



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2025

Pearson Edexcel GCSE

In Religious Studies A

Paper 4: Area of Study 4 – Textual Studies

Option 4A – Mark's Gospel

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Introduction

This was the second examination series since the introduction of the revised mark scheme for **d** type questions. Centres are advised that there are extensive resources to support teachers in preparing their candidates for **d** type questions on the Pearson Edexcel website.

a type questions require that the candidate give three pieces of information in response to the question. It is important that the candidate not simply give a list of items, but that each piece of information conveyed is presented either in its own sentence, or at least in its own clause within a sentence.

b type questions require that the candidate should be able to present two pieces of information; typically two reasons for something, two attitudes to something, two ways for something. To gain full marks on this question, the candidate should aim to develop each of those reasons, attitudes or ways. This can be done by adding additional relevant information, by giving an example or by citing a religious source. The number of reasons/ways etc. is limited to 2 and so candidates are not able to access a third mark by giving a third reason/way.

c type questions are answered similarly to **b** questions, except that here the candidate has the potential to gain an additional development mark from the use of a source of wisdom and authority that is relevant both to the question asked and to the point that they are making. The use of a source of wisdom and authority on its own does not automatically gain the additional mark but is a means for the candidate to gain a further mark where they have already given a developed response. On the basis (outlined above for **b** questions) that a source of wisdom and authority can be used as a means of developing a response, candidates can use two, relevant, sources of wisdom and authority in a **c** question to access the third mark for that particular explanation or reason. Centres are reminded that the Source of Wisdom and Authority has to *do* something; contribute to the point being made, develop the point being made and not just be appended to the answer, or be dropped in without context.

d type questions allow candidates to give reasons for and against a particular proposition, whilst coming to a justified conclusion. The response needs to show evidence of appraisal if it is to access the higher levels available, and this appraisal should not be superficial – simply stating that an argument is strong (or weak), or supporting it with an additional reason, rather than an appraisal of the argument. Importantly, appraisal is not the only factor in accessing Levels 3 and 4, but one of several. An answer may show good appraisal, but be full of disparate, undeveloped, ideas that fail to make connections and so be a better fit for the lower levels of the mark scheme. A significant number of candidates use additional answer sheets, particularly for their **d** questions. In only a few cases did the additional answer sheets result in the candidate accessing a higher level on the mark scheme. Candidates are advised that their time is probably best spent planning their answers and ensuring their coherence and consistency.

SPaG is assessed in half of the **d** questions. Whilst there are relatively few marks available for SPaG, there are candidates who will have been awarded a lower grade because of marks that were dropped here. Time spent reminding candidates of the importance of punctuation would be well spent, as would time on key spellings.

Overall, the most successful candidates tended to understand key terms from the specification – and whilst 'keywords' are not assessed on this paper, it became apparent that some candidates had benefited from being taught them. Successful candidates were able to develop their responses, however simply, and were able successfully to deploy a range of sources of wisdom and authority to support and develop their responses. In **d** answers, the most successful candidates considered the various merits of the

arguments they were presenting by, for example, appraising the **relative** authority of different sacred texts or the **comparative** validity of secular or scientific arguments in an integrated manner which showed the capacity to link connected ideas. In future examination series, this latter capacity would seem likely to be key to accessing the highest grades.

Question 1a

Many candidates scored full marks here. Where this was not the case, they had imported details from other Gospels, or were presenting interpretative gloss as part of the Gospel narrative.

Question 1b

Close attention to the wording of the question is essential, and this question was a case in point. The question specifically asked for beliefs about the Messiah from the Old Testament and not for beliefs about the Messiah that were current at the time of Jesus. A good many candidates fell into the trap of telling us what they knew about contemporaneous messianic beliefs, rather than those that could be found in the Old Testament.

Question 1c

Although the phrasing "Christian responses to non-religious arguments..." is clearly derived from the Specification, it results in a question that could be misunderstood. There are examples of this phrasing in Spec points 1.3, 1.6 and 2.6. Centres may find it useful to prepare candidates for the wording, so that the first time they consider the meaning of it is not in the heat of the exam. That said, it was pleasing to see just how many candidates were able to answer this challenging question well, and the most common obstacle was candidates citing miracles that did not belong to the category of nature miracle.

Question 1d

There were very many good responses to this question and it was interesting to see how many candidates focused on the fact that it was women who discovered the empty tomb, rather than more generally on the resurrection. Candidates were understandably familiar with the resurrection narrative and this, in turn, allowed them to demonstrate an understanding of religion and belief that was at least sound, and that saw them comfortably into Level 3 at least.

Question 2a

This was another case where details from other Gospels, or indeed other anointings, crept into candidate's answers. It is only features from Mark that were credited.

Question 2b

This was another occasion where the wording of the question needed to be correctly understood by the candidates. The question was about *the call of the first disciples*, not discipleship in general nor Jesus sending out the Twelve. Those who answered the question, as set, routinely did very well.

Question 2c

There were many full mark responses to this question. The parable is well-known, and is a Source of Wisdom and Authority on its own, making it easy to access the fifth mark.

Question 2d

This question was answered well by the majority of candidates. There are enough teachings about service in the Gospel that there was a wide variety of approaches taken – the vast majority of which were legitimate.

Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

Any technical vocabulary used in the question paper will also be in the Specification. Check your understanding of this vocabulary, especially where there are similar looking words with different meanings. It would also seem to be a worthwhile exercise to make sure that you understand the technical terms in the Specification that are not subject specific.

Allow yourself enough time to both read *and* understand the questions. Make sure that you explain things that require explaining and that you are in fact answering the question that has been set. If you don't address the specific question asked, you will lose valuable time in the exam, writing an answer that can only access some of the marks.

The exam is specifically about Mark's Gospel. It may be the case that you are more familiar with a version of the story from a different Gospel – make sure that you are referring to Mark's version in your answers. When you use the quote in your exam, make sure that it is 'doing something' in your answer and not just dropped in as an afterthought. The quote will gain marks only if it is developing one of the points you've made – rather than being appended to the answer (often in a discrete paragraph) saying "A source of wisdom and authority to support this is...".

Read the bullet points in part **d** questions carefully and make sure that you cover them - if you are asked to provide non-religious reasons, make sure you do. If non-religious reasons are not asked for, you can save yourself time in the exam by not giving them. Remember that reasons from another religion are not *non-religious* and will not be considered as such.

d questions require you to say how effective or 'strong' the elements of the argument you are giving are - but do not limit yourself to saying that x is a strong argument; tell the examiner why x is stronger than y. Is it supported by a more authoritative text for example? Answers where every paragraph ends either 'This is a strong argument because it is supported by scripture' or 'This is a weak argument because it is just an opinion' are always going to seem a little superficial.

Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar are marked in 1d. Re-read your answer, after you have written it. Does it have capital letters and full stops? Does it have commas? If an upper-case letter is used in the question (for example, Christian, Gospel etc.), did you also use an upper-case letter? Check for words like argument, crucifixion, resurrection, pilgrimage, miracle and so on. They are often used in d questions and frequently misspelt.