

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

J625

For first teaching in 2016

J625/03 Summer 2024 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate responses is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Paper 3 series overview

J625/03 is a one-hour paper which includes two thirty-mark questions, each broken down into five parts. There are three questions each worth three marks, followed by a six-mark and a fifteen-mark question. All the assessment objectives are assessed during the paper. The three-mark and six-mark questions target AO1. On the fifteen-mark questions, both AO1 and AO2 are assessed. There are no optional questions and hence no rubric errors. Extra marks are given for spelling, punctuation, and grammar. The SPaG. marks are only given explicitly on Question 1 (e).

To address the assessment objectives, candidates need to have a good knowledge and understanding of Jewish beliefs, teachings and practices. These facets of Judaism are equally apparent in the two questions and over the paper as a whole. Candidates must also be able to analyse and evaluate the issues that these aspects of the faith might raise. In doing so, candidates should refer to sources of wisdom and authority. Candidates must be able to use the available time effectively, relative to the marks available for each question. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are assessed in different ways on the two longer part (e) questions. Candidates are not penalised for misspelling words transliterated from the Hebrew.

As mentioned, the time spent on questions should be dictated by the number of marks available. It is crucial that candidates devote adequate time and effort to part (e) responses as these constitute half of the marks available. The space available in the answer booklet is indicative of how much a candidate should write for each question, although extra space is provided at the back of the booklet and examiners are careful to check for this. Time-consuming and complicated essay planning is rarely of benefit although a few brief notes and some acronyms can be of help. Essay structure need not be especially complicated in order to reach the highest levels.

Part (d) questions deal with knowledge and understanding. Examiners have no expectation of seeing any evaluative responses in response to part (d) questions.

Part (e) questions primarily deal with analysis and evaluation. Up to three marks are given for knowledge and understanding. It is important for candidates to refer to sources of wisdom and authority. This could be in the form of a quotation. Candidates are no longer required to overtly present their own opinion, although doing so is by no means discouraged. One of the main challenges for candidates following this specification is to address two assessment objectives in the space of one part (e) question. A top level AO2 response will also normally incorporate good knowledge and understanding of the topic at hand, although candidates do not always receive the same levels for AO1 and AO2 in these questions.

As is always the case on this Judaism paper, there were many examples of good knowledge, understanding, analysis and evaluation. Many candidates performed at a very high standard. Centres and candidates are to be congratulated. Different effective revision and examination strategies were apparent and exemplary teaching was, once again, evident in the way candidates approached the questions. Many candidates made good use of the available time. Sources of wisdom and authority were utilised to good effect.

Occasionally handwriting was difficult to decipher. Marks cannot be given where responses are completely illegible. There were certain less successful areas, including in the stimulus questions (part (e)), which limited the level that could be attained. It is hard to know whether candidates had gaps in their knowledge or had embarked on a response without carefully reading the question.

On certain questions, some candidates confused Judaism with other world faiths, especially Christianity and Islam. Sometimes this might just have been a slip of the pen, or it may have been due to having recently been examined on another faith. On other occasions, candidates are still referencing Christian sources of wisdom and authority on the Judaism paper. Examiners especially reported confusion regarding the treatment of holy books and in the examples provided of G-d's intervention in the world.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• made effective use of the time available• had a good grounding in sources of wisdom and authority• were able to differentiate between Orthodox and Progressive Judaism with accuracy• ensured that they understood the question before embarking on it• were familiar with the concept of 'rites of passage'• were familiar with the concept of 'moral principles'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• did not attempt certain questions• did not take the time to read questions carefully• confused Judaism with other Abrahamic faiths• were insufficiently familiar with the content of the specification• confused the tenets of different Jewish movements• made insufficient use of the time available.

Question 1 (a)

1

(a) Describe why the recitation of Grace after meals is important for Jews.

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..... [3]

Lots of candidates correctly identified that the prayer involves giving thanks to G-d for food. That said, many knew little more than this. There was scope for candidates to describe the references to the covenant, the coming of the Messiah, Israel and Jerusalem. Some knew that Jews thank G-d for the Exodus from Egypt and this was, of course, given marks.

Assessment for learning



Grace after meals includes much more than thanking G-d for the meal. The example below is typical of candidates who only received one mark.

Exemplar 1

Jews recite grace after meals to thank
G-d for feeding them, to thank G-d for
giving them food and to thank G-d for ~~creating~~

This response is typical of candidates who recognised that the prayer involved thanking G-d for food, but little else.

Question 1 (b)

(b) State **three** reasons why a Jew might use a mikveh.

- 1
- 2
- 3

[3]

There were some excellent responses, like that below, that cited the use of the mikveh after menstruation and how it is used before marriage. Candidates were aware of its connections to rites of passage and to festivals. That said, some had no idea about what the mikveh is, or what it might be used for. These candidates either wrote nothing or described another Jewish artefact or ritual. There was also some confusion with Christian ideas about baptism.

Exemplar 2

- 1 *To purify themselves after having a period*
- 2 *When converting to Judaism*
- 3 *Purifying themselves before marriage*

This response is typical of well-informed candidates who were aware of the different functions of a mikveh in a Jewish community.

Question 1 (c)

(c) Describe what Jews believe about the difference between human and non-human lives.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [3]

The wording of this question comes from the specification. The better responses described the idea of sanctity of life and linked this to either being made 'in the image of G-d' or the implications of pikuach nefesh. Others described Jewish beliefs about the soul, eating meat or sacrifices in the Temple. Some candidates misinterpreted 'non-human lives' as referring to disembodied souls in the afterlife.

Question 1 (d)

(d) Outline the importance of Rosh Hashanah for the Jewish community.

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.....

..... [6]

Most candidates recognised that the festival marked the Jewish New Year, or 'Head of the Year'. Among these candidates, there was still confusion with Yom Kippur at times, although reference to the connections between the festivals was, of course, given marks by examiners. The better responses explained the main themes of returning, judgement, forgiveness and so on. Many were able to outline the importance of key rituals like the apple and honey, tashlich, fish heads, fresh fruit and so on. Good responses included explanations for the use of the shofar. As has been indicated, candidates were rewarded for setting out the implications of The Days of Returning. The less successful responses to this question confused Rosh Hashanah with another festival – especially Pesach and Hanukkah. This did not mean that the entire question was unworthy of any credit, but it obviously significantly limited the number of marks given.


Question 1 (e)

(e) 'Jewish moral principles are more important than worship.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Judaism.
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

 Spelling, punctuation and grammar [3]

Where candidates were able to discuss the relative importance of moral principles and worship, examiners saw some impressive responses. This question lent itself to contrasting different Jewish denominations. Candidates were able to cite specific examples of moral principles, including from the Ten Commandments, to good effect. Good use was also made of beliefs about pikuach nefesh and the extent to which mitzvot might be set aside, and the exceptions to this principle. The better responses made exemplary use of sources of wisdom and authority. The main issue faced by some candidates on this question was that they were unclear as to the meaning of 'moral principles'. Some confused moral principles with mitzvot more generally. When this happened, the number of marks a candidate was able to achieve was significantly limited. Sometimes the phrase was used, but there was little evidence that it had been understood by the candidate.

Misconception



The phrase 'moral principles' does not refer to all mitzvot.

Question 2 (a)

2

(a) State **three** ways in which Jews treat the Sefer Torah with respect.

- 1
- 2
- 3

[3]

This question was well answered by many candidates. It is worth noting that examiners were looking to credit references to the physical scroll. There was some confusion with the Quran at times. The more successful responses were able to describe how the scroll is dressed, the use of the yad, storage in the ark and the role of a scribe in writing the text. Candidates were also aware of the implications of the scroll being dropped and the burying of a scroll when beyond repair.

Question 2 (b)

(b) Name **three** books of the Ketuvim.

- 1
- 2
- 3

[3]

Some candidates were able to accurately name three books and move on to the next question, but this was not a topic on which all were confident. This question often resulted in a 'no response' or candidates listing other books from the Tenakh, parts of the Talmud or the New Testament.

Question 2 (c)

(c) State **three** examples Jews might give of G-d intervening in the world.

- 1
- 2
- 3

[3]

Most candidates answered this question well, as in the example provided. The examples often came from the life of Moses – the plagues, the Red Sea, the covenant on Sinai and so on. Many cited the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. Interestingly, candidates also referred to G-d intervening nowadays. They provided examples like G-d answering prayers and sustaining his creation. Examiners credited both of these approaches equally.

Exemplar 3

- 1 The ten plagues in Egypt
- 2 The story of Jonah when God sent a whale
- 3 ~~the~~ when God gave ^{Jews} ~~the~~ the mitzvot

This candidate achieved three marks. It was common for candidates to cite two or three examples from the life of Moses. This was perfectly acceptable.

Question 2 (d)

(d) Outline the importance of Moses for Jews.

.....

.....

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.....

.....

..... [6]

This question was well answered by most candidates. The only candidates who did not achieve highly were those who had confused Moses with Abraham. The highest performing responses referred to key events in the life of Moses and explained how these demonstrated his importance to Jews. Candidates were familiar with the stories of the plagues and the Exodus from Egypt. Many were able to explore the significance of the covenant on Sinai and the impact that this has on the lives of Jews. Some discussed the importance of his leadership during the desert wanderings. Candidates were also given marks for setting out his personal qualities and how these might be important for Jews today. Many viewed Moses as a role model for the Jewish community. Some candidates went on to discuss how he is remembered in the Pilgrim Festivals.

Question 2 (e)*

(e)* 'Women have an important role in Jewish rites of passage.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Judaism.
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

This was another question that enabled candidates to make effective use of their understanding of the different Jewish groups and their varying attitudes towards the role of women in different rites of passage. The wording for the stimulus quotation comes from the specification. A significant number of candidates struggled to achieve the higher levels because they were not familiar with the term 'rites of passage'. This led them to produce well-informed discussions about the role of women in Judaism more generally. Even though some marks were given for these responses, they were limited. Where candidates fully understood the stimulus, examiners reported excellent responses that discussed different rituals marking birth, coming of age, marriage, and death. Because of the inevitable time restrictions, candidates did not have to discuss all the key events to receive full marks for this question. It was very encouraging that many candidates were aware of rituals developed quite recently to mark the birth of a girl in some branches of Judaism.

Assessment for learning



Taking time to read the question carefully might have led to more candidates recognising the importance of discussing rites of passage, and not just the role of women more generally.

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