

*How to tackle
the
Common Entrance
Religious Studies
Exam*

What to Expect in the Exam

Sections 1 and 2 – Old and New Testament Set Texts

You will need to answer one complete question (a, b, c, d) from section one (Old Testament) and one complete question (a, b, c, d) from section two (New Testament). Happily, the Common Entrance questions are very predictable in terms of format, although it is impossible to predict their content. They always run along the following lines:

Part (a) [2 marks] is a short question and it requires a short answer, with two facts if possible.

E.g.

What is sin?

* *Sin is when you do something morally wrong, against God.*

What is temptation?

* *Temptation is when you do something that you know is morally wrong, but you do it anyway.*

What is a parable?

* *A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning; it has a moral message.*

Part (b) [6 marks] requires you to re-tell the story in as much detail as possible, and usually starts with the word “Describe” (5-6 lines minimum if you can, as thorough as possible with no mistakes).

E.g. Describe what happened when Elijah and the prophets of Baal were at the top of Mount Carmel.

Part (c) [6 marks] requires you to think about and explain an aspect from the story, and almost always starts with the word “explain”. It may ask you to explain what a story teaches about someone’s character. You will need to refer to the passage, and make four or five different points – you are NOT simply re-telling the story. Re-read the question regularly, and make sure that you are always answering what it asks. To get the best marks, your answer will need to give a coherent and comprehensive interpretation, showing excellent knowledge and a mature development of the main themes and ideas. Writing in mini paragraphs can help here.

In general, try to make four/five points and explain each one, not one point in five different ways!

E.g. *Explain what Jesus’ death meant for the early Christians.*

For the early Christians, Jesus’ death meant the following:

Firstly, sin could be defeated. Jesus took away original sin by acting as a pure sacrifice, purer than the sacrifices offered in the temple.

Also, it showed that Jesus was part human and part God. This meant that God was able to understand and experience human suffering, yet overcome it – demonstrated by the fact that Jesus came back to life.

In addition, it showed that the temple was not the only way to God – the curtain split and God was everywhere. The Roman Centurion’s acknowledgement of Jesus’ true identity shows that his message was truly open to all.

Finally, it proved that death was not the end. Jesus came back to life; Christians believe that there is judgement after death.

Part (d) [7 marks] requires you to give your own opinions. Write in paragraphs. Give examples, and refer to current affairs and the Bible. Try to give a contrast (“On the other hand...”). The following structure seems to work well:

Paragraph One:	Brief introduction
Paragraph Two:	First example, explained and tied back to the question
Paragraph Three:	Second example, explained and tied back to the question
Paragraph Four:	Optional Linking sentence
Paragraph Five:	Some kind of contrast, showing that you can see another side to the issue. "On the other hand..."
Paragraph Six:	Conclusion, tying your arguments together

E.g.

“It is impossible to be a modern day Good Samaritan.”

Do you agree? Give reasons to support your answer.

In general, I disagree with this statement. I think that it is possible to be a modern day Good Samaritan.

For example, charities like the Red Cross (and Red Crescent) help the needy no matter what their beliefs or background. They go into areas of great poverty, or war zones to offer assistance to anyone who requires it. People in the UK may give money to support this charity because they feel that this is a morally good thing to do. Those working for the charity, and those donating money, could all be seen as modern day Good Samaritans.

Also, Mother Teresa worked in the slums in Calcutta. Her mission was to help those who couldn't help themselves, including lepers and outcasts from society. She followed her Christian conscience and helped people no matter who they were. She could also be classed as a modern day Good Samaritan.

In following Jesus' teaching in Luke 6:31, people should treat others as they would like to be treated themselves. This means that all good Christians should strive to be “Good Samaritans” and help others.

On the other hand, people in the twenty first century are increasingly self-centred and greedy. They like to accumulate money and keep it for themselves. They can also be suspicious of others, especially those from different backgrounds to their own. This makes them less likely to get involved in tricky situations – and so perhaps there are fewer “Good Samaritans” than there used to be.

In conclusion I think that it is certainly possible to be a modern day Good Samaritan, and there are many around, but perhaps it is harder now than it was 2,000 years ago.

Section 3 – World Religions & Contemporary Issues

You need to answer ANY three questions (each is worth 6 marks). You can answer from just one section/religion if you want; you can answer from two or three sections if you prefer. For each answer, try to mention 8-10 “key words”, with no mistakes. Your answer should be at least 5 lines long.

E.g. World Religions: Christianity

Describe what happens at a Christian baptism service:

A baby is baptised to remove original sin (✓) and welcome it into the Christian Church (✓). The baby is dressed in white (✓) which represents purity (✓). The priest pours water (✓) from the font (✓) on the baby's head (because water gives and sustains life (✓)). A candle is lit (✓), symbolising heat, light, life and direction (✓). The baby may be anointed with oil called Chrism (✓), representing cleanliness (✓). Godparents make promises on behalf of the baby (✓), and the baby is officially given a name (✓).

A few general hints...

- Start with **Section 3** (you have to start each section on a new piece of paper anyway, so simply put this page at the back of your answer script when you hand it in). The reason for this is that you earn marks more quickly in Section 3 than in Sections 1 and 2, so if you run out of time at the end (which is quite possible as you may well be writing around four to five sides of A4 in the hour) you stand to lose more marks if you leave Section 3 questions unanswered, as compared to leaving other questions unfinished.
- Aim to spend 5 minutes per question on **Section 3**. Watch the clock and plan to move on when you are 15 minutes into the exam. This means that you should then have 22 minutes for each complete question in Sections 1 and 2, plus a very small amount of reading time.
- It is very easy for you to work out if your **Section 3** answers are worth top marks – count the points you have made (see the ticks in the sample answer on page 3). If you have made 8-10 points with no mistakes, and written around 5 lines, then you should earn 6/6.
- In **Sections 1 and 2**, **parts (a) and (b)** should take around six minutes in total, **part (c)** should take around six minutes, and **part (d)** around ten.
- If **part (c)** asks you to explain about a person's character, the useful words on page 5 might help.
- When tackling **part (c)**, think in bullet points but write in mini paragraphs, explaining yourself as you go. In effect, each mini paragraph represents one of your bullet points.
- For **part (d)**, always write in paragraphs. You should aim to write around three quarters of a page. Use my suggested structure on page three to help. Leave a line between each paragraph.
- Try to include two of the "People" examples from page 5 somewhere in your **part (d)** answers.
- Try to include a selection of the useful **part (d)** words from page 6 – but only if they are appropriate to your answers!
- Try to include reference both to current affairs, and to elsewhere in the Bible, in your **part (d)** answers.

Overall:

- Remember that the standard of your written English is important – careless spelling mistakes and scruffy handwriting will mean that you quickly lose the goodwill of the examiner: certainly not what you want to happen!
- If you do finish early, then keep checking your answers through until the exam ends – there will always be ways in which they can be improved.

People (part d examples)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

- Stood up for his beliefs and was a pacifist.
- Academic & head of a German training college for pastors (founding member of *The Confessing Church*).
- Encouraged people to refuse to do Nazi military service.
- Publicly opposed persecution of Jews – said that this was against Christian principles.
- Helped Jews to escape.
- Involved in the resistance movement, and plots to assassinate Hitler.
- Imprisoned and executed at Flossenberg concentration camp on 9th April 1945.

Martin Luther King (1929-1968)

- American civil rights leader.
- Stood up for his beliefs and was a pacifist.
- Baptist minister.
- Problems black people faced included:
 - having to go to special schools.
 - having to shop in special shops
 - having to sit at the back of buses.
 - having difficulty in voting.
 - being paid half of a white person's salary.
- 1955 – Montgomery bus boycott. Rosa Parks. The next year, the law was changed.
- 1963 – organised a peaceful march of schoolchildren in Birmingham, Alabama. Police response included dogs and high-pressure water hoses. Many children injured.
- 1964 – Nobel Peace Prize.
- 1965 – peaceful march to encourage equal voting rights for blacks. Police used tear gas and batons. Before long, the law was changed.
- Pictures of police aggression were broadcast on television around the world; Martin Luther-King, his cause and his non-violent protests gained worldwide support.
- 1968 – assassinated by James Earl Ray.

Mother Teresa (1910-1997)

- Followed her conscience even though this wasn't straightforward.
- Helped others without any thought of reward for herself.
- Worked in the slums of Calcutta.
- Started a new order of nuns called *The Missionaries of Charity*.
 - She opened a home for the destitute dying – regardless of their beliefs. No one turned away.
 - She started schools for the poor.
 - She set up a special town for lepers.
 - Won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979.

Useful Words, Examples and Definitions

Useful part c words, if the question asks you to explain someone's character:

Wise, Respectful, Forgiving, Trusting, Intelligent, Testing, Following rules, Faithful to God, Giving a chance, Looking after, Powerful, Proving power, Rewarding, Doubtful, Not giving in easily, Brave, Confident, Strong, Defeating evil, Setting example, Controversial, Kind, All-knowing, Influential, Sense of humour, Violent, Cunning, Over-reacted, Deceitful, Dishonest, Loyal, Naive

Useful part d words:

<u>Conscience</u>	The voice in your head telling you how to act
<u>Moral</u>	Rights and wrongs
<u>Parable</u>	An earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It might be called an...
<u>Allegory</u>	Not literally true
<u>Miracle</u>	Something that is not scientifically possible
<u>Luke 6:31</u>	Treat others as you would like them to treat you
<u>Sin</u>	An act against God; morally wrong
<u>Crime</u>	Doing something that is against the law
<u>Forgiveness</u>	Accepting what has happened and moving on; not forgetting
<u>Justice</u>	The consequences of your actions. Might include: reform, punishment, deterring & protecting.