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Religion

How to get an A in the Junior Cert
Religion Exam



by **Cillian N.**

Cillian N got an A in his higher Junior Cert Religious Education paper. Here's what he learned.

Religion can be a daunting exam to do, and for many students it is more challenging than other subjects. It requires you to think deeply about the questions and try to read in between the lines. It is definitely possible to do really well in the exam though, and in this guide, I'll share some tips and advice with you to help you get the best grade that you possibly can, hopefully an A!

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Layout

The higher-level Religious Education exam is 2 hours long and you have 5 sections to answer. Fortunately, there is a choice in every section except for Section 3 where you must answer all questions.

Sections 1 and 2 are short-answer questions and Sections 3, 4 and 5 require longer answers. The final examination is worth 400 marks and is worth 80% of your final grade. There is also a journal to complete which is worth 20% of your final grade.

Final Examination (80%)

The final exam in June is usually one of the last exams you will do. The paper consists of both long questions and short questions. The most important aspect of the paper for me was ensuring that I got all questions completed and therefore timing was crucial. I will outline the amount of time that you should spend on each section later, and this is based on the amount of marks that are allocated for each question.

There are **5 sections** on the paper to complete:

- ▶ Section 1: Short Questions (50 marks)
- ▶ Section 2: Picture Questions (30 marks)
- ▶ Section 3: Comprehension (50 marks)
- ▶ Section 4: Long Questions (200 marks)
- ▶ Section 5: Essay Question (70 marks)



1. Short Questions (50 Marks)

This is probably the easiest section on the exam paper and is one that you can perfect easily.

- There are 20 short questions in this section, but you only need to answer 10. I would recommend answering at least 12 to 13 questions to ensure that you're awarded full marks.
- Practising previous short questions from other years really helped me prepare for this section, and **Studyclix** makes this really easy with the Questions by Topic page.
- Short questions usually repeat themselves, and I also found that I was able to complete the short questions in a much quicker time in the actual exam after spending a few study periods practising them on Studyclix. This gave me more time to focus on the difficult questions, so I strongly recommend preparing well for this.



2. Picture Questions (30 Marks)

Section 2 contains four pictures which each have questions based on them. However, you only need to answer **three** of these picture questions.

1) **The First Question** will always ask you something about the picture itself. For example, “Pick one thing from this photograph that suggests these people are co-operating’.” The answers to these questions are usually straightforward enough, but if you have any difficulty, it is useful to have a look at the marking schemes from previous years’ exam papers on Studyclix just to see what the examiner is looking for.

2) **The Second Question** of each picture requires you to have some knowledge about the topic that the picture is based on. For example,

“State one way that co-operation can be seen in a community of faith today”. For this particular question you would need to have some basic knowledge of communities of faith. A sample answer for this question would be “members of the public donating to Trócaire to help eliminate poverty”.

3) **The third question** is based on the second question. You are usually asked to give two reasons for something relating to the topic. For example, “Give two reasons why co-operation is valued by the members of a community of faith today”.



3. Comprehension (50 marks)

In Section 3, you do not have a choice and must answer all questions. This section contains an article relating to a topic that you must answer questions on. There are three to four questions in this section and they are the first long questions on the paper.

The key to writing long answers is to develop each point you make and write every single thing you know about it.

- ▶ **Question 1:** This is just a direct comprehension question. You will find the answer in the text and the question is fairly straightforward. Usually, you're asked to give the answer in your own words, so make sure that you don't take the answer directly out of the article as you may lose marks.
- ▶ **Questions 2, 3 and 4:** The rest of the questions require longer answers and may be slightly more difficult but nevertheless it's not impossible to achieve full marks. The second question usually relates to the topic that the article is about.

For example: The article in the 2019 paper was about the World Meeting of Families in Croke Park where Pope Francis visited the country. The second question asked you to "Outline what happens in another form of worship, different to that



described in the above message, which is associated with members of one of the following world religions”.

Basically, this question is asking you to describe how members of another religion come together to pray or how they show love to their god(s).

- ▶ **Structure Your Question:** To help you to achieve maximum marks you should structure your answer well. I used to give an introduction where I would pretty much just repeat the question and explain any words (such as the meaning of the word worship) in the question. This is a great way to get you focusing on what exactly you are being asked.

Next, you write your answer and detail the key points and you then finish with a conclusion which is basically just a summary of what you have written with reference to the main points in the introduction.



4. Long Questions (200 marks)

Section 4 is, in my opinion, the most important section in the whole exam, considering it's worth 200 marks, which is half of the final examination paper. You must answer 4 of the 6 questions.

Fortunately, the same topics come up each year so at least you have an idea of what to study.

- Question 1: Communities of Faith
- Question 2: Christianity
- Question 3: Major World Religions
- Question 4: The Question of Faith
- Question 5: The Celebration of Faith
- Question 6: The Moral Challenge

What do I study?

Even though you know the topics that are coming up, you should still study at least 5 topics if not all of them rather than just choosing 4 of them to study. This way you will be prepared just in case a question appears that does not suit you. There's nothing worse than seeing a question on the paper that you have no idea how to answer. So, my advice is to be prepared for all situations.



How do I time it?

I recommend spending 50 to 55 minutes on this section. Each question should take you about 12 to 15 mins. Make sure that you do not spend too much time on any one question. If 15 minutes are up and you don't have all of the question finished, move on to the next one. You can always come back to it at the end.

For this question you have a lot of knowledge about the topics but don't let that put you off. Like the other sections, going over previous years in your exam papers will help you greatly. After all, there's only so much they can ask.

What's the structure?

Each question in section 4 consists of two parts: **A** and **B**. Each part both consists of a number of questions each (usually two or three).

- ▶ **The first question** will always be a short question which is easy provided you have revised the course, so it should be a handy 5 marks to get.
- ▶ **The next question** will be a follow up one to the first and could be worth 10 to 18 marks. It will require you to write a long answer so make sure you structure your answer like I said previously.
- ▶ I always answered the questions on Communities of Faith, Christianity and Major World Religions as I felt they were easiest to study for. It usually depended on the day whether I then chose to do the question about The Question of Faith, The Celebration of faith or the Moral Challenge. That's why I recommend you **study each topic just in case!**



5. Essay Question (70 marks)

Section 5 was the question that I feared the most, considering it is worth 70 marks and you never really know what will come up. However, it is possible to do really well here, especially with these tips:

In this section, you are given a choice of 6 questions to choose from, each of them relating to a section on the course. The questions will always be related to Communities of Faith, Christianity, Major World Religions, The Question of Faith, The Celebration of Faith and The Moral Challenge.

1. Obviously, always choose the question that you feel you can write the most on. If you need to, you could do a little brainstorm above each question just to see what question you would be most comfortable doing.
2. Underline or **highlight** the important words in each question so that you know exactly what is being asked of you.
3. Write an introduction to the question you are completing. Explain the question and outline what exactly you will cover in your answer. This should be about five or six lines.
4. Your answer should consist of around 4 or 5 paragraphs. Address one point in each paragraph.
5. Make sure you use as many key concepts as possible. Give the definition of these as it will help you to accumulate more marks.
6. To finish your essay, write a conclusion similar to your introduction. In this, you should give a brief summary of the points you made in your answer.

Remember that some of these essay questions may take the form of a newsletter or a debate so ensure that you take this into account when composing your answer.



Journal (20%)

You are required to complete a journal booklet which is worth 100 marks and 20% of your total grade. This is a project you must complete either in a group or by yourself. The State Examinations Commission will prescribe a list of 12 titles to choose from.

- ▶ You will conduct research on the topic that you choose. Make sure that you keep a record of everything you do such as guest speakers, websites you used, interviews, videos you watched, etc.

- ▶ For my Journal Work, I chose a title that investigated how prayer is a key feature in the daily lives of Muslims. To conduct research, my class invited the local Imam to come and speak to us about his daily life as a Muslim. I also watched videos on YouTube and researched information about prayer on various websites.

- ▶ It is important that you keep a record of everything you've learned also as you will need to complete a section in the booklet about what you have learned.

- ▶ Other questions that are included in the booklet are:
 1. My reaction to doing this work was...
 2. To prepare for doing my journal work I...
 3. I included this in my journal work because ...
 4. As a result of what I have learned I will...



- ▶ You also have to choose **two skills** that you used during the completion of the booklet and explain how you used them.
- ▶ The question that I found most difficult was the discoveries section. This is where you must make a link between your project and the sections on the religion course, which are Communities of Faith, Christianity, Major World Religions, The Question of Faith, The Celebration of Faith and The Moral Challenge. You must state how your journal work reminded you of studying **two** of these sections.
- ▶ The final question requires you to reflect on your journal work and the different experiences you encountered. Think about what you would do differently if you were to start your Journal Work all over again and the advice that you would give to someone who is starting this project.
- ▶ Overall, the Journal Booklet isn't overly difficult, and it gives you a chance to achieve 20% before you even sit the final exam in June so you should work hard at it and put a lot of effort in!



Some Final Tips

- ▶ Timing is crucial if you want to get the best result possible. In the Religion exam, if you do not manage your time wisely, you will struggle to complete it. Here is the maximum amount of time that you should spend on each section:
 - Section 1: Short Questions **(15 minutes) ***
 - Section 2: Picture Questions **(15 minutes)**
 - Section 3: Comprehension **(15 minutes)**
 - Section 4: Long Questions **(55 minutes)**
 - Section 5: Essay Question **(20 minutes)**

*I used to try to complete the short questions in 5 minutes as this gave me extra time to focus on the essay question in Section 5 and other difficult questions on the paper.

- ▶ Practice the questions from previous years on Studyclix, especially the short questions. I found that by practicing the short questions, I could get through them much quicker on the day of the exam, leaving more time to concentrate on the long questions.
- ▶ Have a look at the marking schemes from previous years so you can see what exactly the examiner is looking for.
- ▶ I would definitely recommend learning the definitions of the key concepts off by heart as these can help to improve your answers immensely. Try to include these in your answers particularly the section 5 essay.



- ▶ Always read through the paper before getting stuck into it. This helped me to generate ideas for answers for some of the long questions. You can also be thinking about the essay question while completing the rest of the paper.
- ▶ Start with the short questions first, as this will help to get you warmed up for the rest of the paper. It will also help you to recall the information that you studied for the exam more easily.
- ▶ If you have time, make sure that you read back over your answers and that you answered each question correctly. You should also add in some things to your answers to improve them if time allows.





Finally, I would like to wish you the best of luck in the exam! You will be fine. 😊

