



GCE AS MARKING SCHEME

SUMMER 2025

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES - UNIT 1
OPTION D: AN INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM**

2120UD0-1

About this marking scheme

The purpose of this marking scheme is to provide teachers, learners, and other interested parties, with an understanding of the assessment criteria used to assess this specific assessment.

This marking scheme reflects the criteria by which this assessment was marked in a live series and was finalised following detailed discussion at an examiners' conference. A team of qualified examiners were trained specifically in the application of this marking scheme. The aim of the conference was to ensure that the marking scheme was interpreted and applied in the same way by all examiners. It may not be possible, or appropriate, to capture every variation that a candidate may present in their responses within this marking scheme. However, during the training conference, examiners were guided in using their professional judgement to credit alternative valid responses as instructed by the document, and through reviewing exemplar responses.

Without the benefit of participation in the examiners' conference, teachers, learners and other users, may have different views on certain matters of detail or interpretation. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that this marking scheme is used alongside other guidance, such as published exemplar materials or Guidance for Teaching. This marking scheme is final and will not be changed, unless in the event that a clear error is identified, as it reflects the criteria used to assess candidate responses during the live series.

Marking guidance for examiners, please apply carefully and consistently:

Positive marking

It should be remembered that candidates are writing under examination conditions and credit should be given for what the candidate writes, rather than adopting the approach of penalising him/her for any omissions. It should be possible for a very good response to achieve full marks and a very poor one to achieve zero marks. Marks should not be deducted for a less than perfect answer if it satisfies the criteria of the mark scheme. Exemplars in the mark scheme are only meant as helpful guides. Therefore, any other acceptable or suitable answers should be credited even though they are not actually stated in the mark scheme.

Two main phrases are deliberately placed throughout each mark scheme to remind examiners of this philosophy. They are:

- “Candidates could include some or all of the following, but other relevant points should be credited.”
- “This is not a checklist, please remember to credit any valid alternatives.”

Rules for marking

1. Differentiation will be achieved on the basis of candidates' response.
2. No mark scheme can ever anticipate or include every possible detail or interpretation; examiners should use their professional judgement to decide whether a candidate's particular response answers the question in relation to the particular assessment objective.
3. Candidates will often express their ideas in language different from that given in any mark scheme or outline. Positive marking therefore, on the part of examiners, will recognise and credit correct statements of ideas, valid points and reasoned arguments irrespective of the language employed.

Banded mark schemes

Banded mark schemes are divided so that each band has a relevant descriptor. The descriptor provides a description of the performance level for that band. Each band contains marks. Examiners should first read and annotate a candidate's answer to pick out the evidence that is being assessed in that question. Once the annotation is complete, the mark scheme can be applied. This is done as a two-stage process.

Banded mark schemes stage 1 – deciding on the band

When deciding on a band, the answer should be viewed holistically. Beginning at the lowest band, examiners should look at the candidate's answer and check whether it matches the descriptor for that band. Examiners should look at the descriptor for that band and see if it matches the qualities shown in the candidate's answer. If the descriptor at the lowest band is satisfied, examiners should move up to the next band and repeat this process for each band until the descriptor matches the answer.

If an answer covers different aspects of different bands within the mark scheme, a 'best fit' approach should be adopted to decide on the band and then the candidate's response should be used to decide on the mark within the band. For instance, if a response is mainly in band 2 but with a limited amount of band 3 content, the answer would be placed in band 2, but the mark awarded would be close to the top of band 2 as a result of the band 3 content.

Banded mark schemes stage 2 – deciding on the mark

Once the band has been decided, examiners can then assign a mark. During standardising (at the Examiners' marking conference), detailed advice from the Principal Examiner on the qualities of each mark band will be given. Examiners will then receive examples of answers in each mark band that have been awarded a mark by the Principal Examiner. Examiners should mark the examples and compare their marks with those of the Principal Examiner. When marking, examiners can use these examples to decide whether a candidate's response is of a superior, inferior or comparable standard to the example. Examiners are reminded of the need to revisit the answer as they apply the mark scheme in order to confirm that the band and the mark allocated is appropriate to the response provided. Indicative content is also provided for banded mark schemes. Indicative content is not exhaustive, and any other valid points must be credited. In order to reach the highest bands of the mark scheme a learner need not cover all of the points mentioned in the indicative content, but must meet the requirements of the highest mark band.

Awarding no marks to a response

Where a response is not creditworthy, that is it contains nothing of any relevance to the question, or where no response has been provided, no marks should be awarded.

AS Generic Band Descriptors

Band	Assessment Objective AO1 – Part (a) questions [15 marks] <i>Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of religion and belief, including:</i> - <i>religious, philosophical and/or ethical thought and teaching</i> - <i>influence of beliefs, teachings and practices on individuals, communities and societies</i> - <i>cause and significance of similarities and differences in belief, teaching and practice</i> - <i>approaches to the study of religion and belief.</i>
5	13-15 marks • Thorough, accurate and relevant knowledge and understanding of religion and belief. • An extensive and relevant response which answers the specific demands of the question set. • The response shows an excellent standard of coherence, clarity and organisation. • The response demonstrates extensive depth and/or breadth. Excellent use of evidence and examples. • Thorough and accurate reference made to sacred texts and sources of wisdom, where appropriate. • Thorough and accurate use of specialist language /vocabulary in context. • Excellent spelling, punctuation and grammar.
4	10-12 marks • Accurate and relevant knowledge and understanding of religion and belief. • A detailed, relevant response which answers the specific demands of the question set. • The response shows a very good standard of coherence, clarity and organisation. • The response demonstrates depth and/or breadth. Good use of evidence and examples. • Accurate reference made to sacred texts and sources of wisdom, where appropriate. • Accurate use of specialist language and vocabulary in context. • Very good spelling, punctuation and grammar.
3	7-9 marks • Mainly accurate and relevant knowledge and understanding of religion and belief. • A satisfactory response, which generally answers the main demands of the question set. • The response shows a satisfactory standard of coherence, clarity and organisation. • The response demonstrates depth and/or breadth in some areas. Satisfactory use of evidence and examples. • Mainly accurate reference made to sacred texts and sources of wisdom, where appropriate. • Mainly accurate use of specialist language and vocabulary in context. • Satisfactory spelling, punctuation and grammar.
2	4-6 marks • Limited knowledge and understanding of religion and belief. Basic level of accuracy and relevance. • A basic response, addressing some of the demands of the question set. • Partially accurate response, with some signs of coherence, clarity and organisation. • The response demonstrates limited depth and/or breadth, including limited use of evidence and examples. • Some accurate reference made to sacred texts and sources of wisdom, where appropriate. • Some accurate use of specialist language and vocabulary in context. • Some minor, recurring errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.
1	1-3 marks • Very limited knowledge and understanding of religion and belief. Low level of accuracy and relevance. • A very limited response, with little attempt to address the question. • Very limited accuracy within the response, with little coherence, clarity and organisation. • The response demonstrates very limited depth and/or breadth. Very limited use of evidence and examples. • Little or no reference made to sacred texts and sources of wisdom, where appropriate. • Some grasp of basic specialist language and vocabulary • Errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar affect the meaning and clarity of communication. N.B. A maximum of 1 mark should be awarded for a response that only demonstrates 'knowledge in isolation'
0	• No relevant information.

Band	Assessment Objective AO2- Part (b) questions [15 marks] <i>Analyse and evaluate aspects of, and approaches to, religion and belief, including their significance, influence and study.</i>
5	13-15 marks • Confident critical analysis and perceptive evaluation of the issue. • A response that successfully identifies and thoroughly addresses the issues raised by the question set. • The response shows an excellent standard of coherence, clarity and organisation. • Thorough, sustained and clear views are given, supported by extensive, detailed reasoning and/or evidence. • Thorough and accurate use of specialist language and vocabulary in context. • Excellent spelling, punctuation and grammar.
4	10-12 marks • Purposeful analysis and effective evaluation of the issue. • The main issues raised by the question are identified successfully and addressed. • The response shows a very good standard of coherence, clarity and organisation. • The views given are clearly supported by detailed reasoning and/or evidence. • Accurate use of specialist language and vocabulary in context. • Very good spelling, punctuation and grammar.
3	7-9 marks • Satisfactory analysis and relevant evaluation of the issue. • Most of the issues raised by the question are identified successfully and have generally been addressed. • The response shows a satisfactory standard of coherence, clarity and organisation. • Most of the views given are satisfactorily supported by reasoning and/or evidence. • Mainly accurate use of specialist language and vocabulary in context. • Satisfactory spelling, punctuation and grammar.
2	4-6 marks • Some valid analysis and inconsistent evaluation of the issue. • A limited number of issues raised by the question set are identified and partially addressed. • Partially accurate response, with some signs of coherence, clarity and organisation. • A basic attempt to justify the views given, but they are only partially supported with reason and/or evidence. • Some accurate use of specialist language and vocabulary in context. • Some minor, recurring errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.
1	1-3 marks • A basic analysis and limited evaluation of the issue. • Very limited accuracy within the response, with little coherence, clarity and organisation. • An attempt has been made to identify and address the issues raised by the question set. • Little attempt to justify a view with reasoning or evidence. • Some grasp of basic specialist language and vocabulary. • Errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar affect the meaning and clarity of communication.
0	• No relevant analysis or evaluation.

GCE AS RELIGIOUS STUDIES – UNIT 1
OPTION D: AN INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM
SUMMER 2025 MARK SCHEME

To be read in conjunction with the generic level descriptors provided.

Section A

1. (a) **Explain the Four Sights, with reference to dukkha (unsatisfactoriness), anicca (impermanence) and anatta (insubstantiality/no-self). [15]**

Candidates could include some of the following, but other relevant responses should be credited.

- Four Sights also known as Four Signs – sickness, old age, death, ascetic.
- At 29 years old, the Four Sights had a profound effect on Siddhartha as this was his first encounter with the reality of the human condition.
- The Four Sights led Siddhartha to question the meaning of life and influenced his decision to renounce.
- The Four Sights also led him to realise the three lakshanas – anicca, anatta, dukkha - the three marks of existence.
- Siddhartha soon realized that dukkha (unsatisfactoriness / suffering) was a characteristic of life – all living beings are subject to old age, sickness and death.
- His experience of old age led Siddhartha to realise anicca – impermanence, nothing stays the same - 'all that has arisen will pass away'. It is our tendency to grasp that leads directly to dukkha.
- Although the Four Sights do not directly refer to anatta, the sight of a corpse led Siddhartha to question the self.
- Siddhartha was also intrigued by the ascetic lifestyle that aimed to appease the anxieties caused by sickness, old age and death.
- The ascetic inspired Siddhartha to find the answers to the issues he witnessed. He soon realised that there was no permanent self, no unchanging essence. Therefore, there was no eternal soul.
- Siddhartha's ascetic lifestyle led him to redefine personal identity through various observations and teachings associated with anatta.
- The Buddha addressed these later in his teachings on the Four Noble Truths – Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta.

This is not a checklist, please remember to credit any valid alternatives.

- (b) **‘Experiencing the Four Sights had the greatest impact on the Buddha’s life.’**
Evaluate this view. [15]

Candidates could include some of the following, but other relevant responses should be credited.

- Experiencing the Four Sights had a profound effect on Siddhartha as he started to question the meaning of life.
- The decision to renounce from palace life and the beginning of his spiritual quest can be traced to the Four Sights.
- The Four Sights gave Siddhartha a sense of urgency and drive. His life up until this point was an illusion, his life in the palace was far from reality.
- Siddhartha could have easily ignored this reality, he could have accepted the situation and become complacent. Rather, his experiences led him to find the truth.
- However, other significant events had an impact on the Buddha’s life.
- Enlightenment – the Buddha’s teachings are based on his experiences; he became an inspiration to others as he himself overcame suffering. Without his enlightenment, there would be no Buddhism and no dharma.
- The Buddha’s decision to teach - sharing his dharma with others fulfilled Asita’s prophecy that Siddhartha would become a world leader.
- Some question the historical validity of these accounts as many refer to the hagiographical nature of the Buddha’s life - the story communicates values rather than historical facts.
- It is also difficult to compare the value of specific events as all contribute equally to his life story.

Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a substantiated evaluation regarding the issue raised.

2. (a) **Explain the seriousness of the Four Parajikas 'defeats' for the Theravada monastic sangha.** [15]

Candidates could include some of the following, but other relevant responses should be credited.

- The Four Parajikas are the first four rules of the Pattimokkha, found in the Sutta Vibhanga - Vinaya Pitaka – Tipitaka.
- The Pattimokkha is a collection of 227 / 311 rules which govern the life of the monastic sangha (Theravada).
- Parajika = to lose / to be defeated.
- The Parajikas are considered the most serious offences and are dealt as so – they are de-robing offences.
- Bhikkhus / bhikkhunis lose their status as members of the monastic sangha if found guilty of these offences. They are unable to return to monastic duties in their lifetime.
- The Buddha himself considered these to be extreme violations and obstacles that hinder a person's progress on the path to enlightenment.
 1. Sexual intercourse (with consent) between a bhikkhu and a living being.
 2. Taking without being given – intentionally stealing something of value.
 3. Purposely killing – encouraging death, describing the advantages of death, suicide, abortion.
 4. Boasting / lying that one has attained a superior state of mind (jhanas).
- All Four Parajikas should never be changed or interpreted differently.
- The intention to violate the rules must be proven for them to be considered offences – such offences bring bad karma to the individual.
- There is no de-robing ceremony or trial.
- The Four Parajikas link closely to the panca sila (five precepts) and are taught to every new member on ordination.

This is not a checklist, please remember to credit any valid alternatives.

- (b) **‘The Four Parajikas are no longer relevant for the sangha today.’**
Evaluate this view. [15]

Candidates could include some of the following, but other relevant responses should be credited.

- The Four Parajikas remain the most serious violations and should always be taken seriously, they are still relevant today.
- The rules have stood the test of time. They were originally introduced by the Buddha himself. There is no room for interpretation - the punishment remains the same.
- The Four Parajikas keep the Bhikkhus / Bhikkunis on the right path and ensure the correct environment to fulfil the spiritual goal of enlightenment.
- Being aware of the consequences also ensures correct conduct and moral standards.
- The Four Parajikas remind bhikkhus / bhikkunis to control the body and mind, so they remain relevant as a way of distinguishing the monastic sangha from the lay community.
- Some argue that the Parajikas are no longer relevant as they are only appropriate for the monastic Sangha (Theravada).
- Also, many traditions treat the Parajikas differently. For example, in some schools of Mahayana, many monks marry but this has no relevance to Theravada.
- Peter Harvey recognises that Buddhism sees marriage and family life as suitable for those who cannot commit themselves to celibacy and so may not be relevant at all to the wider sangha.
- In recent times, some accept ‘purposely killing’ to include situations of self-defence or saving life.
- Candidate may refer to Thich Quang Duc burning himself to death in protest against Buddhist oppression in Vietnam – 1963.
- It is known that bhikkhunis must follow an additional 4 parajikas – some candidates may question the inequality shown towards women.

Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a substantiated evaluation regarding the issue raised.

Section B

3. (a) Examine the concept of arhat (worthy one) within Buddhism. [15]

Candidates could include some of the following, but other relevant responses should be credited.

- Pali = arahant. Sanskrit = arhat.
- Arhat is a title given to a 'worthy one'.
- This is the ultimate aim / goal of a Theravada Buddhist.
- The arhat has made a commitment to achieve perfection through wisdom, morality and meditation.
- The arhat is a person who has gained enlightenment and insight into the true nature of existence.
- The arhat is free from suffering and desire and is no longer bound to samsara.
- Ari = enemy. Han = kill.
- The arhat has succeeded to 'kill the enemy' – dukkha.
- The arhat refrains from worldly pleasures.
- There are four stages to becoming an arhat:
 1. Stream enterer – sotapanna. A person demonstrates good moral behaviour and is working towards overcoming false beliefs and doubts.
 2. Once returner – sakadagakin. A person has attained the second stage by overcoming lust and hatred. There is only one further rebirth in this realm.
 3. Non returner – anagamin. A person has overcome desire and experiences rebirth to a higher realm. They will not return to human existence after death.
 4. Arhat – all worldly training has come to an end. A person is fully enlightened and is free from the bounds of samsara. A person enters Paranirvana after death.
- Tibetan Buddhists recognise arhats as saints / sages that are free from suffering and rebirth.

This is not a checklist, please remember to credit any valid alternatives.

- (b) **‘The arhat is an essential feature of Buddhism.’**
Evaluate this view.

[15]

Candidates could include some of the following, but other relevant responses should be credited.

- The arhat is the guiding ideal for every Theravada Buddhist.
- The arhat is an example to others and shows others that enlightenment is achievable.
- This ideal also shows that commitment is needed to progress on the path to enlightenment.
- The arhat is considered closest to the Buddha ideal as the Buddha himself is often referred to as an arhat.
- Some candidates may identify the arhat as essential only for members of the Theravada monastic sangha. The sangha provides the ideal conditions for spiritual development that is free from distraction.
- In addition, the arhat has its origins in pre-Buddhist teachings as a title for ‘a worthy one’. It features in Vedic, Hindu and Jain traditions.
- Some may consider that arhat as an elitist concept in the fact that it is only available to very few people.
- Mahayana Buddhists favour the bodhisattva as a higher goal as they work for the good of others.
- The bodhisattvas guide and teach others on how to be free from suffering. They are the embodiment of compassion as they remain in samsara to free all beings from dukkha.
- Many Buddhists also identify the Buddha as a bodhisattva.
- Many bodhisattvas are objects used to aid worship.

Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a substantiated evaluation regarding the issue raised.

4. (a) Explain the importance of meditation in Buddhism. [15]

Candidates could include some of the following, but other relevant responses should be credited.

- Meditation is an essential part of the path towards enlightenment.
- Meditation develops the mind and controls the 'monkey mind' so that it becomes focussed and calm.
- Meditation is important in order to observe the body and mind.
- Teachings on meditation are found in the Buddha's teachings (Satipattana Sutta) and later in non-canonical works such as the Visuddhimagga.
- Meditation (samadhi) is one of the Three Trainings found in magga, the Eightfold Path. This aspect includes right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration (samma samadhi = practical meditation).
- Meditation develops brahma viharas – 4 qualities of heart.
- It eliminates attachment to the 3 fires – greed, ignorance and hatred.
- The Buddha himself practised and taught meditation.
- The Buddha studied under two meditation teachers and later gained enlightenment by meditating.
- Buddhists today meditate in order to relieve suffering and achieve inner peace.
- Meditation is a means to realise one's own potential.

This is not a checklist, please remember to credit any valid alternatives.

- (b) **‘Samatha is more important than vipassana as a form of meditation.’**
Evaluate this view.

[15]

Candidates could include some of the following, but other relevant responses should be credited.

- Both samatha and vipassana are Theravada forms of meditation.
- Both are found in the Buddha’s teachings namely the Satipattana Sutta.
- Some candidates may note the difficulty distinguishing between both forms of meditation.
- Samatha focuses the mind by observing the breath (object).
- Samatha results in calmness and increased ability to concentrate. Samatha allows one to control the wandering mind and ignoring distractions.
- Samatha is a step towards further insight.
- A person must master samatha before progressing towards vipassana.
- Some consider samatha to be limited in scope. It is a form of meditation that is used in conjunction with vipassana.
- Vipassana can be considered a more important form of meditation as it goes beyond the breath.
- Vipassana explores the nature of reality, it is non-judgemental. It is known as ‘insight meditation’.
- Rather than calming the mind, vipassana aims to clear the mind and extinguish the root of suffering. Its focus is the 3 fires of greed, ignorance and hatred.
- Vipassana focusses on Buddhist teachings rather than an object.
- Both are necessary to achieve enlightenment.

Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a substantiated evaluation regarding the issue raised.

5. (a) Examine magga (the path) as part of the Four Noble Truths. [15]

Candidates could include some of the following, but other relevant responses should be credited.

- Magga, the fourth Noble Truth.
- It is the actualisation of nirodha (the third noble truth) and is often referred to as the Eightfold Path.
- It is a practical guide on how to overcome tanha – craving for attachment.
- Magga is seen as the medicine to the human condition (medical metaphor).
- Magga is a whole way of life, it guides a person on what needs to be done. For Theravada Buddhists, magga encompasses a life of poverty, chastity and meditation. This is the Middle Way.
- Magga demands commitment. As an eightfold path, it is an 8-step process although it is not a hierarchical structure. The three-fold trainings of prajna (wisdom), sila (morality) and samadhi (meditation) must be developed together.
- Candidates could elaborate on their meanings.
- All three trainings are required to overcome dukkha.
- Magga is different to the other Truths as it is a practical guidance whereas the first three refer to the nature of reality.
- For Tibetan Buddhists, magga is one element of an advanced path – magga is a path out of suffering. Tibetan Buddhists understand magga in the context of the bodhisattva perfections – paramitas.
- Lay Buddhists practise the path to a lesser extent as they play a more supporting role for the monastic sangha.

This is not a checklist, please remember to credit any valid alternatives.

- (b) **‘The Four Noble Truths are not essential for all Buddhists.’
Evaluate this view.**

Candidates could include some of the following, but other relevant responses should be credited. [15]

- Many Mahayana Buddhist schools focus on the teachings of the bodhisattva path rather than the Four Noble Truths.
- They are not considered essential for all as they are too simplistic. The Four Noble Truths must be supported by the Buddha’s other teachings such as the lakshanas to be fully understood.
- The Four Noble Truths do not answer the problem of suffering. The Buddha himself also stated that a person should find other ways if his teachings are not useful.
- Some view meditation as more essential.
- However, the Four Noble Truths are widely accepted by all traditions and schools of thought and are central to the Buddha’s teachings.
- They are believed to be among the earliest of the Buddha’s teachings and the subject of his first sermon at Sarnath.
- The Four Noble Truths are essential to understand the reality of life as they offer a practical solution to the suffering experienced by all.
- It is difficult to understand Buddhism without understanding the Four Noble Truths.
- The Four Noble Truths are based on the Buddha’s own experiences so they give hope to others.

Overall, candidates should engage with the debate and come to a substantiated evaluation regarding the issue raised.