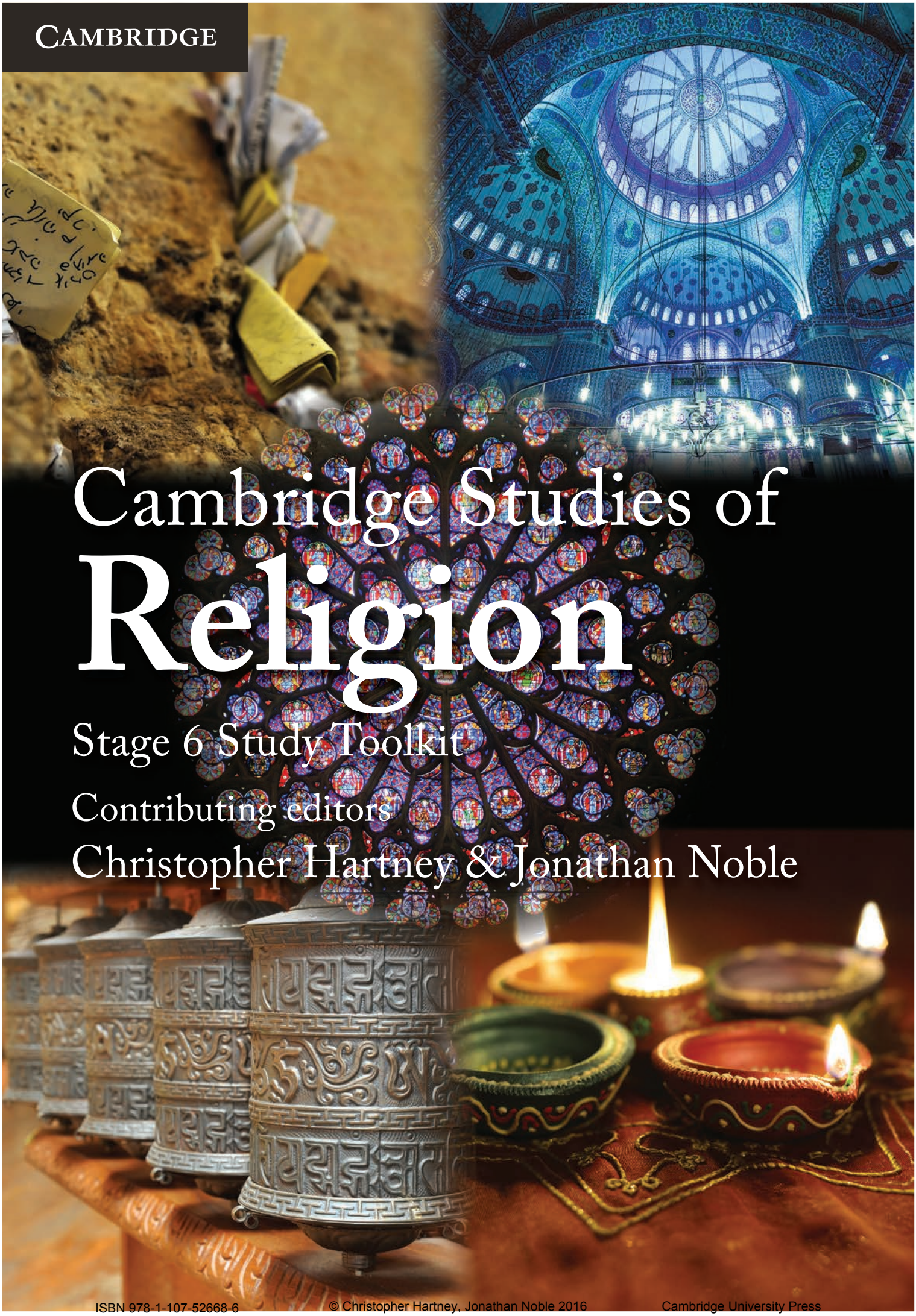

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INTRODUCTION

I'm sitting in a Uniting Church in western Sydney where a Hindu family is viewing the body of a deceased relative. A member of the family, who is a Christian, is playing music while people share the family's sorrow. I'm here to represent the Christian community of the Uniting Church, even though I was raised as a Presbyterian, baptised in the Churches of Christ, ordained as an Anglican priest and have been a Uniting Church elder.

The church and the community have welcomed this Hindu family as a way of reaching out to an expressed need, and as an expression of support for the family, who live nearby. The family has graciously agreed not to have obvious Hindu items in the church building, and the Christian community made no demands on the Hindus who were here. There were concerns expressed by some people – not by the local church, but by Christians who share the family's ethnic origins. Fifty years ago, even 20 years ago, this situation would have been most unlikely.

This gesture by the local church is an example of interfaith dialogue and cooperation, as well as an example of the Australian religious landscape in the 21st century. We now live in a multi-faith, multicultural Australia, some would say a post-Christian Australia. A willingness to be aware of, and sensitive to, the differing traditions in this country is essential to living in a harmonious relationship with everyone in our society. It is this rationale that underlies the Studies of Religion course in New South Wales schools.

This study toolkit includes a considerable amount of material first published in the booklet *The Field, Its Paths,* written by Dr Christopher Hartney and published by Gilgamesh Press (2010). I am indebted to Dr Hartney for many of the ideas and much of the material printed here.

Students will find this toolkit a helpful addition to the student textbook *Cambridge Studies of Religion Stage 6* (third edition) and the study guide *Cambridge Checkpoints HSC Studies of Religion*, which includes sample assessment tasks and exam papers.

Studies of Religion, one of the most popular HSC courses, is a subject that attracts students who want to understand the society in which they live. It is hoped that this toolkit will assist not only HSC students but also all those who consider the study of religion, and thus the need to understand the beliefs, culture and aspirations of those who live in modern Australia.

Enjoy your studies.

Jonathan Noble, Contributing editor

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1 STUDIES OF RELIGION: A THUMBNAIL SKETCH

I believe that the doctrine and history of so extraordinary a 'People' merits the curiosity of a reasonable man.

VOLTAIRE (IN HIS EXAMINATION OF THE QUAKERS)

Although the Islamic world was the first to develop the broad concept of a university (an idea it borrowed from the Byzantine Greeks around the 9th century CE), modern education has grown out of a European, Christian tradition that developed from the 12th century. Education, in general, was the province of the church and religious information was an essential part of education. Throughout this European scholarly tradition, universities and schools were closely linked to the church. To be educated one often needed to be a member of a religious order, and certainly a member of the church. Moreover, slogans such as *cuius regio eius religio* (to that region/nation its own religion) and *un roi, un loi, une foi* (one king, one law, one faith) suggested that there was little room for dissent, certainly not in Europe. Religious diversity, tolerance and pluralism were not part of the world from which our idea of education developed.

TheAge of Colonialism (from approximately the 17th century) and the Age of Enlightenment (18th century) slowly opened Europe's mind to other religious traditions. The 1960s and 1970s were a time of cheap travel and the beginnings of globalisation, which enabled many Westerners to discover the Eastern religions. When the Beatles visited the Maharishi Yogi in India (1967), it was not just a quest for their personal enlightenment; in doing so they had become part of a world discovering something new about different religious traditions. When John Lennon said in 1966 that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus, it unleashed a storm of protest, but the remark would hardly raise an eyebrow today. The number of Australians who check 'no religion' on the census form is increasing dramatically. In today's globalised world, with ready access to the internet, there are few Australians who would not be aware of different world religions, even if they are seen through the eyes of sensationalised media reporting. There is, on one hand, a growing disinterest in religion but on the other hand, an increasing fascination with different religious traditions.

The discipline of Studies of Religion can be traced back to 19th century scholars. The most prominent of these was Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), a German university professor based in Oxford, who studied language structure and myth and undertook the mammoth task of translating a vast range of early Indian scriptures. At that time non-Christian traditions were regularly considered by Western academics to be the work of tricksters or the result of mass delusion. Worse still, New Religious Movements (NRMs), also called Emergent Religions, were (and still are) seen as subversive and socially threatening (of course, every Old Religious Movement was once an NRM). Even during the Industrial Revolution, the development of historical method and the application of science to social phenomena led Europeans to place the religions of the world in a hierarchy. Not surprisingly, the faith of the scholar always managed to appear at the top of the hierarchy. If it did not, it was because the author suggested that religion was no longer relevant and it would soon fall off the map of human experience, especially considering the growth of logic, science and industrialisation. Some thinkers sincerely believed that science would replace religion; the work of Darwin was often cited as the key to this process. That has not happened, even though the expression and forms of religion may have changed. Arguably, religion will always be an important part of human society despite the efforts of its detractors and critics.

Despite these attitudes, humanity entered an age that saw the foundation of comparative religion, a specialised academic discipline that tries to consider all faiths as equal and equally worthy of study. During the 20th century, some academics, such as German philosopher and mathematician Edmund Husserl, used the term 'epoché' to describe an attitude in which students of religion tried to bracket their own beliefs and assumptions in order to remain as independent as possible from the phenomena they studied. To be a scholar in the field of comparative religion, you must study religion beyond your own tradition and background. Many people miss this point and dedicate their careers to what is, in effect, a theological study of their own religion. Comparative religion is ultimately a key that unlocks the door to the consciences and mentalities of the peoples of the world. It is a discipline that compares the similarities and differences of not only religion but also of cosmologies, philosophies and practices in order to comprehend the larger phenomenon of human experience. In this way, Studies of Religion is a vital first step towards understanding the history of human experience and thinking.

This is why Studies of Religion is a rich subject for anyone interested in human society and culture. Rather than developing a narrow specialised look at the nature of our kind, students are encouraged to examine a very wide range of time periods and cultures using methodologies drawn from history, cultural studies, art, music, anthropology, sociology, psychology, literature and literary criticism and more.

The Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW (BOSTES) has deliberately taken a step around comparative religion. The religious traditions studied in the course are deliberately not compared; each is treated as a religious tradition in its own right. Instead, the course emphasises the fact that each religious tradition has its own integrity and contributes to a well-ordered society. The course also emphasises the development of analytical skills, independent research, collaboration and effective communication.

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To help students understand the place of religion in Australian society, students must study at least two religious traditions and in the case of the 2 unit course, three religious traditions. It is not a course designed simply to affirm students' faith in one particular religion but to take an academic approach to the nature of faith and faith's contribution to what it means, ultimately, to be human.

2 WHAT IS RELIGION?

How would you define religion?

In trying to define religion, we often introduce a range of other concepts that are related but that still don't fully explain it. 'Religion' includes concepts such as beliefs, culture, experiences, rituals, and so on.

We assume that religion is universal, that it challenges people's motivations and profoundly influences history at every level. But what is it? This is not an easy question to address so not rushing into a simple definition is a sound plan. The word 'religion' is a culturally framed term. It originally comes from ancient Rome and does not necessarily have an easily translatable counterpart in most non-Western societies. Even the Greeks, who gave so much to Rome intellectually, did not have a word for religion. Unfortunately, the origins of this Latin word are unclear, and its etymology is suspect. Some scholars suggest 'religion' derives from the Latin verb 'to tie', so *re-ligare* means 'to tie back' – perhaps to tie one to a community, a set of ideals or even a set of oaths. In considering the Latin origins, it seems to include aspects such as feelings and devotion, but also sacred objects and places.

As far as a scholarly definition of religion is concerned, many 19th century and early 20th century definitions involved some reference to the supernatural. From a Western perspective this might be justified, but attitudes in the rest of the world can be far more complex. In India, for example, the closest idea to religion can be found in the term *Sanatana Dharma* or 'eternal law', which implies belief in the supernatural but does not necessarily require it, as a few schools of Indian philosophy demonstrate. It is therefore not impossible to find a Hindu who, although he or she does not believe in a god or divine force, is nevertheless a Hindu because they live their life, understand the world and lead an ethical life by following the traditional sacred laws of India. Buddhism does not require belief in a deity. In China, the idea of 道 (*dao*) can imply 'the way things should be' but not necessarily suggest that the supernatural is essential to an understanding of how the *dao* operates. It is a term that in the religious tradition of Daoism (also spelt Taoism) can be applied quite mystically, yet in Confucianism is used in a very pragmatic and humanistic (non-religious) manner. In Australian Aboriginal society, the idea of the sacred, religious or mystical is very hard to separate from the entire working of society as a whole. In Hebrew there is no single word that can be translated as 'religion'.

British scholar S. G. F. Brandon (1907–71) was one of the major 20th century visionaries who promoted the study of comparative religion. He even suggested that it was a vital subject for study in schools, a recommendation that has been adopted in New South Wales. About 15 000 students take Studies of Religion for the HSC, making it one of the most popular HSC subjects. One of Brandon's colleagues, Ninian Smart, a key figure in Studies of Religion, went on to provide what is arguably one of the most useful definitions of religion. Smart's definition, which includes several characteristics of religion, has now become one of the most influential concepts for understanding what religion is. Religion, Smart suggests, comprises many or all of the following seven characteristics:

1 practical and ritual dimensions
- including worship, prayers

2 experiential and emotional dimensions
- that is, an emotive content behind ritual

3 a narrative or mythic dimension
- stories that pertain to a particular tradition, such as Judaism and the stories of Genesis

4 doctrinal and philosophical dimensions
- a system of values and beliefs

5 ethical and legal dimensions
- the idea that rules have to be applied to uphold the values and understandings that a religion may give to the world

6 social and institutional dimensions
- includes the actual organisations that constitute the religion

7 a material dimension
- buildings, works of art, and so on.

However, it is not easy to universally apply a set of characteristics such as these. Some traditions you may encounter have no obvious mythic dimension (such as Confucianism). There are other groups that connect with life in a very profound, ecstatic and, we might easily say, religious manner. Such groups might still fail to conform to almost all of Smart's categories, but still might be considered religions in the broad sense of the word.

Beyond these features of a religion, we may seek a more socially unifying purpose for the place of faith. Religion can then become a symbolic means of uniting (conserving) or transforming society, an aspect that is developed in the HSC course.

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On the legal front, Australian federal law makes an interesting case for what constitutes the religious. After a famous 1983 High Court decision in the *Church of the New Faith v. Commissioner of Pay-roll Tax (Vic)*, a new legal definition of religion was created. It is based on a number of requirements, but the most essential is that a religion is a group that identifies itself as religious. From this we can note that perhaps the best way of defining religion in certain instances is to examine how groups speak of themselves as religious entities or not, as the case may be.

3 WHY STUDY RELIGION?

Professor John Bowker, a well-known British scholar of religion, has noted that religion can be a dangerous thing. While religion has been the inspiration for great art, architecture, music and service to the world, it has also been the inspiration for much violence, xenophobia and warfare, in popular portrayals, if not in reality. It is important to be aware of how people can be inspired to great good and to great evil in the name of God or religion. By studying religion in the HSC you will begin your journey to understanding the human condition and the struggle within each human being.

You may have one of several motivations in taking Studies of Religion. You may be interested in the different beliefs that people have, you may be interested in exploring your own beliefs, you may be interested in the different aspects of life in multicultural and multi-faith Australia or you may be a student at a religious school where it is compulsory for you to study religion. You are probably aware, though, that you are following a different learning experience from that which most other HSC subjects offer. Studies of Religion enables you to access a good HSC result or ATAR score, but many of your other subjects (other than humanities subjects such as History and English) are geared to orient you towards employment. Unless you want to become an academic in the humanities or a minister of religion, studying religion can seem a useless enterprise. This may seem like the great weakness of the humanities, and religious studies in particular, but it is also its great strength. Studying religion, like other subjects in the humanities, which are the oldest remaining subjects in academia, teaches you about human nature, develops your critical faculties and activates your mind in its relation with the world.

Religion is a central part of the study of the humanities, as it is central to so much of life. For many, religion, as a social experience, is the most vital phenomenon of life, the peg upon which human nature hangs its hat. This is illustrated by the content matter of the Studies of Religion course. Studies of Religion encourages you to seek the religious in the many and varied facets of life by using history, philosophy, literary criticism, anthropology, psychology, sociology, ritual (and hence performance studies), archaeology the history of ideas and of science, classics, Asian studies, art, music, language and cultural studies. All of these areas of study are touched on by religion. Studies of Religion is a mature discipline that can greatly assist you in other subjects and in future study. Although it is not vocationally orientated, it may even help you to get a job because you have come to understand something of the cultural differences that exist in our world.

The most significant aspect of Studies of Religion is that it helps you to understand people – how and why they live the way they do, their motivations and what is most dear to them. This can be as simple as understanding why people are honest or not, or as complex as why they meet in particular places at particular times and perform particular rituals in order to build and maintain community.

The study of religion is a way of understanding much about our world, including human society and culture, the history of the world, the values people have, the ethics they practise and the dreams they have. It can be an inspiring study. It can also teach you a great deal about yourself.

4 RELIGION AND THE WORKPLACE

You may be thinking: what kind of career will Studies of Religion help me to develop? Will religion help me get a job? The answers are not terribly obvious. How many careers can you think of in which people become professionally religious: monks, nuns, ministers of religion, academics? Probably the one that most readily comes to mind is becoming a minister of religion, and few HSC students are likely to have that in mind.

So why study religion? What is in it for you?

The study of religion is an important part of the process of inner development. This is vitally true, but even if it weren't, it is an important thing to consider anyway. Studying religion is like value adding: there may not be an obvious immediate payoff, but it helps to develop you as a more rounded person.

You may not yet be thinking of postgraduate study – at this stage you just have to get into university, if that's what you want. Right now you might think that after the HSC you never want to open a textbook again. But if you start further studies, a wealth of opportunities are available to you, including a master's course or even a doctorate.

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Even if you do not reach the doctoral level in your studies, a good bachelor or honours degree can include religious studies and will help you in your life and career. Graduates of religious studies often find themselves in one of the following professions.

Teaching

As mentioned earlier, the humanities are non-vocational-based learning. For the past several years, interest in Studies of Religion at the high school level has been growing. The religions of the world are also taught in New South Wales primary schools as part of the Human Society and its Environment curriculum, as well as in many Years 7 to 10 school courses. So a teaching degree with a focus on religion subjects gives new teachers a great grounding in their areas. More than this, Studies of Religion subjects also provide you with the ability to understand the religious practices of other students in a way that can diminish prejudice and racism at the school level.

Social work, public service, diplomatic service

Similarly, those who plan to work in community services, social work, the public service or the diplomatic corps can gain an advantage by studying religion. Comprehension of the religions of the world is a basic and vital area of study for these professions. It is no wonder that many who study religion end up in government service. In fact, studying religion provides you with a great opportunity to understand the communities that make up Australia's vast and exciting multicultural mix.

Psychology

At university, many students take a psychology major and add subjects from Studies of Religion. Psychology students are encouraged to examine the place of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung as methodologists of religion; consciousness studies are never far away from the material that the senior courses cover. This is because religious experience goes to the heart of the operation of the mind and the way it connects with life and makes sense of living.

Arts/Law/Business

Nor is it surprising to find many law students taking subjects in Studies of Religion. They do so to get a better understanding of the nature of law, ethics and morality. Many codes of law are based on religious principles. The study of religion often entails the examination of how law was constructed as a sacred creed, rather than simply as a secular code.

Many business organisations, including banks, accounting firms, legal firms and publishing houses, appreciate the skills and knowledge of Studies of Religion students who bring an increased awareness of human nature, belief and culture to their employers.

Public thinkers

In Australia, as in every society, we need social commentators in various media, including in journalism and literature, to reflect on society's core values. Many of the issues discussed by commentators are related to religion.

Studying religion helps you develop complex abilities to critique not only the essence of past societies through their most cherished beliefs, but also the essence of our own modern culture. No original thinker should leave home without consideration of the religious dimension of life.

So, what careers does Studies of Religion lead to? The answer is every career. A good employer will understand that the skills you have developed, the understanding you have acquired and the knowledge you have gained will be valuable resources in their company or organisation. They are part of making you a well-rounded person who will be a desirable asset to them.

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5 RELIGION AND FAITH

Let us state it clearly: you do not need to be a believer in a religion to study religion and to do well in the Studies of Religion course.

Studies of Religion is not theology

'He who knows one language knows none,' said Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Friedrich Max Müller, one of the founders of the field of comparative religion, adapted Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's words thus: 'He who knows one religion knows none.' To get a grasp on humanity's incredible capacity for religious creativity, depth and development it is necessary to understand a number of traditions and be able to compare their dimensions. It can be extremely exciting to see how the similarity and differences of the various religions play themselves out.

Theology is the study of religious faith and experience. It is generally seen as including a level of commitment to a particular religious tradition and is usually grounded in a particular religious tradition. The HSC Studies of Religion course is not a theology course. It has little to do with personal faith; rather, it is focused on the development of skills and knowledge of a number of religions. It is an academic subject requiring academic discipline, not faith.

This brings us to the first and most important aspect of the Studies of Religion course, the study of several religious traditions. As part of the HSC course you will study at least two religious traditions. The HSC Studies of Religion course is deliberately not a faith-based course. In fact, it could be a disadvantage to study your own religious tradition if you are a committed follower of that tradition. The HSC course demands an academic distance. Force yourself to step away from the familiar. Consider this as part of your academic adventure of learning about religions and how they make meaning for so many people. Studying your own faith right from the start can affect your ability to fully grasp the methodological importance of Studies of Religion, which involves an examination of each religious tradition in its own right.

It is true that Studies of Religion can be a very personally challenging subject. Your faith, your atheism or your indifference can be seriously challenged by Studies of Religion courses. Use these challenging moments to develop your attitude to the study of religion, and remember that the course itself is made up of people (including your teachers) who are sharing your experiences and having their faiths (or degrees of atheism) challenged by the work that they do.

The study of religion is also likely to evoke a whole range of emotions in you: fear when your own faith or point of view is challenged, excitement when you find words and attitudes that express your own deep feelings – these responses are a part of being human. Remember, though, these emotive responses are not what examiners are looking for in your scholarship. Nevertheless, it is still valid to observe how certain information can challenge you. That's what being a scholar is about – discovering the inner workings of human nature.

Take the opportunity to try to understand the nature of another person's, or community's, beliefs, their cosmological ideas and how they deal with their conception of life. In such tasks, sympathy and empathy walk hand in hand with objective scholarship.

It should be noted that atheists and agnostics can do well in the Studies of Religion course and at times have topped the state with their marks. You don't have to be the adherent of a particular religious tradition. Of course, as you study a religious tradition, it may make you question your own beliefs and reconsider your faith, or lack of it. Don't be afraid of that; true faith can withstand the questions. If you do not have faith you might find it (or you might not). As an adherent of a particular religious tradition you may find your own personal faith is strengthened through the discipline of the academic study of religion.

6 APPROACHES TO STUDY

You will have to attend classes, participate in class discussions, write and hand in essays and assessment tasks, sit for exams and perform many other challenging activities. Why? What is really going on? Well, it's part of the assessment for the subject, but more than that it is an important part of learning in general.

High school is fundamentally there to provide you with an education. A great ATAR or good HSC result is only part of the educational process. As you go on into tertiary education you will find that your education is further developed by more specialised scholarly communities. These communities not only stretch around the world, but also through the ages. The main method of interaction within these communities is through the scholarly creation, compilation and critical evaluation of research. Each of these communities (schools and universities) has its own scholarly traditions, tools of study and particular conventions. Learning to work within these conventions and to meet the expectations of a scholarly community will make your life much easier.

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Studying

As a student of Studies of Religion you are an apprentice member of at least one scholarly community, possibly as many as three or four, depending on how many subjects you take. Get to know the nature of these communities as intimately as possible: the way to do this is primarily through reading and studying. Reading requires time and thought, so from now on start to organise your days carefully. In addition to the time required for classes, set aside time to read as many introductory and explanatory texts as possible. Start with the chapters in your textbooks; most will provide exercises or suggested reading and activities for you to do. There are also many other related books and journals that will help you to explore issues related to the Studies of Religion course. Talk to your school or community librarian about further reading. Books such as *The Encyclopaedia of Religion in Australia* (Jupp 2009) would be a good starting point. There are also many Studies of Religion journals that are available, often from university libraries, that are a good source for modern religious discussion. Quoting relevant journal articles in your written work will impress your marker no end.

Good habits

Study depends on regular habits and a suitable environment for study. Is there a quiet spot in your house where you can concentrate on your books? If there isn't, think about using the study areas of your school library or local public library. Philip Pullman and George Bernard Shaw, two prolific writers, both worked out of sheds in their gardens. Peace and quiet can be a powerful tool. Another effective practice is to use your study area each day and at the same time. Even if the last thing you want to do is look at books today, at least walk into your study area. Much of what we do as scholars relies not only on our consciousness, but also on our subconscious, which we must refashion through habit. Walking or moving into a study space is likely to get the wheels of your mind spinning; the more regularly you do this, the more you will develop the propensity to study as an ingrained habit. Author and broadcaster Clive James recently confessed that he writes books simply by refusing to do anything but sit at his desk and write. When nothing comes, he just sits there until it does. It might sound like a boring method, but he has over 20 books to his name.

Make your study space comfortable, and have dictionaries and other reference books close at hand. Make yourself a hot drink, light some incense if you enjoy that. Smell and sound can help set a study mood – Mozart and Bach can improve mental facility for up to 15 minutes at a time. Finally, summon up the gumption and start reading. Do not put up photographs or other distractions. Concentrate. Read the course material, revise old class notes, keep in touch with what's going into your brain.

Establish a study calendar and timetable

The next thing you need to do is to establish a study calendar for the semester. Mark in when all your assessment tasks are due and work back from the due dates to give yourself plenty of time to read the texts and gather the information. Make up a weekly timetable and allocate the same amount of time to study each of your subjects. Stick to your timetables. Plan your work to be done over a reasonable length of time. Sitting at a desk at four in the morning, having just realised that the blank page in front of you has to be handed in as a 1000-word essay by nine, is not a good place to be. Sometimes students who have had religious education classes for much of their school life believe they know everything that they need to know, or think that religion is an easy subject that doesn't require much effort. That is not true for the HSC course. Allocate the same amount of time that you would for any other 1 or 2 Unit courses in your study timetable and program, and use that time effectively. Religion teachers might not set a lot of homework, but what they do set is to give you the time to read and research. It is not that they want or expect you to do nothing.

Taking notes

When in class and when doing your reading, take notes for use in your further studies. Do some reading through your notes before class. There's a good possibility that several new terms and concepts will crop up from time to time. Underline those terms, come to understand what they mean and train your eye to look for them when you are reading other texts. Write a word list, or glossary, where you define new terms in your own words.

Don't file your notes in a folder, and then forget about them until a few days before an exam if you expect to do well. It won't happen. Develop habits that help reinforce the information you are learning.

Rewrite or at least review your class notes within 12 hours of the class. Rereading reinforces your learning, but rewriting is even better; it gives you the chance to fill in the gaps between what you have written and points from the class you remembered but did not get the chance to write down. Rewriting or typing up your notes also helps you add or make connections with other sources in your own time, rather than when you are busy writing down major points in the classroom.

It can be useful to do this revision with a friend or a small group, because the result of combining both your sets of notes will be superior to when you use either individual set. Talking about the subject effectively reinforces your learning. Spending time talking about other distractions will not help you learn.

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Research

Use your common sense when taking notes, and make things easy for yourself. The most important thing to do is to write at the top of your notes the exact bibliographical details of the website, book or journal you are reading. When you have done this, you still have all the bibliographic details you need to quote the book, even if the book disappears off the face of the Earth.

As you read a book, keep looking for material that is relevant to the issues, which will primarily be the issue of your assessment task question or the particular topic at hand. What argument or interpretation of the facts does the author of this particular book draw from their collected evidence?

When you find a particular argument or an explanation of the given material that seems important and relevant, try to reduce it to a short set of points written in your own words and set them out in brief note form. Condensed points make reviewing your notes easier. Writing useful notes in your own words shows that you have understood the concepts and issues.

Be on the lookout for contention and agreement. Where you find authors disagreeing or coming to the same conclusions over certain points, swoop on it. When an author's argument, judgement or a piece of information agrees with, conflicts with, complements or qualifies something you have found in another source, make a point of this in your notes: alongside your notes on this passage, write 'cf.' (compare with), followed by the name of the author and/or title and page number.

Good research and note-taking

Good research and note-taking are about individualised learning, accuracy, summation and connection. Individualised learning relates to you. You will find that you may learn in a different way to others. Some students like texts (books and journals), others like images and others learn through listening. You will always learn more by taking notes and being an active participant in your own education. When you take notes or research material it is important for you to write things in your own words; this is referred to as 'using your own voice'. It is not helpful to memorise the most detailed, accurate definition of something if you do not understand it. Write the definition in your own words and in a form that means something to you. Don't restrict your note-taking to just words. Use different forms that you might relate better to, such as charts, tables, diagrams, mind maps, pictures, and so on.

Accuracy

Accuracy is vital because it is the quoting of other sources that helps substantiate your own arguments. The first step towards accuracy is writing down the exact details of the book in question – the exact title, the author, the publisher, which edition the book is, place of publication, publication date, even the ISBN (the International Standard Book Number, cited in every book published), which can be a great help when making library enquiries or reservations. Be sure to write down every relevant detail; it will save you having to chase the source again. There is nothing more frustrating than wanting to follow up a point when you can't remember where it was from.

Accuracy is also enhanced by writing down the correct page numbers for when you want to locate a quotation. Many of the books you will read will also be owned by your teachers, and it is no trouble for them to pull a book off the shelf to see where you have taken the quotation from.

Summation

Summation is the point of note-taking. Instead of having to reread an entire book just to find the one quotation you are after, conscientious page-by-page note-taking reduces a book or article to a comprehensible summary of its main facts and the direction of the argument.

Connection

Connection is the fourth factor. In reading more than one source on a topic, you will find that no two authors agree exactly in their interpretation of the facts and the issues that arise from these facts. Discovering why these differences exist and working out who you think is more reasonable is one of the greatest joys of research. Wherever two authors are in disagreement or take a different line on a certain issue make sure you note this down. Studying the reasons for scholarly disagreement will help you develop a critical mind.

As with note-taking in class, watch out for, write down and underline key words and phrases in your notes for later reference.

Your class

The main device of instruction is the classroom. A few hours a week might not seem like much, but teachers pack years of scholarship into each of these hours. The best way to appreciate them is to do some reading on the subject beforehand, and then examine how the class and your readings are similar and how they are different.

The purpose of the class is to introduce you to a broad spectrum of knowledge and to open paths through the academic tradition that is Studies of Religion. It is vital that you know these paths. Many teachers will use a

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variety of learning styles: lectures, discussions, self-directed learning, group work, technology-based instruction, media presentations, reading, and so on. This is generally to make the classes more interesting and to reflect the range of resources and scholarship available to you as a student and to them as teachers. It is also a way of tapping into students' different learning styles. In class, you need to take the initiative to learn – ask questions, join in discussions and keep an open mind. If you cannot get to a class, get notes from a classmate.

Among the many aspects of this course, classes will take you through the general details of some of the world's major faiths. This will be done with a historical perspective in mind. A number of issues will be raised from this perspective. Often assessment tasks or exams will reflect these issues.

Be confident

The school system will not work for you if you are too shy to use it. Verbalising your thoughts is very important. Often we think we know something, but it is not until we try to speak that we force our minds into finding the right words to make our thoughts concrete. Teachers welcome questions and discussion from students in class, so be prepared to get involved. Remember to keep your question and comments on topic.

Excursions or visits

Sometimes the best way to experience a religion is through a personal encounter with it. Students living in Sydney are fortunate that their city has representatives from most of the religions of the world living there too, including people and places of worship. In other areas you may find groups or meeting places, such as temples and mosques of other religious traditions. Investigate! If there are no excursions planned for your course, then take the initiative to visit yourself, perhaps with a friend. Ask your teachers if they can suggest places to visit and give you telephone contacts so you can make appointments for a visit. Most religious organisations and figures welcome interested students who want to learn more.

7 THE BOARD OF STUDIES, TEACHING AND EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The Studies of Religion course is one of the most popular HSC subjects in New South Wales. In 2014, approximately 15 000 students sat for the HSC Studies of Religion examination, making it among the largest HSC candidatures. While many religious and church schools teach the HSC course, more and more public schools offer it as well. However some religious schools choose not to teach the HSC Studies of Religion course because it requires the study of at least two religious traditions.

The course began around 1991 and has been revised several times since. It includes a comprehensive rewrite of the course and the production of a new syllabus in 2005, which was used for and since the 2007 HSC examination.

Your teacher will provide you with the relevant sections from the Studies of Religion syllabus. Make sure it is the 2005 syllabus, as there were extensive changes to the course at that time for the 2007 examinations.

Also be aware of documents and advice from the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW that relate to the HSC course. Get advice from your teacher, or download the documents from the Board of Studies website (www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au). Documents include the syllabus, support material, sample exam papers, past HSC examination papers, advisory bulletins and documents related to assessment and reporting. You will also find reports from the HSC Examination Marking Centre on the previous year's HSC examination. It is important to be aware of these documents and note in particular any changes to the course and HSC exams.

Support material for the course includes advice relating to the structure and content of the course as well as programming and assessment. Recent support material includes examples of high order student responses to section II (short answer response) and section III (extended response) examination questions. While primarily designed for teachers, this support material is useful for students to make them aware of these documents and to enable them to look at the responses from students who achieved high marks.

Recent advisory bulletins note aspects such as new examination formats, the use of words not specifically in the glossary of terms, variations in the styles of questions, use of stimulus material, exam behaviour, special provisions for illness and misadventure, and so on. Again, get access to these documents and know how they apply to your studies.

You need to know the syllabus and be aware of any advice from the Board of Studies.

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8 THE SYLLABUS: STUDIES OF RELIGION STAGE 6 PRELIMINARY AND HSC COURSES

Before you start reading your textbooks, class notes or anything else you think is relevant to the Studies of Religion course, take the time to read the Studies of Religion syllabus. This may not seem the most exciting reading you will do, but it will be one of the most useful documents you will read. The syllabus tells you what you need to know for the HSC exam and what you need to study in Years 11 and 12 to pass. As stated above, your teacher will have a copy or you can download it from the Board of Studies NSW website.

Perhaps you thought the main aim of your study was simply to pass the HSC examination. It is more. The syllabus tells you that this course aims to help you develop an understanding and awareness of the significance of religion and the way people in Australia, and the world, relate to it today. The syllabus has a good explanation of the rationale for the course (worth reading), as well as the objectives, outcomes and content of the course. There are important comments about respect for different communities and religious traditions. For those who are interested there are also comments on assessment.

There are several important aspects that need to be emphasised.

HSC Studies of Religion requires students to study two (1 Unit) or three (2 Unit) religious traditions, which may include the student's own religious tradition and at least one other. This is an important feature of the course in that it encourages students to develop an awareness of a religious tradition other than their own. Although this is quite deliberate, some students may be unhappy with it. When considering this, you need to be aware of the following two points.

1 The HSC Studies of Religion course is not a comparative religion course. Each religious tradition is studied in its own right and treated as a religious tradition in its own right, not in comparison to another. You must take pains not to make comparative comments.

2 The course is a skills- and knowledge-based course, not a faith-based course. Students do not need to believe in a particular religious tradition to study it. In fact, being a believer may blind students to some of the issues relating to their own religious tradition, so take care to minimise any bias in discussing your own or another religious tradition. You will address issues of values and attitudes in the course of your study, but it is expected that you will maintain an awareness of religious diversity.

A close examination of the syllabus will reveal that as well as a study of several religious traditions, there are other aspects to the course, particularly related to the development of the importance of religion and its expression in modern Australia. You will observe that the 1 Unit material is common to both courses but the 2 Unit course includes additional material. These will be discussed later in this toolkit.

As stated above, you need to know the syllabus and to be aware of the content and objectives of the course. Most textbooks, including *Cambridge Studies of Religion Stage 6* (third edition), contain enough material to help you to pass the course, but you will need to read more widely to achieve the best possible marks. *Cambridge Studies of Religion 6* (third edition) follows the syllabus closely in its structure and includes activities and suggestions for students to look further. While these may not be essential, they will increase your understanding and enjoyment of the course and help you achieve a deeper understanding of the subject.

Know the syllabus, it is your friend. However, don't be limited to it. Determine what you need to know, and then be creative in your development of that knowledge. Read more widely, think more creatively and study more purposefully. The greater your interest, the more you learn (even if not directly related to the syllabus) and the more you will be able to draw upon in your assessment tasks as well as your overall education.

Also be aware of the limitations imposed by the syllabus. There is nothing more frustrating to an HSC marker than to read pages of text about a religious tradition that is not included in the syllabus. Remember, the syllabus specifies five particular religious traditions for the depth study; do not study another. Similarly, in the HSC course, the period for the study of Religion in Australia is post-1945. It may be interesting to read about the time of early settlement, but unless it can be cleverly tied into the question it is irrelevant as part of an HSC answer.

And remember, use the syllabus dated 2005, do not use the old HSC syllabus (dated 1999).

9 PRELIMINARY YEAR: THE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

The preliminary year of the HSC course provides a basis for the HSC year. The preliminary material is broadly broken into the religious traditions and aspects other than the religious traditions. Aspects other than the religious traditions will be examined in the next section.

Students are required to study two (1 Unit) or three (2 Unit) religious traditions as part of their preliminary year depth studies. The Board of Studies has identified the five religious traditions that may be studied. Classes and students may choose from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. In recent HSC examinations, the most popular choice was Christianity, with Islam and Judaism the second most popular.

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Buddhism came in fourth and Hinduism had the smallest number of students. It is important to realise that the religious traditions studied in the preliminary year should be continued in the HSC year. While the Preliminary course will not be directly examined in the HSC, it is assumed HSC students will have the Year 11 material as a prerequisite for studying it in the HSC year.

Christianity is the most popular religious tradition studied. Many schools choose Judaism as the other religious tradition because it is often seen as the foundation of Christianity. Nevertheless, many schools are beginning to realise that studying Judaism from a Christian perspective is not appropriate, and that the modern understanding of Judaism is often very different to that developed in Christian schools.

Islam as an HSC subject is increasing in popularity because of the growth of Islam in Australia, the fact it is another Abrahamic religion (as are Christianity and Judaism) and because of the prominence of Islam in the media (positive and negative representations) has added to its popularity. Buddhism, always a comfortable expression of an Eastern religion in Australia, has an appeal to many Westerners. It is now the second largest religious tradition in Australia. Some of the language and concepts of Buddhism can be difficult for Australian students to understand, although new translations of texts and new ways of introducing Buddhism to students are always emerging. Hinduism is the fastest growing religion in Australia but some students struggle with Hinduism's concept of so many gods and the terminology. The challenge of studying this tradition is sometimes its own reward. Many students are concerned by the terminology and language, which can be confusing, and by religious concepts that seem so different to what they are familiar with. But Hinduism is an interesting and fascinating alternative that is worth persisting with in order to develop an understanding of it.

In studying each of these religious traditions, it is important to understand the concepts, use the correct language and terminology, and to examine the religious tradition as a living religious system. Students are expected to refer to each religious tradition with understanding and respect and to avoid derogatory remarks.

An examination of the syllabus reveals that each religious tradition is discussed with a similar format. Students are expected to learn about

- the origins of the religion, including its founder and its early development
- principal beliefs of the religious tradition
- sacred texts and writings
- core ethical teachings
- an aspect of personal devotion, expression of faith or an observance relevant to that religious tradition.

The details of the particular examples or areas are discussed in the syllabus for each of the religious traditions. Several pertinent comments are made about the religious traditions that you may find helpful.

Buddhism

It is significant to note that Buddhism is an atheistic religion. It is not necessary to believe in a god to practise Buddhism. Buddhism is very influenced by the cultural expressions of its adherents. In a city such as Sydney there are Thai, Chinese, Laotian, Tibetan and Australian Buddhist temples, and so on. There is a dedicated Buddhist library in Camperdown that can supply much useful information. It is important to note that while there are common elements in the various strains of Buddhism, there are significant differences as well. You may have some difficulty finding extracts from the sacred texts but they can usually be found through persistent enquiry.

Christianity

You need to ensure that you don't make assumptions about Christianity that may not be evident to the examiner. Christianity must be studied as a skills and knowledge-based study for the HSC, not as a faith-based course. Avoid writing in the first person ('I believe'); instead, use the third person ('Christians believe', or 'Christians tend to believe'). Don't assume your examiner knows what Christians believe – explain clearly and, where possible, use relevant references from the Bible. While reference is made to the Beatitudes in the section on ethics, for example, it is reasonable to see the Beatitudes as an introduction to the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) and thus draw from the whole sermon. Similarly, the syllabus mentions Jesus' commandment of love, and it is possible to draw on several of Jesus' commandments. Also, be careful not to speak of 'the church' to refer to Christian churches; there are many Christian denominations and their interpretations of what Christianity means can differ widely. In academic discourse The Church (with capitals) usually refers to the Catholic Church generally, and more specifically to the organisation in Vatican City that operates this vast organisation. Catholicism, however, remains just one expression of Christianity. Choose your terms carefully. Remember, Catholic is not the same as Christian. Christianity is the religious tradition and a discussion of the Catholic Church only is not sufficient.

Hinduism

Hinduism does not have a single founder. Indeed, there is considerable debate about the development of Hinduism, especially with reference to the Aryans. Students are often concerned about the terminology of

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Hinduism, which is often made more difficult because of variations in spellings due to transliteration of terms. While it is important to learn the correct terms, strictly accurate spelling is not vital. The dating of events and people can also be difficult and inaccurate. Nevertheless, the study of Hinduism is rewarding because Hinduism is an interesting tradition to explore.

Islam

In studying Islam you need to avoid the sensationalism of media bias. It is more interesting to consider where these biases come from. The concepts and aspects mentioned in the syllabus can be explored with some ease as more and more information about Islam becomes available. Copies of the Qur'an are accessible and the Hadith can be found on the internet. You may struggle with the concepts of Islamic jurisprudence. Do remember that there are a number of schools of interpretation on Shari'a law.

Judaism

Judaism is familiar to many students as the religion of the Israelites referred to in the first section of the Christian Bible (Jews avoid calling it the Old Testament, instead calling it the Hebrew Bible or the Tanakh). You need to be careful to avoid a Christian understanding of Judaism, and should discuss Judaism as a religion that preceded and coexisted with Christianity and developed its own extensive body of interpretation. Judaism can be particular in its use of language and you need to be careful to use the correct spellings of terms.

10 PRELIMINARY YEAR: ASPECTS OTHER THAN THE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

The brief comments below relate to the aspects other than religious traditions that are covered in the Preliminary course.

Nature of religion (1 and 2 Units)

The course begins with a discussion of the nature of religion and beliefs. Here, students are introduced to concepts related to religion. Religion can be seen as a worldview that includes a supernatural dimension, which can be experienced within the individual and beyond the human. Several characteristics of religion are introduced and explained, as is a discussion of the contribution of religion to human life and society.

A discussion of the Aboriginal concept of the Dreaming is undertaken; its relation to several aspects of life and the way it is connected to the land and identity are noted.

Religions of ancient origin (2 Unit)

Students discuss two ancient religions and the way they express some of the key characteristics of religion. This topic illustrates the significance of religion through human history.

Religion in Australia pre-1945 (2 Unit)

This aspect examines the role of religion in Australia from the time of European settlement to 1945. Discussion of the arrival of three religious traditions is undertaken, with particular reference to sectarianism and social welfare in Christianity, and also the role of religion in rural and outback communities, education and public morality in Australia prior to 1945.

In studying these parts of the course it is clear that you will cover material that may be part of other areas and subjects of the HSC course. Modern history and ancient history are two that come to mind. Wise students will draw on material that may be relevant in those other courses; however, the particular objectives that relate to Studies of Religion should be considered. Studies of Religion does not have the same outcomes as a History course.

Many schools allow students to research one of the religions of ancient origin as a research task.

These areas of the course can be particularly enjoyable and interesting.

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11 HSC YEAR: THE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

The HSC year course builds on the work students have done in the preliminary year and develops a deeper understanding of three particular areas. Students need to study the same religious traditions they have studied in Year 11. In 1 Unit Studies of Religion, two religious traditions must be studied. In 2 Unit, students study three religious traditions.

Again, the structure of the syllabus is similar for each of the religious traditions. Students must develop a good understanding of three aspects of the tradition.

- *A significant person or school of thought (other than the founder).* You are given a choice of several people or schools of thought in each religious tradition to discuss. There is an option of 'another person or school of thought' that allows a student to choose a person or school of interest to them. Seek your teacher's advice before you choose another person or school. In general the person or school should be significant in the development of that particular religious tradition. Some biographical information may be relevant but should not be the dominant aspect of your research. Rather, focus on the person's, or school's, contribution during their lifetime and today. Demonstrate the impact of that person or school and make an assessment of their ongoing influence on the religious tradition. Remember, the important aspect to be researched is the person's impact on the religious tradition. Interesting facts, such as their impact on a particular country or the world, are secondary aspects and should not be the main focus of your study and research.
- *An ethical area (chosen from bioethics, environmental ethics or sexual ethics).* Choose one of these areas and examine the teachings of the religious tradition on that ethical area. Avoid generalised comments that could apply to any religious tradition. Give examples and, where possible, choose clear and obvious examples. References to sacred texts could be important, as would variants within the religious tradition. Implications for daily life, or in particular situations, may help in developing an understanding of the ethical issues involved. You must be careful not to make general statements such as 'All members of this religious tradition believe …'. Note significant differences within the religious tradition and use examples to illustrate them. Consider whether it would be helpful or unhelpful to study the same ethical area in their set of religious traditions.
- *A significant practice, chosen from three practices.* The practices differ in each religious tradition but you are asked to choose one practice from those given in the syllabus. Do not choose another practice that is not listed in the syllabus, nor the practice studied in Year 11. You are asked to describe the practice and to demonstrate how it expresses the beliefs of the religious tradition. A discussion of various examples and teachings that reveal different understandings and expressions of the practice would be helpful in demonstrating a comprehensive understanding. You also examine the significance of the practice for the individual and for the religious community. Again, consider whether it would be helpful or unhelpful to study a similar practice in their set of religious traditions.

While some HSC exam papers since 2007 have included a specific question on just one of these areas in section III, more recent exam questions have asked students to combine several of these aspects. This is in keeping with the syllabus statements about each religious tradition being an integrated belief system and all aspects are interrelated. Carefully examine recent HSC exam papers whose exam questions have allowed students to draw extensively from the preliminary year sections of the course as well as combining the three HSC aspects of person/school, ethics and practice. While this may be appropriate, you should focus mainly on the HSC course in your examination answers. Often HSC questions include some stimulus, such as a quotation. You must refer to the stimulus in your responses.

The following comments may help you in your study of each religious tradition.

Buddhism

- Some students choose Mahayana Buddhism as one school of Buddhist thought.
- When choosing a practice or an ethical area, you may want to choose a similar or different practice or ethical area in their other religious tradition. If choosing Pilgrimage in Buddhism, for example, does it help or would it be confusing to choose Pilgrimage in Hinduism?
- If choosing the Dalai Lama, ensure you focus on his contribution to Buddhism as a religious tradition rather than political or global issues.

Christianity

- Consider carefully your choice of a person, bearing in mind how much is available for your research. Some students might feel there is too much information available on Paul of Tarsus and Martin Luther, whereas there may be too little on Dennis Bennett or Sarah Maitland.
- When discussing a practice, make sure you focus on the religious aspects of the practice. If you are discussing Christian marriage, for example, don't get distracted by the cultural aspects of the ceremony, such as the colour of the dress, the bridesmaids' role, and so on. Also discuss the different views within Christianity, such as the different beliefs, expressions and forms of baptism.

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Hinduism

- When choosing a Hindu person or school of thought, develop an understanding of their importance and significance. If choosing a person such as Ram Mohan Roy or Gandhi, note their contribution to Hinduism as a religious tradition, not just to Indian society or world peace.
- Again, be careful in discussing the cultural aspects of Indian weddings, for example, of the colours of the dress or the practice of arranged marriages, unless you also explain the religious significance.

Islam

- When discussing Islam it is especially important to avoid media stereotypes, but it may be important when discussing Sayyid Qutb (of the Muslim Brotherhood), for example, to explain his impact on modern Islamic fundamentalism.
- In the ethics section of the course, it is important for students to have a good understanding of Islamic jurisprudence from the preliminary year.

Judaism

- When discussing issues in Judaism, you must, due to major historical developments, be very precise and exact in your language (as one should be with all scholarly discussion).
- It is unacceptable to describe Judaism from a Christian perspective or with a Christian understanding. Judaism is a religious tradition in its own right, not simply a forerunner to Christianity.

The examination of the religious traditions is an important aspect of the HSC course. All the traditions must be approached with care and concentration.

12 HSC YEAR: ASPECTS OTHER THAN THE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

The HSC year builds on the work done in the preliminary year. It seeks to relate the study of religion to the Australian context, increase understanding between adherents of the different religious traditions and explore significant aspects of life that have some relevance to religion and life in Australia.

Three areas are indicated that are a development of the understanding of religion and its expression in modern Australia.

Religion and belief systems in Australia post-1945 (1 and 2 Units)

Aboriginal spiritualities are again discussed, with particular reference to contemporary Australia. Schools are encouraged to work with Aboriginal communities in this aspect of the course. Contemporary issues include the relationship between the Dreaming and areas such as kinship and ceremonial life, dispossession and the Land Rights movement.

Religious expression in a modern multicultural society is the focus of the second section of this topic in the syllabus. An awareness of the religious landscape can be ascertained through census data and areas that have affected it, such as immigration, secularism and other features. Religious dialogue is explored, and the role of ecumenism, interfaith dialogue and a linking back to reconciliation and Aboriginal spiritualities are noted.

Both these areas of study provide an excellent basis for understanding Australian society today, apart from any discussion of the religious life of this country.

Religion and peace (2 Unit)

Students are required to examine the teachings of two religious traditions that relate to peace. The two traditions must come from the five that are referred to in the syllabus. Students are required to draw from the sacred writings and teachings of each religion on peace, with reference to inner peace and world peace. While two religious traditions are to be studied, a comparative approach is not to be taken. Do not compare the two religious traditions but treat each separately in your work. You may be asked to refer to one or two religious traditions in the HSC examination.

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Religion and non-religion (2 Unit)

Students examine the development, expressions and significance of religion in human history as a conserving and transforming movement, with reference to its global distribution. Discussion of new religious expressions is also undertaken with an examination of factors that have led to the growth of new religions. Significant non-religious worldviews are discussed, with reference to atheism, agnosticism and humanism. Finally, the religious and non-religious responses to several concepts are discussed.

13 ASSESSMENT

Years 11 and 12 teachers are encouraged to use a variety of assessment tasks to ensure that not only students who are able to perform well in examination conditions or by writing essays will achieve higher marks, but also that all students have the chance to.

The Studies of Religion subject requires students to complete internal and external assessment. For 1 Unit students this usually means about three tasks each year; for 2 Unit it will probably be four tasks. It is important to do well in internal and external assessment tasks. For 1 Unit students, the tasks should total 50 marks; for 2 Unit students, they should total 100 marks. In Year 12, your internal marks will be communicated to the Board of Studies. It is not the case that your marks are half internal assessment and half external assessment. Rather, the Board of Studies looks at your internal mark and your external HSC exam mark and issues you with a moderated assessment. Your final HSC mark takes into account internal and external assessment as well as considering, if necessary, other significant factors, such as illness and misadventure.

There are many different forms of internal assessment for Studies of Religion that could be used. These include, but are not limited to:

- oral presentations
- *viva voce* (usually oral plus interview with the examiner)
- technology-based presentation (such as a PowerPoint)
- research task
- physical display or model
- peer assessment and review
- diary or journal
- written test
- take home exam
- multiple choice questions
- short answer questions
- response to stimulus
- formal examination.

The main purpose of an exam or assessment task is to test how much you understand, not simply what you know. Your exams in both preliminary and HSC years may include multiple choice questions, short answer questions and extended response questions, but teachers could use a combination of assessment tools. The correct answers to questions will be found in your classes, reading and research. Your success in exams and assessment tasks will depend on how well you listen, how well you can assess the fundamental points of each class, how effectively you make notes in class and in your own study, and how effectively you communicate that to your marker. Remember, it is not just knowledge that is being assessed, it is also skills and understanding.

When you are given an assessment task – you are supposed to be given a formal assessment advice at least two weeks before the task is due – read it carefully and know exactly what is required of you. Plan and prepare well ahead of the due date; start reading and researching as soon as possible to allow you time to digest the information and task requirements.

For formal examinations, the following comments may be useful.

- Make sure your exams do not clash with any others you might be sitting. While it is assumed this won't be the case, check to be sure, and then advise the school if there is.
- Make sure you are prepared for the exam. You will need your Board of Studies number, pens and pencils, a pencil sharpener, an eraser, and other useful writing tools. Bring a watch so you can keep track of the time. Know what you are not allowed to bring into the exam. Do not bring your mobile phone. Leave it outside the exam room and have it turned off. If your phone rings, even if not on your person, you can be excluded from the exam. Do not rely on your phone to tell the time.
- Once you have the exam paper, read through all the questions, and then give your brain a chance to summon the answers. Then relax and plan your answers. For extended response questions, first write a plan on the first page of your answer booklet, and then come back to it when you get new ideas. Hand in your plan and notes with your response, preferably in the same booklet. Do not use white out or similar products. Write with a black pen.

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- If, for whatever reason, you cannot do the exam – you are ill, in an accident or something similar – contact the school immediately as you may be eligible for a consideration for illness or misadventure. This does not apply if you forget or sleep in.

Remember, you may be asked to do a variety of assessment tasks. The most common are examinations, but you may be asked to also write essays (or extended responses), make oral presentations or a number of different possible styles of tasks.

14 THE HSC EXAMINATION

For most students the main focus of study is the HSC examination. This is the final event of high school, and despite the emphasis given to internal assessment, the HSC exam remains the major event and focal point of your study. That's not surprising given the emphasis on achieving a good HSC result and ATAR score for university entry.

It is important for you to know about the exam and to prepare for it. Students in 1 Unit will have a 1½-hour examination that is worth 50 marks; questions are made up of multiple choice questions, short answer questions and an extended response (essay). Students in 2 Unit will have a three-hour exam that is worth 100 marks. Look at past papers to know how the exam is laid out, what each section is worth and which areas of the syllabus are examined in a particular way. You will probably have done a trial exam, which should follow the same format as the HSC examination.

You may also check the *Cambridge Studies of Religion Stage 6* (third edition) textbook and the *Cambridge Checkpoints HSC Studies of Religion* study guide for sample exams and assessment tasks.

Know the way the exam paper is set out – styles of questions, values, length, and so on. Plan your approach to the paper: read it carefully, read all the instructions and take notes. Read sections II, III and IV carefully. There are specific instructions in each section, such as 'You will be assessed on how well you …' Make sure you read them and understand what these instructions mean.

Plan your approach to the exam paper. Decide how to approach the exam: multiple choice questions (MC) first? Section II first? Essays first? Some students find that doing the essays first is most helpful. Certainly it is a good idea to start planning the essays first.

Time is the limiting factor on how much you write. While space is given for the short answer question, you may write more. The Board of Studies expects that it is possible to achieve full marks in the allocated space. However, if you want to write more than there is space for in the allocated space, use a separate booklet and label it clearly. Allocate your time carefully and stick to it. Decide beforehand how much time you should spend on each section and keep your eye on the time during the exam. Some questions will be worth more marks than others, so spend more time on the questions worth more marks. You can come back to questions if you have more time later. Generally, you have just under two minutes of exam time per mark (that is, 100 marks for 180 minutes or 50 marks for 90 minutes).

If, despite your careful planning, you are short of time, think carefully about how you will approach the rest of the exam. If, say, you find that you have only 20 minutes left to answer two questions (each worth equal marks), it's better to spend 10 minutes on each rather than 20 minutes on one. Often, your best writing is done in the first 10 minutes.

Think things through. If you do not know an answer, try to work it out. Can you determine the most logical answer from the information given – dates, places, key words, and so on? Can you find clues or hints in other sections of the exam paper, in the multiple choice questions, for example?

Look for stimulus material. It can be anywhere in the paper. If a question asks you to refer to some stimulus material, such as a picture or a quote, you must refer to it. Both 1 Unit and 2 Unit students might get a stimulus short answer response question at the end of the first section on Religion in Australia pre-1945, but not always. The 2 Unit students might also get a stimulus response question at the end of section 2 for Religion and Non-religion, or the stimulus might relate to any question. Remember, even if you are not specifically told to, it would be wise to refer to the stimulus material.

Pay attention to the verbs used in questions – 'describe', 'outline', 'analyse', 'evaluate', for example – and understand what they mean. On the exam paper, highlight verbs and any other relevant terms or defining statements or limitations (community–individual, beliefs, sacred texts, timeframe, and so on). If the question doesn't ask for variants or reference to sources, especially sacred texts, put them in the appropriate place in your answer anyway. You may find that there are verbs or other key words that are used in the questions that are not in the glossary, including, but not only, How... or Why... or To what extent…

Be aware that the examiner will try to vary the paper. Look at past papers and Board of Studies advice, but be prepared for anything. In the section II questions (three part short answer), the three parts could refer to separate areas of the syllabus, or several of the questions may refer to the same area. This is not a mistake – the questions on the same part will use different verbs or may ask for different aspects or emphasis. You cannot answer each part in the same way; you must respond to the particular verb or instruction. Nor may you combine them into

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one answer. Note that the marks allocated to each section of the three part question may not be the same as in previous papers, or even the same across the exam paper.

When answering MC questions, keep this rule of thumb in mind: if you have read the question correctly, your first response is usually correct. Only change your answer if you are certain you have made a mistake. Practise with past papers. Think logically about the question. Also, be prepared to use material from the MC in other sections of your exam.

Exams and essays require you to respond to the particular question. Prepare general notes, think carefully about what is being asked and respond to the specific question. Always write something. Have a go, even if you do not know or do not understand the question. You will be rewarded for correct answers, not penalised for incorrect ones.

Plan your answer – the markers look at your plan when assessing your work. Write your plan on the inside cover or first page of a booklet. Use a different booklet for each question. Consider planning the essays before you start the MC questions. Don't just dump your information – read and answer the question carefully. Respond to specific aspects or key terms asked in the question. For the extended response questions (sections III and IV), make sure you have a structure to your answer – introduction, body, conclusion. Use the key terms from the question in the opening and closing paragraphs (and throughout your answer), and use a topic sentence to begin every paragraph. As a guide, repeat the key terms from the question in every second paragraph.

Don't assume that your marker knows what you are talking about. Give explicit explanations of your statements, words and ideas and remember, don't assume that the questions will be the same or similar to those of previous years.

Remember that different sections (sections II, III and IV, etc.) are marked by different markers, so you cannot assume prior knowledge and don't need to be afraid to repeat yourself in sections II, III and IV. Do not, however, keep repeating the same material in the same essay or three-part question. Note carefully what aspects you are asked about in the question. In Religion and Peace (section IV), for example, you may be asked to write about one or two religious traditions. If you are asked to write about one religious tradition, do not write about two. The second will be ignored by markers. If you are asked to write about two do not compare them; it is better to write about one tradition first, and then the other. You may make some connecting statements between the two in a concluding paragraph.

Make sure you use examples – sacred texts, specific examples and Australian examples. Use two or three where you can. Reference your quotes where possible. Allusions are acceptable if you can't remember an exact quote. Use knowledge from other sources, such as the hymn 'A New Commandment'.

Mention variants where appropriate. Make sure the marker knows the extent of your knowledge and is impressed by it.

Be very careful of the way you use language and how you write your answers. Use formal language and write in the third person, not the first person.

How to improve your written language

- 'Pilgrimage gives Moksha' is too simplistic. It's more complicated than that, so you need to describe what you mean by the statement.
- Use the third person, that is, 'Christians believe…', rather than 'I believe …', which is the first person.
- Don't write 'God loves us' or 'Jesus died for us' with no explanation or elaboration.
- Don't write as if you believe the tradition.
- Avoid general phrases such 'Where Shaiva is said to have lived'.
- 'Protestant' is not a denomination, it is a variant; Presbyterian, for example, is a denomination.
- Capitalise proper names, such as God and the sacred texts (the Bible, the Bhagavad Gita, the Qur'an).
- Try not to write in absolutes: 'Catholics believe that euthanasia is a sin'. Phrase it more like, 'While official Vatican teaching is that euthanasia is a sin, values surveys of Australians show that nearly 50 per cent of Catholics believe that euthanasia is acceptable in cases of terminal illness'.
- The syllabus says you should use appropriate terminology. Be respectful of religious traditions. Don't use derogatory language. There are serious penalties for inappropriate language. Show that you are aware of alternative views and explain controversial statements or statements where you make a judgement.

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15 ESSAYS AND ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Essays, including research tasks, and oral presentations are probably the most popular forms of assessment. Here are some comments that may be helpful.

Essays

Your written work is vitally important and essays are a formal style of presentation that have to follow certain conventions. Essays are pieces of academic work that should be structured with an introduction, a body and a conclusion. Footnote any words that are not your own, that is, any words you quote from another author, and indicate their source. Failure to do so is considered plagiarism, which is a serious breach of academic ethics and copyright; it is essentially a form of cheating and theft. Plagiarism will often result in a zero mark. Draw on the research and work of authoritative sources, but don't write the bulk of your essay simply quoting others. Your marker will want to see that you have understood others' ideas and, from that understanding, come to your own opinion.

Plagiarism is the most serious form of academic dishonesty: it is the taking of other people's research and passing it off as your own. Be aware that plagiarists get caught. Studies of Religion has great academic scope, but it is not so big that your marker will not be able to detect material that has been stolen. Be very careful to ensure that you attribute other people's ideas correctly and honestly.

If the question for your essay asks you to discuss something, what it is asking you to do is to present an argument. It is asking you to weigh one possibility up against other possibilities and interpretations. It is not asking you to simply relay what one source has found. Only by establishing an argument and showing how various scholars approach the issue can you demonstrate your critical and reasoning faculties. This is what the reader of your essay is looking for. Most importantly, try to examine the primary source material that the issue is based on and form your own opinion. You can argue one side of the issue or another, or come up with your own interpretation, which could be different to that of your source. Where possible, discuss primary sources rather than relying on secondary sources.

If you simply read a few books or, worse, only the introduction to a few books, and then just relay a few facts on the night before the essay is due, chances are you will miss the opportunity to engage in a debate regarding a very important matter.

When considering a question for an essay, ask yourself: Do I agree? If so, why? If not, why not? Often, your essay is simply an answer to those questions (while, of course, drawing on research to support your answer). Your original interpretation of the facts is welcome, but if you arrive at the same opinions as another source, be generous enough to note this. Given the amount of scholarship already produced on the issues addressed in the field of Studies of Religion, you will realise that it is a hard task to be original, but not impossible to be both original and reasonable.

In carefully planning your essay, write a short draft that traces your argument and note where you want to introduce your sources. When you have done your draft (or even a plan), then you will know where you are going with your essay. Remember: introduction, body and conclusion.

Assumed knowledge is a difficult balancing act. You do not need to explain everything. Many students waste valuable words – and time – telling the marker about the basic principles of a religion. This suggests that you have not done enough research and are just filling up space on the page. You can assume that your marker knows the basic facts relating to the area you are researching, but then you need to decide what needs further explanation. Your essay's reader will have a reasonable knowledge of the basic facts, but you may choose to explain some aspects further.

Be careful in your use of language. Stop yourself from making generalisations. Don't say 'All scientists consider ...' or 'As all Zoroastrians know …': chances are there is one that doesn't. Generalisations lead very easily to stereotyping, which must be avoided. Use non-sexist language: 'humanity' is preferred to 'mankind' or 'Man' (as in the 'civilisation of Man').

Despite this list of don'ts, just remember that the English language is one of the most diverse and expressive languages on Earth. Use it effectively and take care not to offend when discussing different religious traditions.

Keep your sentences simple. The simpler they are, the better you will be understood. You can often make yourself clearer by breaking up a single large sentence and making numerous small sentences out of the original mega-sentence. If you want your reader to be convinced, learn to write simply, clearly and systematically. Do not be afraid to tell your reader what you are doing and how this will help your answer. For example: 'Now that we have touched on the issue of plain writing, I shall explain the basic structure of an academic essay.' (However, you should determine if you should write in the first or third person – it will depend on the task).

If you follow the conventions of an essay layout, your introduction and conclusion should complement each other. Before you write your final draft, read just these two parts of your essay. Does the introduction set out all that you intend to do? Does your conclusion then deliver all that the introduction promised, and are there enough points in the body of your work to support your claims at the end? If you cannot honestly answer yes, you need to look at your structure again and make sure that the introduction and conclusion speak to each other in this way. When they do, your essay becomes clearer and your intention becomes more obvious to the marker.

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The main part of your essay is the body. It is the powerhouse of your writing. Here everything that the introduction mentions should be developed; here the proofs for your conclusion are laid out. The best way to approach the body of your essay is to think of it in sections; each section deals with part of your argument.

Unless your essay is very long, do not break up the body of your writing by using subheadings. Subheadings look clumsy in small essays and are annoying for the reader. It is better to allow each of these sections to be built up by one or more paragraphs. A paragraph is a block of sentences dedicated to developing a point. Thus a paragraph may include a sentence to establish what point is being made, a quotation and a final sentence that links the evidence and your (or another commentator's) interpretation of it back to the question. A paragraph may include all this, but generally should not consist of just a single sentence. Single sentence paragraphs are used by some fiction writers as part of their style, but they should rarely appear in academic work.

When referring to other works you must choose a particular style of referencing and be consistent in using it. Two most popular are the Oxbridge and Harvard styles but there are several other options. The referencing style will determine how you refer to book titles, short quotations or longer passages, and how to provide footnotes or endnotes. For each quote, some system of referencing must be used to alert the reader to the source of the quote. Most school libraries have information about the way to reference other works.

The following comments from an anonymous essay marker may help you to see things from another perspective.

> When I am given an essay to mark, the first thing I notice is how the text is laid out – is it double spaced or all crammed into single spacing? At the end of a long night it is very hard to concentrate on tightly crammed text. Moreover, I cannot write helpful notes between the lines. One of the first things I do is leaf through the pages; this gives me a rough idea of how long the work is and I look at the word count, which of course should be included. If the paper is too long or too short it suggests that the writer has had trouble with the question. I also notice paragraphs – a paragraph consisting of only one sentence suggests that the writer has trouble with the elementary structure of an essay.
>
> All these perceptions are already helping me assess the work, and I probably haven't even read a single word.
>
> The next thing I do is turn to the bibliography and check to see how many primary sources there are. Later I will note how these are used, that is, if they are used at all – some people put books in their bibliography that they obviously have not read. I also look for references to those encyclopaedias that come free with new computers – one is called Encarta. This provides a bit of light relief. Even encyclopaedias such as the Britannica and World Book, though great for introductory reading, rarely supply the specialised information an essay writer needs. Also, I am wary of people who only use the course textbooks. They are great introductions to religion, but don't have the breadth of scholarship needed for an essay.
>
> Have they used journals, or interviewed people? These sources look impressive because they can be up to date. After looking for these hints, I turn back to the front and see how they have written out the question on their cover sheet or above their introduction. I check this against the actual question on the question sheet and make sure every single word is reproduced exactly. Sometimes the misreading of an 'is' for an 'an' has changed the whole argument of an essay and led to general disaster. If the writer has not replicated the question, then I double check the question on my list and follow the text even more closely.
>
> The next step is a cruel one, but very effective in sorting the sheep from the goats. I read the introduction, then flip straight to the conclusion. Good essays have a complementarity between these two parts – that is, the introduction will set up the argument and the conclusion will draw the evidence of the essay together and conclude. Then I go back to the beginning and read the essay through. I cringe when I note that most of the essay is simply quotations of other people's ideas. Sometimes I will read through several times, sometimes once. I really appreciate essays that have a clear prose style, and a smattering of wit and excitement through the prose is never out of place. These are essays that bring a critical eye to the primary sources and question their accuracy and usefulness, and then go on to compare various secondary sources, pitting these sources against each other, the essay writer then deciding which is more reasonable. Perhaps they even come to their own conclusions.
>
> Great essays weld all of these points together as a great unified whole and present a consistency of style. They are very exciting to read. Unfortunately, a lot of essay writers cannot get the basics of essay writing together. Some footnotes have no page references, others do, which is infuriating because most of the texts that are quoted I have near me, and I like to look up the quotes to see them in their original context. In bad essays paragraphs are too short, bibliographies are full of books that have not been read and conclusions have only one or two lines in them and relate in no way to the introduction. I look on with horror when someone is introducing new evidence in the conclusion. What strikes me as really bad are those writers who just repeat what they have read in a book as though they are telling you a story, or spend half the essay explaining to you what Buddhism or Islam is when, of course, if you did not know you would not be allowed to mark their essay.
>
> At the end of a long night of marking essays, those which lack a consistency in style and reason bring out both my anger and my sadism, and often my nicer side has to step in and moderate the abysmally low marks that flash into my mind. But ... you take the bad and cheer at the good. Great essays are useful essays

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– essays that get me thinking, that get me excited. To do this the writing does not have to be excited but reasonable, creative, interpretative and critical. They make my night, and all is well.

Oral presentations

An oral presentation, or a *viva voce*, is an oral delivery you make to your fellow students; many teachers use them as an assessment tool. While teachers will sometimes ask you to hand in notes that summarise your talk, an oral presentation is a device that focuses primarily on your ability to present ideas. If you are given an oral task, you must carefully read the instructions and take careful note of the details of the task – topic, time, date, requirement for visual aids, and so on. Many students make the mistake of simply choosing a topic, and then just repeating the main points of the faith – or worse, the main points of the class lesson. Those who have paid attention in class and have done extra reading, not to mention the teacher, find such presentations dull. If you are asked to deliver an oral presentation it is an opportunity for you to read a bit more widely and present new light on the subject that will interest and excite those in the class. Try to broaden your fellow students' understanding of the subject in the way that you would like them to broaden your understanding. Perhaps you might like to investigate themes that the classes and recommended readings did not touch on.

An oral presentation is also an opportunity for you to visit your local mosque, temple, synagogue or church and assess how the books and their theories are related to daily life in Australia. Visiting a place of worship might seem daunting, but they are usually welcoming places. After years of speaking with believers, I have discovered that asking people about their beliefs is a bit like asking how they are. People are almost always delighted that you want to know about their faith.

In your oral presentation, do not simply tell a story or repeat stories about the religion. If you say, for example, 'The prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca. At age 25 he married Khadija, who was a 40-year-old widow. She encouraged him to spread the message of the revelations he received, but Mecca didn't want to listen. So he went to the city of Medina where he became a judge ...' this is doing nothing more than recounting an assortment of facts in a chronological order. Instead, contrast sources, particularly primary sources, to build a dynamic argument that tries to show how a particular phenomenon should be understood.

You might also consider whether the minimal levels of sexism in early Islamic Scripture are due to the fact that Khadija and other women offered Muhammad so much support, or the importance of the first journey to Medina to later Islamic ideas of pilgrimage. But in the end, the specific question you have been given is what you must address.

Whatever else you do in your oral presentation, do not just read your notes aloud. You are speaking to the class and demonstrating not only your knowledge but also your communication skills. Most oral presentations are brief. If you cannot speak without a written page for three to five minutes, you do not know your material. You will be given marks for communication skills so, if you must, use just a few key words on a palm card. Don't speak in a monotone – animate your voice. Engage your audience, use visual aids, costumes, food or props of any sort to make your presentation lively and interesting. Most important of all, be yourself.

Ultimately, give the sort of oral presentation that would excite and educate you if you had to listen to it. Generate interest and you'll be interested; be interested and you will generate interest.

16 WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET STUCK

What happens when you can't think of anything to write? There is a good chance that you will suffer from some or all of the following problems during the course of your writing process.

Starting too fast

You will possibly rush ahead and write your introduction or conclusion or some part of the body, and then not know where to go from there.

Cure

Go back and write a plan. Then write the plan again, this time with more detail. By the third or fourth time you have written the plan, with more and more information included, your plan will look less like a plan and more like an essay. It could also be that the part you started off with might still seem brilliant but less relevant, so be prepared to discard it.

Heading in the wrong direction

You start thinking of an answer that is a little beside the point, and the more you keep thinking and writing the further from an appropriate answer you become. You are writing a good essay, but for some other question.

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Cure
Return to the starting point. Dissect the question, underline its key words, ask other people what they think it is asking, and ask your teacher for help.

Too many bits

Your essay feels very fragmentary. There are bits and pieces all over the place, but nothing that really contributes to a flowing essay.

Cure
Check the opening and closing sentences of your paragraphs. Are they providing the reader with prompts that show where your argument is headed? Does your introduction establish what your conclusion resolves? Do not assume the reader knows your mind; give the reader some hints as to where you are going.

Feeling overwhelmed

You have done so much research that you don't know where to start or how to continue.

Cure
Have a good night's sleep or just start. You can edit bad writing and make it better, but you can't edit a blank page, so at least start by writing something. It is often difficult to get started but once you do you can build up momentum, so just start.

Getting the order right

Suddenly it hits you: What comes first, the argument or the research? Do you set your argument, then go searching for information to support your hypothesis, or do you let the research suggest your line of argument?

Cure
This is a complex issue. Obviously, by the time you come to commence writing, you know something of the material and possibly already have an opinion, so it may be wise to stick with your gut feeling. The only way you can be sure is to start reading very early and have a good working knowledge of the area through a number of sources.

Procrastination

You have been procrastinating for days, paralysed by the anguished feeling that you will never finish anything.

Cure
No known cure! We are still waiting for the magic intellectual pill. In the meantime, turn your mind occasionally to the things you have finished. Whether you think the result was good or bad, we have all occasionally done harder and more complex things than write essays.

House cleaning

Suddenly, you're the most house-proud person ever; if it comes down to a choice between polishing your S-bend with a toothbrush or working on your essay, it's the S-bend that gets higher priority. Anything but the assignment.

Cure
Breaking your study time with alternative activities is healthy, but not if those activities begin to seem more important than the study. Leave the S-bend and get back to the books.

Loss of perspective

You haven't written an essay, you've created another self. You have become so close to your essay that you can barely tell if your sentences have verbs, and there is absolutely no chance of objectivity.

Cure
This happens to all of us. It may be time to show the essay to a friend, or ring up someone you know and tell them, in your own words, about what you are doing. It is sometimes good to see your thinking played out in someone else's eyes.

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Constant revision

You have rewritten your essay six times and you still hate it.

Cure

Just as there is a time to be born and a time to die, so too is there a time to hand in your essay. We all have to face that deadline. Put your head down, finish it and hand it in. Feel free to hate it, but life does go on.

A few pet hates of essay markers

1. Top of the list is spacing. All markers like large margins and double spacing so they have plenty of room to write comments to you. Comments are helpful, so don't discourage your markers from telling you what they think.
2. Unclear or difficult to read typefaces. Use a plain 12-point font, such as Times, Times New Roman or Palatino. Do not use Arial or Helvetica, except for your section headings.
3. Contractions. Do not use contractions such as 'don't' and 'can't' in a formal essay.
4. Using only the given or only the family name of a person you are referring to. When referring to a person repeatedly, provide their given name and family name (for example, Sigmund Freud) once; when you refer to that person again, simply use their family name (Freud).
5. Mixed style referencing. Avoid combining Harvard and Oxbridge referencing systems. Just use the one style throughout your essay.
6. An essay written mostly or completely in point form. Do not use point or bullet form; all essays must be written as prose.
7. Incorrect use of apostrophes. Avoid the incorrect use of apostrophes (for example, it's is a contraction of 'it is'; it is not the possessive, which is its).
8. Misuse of verbs and nouns. Be aware of the difference between, say, 'affect' (verb – to act upon or have an effect on somebody or something, to move someone emotionally, to infect or damage somebody) and 'effect' (noun – a change or changed state, the state of being in force, an impression produced in the mind of someone, etc.).
9. Incorrect use of connecting words. Be very careful with your use of logical connection words. 'Therefore', 'thus' and 'since this' are often overused or are used wrongly, as are 'infer', 'imply' and 'entail'. Make sure the logical connection really is there.
10. Improper use of colons and semicolons. Learn how to use these punctuations correctly.
11. Overuse of dashes. Do not use dashes (–). Master the art of the comma.
12. Overuse of exclamation marks. This punctuation mark has a very specific use; it does not need to be used for every excited statement.
13. Too much use of quoted material. Do not use quoted material to build your argument. Quotes should be used only to reinforce the argument. The argument itself must be made in your own words.

17 TERMINOLOGY

The use of correct terminology is extremely important in Studies of Religion. Course outcomes P 8 and H 8 specifically refer to the use of appropriate terminology. Using correct terminology indicates a good understanding of the religious tradition as well as a respect for the religion and its adherents.

This applies to your use of language when discussing religion as well as to the language of assessment tasks. Some conventions do apply. For example, Islam is the religious tradition; Muslim refers to its adherents. Both can be used as an adjective, but Islamic generally refers to impersonal things, while Muslim generally to the personal – Islamic beliefs, Muslim women. The adherents of Islam are not Islams. Similarly, Judaism is the religious tradition; Jews refers to the people.

Be aware of similarities in terminology; in Hinduism, Brahma, Brahman and Brahmin refer to three different things. When speaking about similar concepts you must use the correct terms; Moksha is the Hindu term and Nirvana is the Buddhist term to describe a state beyond reincarnation. Avoid saying things are 'the same as …' when referring to different religious traditions; for example, do not say 'paradise in Islam is the same as heaven in Christianity'.

Always be respectful in your use of language when referring to different religious traditions and avoid any hint of racism or derogatory comments.

The Board of Studies has produced *Glossary of Key Words*, a list of significant terms that have been defined. These include terms such as 'discuss', 'explain', 'analyse', 'evaluate', and so on. Ask your teacher for a copy of those words and know what they mean. The Board of Studies once phrased its examination questions using those terms or terms taken directly from the syllabus; however, recent advisory bulletins have noted that questions

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in the HSC need not be restricted to these terms. Questions may be phrased in terms such as 'How …?', or 'To what extent …?'. Other verbs such as 'translate' or 'list' that are not included in the glossary may also be used.

You may find the comments below on the use of particular terms useful.

'Discuss'

If you are asked to 'discuss' you not only have the option of agreeing or disagreeing with the quotation or idea mentioned, but you can also investigate the assumptions behind the question. Be careful though; an approach such as this only remains viable if, at every stage, you are linking your answer back to the question. 'Discuss' implies there are points for and against.

'Compare and contrast' or 'Comment on the relationship between …'

'Comment on the relationship between a deity and a site in Ancient Greece', for example. This sort of question can quickly lead you astray. Essay writers can get carried away with describing the attributes of the deity or the site but forget to examine the relationship. In answering a question such as this you do not need to say anything about the deity except comment on those attributes that link it to a particular place. Don't say 'Athena was associated with the olive tree'. This is no basis for an argument. Do say 'Athena was said to have granted the olive tree to the city. As olive cultivation made up a significant part of the Attica economy [add a footnote here to indicate the source that tells you this] we can see a clear economic link between the beneficence of the deity and the economic viability of the site.' You could then go on to develop a paragraph on the economic relationship, another on social relationship and at the end of each paragraph link your evidence to your argument and thence back to the question. In your conclusion you bring together these points, which will show the nature of the relationship. By these means you begin to answer the question.

A 'compare and contrast' question works in a similar way. Make sure you do both. Compare and contrast the two phenomena mentioned in the question. Delete anything that is not relevant to the relationship between them. A question that includes compare and contrast will usually be based on an issue where a number of academics are unsure of the relationship between two things. Some secondary sources will suggest a close relationship, others a distant one. Use these sources, as well as your own interpretation of the primary sources, to establish an argument, then conclude by stating how your evidence leads you to agree with one interpretation or another, or discuss your independent conclusions.

'Does …?'

'Does the *Dao De Jing* uphold feminine values?' Again, simply answering yes or no and giving evidence that suggests only one side of the issue will dull your answer. Present evidence for both possibilities, then show why, in the end, the evidence leads you to say yes or no, or perhaps draw some conclusion in between.

'Significance' or 'To what extent …?'

'What is the significance of the Upanishadic phrase "Thou art that?" ' Many answers to a question such as this will talk about the place of 'thou art that' in the Upanishadic tradition. This will not answer the question. You must explain what its significance is. Ultimately, you have to give a quantitative reply – it was very significant, it was not significant, it was moderately significant. To do this you have to put the phenomenon in context. Was this the only important development in Hinduism at the time? Were there others? If so, what were they?

'To what extent …?' requires the same quantitative answer. 'To what extent was early Confucianism the ideology of the conservatives?' This question asks you to identify the conservatives in Chinese history, and then examine to what extent, during the early period of Confucianism, were Master Kung's ideas part of their ideology. We know that Confucianism eventually became part of the conservatives' ideology, but you must concentrate on early Confucianism when legalist ideas were very influential and, some argue, very conservative. Presenting an argument that shows the influence of legalism and Confucianism on those who you have defined as conservatives is sensible. Ultimately, you must bring all this back to answering to what extent was early Confucianism the conservatives' ideology. Always present both sides of the case, then decide through your reasoning, which case, given the evidence, seems stronger.

'Main features'

An example of this style of question would be 'What are the central concerns of religious Daoism?' This is not an excuse to discuss everything about Daoism. Set up a case and argue why, and why not, certain Daoist phenomena are central concerns. Is alchemy really a central concern? Assess how popular it was, or how much the basic assumptions of Daoism rely on alchemy. Explain why alchemy can be seen as central, and how it can be seen as peripheral, then make up your own mind. Follow this pattern for other concerns that might be considered central.

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In other words, a question is often seeking more information, or deeper judgements, than we are used to giving. Think through the terminology of questions when writing a response and ensure that you write at a deep enough level.

18 SOURCES

Many students will look at their textbook as their main source of information for the course. Textbooks are written to get you started in the Studies of Religion course. They are mainly written to help you pass the course, but all textbook authors would agree that to do well in the subject you must read further.

There are many sources that can be drawn upon in Studies of Religion. As well as textbooks, these include encyclopaedias, academic and popular books, and journals. These are the most commonly used, but in some ways the least helpful. All of these sources are secondary sources and are inevitably the opinions of one person and biased in some way.

There are other sources that would be considered primary sources. These include sacred texts, people, buildings and direct religious experiences. These are also open to interpretation and can also reflect some bias, but at least they are closer to the religious tradition than those who simply write about it.

I often write about Hinduism, for example, but I recognise that I interpret what I see, hear and read. I am not a Hindu, which protects me from one bias, but I am a Christian, which may add another. If I visit a Hindu temple and write about it, you are reading my interpretation of what I see. I may have done excellent research and written some very good comments and analysis; I may even have brought some insights that a Hindu may not be aware of, but it is still my interpretation. If you visit a Hindu temple, you have your own experience of that visit, as well as your own insights and understanding. Your visit is primary research; reading about my visit is secondary research. You may well find you learn much from both but, arguably, primary research should take priority.

When you come to conduct your research and study you should, from what you have learnt in class, have done enough reading to know the areas of the course that are interesting to you or relevant to your study. Once you have your question, start planning your research. Carefully reread class notes, your own notes and textbooks. From these and other readings develop a line of argument directed at the question.

Make sure you understand what the question is asking you and what are likely to be the main issues and key terms you need to define. You might like to look at general books on religion for overviews of the area you plan to research, but leave these alone after you feel you are developing an answer. Always give priority to primary sources, then consider how secondary scholarship approaches the issues of the question. Don't be put off by large books or obscure primary texts; always look at the chapter headings and index to help you locate specific information.

Be warned: I have read some excellent papers by some brilliant students who still get terrible marks. These students become so enmeshed with the research that they forget the question. You will be marked on how well you answer the stated question, not your own question.

Primary sources should be given priority; however, in Studies of Religion many of these sources will be conditioned by faith or doctrine. Literature produced by the religion concerned, or scripture that the religion is based on, assumes a particular worldview that might be quite different from your own. When you examine the literature of a religion, continually ask yourself how it is constructed, and for what purpose. Also ask yourself how you might be biased in your own reading.

Be careful in your use of encyclopaedias. Works such as the *Encyclopaedia of Religion in Australia* are a great starting point, but should be only a starting point. Such books are written by scholars in the field and often cover, in summary, articles on religious phenomena that cannot be found in any other document. A better idea is to look to the bibliographical details in the encyclopaedias and see if you can read the texts mentioned there. Ask your teacher, librarian or another student for helpful books you can use.

The internet is increasingly providing information on all sorts of religious activity. When using online sources, try to remain aware of the reasons why the website might have been created. Was it to promote a religion, to condemn one or to foster good scholarship? How valid is the source and what bias is evident?

Be careful, too, of open source sites such as Wikipedia. This site can give you a great overview of an issue to get you started, but you really cannot quote it. Wikipedia entries remain open sources – anyone can go in and change the information. You must make a judgement about how useful and appropriate this website is. To cite a web page, footnote the URL and cite the date you accessed it. The date is necessary because many sites are updated or drop out of circulation. To use the internet as a replacement for good scholarship is tempting, but it is also very easily detected. Just as Google enables you to source information quickly and easily, it makes it just as easy for markers to check which parts of your essay you might have 'accidentally' borrowed off the web without acknowledgement. Plagiarism from the web is very easy to discover. It is also one of the worst intellectual crimes you can commit as a student. You will be found out.

Personal interviews are a great way of sourcing first hand accounts of faith. If you are interviewing someone connected with a particular faith and you expressly have their permission to quote them (which you should get

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in writing), then footnote any quotes by writing: 'Personal interview with [insert their name, their position in the religion and whether they are a layperson, monk or rabbi]', and then give the place and date of the interview. Interviews are a great primary source and allow you to develop questions and arguments that you may not find in a text. You should, of course, carefully consider how you will conduct yourself in an interview setting, take steps to ensure that you respect the person and their religion, and behave and dress appropriately.

Do not quote from classes. Feel free to ask your teacher for advice on where he or she read or quoted a particular reference, but a class is a teaching device; your teacher is placing information in context for you and is not to be considered an academic source.

The material found on tapes, DVDs, videos and films can sometimes provide you with access to essential social phenomena. Unfortunately, these media can complicate an essay, because an essay is on paper and precious words can be taken up describing what is taking place in the visual or aural realm. Nonetheless, watching relevant television programs, reading newspapers or magazines and watching movies are excellent ways of looking at how religion is reported and expressed in today's society. There are many useful documentaries about religion that are available; sometimes they can be a helpful – and relevant – break from the books. But remember, they may be biased as well.

Much scholarship in Studies of Religion is conducted in German, French and other languages. At university the use of foreign language sources in your essays is encouraged, but it is not necessary at HSC level. If you want to use other language sources to quote a piece of vital non-English text, provide an English translation in the body of the text, or place an English translation in the footnotes.

A bibliography is an essential part of academic writing. It is a list of books and other sources you have used to come to the conclusions in your essay. Check with your school library about the format and use of bibliographies and acknowledgement of sources. It is extremely important to acknowledge your sources when writing. Make sure you use the correct format to do so.

19 FURTHER STUDY

When you are caught up preparing for the HSC, probably the last thing you want to know about is more study. But no doubt you have enjoyed Studies of Religion so much that you will soon ask yourself: What now? Or What if I want to take Studies of Religion further?

Studies of Religion can help people in a variety of occupations to understand the people they will be working with in the future. Many students go on to study religion at university as part of an arts course or in more specialised study. There are considerable academic opportunities for those who want to go on to study this subject at postgraduate level.

CONCLUSION

Remember, Studies of Religion is a life orientated course, not just an HSC exam subject. The skills and knowledge you learn in this subject will help you in the future in your relationships with others, your knowledge of society and culture, and in your own personal growth and development.

Religion never gets boring or irrelevant. Students who choose Studies of Religion are unique. Perhaps aided by the delicate nature of the subject, they stand out due to their willingness to welcome students from all sorts of backgrounds into the infinitely broad expanse of our subject area and encourage and support them all the way. We understand that religion is not everyone's cup of tea; for many years, the study of religion has been seen as less relevant in a society that has tried hard to remain secular and atheistic. Yet because our subject area is so broad, we have found that students enjoy linking their own interests to the study of beliefs, myths and religious systems that profoundly express the amazing dimensions of human experience.

There is a particular technical approach to such a study. We hope this toolkit has explained to you the basics of this approach and generally made life easier for you. We hope, too, that this little guide will stay on your desk, or desktop, for years, helping you right through your first degree and into the next … and the next.

Good luck with your study.

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