

WORLD RELIGIONS

Overall grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0 - 7	8 - 15	16 - 22	23 - 28	29 - 36

The range and suitability of the work submitted

There was a wide range of work, from the outstanding to very poor. Strong essays were presented on a variety of subjects (essentially all world religions as well as comparative topics) and using a variety of methods (textual analysis, in-depth interview research). The critical factors determining the success of candidates seems to be the formulation of an appropriate research question and the level of supervision received.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

While many candidates posed well defined research questions many more were too broad or tended not to catalyze real analysis and argument. A significant number of essays were essentially confessional tracts. Candidates should be instructed clearly to avoid submitting such essays.

Criterion B: introduction

One of the most difficult tasks for candidates seems to be mastering the scholarly context of the questions they are posing. Without this context real analysis and argument are impossible. Candidates should be helped by advisors with scholarly expertise in the field.

Criterion C: investigation

There has been some improvement in the quality of essays using in-depth interview methods, with some candidates actually conducting a meaningful number of interviews. Candidates suffer from a lack of access to research libraries and from a tendency to rely on encyclopaedias, textbooks, and comparable sources.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Candidates generally showed at least a basic knowledge of the subject they investigated. The difficulty is that in some cases the topic was so broad that they were merely summarizing encyclopaedias or textbook material.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

This criterion and the next one continue to be the biggest differentiators among essays. While most candidates make some effort at an argument few produce one that takes into account the current state of the question or that addresses relevant counterarguments.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

Without training in one of the underlying disciplines used in religious studies it is difficult for students to carry out real analysis. Students at international schools or schools which teach world religions generally do better in this regard.

Criterion G: use of language

A small but significant number of essays from the US showed significant writing difficulties. Rare essays not written in the candidates first language also showed such problems, but to a much lesser extent. Mastery of subject specific terminology generally depends on the level of supervision and formation in the field.

Criterion H: conclusion

The presence of a strong conclusion is usually dependent on the posing of a strong question. Those with real research questions generally answered them. Those without such questions lacked a well defined conclusion

Criterion I: formal presentation

Formal presentation is generally adequate to good, though a few essays had only a minimal scholarly apparatus and a few overdid illustrations, appendices, etc.

Criterion J: abstract

Abstracts were most often missing a discussion of method. Many do not understand the difference between an abstract and an introduction.

Criterion K: holistic judgment

Many essays brought authentic insight and showed real engagement with the subject matter even when weak on one or more of the formal criteria.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Candidates should be advised by an adviser with scholarly training in religious studies or a related field and they should be given access to a good academic library. Supervisors need formal training in what constitutes a research question; and how to advise candidates on the state of the question in a discipline, method, argument, etc.