

Academic Year 2026-27
Semester 1
HKU

BSTC 1003 Introduction to Religious Studies

(6 Credits)

(The course is open to students from all faculties as a free elective)

Course Instructor:

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Class Day and Time: Tuesday 1:00 pm to 2:50 pm (110 minutes)

Class Venue: RHT

Class Days: September: 1, 8, 15, 22, 29; October: 6, 20, 27; November: 3, 10, 17, 24

[No tutorial classes]

Course Description

In this course, students survey the academic study of religion through learning its subject matter, history, and interpretive frames to understand different ways people have thought, felt, and acted as religious devotees over the course of long histories of their religions and how scholars have enhanced our knowledge of religion and individual religious traditions through multiple methodological approaches. Students learn the subject matter by examining key beliefs, practices, and historical developments of selected world religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Taoism, and Shinto, and learn the history and interpretive frameworks of studying religion by surveying the antecedents of the religious studies discipline and critically assessing its theological, sociological, psychological, and phenomenological interpretive frames.

Coursework 100%

Course Objectives

- To enable students to be familiar with beliefs, practices, and historical developments of individual religious traditions.
- To enable students to distinguish academic study of religion from religious study of religion.
- To enable students to be familiar with varying academic approaches to the study of religion.
- To enable students to critically assess significant contributions of different scholars to enhance our knowledge of religion.
- To enable students to develop their research and academic writing skills.

Course Outline

This course provides a comprehensive overview of the world's major religions, important theoretical perspectives in the study of religion, and critical contemporary issues in religious studies. The goal is

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to foster a deep understanding and respect for religious diversity, as well as to develop critical thinking skills by examining the roles religion plays in society and individual lives. Hence, each class will include a blend of lectures, question-and-answer sessions, and interactive class activities designed to deepen understanding and engage students in the material actively.

Class 1: 1 September 2026 – Overview of Religion and Religious Studies

Lecture: Defining Religion and Religious Studies

Activities: Syllabus review, Q&A

Class 2: 8 September 2026 – Exploring Hinduism

Lecture: Introduction to Hindu beliefs, scriptures, and practices

Activities: Q&A session, Class activity

Class 3: 15 September 2026 - Sigmund Freud's View on Religion

Lecture: Analysis of Freud's psychoanalytic approach to religion including totem and taboo

Activities: Q&A session, Class activity

Class 4: 22 September 2026 – Shinto: An Overview

Lecture: - Exploration of Shinto beliefs, practices, shrines, and communities.

Activities: Q&A session, Class activity

Class 5: 29 September 2026 – Durkheim's Sociology of Religion

Lecture: - Exploration of Durkheim's ideas on society's role in shaping religious life

Activities: Q&A session, Class activity

Class 6: 6 October 2026 – Judaism: Beliefs and Practices

Lecture: - Examination of Jewish history, major branches, scriptures, and holy days

Activities: Q&A session, Class activity, **Quiz 1**

[Reading Week: No Class]

Class 7: 20 October 2026 – Comparative Religion: History and Phenomenology

Lecture: - Comparative analysis of religious traditions and religious languages

Activities: Q&A session, Class activity

Class 8: 27 October 2026 – Christianity: Foundations and Branches

Lecture: - Exploration of the life of Jesus, early Christianity, the Gospels, and denominational diversity

Activities: Q&A session, Group activity

Class 9: 3 November 2026 – Mircea Eliade's Perspective on Religion

Lecture: - Discussion on Eliade's views on sacred vs. profane, symbols, myths, and sacred time

Activities: Q&A session, Group activity

Class 10: 10 November – Islam: Faith and Practice

Lecture: - Discussion on Islamic beliefs, the Five Pillars, the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and denominational differences

Activities: Q&A session, Group activity

Class 11: 17 November 2026 – Postmodernism's Influence on Religion

Lecture: - Study of postmodernist views on religion and exploration of new forms of religiosity
Activities: Q&A session, Group activity, **Quiz 2**

Class 12: 24 November 2026 – Insider-Outsider Perspectives in Religious Studies

Lecture: - Examination of methodological approaches in studying religion: empathetic vs. explanatory
Activities: Q&A session, Group activity

Teaching and Learning Activities

1. Pre-class Reading

Students are expected to read from the recommended reading list and lecture notes on an ongoing basis. These readings:

- Prepare you for the topics discussed each week.
- Introduce you to key scholars and classic texts in the academic study of religion.
- Support your work on the video assignment and review essay by providing examples of methods, theories, and debates that you can draw on in your own analysis.

2. Class Lectures

Lectures provide a structured overview of:

- Major religious beliefs and practices across different traditions.
- Core academic categories, concepts, theories, and methods used in the study of religion. They are designed to give you the conceptual framework needed to interpret both the readings and the religious communities you study in your assignments.

3. Class Activities and Quizzes

In-class activities and short quizzes help you to:

- Learn and retain key terms and concepts.
- Practise applying theoretical tools to concrete examples.
- Develop teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills through discussion and collaborative tasks.

4. Video Report and Review Essay

The video assignment and the review essay allow you to:

- Practise basic research skills (locating, selecting, and using academic sources).
- Develop your writing, argumentation, and presentation skills.
- Deepen your understanding of world religions and the different academic approaches to studying religion by applying course concepts to specific cases, scholars, or methods.

Assessments

Coursework Breakdown

The entire course evaluation comprises 100% coursework, distributed as follows to assess various competencies:

Assessment Tasks	Weighting	Day
1. Class Participation	20%	Weekly classes
2. Quiz 1	10%	On October 6
3. Quiz 2	10%	On November 17
4. Video Assignment: Report on a Religious Community	30%	Due October 31
5. Review Essay	30%	Due November 30

1. Class participation (Class activities) 20%

Class participation is evaluated in three components:

- **Attendance – 5%**

Regular and punctual attendance is expected. Marks are based on frequency of attendance and timely arrival to class. Medical or other approved absences will be taken into account.

- **Participation – 10%**

This mark is primarily for completing the class activities during class time (individual and group), and joining group discussions and sharing, either voluntarily or when asked. Activities in most classes are completed either on paper or online. For online activities, students are required to use their real name so that completion can be recorded accurately. Given the large class size, participation is assessed mainly through evidence of activity completion and visible engagement with group work, rather than detailed monitoring of each individual contribution. Make-up completion of missed class activities is permitted only for students who absences are due to medical or other approved reasons.

- **Quality of Contribution / Engagement – 5%**

Class activities are collected each week and kept by the instructor. They are not graded individually, but reviewed at the end of the course. Marks are then allocated based on the overall quality of engagement and completion across the semester (e.g., effort, thoughtfulness, and consistency in doing the tasks), rather than on the accuracy of answers. Since the class activity sheets are collected, students who wish to keep a record of their work are encouraged to take a photo of the completed activity before submitting it.

2. Two Quizzes 20% (Open Book)

- All quizzes are open-book and administered in paper format.
- Each quiz is based on course content discussed in five classes.
- Each quiz contains 20 MCQs to be completed within 10 minutes.
- Quiz 1 (given in class 6, **October 6**) covering the lecture notes of classes 1 - 5
- Quiz 2 (given in class 11, **November 17**) covering the lecture notes of classes 6 - 10
- Permitted materials include printed or digital lecture notes and personalised notes only (e.g., on personal devices such as tablets or laptops).
- Use of AI tools, communication with others, or any unauthorized aids is strictly prohibited and will result in disqualification.

3. Video Assignment: Report on a Religious Community 30%

Assignment Overview

Create a short documentary-style video that presents a specific local/national/regional religious community in a clear, accurate, and engaging way. Your video should:

- Introduce the community and its basic identity.
- Describe its tradition, history, and core beliefs.
- Show how it is lived today: people, practices, places, and institutions.
- Explain how the community is changing in the contemporary world and what challenges it faces.

You are not expected to cover everything in equal detail. Instead, choose a few key themes and explore them with depth and clarity. However, to give a clearer picture of the community, you may want to discuss (among others):

- Name and **tradition** (e.g., Sunni Islam, Theravāda Buddhism, Roman Catholicism).
- **History and origins** of this community (globally or locally).
- **Location and population** (where they are, approximate size, main languages or ethnic groups).
- **Devotees and specialists** (lay people, monks/nuns, priests, imams, rabbis, gurus, etc.).
- **Places of worship** and/or important institutions (temples, churches, mosques, synagogues, community centres, schools).
- **Key scriptures or authoritative texts** (Bible, Qur'an, Tripiṭaka, Guru Granth Sahib, etc.).
- **Core beliefs** (e.g., about God/the gods, karma, salvation, liberation, afterlife).
- **Rituals and practices** (e.g., daily prayer, festivals, pilgrimage, life-cycle rituals).
- **Conversion and membership** (how people join or leave; attitudes towards converts).
- **Contemporary changes and challenges** (e.g., migration, secularisation, state policy, interfaith relations, internal debates, digital media, gender roles).

Format

Length

- Individual project: **5 minutes** (± 30 seconds).
- Group project (2–4 students): **5 minutes + 1 minute per extra member**
 - 2 members = 6 minutes
 - 3 members = 7 minutes
 - 4 members = 8 minutes

The required length of the main video (excluding the contribution segment) may be up to 30 seconds over or 30 seconds under. Videos exceeding or falling short by more than 30 seconds will be subject to mark deduction, determined case-by-case, considering the extent of the deviation, its impact on content and assessment criteria, and any submitted justification (e.g., technical issues or documented circumstances). Students are highly encouraged to stay within the time limit. Videos that are significantly shorter or longer may be penalized.

Visuals

- Include **relevant visuals** such as photos, short video clips, maps, timelines, diagrams, or graphics.
- Visuals must:
 - Clearly relate to what is being said.
 - Be legible (text large enough to read).
 - Be of reasonable quality (not blurry or distorted).
- There is **no minimum number** of visuals, but they must **substantively support** your explanation, not just decorate it.

Weight

This assignment is worth **30%** of the final course grade.

Group Work

You may work:

- Individually, or
- In a group of **2, 3, or 4** students.

Individual contribution (for groups)

- At the end of the video, include a brief **“Contribution Statement” segment** (about 1 minute total, not 1 minute each).

- Each member must **appear on screen or in voice** stating their role(s), for example:
 - “I researched the history and beliefs.”
 - “I conducted and edited the interviews.”
 - “I designed the visuals and did the video editing.”
- You may combine roles (e.g., research + narration).
- The “Contribution Statement” segment is not applicable for individual submission.

Submission for groups

- **Only one** member uploads the assignment on the course platform.
- The video must clearly list **all group members’ full names and student numbers**:
 - At the start or end of the video, and
 - In the written summary file.

Topic Selection

Choose **one specific religious community**. It can be defined by:

- **Location**: “The Christian community in Kowloon Bay”; “The Jain community in London.”
- **Tradition + Location**: “Sunni Muslims in Egypt”; “Theravāda Buddhists in Thailand”; “Catholics in Sri Lanka.”
- **Ethnic or cultural group** (if relevant): e.g., “Tamil Hindus in Malaysia.”

Guidelines for choosing a topic

- **Researchability**: Make sure you can find enough reliable information (books, academic articles, reputable websites, official community pages, etc.).
- **Manageable scope**: Avoid something so broad that you cannot be specific (e.g., “Christians in the world”) or so narrow that information is impossible to find.
- **Personal interest / access**: If possible, choose a community you can observe (online or in person) or have some contact with, as this often leads to richer material.
- **Angle or focus**: You may choose a special focus, such as:
 - A particular **festival or ritual** and what it reveals about the community.
 - The **impact of migration or globalization** on this community.
 - How this community negotiates **modernity, technology, gender, or politics**.

Submission Details

- **Due Date: October 31, 2026 (Saturday), before 23:59.**
Late submissions may be penalized according to course policy.

You must submit:

1. **The video (via link)**
 - Upload to a stable platform (e.g., YouTube unlisted, Vimeo, or university system).
 - Ensure the link works and **viewing permissions are correct**.
2. **A Word or PDF document** containing:
 - University AI declaration form: Any AI use—or the absence of AI use—must be declared (Submission without a completed AI form will not be graded).
 - The **video title**.
 - The **video link**.
 - A **100–200 word summary** of the video:
 - Clearly state the community chosen.
 - Outline the main themes (e.g., history, beliefs, practices, contemporary challenges).

- The **full names and student numbers** of all contributors.
- Reference list / bibliography (About **five** works cited is normally sufficient. Cite appropriately.)

Not counted toward the word limit (but must appear in the video itself):

- Bibliography / references / works cited.
- Credits for visuals (image/video sources, music, etc.).
- Detailed individual contribution information (for group work only).

Grading Criteria

1. Relevance and Depth (25%)

- **A+/A/A-**: Focuses clearly on one specific community; excellent balance between describing its tradition and explaining contemporary changes and challenges; uses concrete examples.
- **B+/B/B-**: Covers most key elements (history, beliefs, practices, etc.) with some depth; may lack detail or clarity in a few areas.
- **C+/C/C-**: Basic description of the community; limited explanation of change, challenges, or internal diversity.
- **D+/D**: Very general or incomplete description; important aspects of the community are missing or unclear.

2. Use of Visuals (20%)

- **A+/A/A-**: Visuals are well-chosen, clearly explained, and significantly improve understanding (e.g., maps used to clarify migration; ritual photos timed with narration).
- **B+/B/B-**: Visuals are generally relevant but may sometimes be repetitive, poorly labelled, or not fully integrated into the narration.
- **C+/C/C-**: Few visuals, or many irrelevant/low-quality visuals; limited explanation of what is shown.
- **D+/D**: Very minimal or distracting visuals; visuals do not support the content.

3. Understanding, Analysis, Synthesis, and Application (25%)

- **A+/A/A-**: Shows strong understanding of the community; explains connections between beliefs, practices, and social context; identifies patterns of continuity and change; may briefly relate to course concepts.
- **B+/B/B-**: Demonstrates generally accurate understanding; some attempt to explain “why” things are as they are, but analysis is uneven or underdeveloped.
- **C+/C/C-**: Mostly descriptive (“what” happens) with little explanation of “why” or “so what”; some inaccuracies or unexamined assumptions.
- **D+/D**: Largely uncritical or confused; significant misunderstandings or factual errors.

4. Structure and Organization (15%)

- **A+/A/A-**: Clear introduction (who/what/where), logically ordered sections (e.g., history → beliefs → practices → changes), and a concise conclusion that summarises key points.
- **B+/B/B-**: Overall structure is clear but some transitions are abrupt or sections feel unbalanced.
- **C+/C/C-**: Basic structure present but lacks smooth flow; viewers may struggle to see how sections connect.
- **D+/D**: Disjointed, repetitive, or confusing; difficult to follow the argument or narrative.

5. Mechanics (15%)

- **A+/A/A-**: Clear audio; narration is easy to understand and well-paced; minimal language errors; editing is smooth; titles and captions are correct and readable; overall professional appearance.
- **B+/B/B-**: Occasional issues with sound, language, or editing, but they do not seriously affect comprehension.

- **C+/C/C-**: Noticeable problems with pronunciation, background noise, subtitles, or basic editing that reduce clarity.
- **D+/D**: Frequent technical or language errors; video is difficult to hear, see, or follow.

Guidance for Creating the Video

Choosing and Narrowing Your Topic

- Ensure **enough sources**: academic books/articles, reputable websites, official community materials, and (if possible) interviews or observations.
- If the community is very large, consider a **sub-focus** (e.g., “Youth in the Muslim community in New Zealand” rather than all Muslims in New Zealand).

Research and Scriptwriting

- Start with **background research** to understand the broader tradition.
- Then **zoom in** on:
 - Local history (how and when this community formed where you study it).
 - Specific beliefs and practices that are central for this group.
 - Recent changes or debates affecting them.
- Write a **structured script** with:
 - Clear sections (e.g., “History,” “Beliefs,” “Rituals,” “Contemporary Challenges”).
 - Simple, accurate explanations of key terms (avoid unexplained jargon).
 - A conversational but respectful tone.

Visuals and Editing

- Match visuals to narration: show what you are talking about at that moment.
- Use:
 - Maps (to show spread or migration).
 - Photos of places of worship and community events.
 - Short clips (if you have permission).
 - Simple graphics (e.g., timeline, family tree, organisational chart).
- Keep editing clean:
 - Avoid overly flashy transitions.
 - Use captions for names, places, and key terms.
 - Ensure background music (if used) is low and does not overpower speech.

Group Dynamics (if applicable)

- Early in the process, assign **clear roles** (research, script, on-screen presentation, editing, visuals, fact-checking).
- Schedule **regular check-ins** with specific tasks and deadlines.
- Keep a simple **contribution log** so that the “Contribution Statement” at the end of the video is accurate and fair.

Academic Integrity

- Use **credible sources** and keep track of them.
- Include a **“References” or “Sources”** slide or section in the video:
 - Books, articles, websites, interviews, and image/video sources.
- Do not copy text or narration from other videos or websites. Paraphrase and explain in your own words.

Final Checks Before Submission

- Does the video:

- Clearly identify the **specific community**?
- Address **both tradition and contemporary change/challenges**?
- Stay within the required **time limit**?
- Are:
 - Audio, visuals, and subtitles clear?
 - All group members properly **credited**?
 - References and image credits included?
- Test the **video link** from another device before submitting.

Following these guidelines will help you produce a focused, well-researched, and engaging video that demonstrates a strong understanding of your chosen religious community.

4. Review Essay on the Study of Religion 30%

Review Essay on the Study of Religion

Assignment Overview

- **Essay Type:** Critical review essay
- **Length:** 1,500 words (Acceptable range: 1450-1550 words)
- **Weight:** 30% of course grade
- **Deadline:** **30 Monday 2026**, before 23:59
- **Submission Format:**
 - No specific font style, size, or line spacing is mandated, but formatting must be consistent and readable throughout the submission (e.g., a standard serif or sans-serif font, 11–12 pt, single or 1.5 line spacing is recommended).
 - The word count must be clearly shown. Do not show the number of characters.
 - Include a **cover page** with:
 - Essay title
 - Your full name
 - UID number
 - Word count (excluding cover page, footnotes, and bibliography)
 - You must include the completed AI Tools Declaration Form and adhere to the University AI Policy (attach the form in the first page of your submission). If you use AI for grammar checking or rewording, you must include your original, unedited text as an appendix or separate section in the same submission file. Any AI use—or the absence of AI use—must be declared (Submission without a completed AI form will not be graded).

Purpose of the Assignment

This assignment asks you to engage deeply with how religion is studied in the academy—through methods, key scholars, or influential texts. You will:

- Explain the key ideas of your chosen topic.
- Critically evaluate its strengths, limits, and impact.
- Show how it helps (or fails to help) us understand religion.

You are expected to go beyond description and offer a clear, well-argued assessment.

Topic Options (Choose ONE)

You may choose one of the options below or, with the instructor's approval, develop a closely related

topic of your own.

Option 1: Methodological Approach

Critically analyse **one methodological approach** to the study of religion, for example:

- Phenomenology of religion
- Comparative method
- Sociological, psychological, anthropological, or historical approaches

Your essay should:

- Explain what the method is and how it is used.
- Outline its historical development and main representatives.
- Analyse its strengths and limitations for understanding religion.
- (Recommended) Compare it briefly with at least one other method.

Option 2: Scholar's Contribution

Critically review the work of **one influential scholar** in the study of religion, for example:

- F. Max Müller (science of religion)
- Émile Durkheim
- Mircea Eliade
- Carl Jung
- Wilfred Cantwell Smith

Your essay should:

- Identify and explain the scholar's main ideas about religion.
- Situate these ideas in their historical and intellectual context.
- Show how they have shaped the academic study of religion.
- Discuss major criticisms or limits of their approach.

Option 3: Chapter from a Key Text

Critically examine **one chapter or clearly defined section** from one of the following books:

- Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*
- Robert A. Segal (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*
- William E. Paden, *Interpreting the Sacred: Ways of Viewing Religion*
- Daniel L. Pals, *Ten Theories of Religion / Eight Theories of Religion*

Examples (you may choose these or similar ones):

- Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*, Chapter 2 or Chapter 10
- Segal, *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, chapter on "Death and Afterlife"
- Paden, *Interpreting the Sacred*, Chapter 6: "Unveiling Religion as a Comparative Framework of Beliefs"
- A chapter on Eliade's approach in Pals, discussing both his contributions and critiques

Your essay should:

- Summarise the chapter's main arguments.
- Explain how it contributes to the academic study of religion.
- Critically assess its strengths, weaknesses, and assumptions.
- Where appropriate, compare it with other scholars or approaches.

Objectives of the Essay

Your essay should:

- **Accurately present** the key points of your chosen method, scholar, or chapter.
- **Critically analyse** how it contributes to understanding religion (e.g. what it explains well, what it overlooks, what questions it raises).
- **Relate it to other work** in the field where relevant (comparisons, agreements, disagreements).
- **Offer your own reasoned evaluation**, supported by evidence from primary and secondary sources.

Source Requirements

- **Minimum:** 5 academic references (no maximum).
- Include at least:
- The **primary text(s)** you are reviewing (methodological text, scholar's own writings, or chosen chapter).
- Relevant **secondary literature** (e.g., scholarly articles, chapters, or books that explain, apply, or criticise your topic).
- All sources must be **academically credible** (books from academic presses, peer-reviewed articles, reputable reference works).
- Cite all sources consistently using an accepted academic style (e.g. Chicago, APA, MLA), following any specific course guidelines.

Structure and Style

Your essay must have a clear, coherent structure:

1. Introduction

- Introduce your topic (method, scholar, or chapter).
- State your **thesis**: your overall evaluation or main argument about its contribution to the study of religion.
- Briefly outline the structure of your essay (what each main section will do).

2. Body

Organise the body into clearly labelled or clearly separated sections, for example:

- **Context and Overview**
 - Explain the background: historical period, intellectual setting, or purpose of the method/scholar/text.
 - Summarise the central ideas or arguments.
- **Critical Analysis**
 - Examine key claims or concepts in detail.
 - Discuss strengths (e.g., what this approach reveals about religion).
 - Discuss limitations or criticisms (e.g., what it neglects, where it is biased, where later research disagrees).
 - Where appropriate, **compare** with other approaches or scholars to sharpen your analysis.
- **Implications for the Study of Religion**
 - Explain how your topic has influenced the academic study of religion.
 - Consider how useful or relevant it remains today.

3. Conclusion

- Summarise your main findings and how they support your thesis.
- Restate your evaluation of the method/scholar/chapter in a concise way.

- Optionally indicate questions for further study or how this topic shapes your own understanding of religion.

Style Expectations

- Use **formal academic English**: clear, precise, and free from slang.
- Demonstrate **analysis and synthesis**, not just description.
- Ensure paragraphs are logically ordered and linked.
- Minimise grammatical errors and typographical mistakes.

Word Count

- **Target length**: 1,500 words (Acceptable range: 1450-1550 words).
- The word count covers all body content (including in-text citations). The word count **does not include** the cover page, footnotes/endnotes, and bibliography/reference list.
- Aim to be as close as possible to the required length; significant deviation may affect your grade in this area.

How to Approach the Assignment

1. Choosing Your Topic

Methodological approach (Option 1):

- Example: Phenomenological method
 - Explain what phenomenology of religion is (key concepts, aims).
 - Outline its development and main figures.
 - Analyse its strengths (e.g., attention to lived experience) and weaknesses (e.g., risk of bracketing history or power).
 - Briefly compare it to another method (e.g., sociological or historical).

Scholar's contribution (Option 2):

- Example: Émile Durkheim
 - Focus on a key work such as *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.
 - Explain his view of religion as a social phenomenon.
 - Show how his ideas shaped later sociology of religion.
 - Discuss major criticisms (e.g., on totemism, reductionism, Western bias).

Book chapter (Option 3):

- Example: Paden, *Interpreting the Sacred*, Chapter 6
 - Summarise the main argument of the chapter.
 - Explain how Paden's framework for "unveiling" religion works.
 - Compare his approach to at least one other theorist.
 - Evaluate how convincing and useful his framework is.

2. Research and Note-Taking

- Begin with the **primary text** (methodological manifesto, classic work, or chapter).
- Use the library and academic databases (e.g., JSTOR, ATLA, Project MUSE, Google Scholar) to find **secondary sources**:
 - Explanations, applications, and critiques of your chosen topic.
- Take notes that distinguish clearly between:
 - Summary of what the author says.
 - Your own reflections and criticisms.

3. Developing Your Argument

- Decide what **central claim** you want to make (your thesis), for example:
 - “Although X has been criticised for Y, it remains valuable for Z.”
 - “Scholar A’s theory is insightful for understanding ritual but problematic when applied to religious diversity.”
- Make sure each section of the essay **contributes directly** to supporting or refining this thesis.

4. Drafting and Revising

- Write a first draft focusing on **clarity of explanation** and **coherence of argument**.
- Then revise for:
 - Logical flow between paragraphs and sections.
 - Clear topic sentences and transitions.
 - Consistent, accurate citation of sources.
- Proofread carefully for grammar, spelling, and formatting issues.

Grading Criteria

A Range (A-, A, A+)

- **Content & Understanding:**
 - Excellent grasp of the chosen topic; key ideas are accurately and clearly explained.
 - Deep, nuanced critical evaluation of how the method/scholar/chapter contributes to the study of religion.
 - Comparisons with other approaches or scholars significantly enrich the analysis.
- **Argument & Critical Thinking:**
 - Clear, strong thesis consistently supported throughout.
 - Arguments are logically structured, well-developed, and insightful.
 - Demonstrates independent thinking and original, well-supported critique.
- **Research & Sources:**
 - Wide range of relevant academic sources; primary and secondary materials are well balanced.
 - Sources are smoothly integrated and effectively support the argument.
- **Writing & Presentation:**
 - Writing is clear, precise, and stylistically mature.
 - Virtually no grammatical or typographical errors.
 - Excellent organisation and paragraphing; adheres closely to word count and formatting guidelines.

B Range (B-, B, B+)

- **Content & Understanding:**
 - Solid and accurate understanding of the topic.
 - Good critical engagement, though less original or less in-depth than A-range work.
- **Argument & Critical Thinking:**
 - Clear thesis and generally coherent argument.
 - Some points may be underdeveloped or repetitive.
- **Research & Sources:**
 - Adequate number and quality of sources.
 - Sources are usually relevant and integrated, though sometimes used mainly for support rather than critical dialogue.
- **Writing & Presentation:**
 - Generally clear writing with some minor errors.
 - Structure is sound, with only occasional lapses in flow or clarity.
 - Mostly follows word count and formatting requirements.

C Range (C-, C, C+)

- **Content & Understanding:**
 - Meets basic requirements; main points are summarised but often remain descriptive.
 - Limited or uneven critical analysis; some misunderstandings may appear.
- **Argument & Critical Thinking:**
 - Thesis present but weak, vague, or inconsistently supported.
 - Argument may be fragmented or not clearly linked to the thesis.
- **Research & Sources:**
 - Uses some academic sources, but range and integration are limited.
 - Tends to rely on summary rather than critical engagement.
- **Writing & Presentation:**
 - Noticeable grammatical or stylistic issues that affect clarity.
 - Structure is basic; transitions may be abrupt.
 - Word count or formatting guidelines only partially followed.

D Range (D-, D, D+)

- **Content & Understanding:**
 - Minimal understanding of the topic; important points are missing or misrepresented.
 - Very little critical analysis.
- **Argument & Critical Thinking:**
 - Thesis unclear, missing, or unsupported.
 - Argument disorganised, inconsistent, or hard to follow.
- **Research & Sources:**
 - Few sources; some may be non-academic or poorly chosen.
 - Weak or incorrect use of citations; little integration into the argument.
- **Writing & Presentation:**
 - Frequent errors in grammar, spelling, and style.
 - Poor organisation; does not follow basic academic conventions.
 - Significant deviations from word count or formatting requirements.

By following these guidelines, you will be able to produce a focused, well-researched, and critically engaged essay that demonstrates a strong grasp of how religion is studied in the academic context.

Your Final Course Grade

Please note that we will award assignment grades based on your meeting the requirements or required standards set by the course (that is what we consider that your assignment truly deserves). However, at the end of the course, if more than 40% students of the course were to receive A range grades as final course grades, in such occasion, we will apply a curve to limit the A range grades to 40% maximum. So working to your maximum ability is required to receive a higher grade in this course.

In addition, the course grading criteria consider the details given in the following two university documents:

1. Faculty Grade Expectations:

- https://arts.hku.hk/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/grade_expectations.pdf

2. Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a serious academic offence. The University upholds the principle that plagiarism in any form is unacceptable and any student found plagiarizing is liable to

disciplinary action in addition to failing the assessment concerned. Please read the following webpage on “plagiarism” for details:

- <http://arts.hku.hk/current-students/undergraduate/assessment/plagiarism>

Reading List

- Archer, Peter (2014) *Religion 101 – From Allah to Zen Buddhism, An Exploration of the Key People, Practices, and Beliefs that have shaped the Religions of the World*. Avon, Massachusetts: Adams Media.
- Paden, William E. 1992. *Interpreting the Sacred: Ways of Viewing Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Pals, Daniel (2022) *Ten Theories of Religion*. Fourth edition. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780190935085
- Sharpe, Eric J. (1986) *Comparative Religion: A History*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd.
- Segal, Robert A. (ed.) (2006) *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Smith, Huston (1991) *The World's Religions* – The revised & updated edition of The Religions of Man. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.
- Toropov, Brandon & Buckles, Father Luke. 2002 (second edition). *The Complete Idiot's Guide to World Religions*. Indianapolis, IN: ALPHA A Pearson Education Company. [Judaism pp. 27-54; Christianity pp. 55-86; Islam pp. 87-110; Hinduism pp. 111-134]

A Note

- Please check the Course Moodle Page regularly for course updates, FAQ for quizzes and assignments, announcements, weekly lecture notes, readings materials, class activities, attendance marking, submission of assignments, grading criteria of assignments, feedback for your submitted assignments, and recordings of classes.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Statement

The Faculty of Arts is dedicated to supporting your overall wellbeing during your studies. Prioritize your mental and physical health and seek help when needed.

Key Resources:

- **Faculty Student Wellness Counsellor**
Ms. Trinity Pun
Room 4.05, 4/F, Run Run Shaw Tower, Centennial Campus
Tel: 3917 2279 | Email: trinityp@hku.hk
- **Career Development Advisor (including wellbeing-related concerns)**
Ms. Heidy Wan
Room 4.05, 4/F, Run Run Shaw Tower, Centennial Campus
Tel: 3917 0736 | Email: heidywan@hku.hk
- **Thrive@Arts**: wellness activities to de-stress, build resilience, and connect with

peers. Stay tuned for upcoming events.

- **CEDARS Counselling & Psychological Services**
Tel: 3917 8388 | Email: cedars-cope@hku.hk
Online registration: cedars.hku.hk/cope/cps/online-registration
- **TourHeart+ Platform:** Free confidential online support, assessments, and exercises.
<https://sso.cedars.hku.hk/tourHeart/>
- **Wellness@HKU Portal:** Self-assessments, resources, and workshops.
<https://wellness.hku.hk/login>

Quick Reminders:

- Feeling stressed is normal. Seeking help early is a sign of strength.
- All services are free, confidential, and available to Arts students.
- In emergencies (after hours), contact CEDARS at
<https://www.cedars.hku.hk/cope/cps/reach-out-for-help>.

Your wellbeing matters. Reach out — support is available.