

GCSE (9–1) Religious Studies

Frequently asked questions on changes made to Mark Scheme for (d) item questions.

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Support

What information and support has Pearson Edexcel provided in relation to this change?

1. An explanation of the changes made to our GCSE Religious Studies Mark Scheme, Question Paper and Published Taxonomy is outlined in this guidance document: <https://bit.ly/40XP1Lz>
2. A pre-recorded session, delivered by our chair of examiners, Dr. James Holt, where he provided essential information and guidance, relating to amendments made to the Mark Scheme for (d) item questions is available here: <https://bit.ly/48NVsd9>
3. A pre-recorded on-demand version of the live session, where the amends are explained alongside the provision of a series of example answers, explained against the new level descriptors is available here: <https://bit.ly/47koMQZ>
4. An assessment and marking resource, is available as an interactive, PowerPoint Show here: <https://bit.ly/3vprMhQ> and as a 'print-friendly PDF version here: <https://bit.ly/3tIV7Dw>
5. The [Pearson Edexcel Mocks service](#) for GCSE Religious Studies, allows teachers to see the marking of their students' scripts or to check a sample of their own marking.
6. Subject advisor support allows teachers to discuss any further queries via [email](#) and offers further support, through the [booking of Teams meetings](#) with to discuss any further queries you may have.

Key information about the changes themselves

When will these changes come into effect?

Changes will take effect for first assessment from Summer 2024 and all UK GCSE Religious Studies assessments will use the amended Mark Schemes.

Do these changes apply to International GCSE RS also?

No, changes currently only apply to our two UK GCSE qualifications for specifications A (1RA0) and B (1RB0). If any changes are made to our international qualification, these will be communicated to centres separately.

What is meant by 'Point/s of view' on different exam papers in each specification?

All Mark Schemes now feature information, relating to 'Point/s of view' below the level descriptors. This provides clarity as to what is expected when 'different points of view' are mentioned within the level descriptors.

In Specification B:

'Points of view' always refers to arguments for and against. It also refers to any additional bullet points which **may** be included within the question. A question will always state that a candidate must refer to 'teachings from within that religion' and 'a conclusion'. It may also direct candidates to include:

- different views within the religion, or
- non-religious views, or
- philosophical arguments, or
- ethical arguments.

Bullet points used, will depend on the section of the exam paper the question applies to, and which bullet points are relevant in relation to the specification content.

In Specification A:

Bullet points used will differ depending on the paper.

- In **Paper 1** and **Paper 2**, the only additional bullet point that will be used is: 'refer to different views with the religion studied'.
- In **Paper 3**, along with this, it can also include 'non-religious views', 'philosophical arguments' and 'ethical arguments'.
- In **Paper 4**, along with 'different views within the religion', this can also include 'non-religious views' and 'Mark's Gospel' or the 'Qur'an' depending on whether 4A or 4B is the chosen paper.

As with Specification B, the bullet points used will depend on the section of the exam paper the question is in, and which bullet points are relevant in relation to the specification content.

When would a ‘capping statement’ be applied to answers provided for (d) item questions?

A capping statement may appear at the bottom of the indicative content for questions where there are more than two bullet points.

They ‘cap’ a candidate’s answer at Level 2 if they do not include this additional bullet point, as this will prevent them from answering the question properly.

This is the only capping that will be applied. Marking uses a best-fit approach and levels are awarded depending on where an answer ‘fits’ best.

The first bullet point in (d) item questions will always refer to ‘religious teachings’. If a candidate has not included religious teachings or arguments, they have not answered the question or referred to different points of view so, and this will impact where the answer ‘fits’ best against the levels.

Additionally, if a candidate has not included a conclusion, there is no cap that is applied, but this will affect how well they can meet the level criteria.

How does the ‘should’ to ‘must’ change, within the question wording for (d) item questions, affect what is expected of students?

This does not change what is expected of students. We have always been clear that candidates need to include reference to the bullet points but using ‘must’ instead of ‘should’ reinforces this expectation.

How will these changes to the level descriptors impact on grade boundaries for summer 2024?

Whilst we expect that these changes will have an impact on marks achieved, we cannot predict how students will perform in (a), (b), (c) or (d) questions for each section of the paper. Due to this, we cannot predict how grade boundaries may change, for each paper in summer 2024. Although changes may impact the **marks** students get, they should not affect the **grades** that students achieve.

Whilst marks achieved in (d) evaluation questions may change, these amends should not affect the grades that students achieve as, systems in place ensure standards are maintained across exam series. Additionally, our senior examining team will look to ensure that a Grade 7 quality exam script (as with other grades) will achieve Grade 7 regardless of the exam series sat. This process will ensure that students will be awarded the grades that they deserve.

Additional detail, explaining how grade boundaries are set, can be found here:

<https://bit.ly/46IHLEs>

Support with mock exams

Will past exam papers be amended for use in mock exams?

Past exam materials will not be changed as they need to reflect the criteria used within that series. Adaptations have been made however, to our existing Sample Assessment Materials (SAMS), to reflect the changes to the Mark Scheme.

Our amended Sample Assessment Materials can be accessed by following the links below for Specifications A (1RA0) and B (1RB0):

- Sample Assessment Materials – GCSE RS Spec A: <https://bit.ly/3Sk5U0x>
- Sample Assessment Materials – GCSE RS Spec B: <https://bit.ly/3tjQIFE>

For ease of accessibility, all Sample Assessment Materials are provided as a single archive (.zip file) which includes each exam paper and Mark Scheme separately, rather than one large document.

Which version of the Mark Scheme should centres use to assess their mock exams?

Some schools may wish to use the new level descriptors to assess their mock exams, whilst others will feel more comfortable in applying the legacy Mark Scheme. We recommend that schools use whichever Mark Scheme they feel most comfortable with. It is again worth noting that the grades students achieve in the summer should not be impacted by this change.

What help is available to support us with the marking of mock exams?

To support teacher accuracy in the application of the new level descriptors, we suggest following advice provided in our live training event and in the interactive assessment and marking resource, which can be accessed by following the links below:

- A pre-recorded on-demand version of our live training session: <https://bit.ly/47koMQZ>.
- Interactive assessment and marking resource: <https://bit.ly/3vprMhQ>

What grade boundaries should we use when marking our mock exams?

Whilst grade boundaries are often used by teachers to support accurate predictions, there is no way to predict these accurately for summer 2024.

Teachers are advised to use the question papers and Mark Schemes from a previous exam series, alongside the grade boundaries for that series, to support the prediction of grades.

Using past Mark Schemes and grade boundaries will not disadvantage candidates or the predictions that you make for them, due to the systems in place to maintain standards.

Who will mark the mocks in the mock marking service?

All mock exams will be marked by senior examiners who were involved in writing the amended level descriptors or have been trained on applying these.

Will the mock marking service use the amended level descriptors?

Yes, the mock marking and moderation services offered, will use the amended level descriptors providing the opportunity to see how questions perform under the new criteria.

These services are currently available to order now for the following most popular papers:

- Specification A: Paper 1A, Paper 2F, Paper 3A*
- Specification B: Paper 1B, Paper 2C*

**You can additionally request other papers on an ad-hoc basis*

Which papers are used in the mock marking service?

The mock marking service uses papers from the most recent exam series, (In January 2024 it will use the 2023 papers).

It is not possible to create your own papers and get these marked as we need to ensure that all marking is standardised, using the same questions, to ensure consistency.

General teaching questions

Is 'appraisal' the same as 'evaluation'?

Evaluation is the overall skill shown across the whole of a (d) evaluation question. Part of the skill of evaluation includes appraisal.

Evaluation includes:

- Making judgements
- Responding to the statement
- Answering the question
- **Appraising** the arguments made
- Weighing up the arguments made, leading to a conclusion.

Appraisal is therefore one aspect of the overall evaluation skill.

What is your advice on the use of writing frames?

Scaffolding can be of benefit within the learning process, especially for lower ability or less confident learners. However, we have found that writing frames, if applied too rigidly, can affect the flow and explanation of higher-level responses.

There is no one way to structure a top-level response but, we acknowledge that scaffolding might be useful for some learners.

Sources of wisdom and authority

What is meant by 'religious teachings' and does this differ to 'sources of wisdom and authority'?

Sometimes teachers may use the term 'religious teaching' within lessons to refer to 'sources of wisdom', but when we use the term, we are not using it in this way.

'Religious teachings' are the official things that religions teach. These could include:

- Buddhist teachings about the four noble truths
- The Christian teaching that Jesus died for the sins of humanity.
- The Jewish teaching about the oneness of the Almighty.

'Sources of wisdom and authority' are the sources of these 'religious teachings', from either a religious book (e.g. the Qur'an) or an authoritative individual (e.g. Guru Gobind Singh). They can be as quotes or paraphrases and demonstrate that a candidate understands the basis of religious teachings.

Do students need to provide sources of wisdom in (d) questions?

In (d) evaluation questions, candidates are asked to evaluate referring to religious teachings, so we expect the arguments analysed, to be based on the teachings of a religion.

Sources of wisdom and authority are not compulsory in 12-mark 'Evaluation' questions, but they can be useful to develop, support and appraise arguments.

Sources of wisdom and authority are only compulsory in 5-mark 'Explain' questions.

Logical chains of reasoning

How many 'logical chains' would be needed for each point of view to attain Level 4?

There is no set number of logical chains of reasoning required.

Candidates need to ensure that they have covered all required points of view within the question (arguments for, arguments against, religious teachings and any other bullet points) so at least two chains of reasoning would be required. This reflects the need for there to be two sides in the response to the statement - hence at least two logical chains. Candidates can, when done well, achieve the top level with one logical chain on each side.

Candidates may choose to analyse a number of arguments on each side of the argument or analyse less but in greater detail. Any approach is acceptable as long as it meets the level criteria.

Conclusions

Can you achieve 3 marks without writing a conclusion?

- Yes, a conclusion is not included as part of the Level 1 criteria and therefore is not expected within a Level 1 answer.
- All marking will use a 'best fit' approach so, examiners will look for answers that 'fit' best into a level rather than having a tick-box criteria of what should be included.

With no attempt at a conclusion, can a student go above Level 1?

Yes, there is no cap on a student that does not write a conclusion. The level descriptors will use a 'best-fit' approach rather than using the criteria like a checklist. This means that an answer does not need to meet everything within the level descriptor to achieve this level. Instead, the answer is read holistically, and the examiner will decide where it is best placed, looking at all elements of the answer.

Can a student use 'I' in the conclusion?

Yes, we often try to encourage candidates to use more academic language but, they are not penalised for using 'I' in their conclusion.

We would recommend avoiding this within the analysis however, as candidates are asked to analyse religious teachings and not required to give their own arguments or opinions.

Can the conclusion be from a personal perspective?

A conclusion should be the overall judgement based on the analysis of religious arguments.

Candidates are not asked for their own personal view or opinion, so we would recommend that any conclusions are based on the arguments presented.

They can come to their own individual judgement on this, but this should be based on the religious teachings analysed within their answer.

If conclusions are provided throughout, is an overall conclusion needed?

A conclusion can come at any point in an answer. Whilst most students include these at the end, some include them at the start as a thesis and others choose to include mini conclusions throughout.

Any approach is acceptable, and examiners will look for these at any point within the answer.

Do pupils need to 'agree' or 'disagree' in the conclusion (Do they have to give their opinion?)

No, most candidates tend to come to an overall judgement that they agree or disagree, but this is not required.

It is acceptable to reach an overall judgement that is not 'clearcut', as long as candidates justify their decision made based on the arguments, evidence and appraisal discussed within their analysis.

Can appraisal happen just in the conclusion?

Yes, the appraisal can come at any point within the answer as the whole answer will be read holistically.

Some candidates include appraisal throughout their answer, whereas others include it as part of mini conclusions throughout, or within their final conclusions at the end.

Further Support & Guidance

You can contact us in various ways for clarification:

- Email us: TeachingReligiousStudies@pearson.com
- Call us: UK: 0344 463 2535 (Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm GMT)
- Book a Teams meeting with the subject advisor: <https://bit.ly/3xltNo6>

*To stay informed, you can additionally sign up for subject updates, by following the link below:

- <https://bit.ly/3t4bJlx>