

Tips for the Task

Keep in mind the **main goal**: applying what we have learned by engaging with the contemporary form of any of the religions we have studied, as lived today and experienced by its believers.

In your reports, you are asked to come up with an “**analysis**” which basically means that you are looking for where individual contemporary believers/practices fit in the bigger picture. You will need to identify the particular “sect” or “strand” of the belief they belong to, notice certain ritual or philosophical choices or short-cuts they may use to accommodate their particular living circumstances, tactfully seek justifications or interpretations of divergences of the “classical” tenets of their beliefs, what it means to them to practise away from the “homeland” of their religion and/or how they have (or claim not to have) changed in response to modern values...

You are asked to make a **choice** and either

1. interview a believer
2. observe a ritual/cultural performance or visit an exhibition and
3. read a book about contemporary religion

Choice 1 & 2: If you interview a believer or observe a ritual, you will need to display a certain amount of **cultural sensitivity**. While your work will not be published, you should still keep in mind some of the basic rules to be observed for such academic projects:

1. ask permission to conduct the interview/attend the ritual/service beforehand
2. make clear the purpose of your visit when you seek permission
3. be respectful of the believers and careful not to hurt their sensitivities
4. ask beforehand about culturally-appropriate behavior, which may entail taking off your shoes before entering a shrine, covering our head, wearing appropriate clothes, body-language that fits the situation (folded hands, bowed heads, etc.)

I encourage you to **work in groups**. You could, for example, with a few friends visit a shrine to observe a ritual, interview the officiating priest or head of the shrine, and a few of the believers (one man and one woman, someone younger, someone older, or some such interesting contrast). Afterwards, you can divide tasks between yourselves: one can report on the ceremony itself, another on the interview with the priest, and yet others on the ones with the believers. You will each still write separate reports, but if we coordinate your presentation in class, this may well result in interesting contrasts and a nice “slice of life” picture for your fellow-students.

For interviews, please make a transcript (write out the questions and answers) and have it checked over by the people you interviewed, especially if you do not tape the interview. It is very easy to misunderstand and hence misrepresent people, and this “check” will help do away with that difficulty. **For rituals/cultural performances,**

please add a bulleting/program if provided, for exhibitions add curator's notes. Add your admission ticket stubs to the paper.

Writing up the report (2 pages max): Please provide:

1. Full identification of interviewee (name, address, age, gender, socio-linguistic group, or of the ritual/ cultural performance (venue, date, type of ceremony/performance, names of officiating priests, note on the worshipers/public) (1 short paragraph)
2. Briefly outline the main features of the interview/performance (1 paragraph)
3. Analysis: main findings of similarity of variance, main justifications offered by participants, your comments and surmises.
4. Short summary of conclusions (1 paragraph)

Choice 3: if you choose to analyze a book, here are some tips on **writing up the report (2 pages max):** Please provide:

1. Full identification of the book you have read: author, title, series, press, date and place of publication (in the title of your report)
2. Briefly outline the main approach/argument of the work (1-3 paragraphs)
3. Analysis: main findings of similarity of variance, how this is addressed by the author (if so), your comments and surmises (should be the bulk of your report)
4. Short summary of conclusions (1 paragraph)