

Common Entrance Religious Studies

A possible revision scheme from www.ce-rs.com

I am often asked the question, “How do I revise for RS?”. The simple answer is that there is no ideal method; everyone revises differently. I have put together a few tips that have worked for my pupils over the years. They might not work for you – in which case, I hope you will find a system that is effective for your own learning style.

Remember that it is better to do a short amount of focused, concentrated revision than to spend hours staring at notes and then remember nothing. The best revision involves a mixture of reading (and possibly highlighting), thinking and writing. Many people remember things better if they have written them down; others prefer to listen to them over and over again. Often, a mixture of both methods can be effective. You certainly need to take time to stop and think about the ethics topics, and relevant current affairs – have you read a newspaper lately? I once had a pupil who liked to record various key revision points then play these back to himself every evening – which worked very well. You might find it useful to download my podcast summaries of the Set Texts via www.ce-rs.com and then listen to these on your iPod in order to help you with your revision. The point is, once you have found a method that works for you, stick with it.

Revision is hard work, it can sometimes be quite boring, and it tears you away from all the other things that you would rather be doing. However, in the long run, it’s worth it. Common Entrance is ultimately a pass/fail exam and every year there are pupils who fail to get into their first choice of school. You certainly don’t want to be in that situation. Don’t aim simply to “scrape” a pass; aim to score the best grades you possibly can. You want to be able to feel proud of your results.

The advice below assumes that you have printed copies of my three sets of Common Entrance notes, available from this website (Set Texts, World Religions and How to Tackle the Exam).

1. By the end of the Easter holiday, make sure that you have read through the Set Texts and World Religions notes a few times (listening to my podcast summaries of the Set Texts might help you with your learning). Use a highlighter pen and pick out the main points in the booklet if you want. You do not have to answer any of the questions at this stage; you can if you want (every little helps). You will probably have quite a lot of revision to do over the Easter holiday. It is better to do a little RS but to do it properly than to try half-heartedly to do a lot but actually to remember very little.
2. If you want some question practice at this stage, I recommend concentrating on World Religions. Remember, for each answer you are aiming to write 5-6 lines, and to mention 8-10 “key facts”. If you are preparing for Christianity and Judaism, here are some practice questions. Use lined paper. Aim to spend 5 minutes on each answer.

Christianity practice questions (each worth 6 marks)

Describe the major events in the life of Jesus · Explain why Jesus is called Christ and Son of God · Describe and explain the symbols used at a baptism ceremony · Describe and explain three different types of Christian prayer · Outline some of the different Christian denominations, and also some of the different titles given to Christian leaders · Describe the main features of a Christian wedding ceremony · Describe and explain the importance of Good Friday and Easter Sunday for Christians · Describe one important place of Christian pilgrimage and explain its significance

Judaism practice questions (each worth 6 marks)

Describe how Judaism began · Describe the role of a typical rabbi in his (or her) synagogue · What are the Torah and the Talmud, and what do Jews believe about them? · Describe the main features of a typical synagogue · What do Jews believe about the Messiah? · Explain the use of the mezuzah in the Jewish family home · Describe a Jewish wedding ceremony · What happens when girls and boys become Bat and Bar Mitzvah?

3. From day one of the Summer Term (or before), it is crucial that you work on the “little and often” principle. Initially, **aim to spend at least 5 (focused) minutes per day on your RS**. Read through the Set Texts and World Religions notes regularly. **Remember, 55% of the marks in the exam are available simply for factual knowledge. You must learn the texts and religions thoroughly. If you don't, you cannot achieve a top grade.** If you haven't used a highlighter yet, use one now. But don't simply highlight everything – pick out key words and facts. Also, start answering some of the questions in the Set Texts booklet. You don't have to answer them all. Your answers don't have to be in sentences. The questions are there simply to help you with your revision and to make you think more about the texts. Use my quizzes, downloadable (with answers) from www.ce-rs.com, in order to test yourself. Spending 5 minutes on a few questions, or simply listening to two or three of my podcasts, can be your RS revision for that day – quite painless!
4. Make use of my notes on *How to Tackle the Exam*. Read through them a few times and try to follow the advice. Also, check back on www.ce-rs.com for some practice questions – and practise answering them. Initially, use the notes and advice to help you as you write your answers. As time goes by, try to answer them on your own. At this stage, aim to answer them well, even if this takes a little longer than you will have in the exam.
5. I am a great believer in doing more writing as the exam draws nearer (I think that this is because I am making up for the fact that I am not a great believer in doing much writing in the preceding years!). Begin to practise questions against the clock at least three weeks before the exam. Give yourself 22 minutes (and no more) for a complete Set Texts question. Answer each individual World Religions/Contemporary Issues question within 5 minutes. The exam involves an awful lot of writing, so it's worth setting aside an hour in the week before the real paper in order to attempt an entire past paper, against the clock. That way, if you get your timings wrong it doesn't matter – and you will be better prepared for the proper exam the next week.
6. It is crucial that you get the balance right in the few days before your exams. If you work too hard then you can burn yourself out; if you don't work hard enough then you might not be properly prepared. You certainly need to revise. You also need to make some time to relax.

Don't panic – equally, there's probably something wrong if you aren't a little nervous.

Your school will almost certainly lay on a whole range of treats and excursions for you once the exams are over. You will enjoy these all the more if you feel that you deserve them because you have revised thoroughly, done your best in the exams, and passed into your first choice public school with your best possible grades.

Good luck!