in another. In deciding which mark within a particular level to award to any response, examiners are expected to use their professional judgement. The following guidance is provided to assist examiners.

- **Threshold performance:** Response which just merits inclusion in the level and should be awarded a mark at or near the bottom of the range.
- **Intermediate performance:** Response which clearly merits inclusion in the level and should be awarded a mark at or near the middle of the range.
- **High performance:** Response which fully satisfies the level description and should be awarded a mark at or near the top of the range.

Each of the two assessment objectives have been categorised into five levels of performance relating to the respective abilities of the candidates. Having identified, for each assessment objective, the band in which the candidate has performed, the examiner should then decide on the appropriate mark within the range for the band.

Other Aspects of Human Experience at AS Level

Candidates must engage with other aspects of human experience, when required, to access Bands 3–5.

Synoptic Assessment at A2 Level

Candidates must support their answer with reference to at least one other unit of study to access Bands 4–5.

Candidates must engage with other aspects of human experience in their AO2 response to access Bands 3–5.

Quality of written communication

Quality of written communication is taken into account in assessing candidates' responses to all tasks and questions that require them to respond in extended written form. These tasks and questions are marked on the basis of levels of response. The description for each level of response includes reference to the quality of written communication.

For conciseness, quality of written communication is distinguished within levels of response as follows:

- Level 1: Quality of written communication is basic.
- Level 2: Quality of written communication is limited.
- Level 3: Quality of written communication is good.
- Level 4: Quality of written communication is very good.
- Level 5: Quality of written communication is excellent.

In interpreting these level descriptions, examiners should refer to the more detailed guidance provided below:

Level 1 (Basic): The candidate makes only a basic selection and use of an appropriate form and style of writing. The organisation of material lacks clarity and coherence. There is little or no use of specialist vocabulary. Presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar are basic and the intended meaning is not clear.

Level 2 (Limited): The candidate makes a limited selection and use of an appropriate form and style of writing. The organisation of material may lack clarity and coherence. There is limited use of specialist vocabulary. Presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar may be such that intended meaning is not clear.

Level 3 (Good): The candidate makes a reasonable selection and use of an appropriate form and style of writing. Relevant material is organised with some clarity and coherence. There is good use of appropriate specialist vocabulary. Presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar are sufficiently competent to make meaning clear.

Level 4 (Very Good): The candidate makes a very good selection and use of an appropriate form and style of writing. Relevant material is organised with clarity and coherence. There is very good use of appropriate specialist vocabulary. Presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar are of a very good standard to make meaning clear.

Level 5 (Excellent): The candidate successfully selects and uses the most appropriate form and style of writing. Relevant material is organised with a high degree of clarity and coherence. There is widespread and accurate use of appropriate specialist vocabulary. Presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar are of a sufficiently high standard to make meaning clear.

Band	AO1 Performance Descriptors	Marks
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An excellent response to the question asked • Demonstrates comprehensive understanding and knowledge • Demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the influence of beliefs, teachings and practices on individuals, communities and societies • A very high degree of relevant evidence and examples • A sophisticated answer with a clear and coherent structure • An extensive range of technical language and vocabulary with accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar 	[21]–[25]
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A very good response to the question asked • Demonstrates a high degree of understanding and almost totally accurate knowledge • Demonstrates a high degree of understanding of the influence of beliefs, teachings and practices on individuals, communities and societies • A very good range of relevant evidence and examples • A mature answer with a mainly clear and coherent structure • A very good use of technical language and vocabulary with a mainly accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar 	[16]–[20]
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good response to the question asked • Demonstrates a reasonable degree of understanding and mainly accurate knowledge • Demonstrates a reasonable degree of understanding of the influence of beliefs, teachings and practices on individuals, communities and societies • A good range of relevant evidence and examples • A reasonably mature answer with some evidence of structure and coherence • A good use of technical language and vocabulary with a reasonably accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar 	[11]–[15]
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A limited response to the question asked • Demonstrates limited knowledge and understanding • Demonstrates limited understanding of the influence of beliefs, teachings and practices on individuals, communities and societies • A limited range of evidence and/or examples • A limited answer with limited evidence of structure and coherence • A limited use of technical language and vocabulary with a limited command of spelling, punctuation and grammar 	[6]–[10]
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A basic response to the question asked • Demonstrates minimal knowledge and understanding • Demonstrates minimal understanding of the influence of beliefs, teachings and practices on individuals, communities and societies • Little, if any, use of evidence and/or examples • A basic answer with basic structure and coherence • A basic use of technical language and vocabulary with a poor grasp of spelling, punctuation and grammar 	[0]–[5]

Band	AO2 Performance Descriptors	Marks
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A comprehensive and coherent response demonstrating an excellent attempt at critical analysis • An excellent attempt at the application of beliefs, values and teachings to the question asked • An excellent attempt using evidence and reasoning to construct well informed and balanced arguments which are set, where necessary, in the context of other aspects of human experience • An excellent attempt at providing personal insight and independent thought • A sophisticated answer with a clear and coherent structure • An extensive range of technical language and terminology with accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar 	[21]–[25]
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A very good response demonstrating a very good attempt at critical analysis • A very good attempt at the application of beliefs, values and teachings to the question asked • A very good attempt using evidence and reasoning to construct well informed and balanced arguments which are set, where necessary, in the context of other aspects of human experience • A very good attempt at providing personal insight and independent thought • A mature answer with a mainly clear and coherent structure • A very good use of technical language and vocabulary with a mainly accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar 	[16]–[20]
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reasonable response demonstrating a good attempt at critical analysis • A good attempt at the application of beliefs, values and teachings to the question asked • A good attempt using evidence and reasoning to construct well informed and balanced arguments which are set, where necessary, in the context of other aspects of human experience • A good attempt at providing personal insight and independent thought • A reasonably mature answer with some evidence of structure and coherence • A good use of technical language and vocabulary with a reasonably accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar 	[11]–[15]
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A limited response demonstrating a modest attempt at critical analysis • A limited attempt at the application of beliefs, values and teachings to the question asked • A limited attempt using evidence and reasoning to construct well informed and balanced arguments which struggle to relate, where necessary, to other aspects of human experience • A limited attempt at providing personal insight and independent thought • A limited answer with limited evidence of structure and coherence • A limited use of technical language and vocabulary with a limited command of spelling, punctuation and grammar 	[6]–[10]

Band	AO2 Performance Descriptors	Marks
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A basic response demonstrating little attempt at critical analysis • A basic attempt at the application of beliefs, values and teachings to the question asked • A basic attempt using evidence and reasoning to construct well informed and balanced arguments which fail to relate, where necessary, to other aspects of human experience • A basic attempt at providing personal insight and independent thought • A basic answer with basic structure and coherence • A basic use of technical language and vocabulary with a poor grasp of spelling, punctuation and grammar 	[0]–[5]

Candidates must engage with other aspects of human experience, where necessary, to access Bands 3–5.

Section A

AVAILABLE
MARKS

Answer **one** question from Section A

1 (a) Describe the challenges to the Ontological argument.

Answers may include:

- An outlining of a number of challenges to the Ontological argument.
- A critique of Anselm's, Descartes', Plantinga's and/or Malcolm's Ontological argument.
- An exploration of Gaunilo's critique of the argument.
- An exploration of the circular nature of the argument.
- Reference to the views of relevant scholars such as Kant, Hume, Russell and/or Davies.
- An exploration as to whether existence is in fact a predicate of greatness and/or perfection.
- Reference to the distinction between 'a priori' and 'a posteriori' arguments and whether God's existence needs empirical verification.
- Reference to Frege's distinction between first and second order predicates.
- An exploration of Aquinas' call to provide evidence from the universe to support the argument for God's existence.
- Reference to relevant analogies such as the perfect island and/or the perfect unicorn.
- Awareness of the nature of the Ontological argument.

Accept valid alternatives

Mark in levels

(AO1)

[25]

(b) Evaluate the view that the main purpose of the arguments for the existence of God is to convince doubters and unbelievers. Justify your answer.

AVAILABLE
MARKS

Answers may include:

- An evaluation of the claim that the main purpose of the arguments for the existence of God is to convince doubters and non-believers.
- Support for the stated claim, Anselm's reference to the Fool in his Ontological argument.
- An exploration of historical and/or contemporary God debates, when one or more of the God arguments are cited when challenging atheism.
- Reference to the citing of the Cosmological argument in the Russell versus Copleston debate.
- Reference to the 'a posteriori' nature of the Cosmological argument as providing common ground for dialogue with atheistic scientists.
- An exploration of the aim of the God arguments in overcoming potential doubts as to the existence of God.
- A clarification of the terms 'doubters' and 'unbelievers' and the distinction between these terms.
- Reference to specific God debates at universities and as shared on social media to diverse audiences.
- Counter challenges to the stated claim, the arguments as primarily designed for believers to enhance faith.
- Reference to the intended audience for Anselm's argument and its purpose as a prayer rather than a proof of God's existence.
- An exploration of the diverse purposes of the arguments for God's existence, it is inaccurate to state that the God arguments serve a single purpose.
- Logical proofs are useful when appealing to the sceptic as they are based on rationality, e.g. cause requires a causer.
- Pointers to the rationality of faith rather than the suggested 'blindness' of faith.
- Few converts have been made by rational argument but through encounter by revelation.
- Possible consideration of the particular strengths of the moral argument.
- Reference to Aquinas' conclusions in his Five Ways 'this everyone knows to be God' as addressed to confirmed believers.
- Reference to the continued use of the God arguments in an increasingly secular age.
- The challenges posed by sheer obduracy in the debate.

Accept valid alternatives

Mark in levels
(AO2)

[25]

50

2 (a) Examine the main characteristics of mystical experiences.

AVAILABLE
MARKS

Answers may include:

- An examination of the main characteristics of mystical experiences.
- An exploration of such characteristics as their profound intensity and extreme clarity, as engendering a sense of enlightenment and/or new perspectives.
- Reference to their subjective, transitory, ineffable, and noetic nature.
- An exploration of key terms such as 'mysterium tremendum et fascinans', the Idea of the Holy, passivity.
- An exploration of the stages of mystical experiences such as the purgative, the illuminative and the unitive.
- An exploration of Rudolf Otto's and/or William James' classification of religious experiences.
- An exploration of the link between prayer, meditation, and mystical experiences.
- Reference to the distinction between extrovertive and introvertive mystical experiences.
- Reference to relevant experiences of mystics studied such as Martin Buber and/or Teresa of Avila.
- Reference to the writings of relevant scholars such as The Interior Castle, I and Thou, The Varieties of Religious Experiences.
- Reference to mysticism across faith traditions such as found in Zen Buddhism and/or Sufism.
- Reference to selected examples of religious experiences and a delineation of the main characteristics of such experiences.

Accept valid alternatives

Mark in levels

(AO1)

[25]

- (b) "Religious visions should not be dismissed as unreasonable or delusional."
To what extent do you agree with this claim? Justify your answer.

AVAILABLE
MARKS

Answers may include:

- An exploration of the claim that religious visions should not be dismissed as unreasonable or delusional.
- An acknowledgement that while many human experiences are private and/or subjective, this is not automatic grounds for their dismissal.
- An exploration of scriptural support for the veracity of visions such as Paul's conversion on the Road to Damascus, Isaiah's vision of God.
- An exploration of relevant public visions such as the Marian visions at Lourdes or Fatima and/or the Toronto Blessing and the number of witnesses to these events.
- An exploration as to what counts as verifiable experiences.
- Reference to Swinburne's Principles of Testimony and Credulity as applied to testimony regarding visions.
- Clarification of the terms 'unreasonable' and/or 'delusional'.
- Counterchallenges to this claim, religious visions as non-empirical experiences and thus, unreliable.
- An exploration of atheistic scientists' rejection of religious visions.
- An exploration of scientific criteria to adjudge experiences.
- The veracity of the experience could be tested by considering its results (positive/negative).
- Reference to the nature of visions as unique, transitory and subjective in nature and thus, non-verifiable.
- Challenges to specific visions as belonging to a pre-scientific era and frequently witnessed by those with little education.
- References to alternative explanations for visions, visions as the product of hunger/fasting, illness or hallucination.
- Reference to the Catholic Church and its acceptance of only twelve Marian visions.
- Reference to neurological research such as Persinger's Helmet.
- Reference to contentious visions such as moving, drinking or bleeding statues; how such could diminish the standing of religion.
- Reference to the views of relevant schools of thought such as Fideists and/or Logical Positivists.
- The possibility that while religious visions could be considered reasonable, they are still delusional.

Accept valid alternatives

Mark in levels

(AO2)

[25]

50

Section B

AVAILABLE
MARKS

Answer **one** question from Section B

3 (a) “Evil is the consequence of human sin.”

Discuss this statement with particular reference to the Augustinian theodicy.

Answers may include:

- A discussion of the statement that ‘evil is simply the consequence of human sin’, with particular reference to Augustine’s theodicy.
- An exploration of the central teaching of Augustine concerning the origins and nature of evil.
- Reference to Augustine’s reliance on the Creation and Fall narratives.
- An exploration of Augustine’s portrayal of God as righteous Judge.
- Reference to Augustine’s use of Pauline teaching on salvific grace.
- An exploration of Augustine’s teaching on the gift of freewill and humanity’s misuse of this gift.
- An exploration of key features within Augustine’s theodicy such as the idea of inherited evil.
- An exploration of Augustine’s emphasis on Divine judgment and the importance of Divine salvation.
- Reference to the nature of God as Judge and moral arbitrator.
- An exploration of Augustine’s teaching concerning salvation.
- Augustine’s theodicy as being rooted in a literalist interpretation of scripture.
- An exploration of the recorded consequences of the actions of Adam and Eve as recorded in Genesis 3.
- Reference to Islamic teachings on the disobedience of Adam and Eve and the consequences of such disobedience.

Accept valid alternatives

Mark in levels

(AO1)

[25]

(b) “Religion provides the strongest motivation to overcome evil and suffering.”
With reference to other aspects of human experience, assess this claim.
Justify your answer.

Answers may include:

- Support for this claim, the concept of Divine judgement as providing strong motivation to battle evil and allied suffering.
- An exploration of religious teaching concerning the battle between the Devil and God, good and evil and the promise of an afterlife without evil, suffering and death.
- Reference to theistic teachings concerning the importance of building the Kingdom of God on earth and on the imperative of obedience to Divine command.
- An exploration of the work of religious charities tackling injustice, evil and suffering.
- Reference to the Hindu concepts of karma and moksha.
- A clarification of the terms ‘evil’ and ‘suffering’, suffering as the consequence of evil.
- Reference to the Neo-Darwinist view of natural evil as the inevitable by-product of evolution.
- An exploration of the eschatological teaching of one of more faith traditions.
- Counter challenges to this claim, atheism’s rejection of this claim as both inaccurate and offensive.
- Reference to the illogical need to overcome evil if everything that exists is the product of ‘the survival of the fittest’ since it is an inevitable feature of existence.
- Reference to atheism’s claim that religion is world evading, focusing on an illusory afterlife and thus neglecting real human needs here and now.
- Reference to the secularist position that religion glorifies suffering, encouraging passivity in the face of evil.
- An exploration of Dawkins’ statements concerning the evils of religion.
- Reference to evil and suffering caused by religious extremists or those in religious leadership.
- Reference to the views of relevant thinkers such as Craig, McGrath, Dawkins and Hitchens.

Accept valid alternatives

Mark in levels

Candidates must engage with other aspects of human experience to access Bands 3–5.

(AO2)

[25]

50

AVAILABLE
MARKS

- 4 (a) "There are rational explanations for events that are claimed as miracles."
Discuss this statement with particular reference to the contribution of Holland.

Answers may include:

- A discussion of the stated claim, that there are rational explanations for events that are claimed as miracles, with particular reference to the contribution of Holland.
- An exploration of Holland's teachings concerning miracles, notably his statement that coincidences may be accepted as miracles.
- Reference to Holland's acceptance of events that do not violate natural laws as having the potential to be miraculous.
- Reference to specific examples of cited miracles such as the train analogy, the retrieved beach ball or lost purse.
- An exploration of Holland's emphasis on the nature of miracles as 'signs', a term also used within John's Gospel.
- Reference to the inconsistency of Divine intervention, a God intervenes in the Exodus but not in the Holocaust.
- Reference to selected writings of Holland such as 'The Miraculous'.
- An exploration of controversy in how miracles are defined, and as to which forms of interventions are accepted as miraculous; reference to realist and anti-realist interpretations.
- Reference to examples of acclaimed miracles which may have alternative or indeed simpler/better explanations.

Accept valid alternatives

Mark in levels

(AO1)

[25]

AVAILABLE
MARKS

(b) “Belief in miracles is an essential feature of religious faith, because they bring hope.”
 With reference to other aspects of human experience, evaluate this view.
 Justify your answer.

Answers may include:

- An evaluation of the statement that belief in miracles is an essential feature of religious belief because they bring hope.
- Support for this statement, an exploration of the importance of miracles across multiple faith traditions.
- An exploration of the role of miracles in providing hope, both temporal and eschatological.
- Reference to the importance of the miracle of Creation for theists.
- An exploration of the nature of God as omnipotent and omnibenevolent.
- An exploration of the importance of an interventionist God, one who responds to human needs and prayers.
- Reference to the importance of the Incarnation and Resurrection within Christianity.
- Reference to the Catholic Church’s support for miracles such as the healings at Lourdes and/or miracles cited at Canonisations.
- Reference to named miracles that engender hope.
- Counter challenges to the stated claim, a faith that requires proof in the form of miracles is no faith at all.
- A clarification of the terms religious belief and/or hope.
- An exploration of the views of relevant scholars such as Craig, Bultmann, Pannenberg and/or Davies.
- Reference to relevant examples from scripture such as John 4: 48, Luke 23:8.
- An exploration of the importance of natural laws and the source of such laws; God’s providence.
- Reference to the importance of selected contemporary and/or historical miracles.
- Miracles as engendering false hope.
- An exploration as to whether Biblical miracles are to be taken literally or as enacted parables.
- Reference to controversy regarding miracles as detracting from the message within sacred texts.
- An exploration of an increasingly cynical attitude to miracles in a secular age.

Accept valid alternatives

Mark in levels

Candidates must engage with other aspects of human experience to access Bands 3–5.

(AO2) [25]

Total

**AVAILABLE
MARKS**

50

100