

Planning on starting A level Religious Studies next year?

Religious Studies is a great subject to help you build a wide range of skills, including improving your skills as a writer, speaker and thinker.

You can read, watch and listen to interesting ideas and think about the opinions expressed. How far do they match your own views? What might someone say if they had a very different opinion? Where people have different attitudes towards something, which do you agree with most, or least, and why?

For the following activities you will:

- Investigate ultimate questions such as "why does evil exist?" and "what is the purpose of life?"
- Study topics that explain the diversity of life and religion in the modern world
- Improve philosophical thinking skills and the ability to think outside of the box
- Understand contemporary ethical and religious issues such as medical ethics and religious fundamentalism
- Develop communication skills and learn to clearly express your views and increase your self-confidence

Critical thinking activities

Here are a couple of activities to try, to start you off, and then a selection of other directions you might like to take:

Activity 1.

This is the first episode of a documentary about attitudes towards homosexuality.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMPI25oraVc>

This is the first episode of Stephen Fry's series 'Out There', where he explores attitudes to homosexuality in different parts of the world.

Questions to think about and/or write about – try to support your answers with reasoning:

1. Do you think there is a 'right' attitude and a 'wrong' attitude towards homosexuality? What is it that makes these attitudes right or wrong?

2. Some people might argue that different cultures have different ideas about morality, and that these different cultural beliefs should be respected even if we don't agree with them. Do you think we should always respect the beliefs and attitudes of cultures different from our own, or should we try to persuade them to adopt our own beliefs instead?
3. What do you think are the aims of this television series? Do you think they are good aims? Do you think this first episode is successful in achieving its aims?
4. What religious reasons do people sometimes give for opposing homosexual relationships? How would you support or oppose these views?

Activity 2

Watch this documentary, 'Barra Boy'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhGX1YCsVAM>

1. Do you think the story provides convincing evidence for reincarnation? Why, or why not?
2. What do you think counts as 'convincing evidence' for life after death (e.g. scripture, near death experiences, nothing)? What makes evidence convincing or unconvincing?
3. Read the accounts in the gospels of the resurrection of Jesus (you could use biblegateway.com if you don't have a Bible at home)

Matthew 28:1 – 10

Mark 16: 1 – 8

Luke 24: 1 – 10

John 20: 1 – 18

4. Do you find these stories convincing? Why, or why not?
5. Do you think the stories contradict each other, or are they just told from different points of view, in your opinion? What might account for the differences and the similarities between the stories?

Reading activities

Reading *anything* of good quality, even if it's a novel or a book about an entirely different topic, is always helpful for improving your skills, because you are practising your comprehension skills as well as practising understanding different ways in which writers express their ideas. Your own writing will improve, the more you read.

The Brothers Karamazov – Fyodor Dostoevsky: a huge and important 'classic' book, which takes time and effort and is well worth both. Raises issues of God, evil, rivalry, loyalty ...

To Kill a Mockingbird – Harper Lee – another classic and should be on everyone's 'must read' list

The Puzzle of... - Peter Vardy – this series of non-fiction books is about issues in religion and philosophy, very readable and you don't have to be an expert to enjoy them. You can dip in and out of different chapters rather than having to start at the beginning and work through to the end.

Candide – Voltaire – another 'classic', this one takes a philosophical view of people's approaches to evil and natural disaster. It's a great book but the topics might be too difficult for you to cope with in the current circumstances, so try it if you want to but save it for more stable times if you don't.

Books to help develop your thinking skills

The pig that wants to be eaten – Julian Baggini

50 Philosophy ideas you really need to know – Ben Dupre

Think – Simon Blackburn

The Blind Watchmaker, and/or The God Delusion – Richard Dawkins

Online resources

The Philosophy Man - <https://www.thephilosophyman.com/>

This website gives you lots of different ideas to think about. Try the 'brainsqueezers'. These are good if you don't have too much time, or if you're finding it difficult to settle to anything more concentrated.

Philosophers Magazine – <https://www.philosophersmag.com/>

Try the games on this website, and read the commentaries that go with them. Lots to think about!

Peped – <https://peped.org/>

This website has a lot of good resources that you might use once you start you're a level course; you could dip in and start exploring some of the ideas you will meet next year.

Ethics online - <https://ethicsonline.co.uk/>

This looks at Ethics in the modern world and its relevance in the 21st century

To watch and think about

All kinds of films and series have philosophical and religious ideas in them, so follow your own interests! Try these and use them as a stimulus for thinking and writing, rather than just sitting in front of them:

The Good Place

The Matrix

Unorthodox

Twelve Angry Men

TED talks – these are usually wonderful, with plenty to stimulate your questioning and reasoning skills. Some favourites:

Elizabeth Loftus – how reliable is your memory?

Dan Gilbert – why we make bad decisions

Richard Dawkins – militant atheism

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – We should all be feminists

Damon Horowitz – Philosophy in prison

There are loads of talks on here, so use the search engine to find topics that interest you. Practise note-taking; write notes as you listen, just as you would if you were listening to a real-life lecture, and practise the skill of jotting down key points at speed. Ask yourself questions when you get to the end: what were the speaker's key messages? Do you agree with the speaker? What might someone who disagreed say, and what might their reasons be?

Research skills

There are all kinds of resources on line and in books to help you, if you want to start to learn a little more about some of the philosophers you will meet in you're a level course.

Use Wikipedia as a starting point and follow some of the links in the articles. You could do some research about:

Plato
Aristotle
Aquinas
Bentham
Mill
Hume
Kant

Practice using a range of sources to find out about a single person. When you have gathered together a range of information, try and synthesise it into a single piece of writing of your own.

The BBC has some great podcasts available:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01f0vzr>

(They are quite long and heavyweight, don't worry if this activity isn't for you)

Practice your note-making skills by pausing and writing a summary of what you've heard so far. Think about whether you agree with what the philosopher is saying.

Listen to whatever takes your interest. For RS specifically, you could concentrate on the ones starred, and/or move onto others from this list:

Plato's Republic
** St Thomas Aquinas
** Augustine
The Ontological Argument
** The Soul
** Relativism
** Utilitarianism
William James
Al-Ghazali
** Duty
** Good and Evil
Altruism
** Feminism
** Evil