
Subject Content

Taken from: Cambridge International AS & A Level Islamic Studies 9488 syllabus for 2024, 2025 and 2026. (Slightly adapted)

Paper 1 Islamic beliefs and practices

This paper introduces the origins of Islam and the main beliefs and practices of Islam. The exemplification of good character in the life of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is the focus of Section A. Candidates study examples of good character and trace these from the key texts given for study. Candidates are required to discuss and debate how good character could be applied in certain situations in the lives of Muslims today.

The main beliefs of Islam are introduced in Section B. Candidates study what the main beliefs are and consider how they affect the everyday lives of believers. They are required to explore the variety of beliefs held by Muslims.

Section A: The Qur'an and Sunnah

An introduction to the main sources of Islam through examples from the Qur'an and Sunnah and their application as a model for good conduct for Muslims.

1.1 The life of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)

Content (5 lessons)

- his early years and first proclamation to 622 CE (the year of the migration)
- his challenges to Meccan beliefs
- the Hijrah and its significance
- his administration and leadership roles (religious, political and military)
- his morals, manners and character as an example to Muslims.

1.2 A study of set texts from the Qur'an

Content (10 lessons)

- 3:144 The Prophet
- 4:12 Inheritance
- 5:89–90 Intoxicants
- 10:99–100 Freedom of belief
- 13:3–4 Signs
- 17:31–34 Orphans
- 17:35 Fairness
- 25:68–70 Punishment
- 31:14–15 Parents
- 31:17–19 Prayer and arrogance

Candidates should be able to:

- explain the teachings in these sources in relation to the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)
- show how the teachings from these sources might be applied in the lives of Muslims today
- discuss how the Prophet (ﷺ) is a perfect example for Muslims to follow with reference to these sources.

Specified text for study:

The Qur'an passages printed on the question paper will be taken from the version of the specified texts prescribed in the syllabus. If schools wish to use other versions of the translated texts, they are welcome to do so, but teachers should make candidates aware that there may be differences with the translations that appear on the question papers.

(Mushin Khan and Taqi ud-Deen Hilali is preferable quran.com or thenoblequran.com)

1.3 A study of set Hadith texts

Content (10 lessons)

- 1 Sincerity
- 18 Repentance
- 27 Perseverance
- 54 Truthfulness
- 73 Piety
- 75 Firm belief
- 85 Steadfastness
- 199 Hypocrites
- 309 Neighbours
- 316 Parents

Candidates should be able to:

- explain the themes in these Hadith in relation to the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)
- show how these Hadith might be applied in the lives of Muslims today
- discuss how the Prophet (ﷺ) is a perfect example for Muslims to follow with reference to the set Hadith texts.

Specified text for study:

Riyad as-Salihin, Book 1, *The Book of Miscellany*:

<https://sunnah.com/riyadussaliheen>

The Hadith passages printed on the question paper will be taken from the version of the specified texts prescribed in the syllabus. If schools wish to use other versions of the translated texts, they are welcome to do so, but teachers should make candidates aware that there may be differences with the translations that appear on the question papers.

Section B: Islamic beliefs, practices and ceremonies

Candidates will study Islamic beliefs and practices and how these help Muslims to realise, proclaim and develop their faith in daily life.

Candidates may be required to make connections between the content areas in Section B.

1.4 Main beliefs

Content (6 lessons)

- belief in a single Creator God (*tawhid*)
- the role of prophets as human messengers, delivering revelations (*risalah*)
- angels as deliverers of books and recorders of human actions (*malaikah*)
- the revealed word of God as guidance to humankind (*wahy*)
- the Day of Judgement and the afterlife (*‘akhirah*)
- life as a test within the bounds of fate and predestination (*qadar*).

Candidates should be able to:

- consider how the main beliefs are strengthened and realised through a Muslim's actions
- make links between beliefs and actions and reference examples from the Five Pillars of Islam.

1.5 Purification and intention

Content (4 lessons)

- the rituals of purification for prayer, preparation for pilgrimage (*Hajj*) and purification in Islamic birth and death rituals
- purification of the mind from worldly thoughts and the importance of making the right intention (*niyyah*) and purification of the heart through the statement of faith (*shahadah*)

- fasting in Ramadan (*sawm*) as a form of physical and spiritual renewal
- almsgiving (*zakat*) as a means of purification of wealth.

1.6 Acts of devotion and commitment

Content (4 lessons)

- daily and occasional prayer rituals, including the five daily prayers, Eid prayers and prayers on special occasions
- the importance of acts of worship (*ibadah*) and developing God-consciousness (*taqwa*)
- the role of the family in developing faith; marriage (*nikah*) as an act of commitment
- diversity of acts of devotion carried out by different Muslims, including Ashura, the 10th of Muharram and personal prayers (*du'a*) for guidance.

1.7 Putting faith into action

Content (4 lessons)

- support for the poor through almsgiving (*zakat*), voluntary donations and charitable giving
- creation of equality in the Islamic community (*ummah*) through acts of devotion including the rituals of pilgrimage (*Hajj*)
- the inclusion of everyone in the Eid festivals; importance of sacrifices made for God and rewards shared in family and community
- the relationship between intentions, actions and belief in judgement and the afterlife.

Paper 2 Islamic law (Shariah) and its application

The origins of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) are the focus of Section A. Candidates develop an understanding of why each source of authority is important and how they are used together to form Islamic teachings. This study gives candidates an opportunity to debate different interpretations of law applied to moral and ethical issues.

Section B focuses on the study of three areas of Islamic belief: the oneness of God (*tawhid*), the role of religious leaders and judgement and the afterlife (*ʿakhirah*). The study will build on Section B of Paper 1 to involve a discussion of a variety of points of view and perspectives.

Section A: Schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*)

Candidates will focus on the study of some specific aspects of Islamic law (*shariah*): worship, family life and finance and employment. They will trace how opinions regarding their application are formed using sources of authority and their interpretation by different schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*).

2.1 Worship

Content (3 lessons) See 2.4 also.

- opinions regarding purification (*wudu*) before prayer
- the timing and conditions for the daily prayer services, conditions for combination of prayers and the timings of dawn (*fajr*), afternoon (*asr*) and sunset (*maghrib*) prayers
- the conditions for the Friday prayers (*Jumuʿah*).

2.2 Family life

Content (3 lessons) See 2.4 also.

- opinions regarding marriage (*nikah*) to relatives and those of other faiths
- freedom of choice of marital partners and conditions for divorce (*talaq*)
- questions of inheritance, in particular shares for female family members.

2.3 Finance and employment

Content (3 lessons) See 2.4 also.

- the principles of trade and business transactions
- issues of handling debt, usury and interest (*riba*); mortgages
- employment in different local contexts according to Islamic principles.

2.4 Application of Islamic law (*shariah*)

Content (1-2 lessons)

- for 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 the opinions from **two** schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) should be studied. These are to be chosen from:
 - **one** of the four Sunni Imams and their Madhab: Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbali
 - and **one** from:
 - another of the four Sunni Imams and their Madhab
 - OR a Shi'i School of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), such as the Twelvers or Ismailis
 - OR a perspective from outside the traditional schools, such as reformist or Salafi.

Candidates should be able to:

- make comparisons between the content areas and between interpretations of the two schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) which have been chosen for study.

2.5 Sources of Islamic law (*shariah*)

Content (1-2 lessons)

- sources used to derive opinions; why they are important and how they are used together in order of priority:
 - primary sources of Islamic law (*shariah*), the Qur'an and Sunnah; the progressive revelations from Mecca to Medina; issues of strong (*sahih*) and weak (*da'if*) Hadith

- secondary sources including consensus (*ijma'*), analogy (*qiyas*) or reasoning (*'aql*) and variation in opinion about their use
- references to the habits of the people of Medina; local cultural practices (*'urf*); the companions (*sahaba*) of the Prophet (ﷺ) and their followers.

Section B: Diversity of schools of thought

Candidates will make a study of three areas of Islamic belief and analyse the variety of opinions and perspectives about them.

2.6 The oneness of God (*tawhid*)

Content (4 lessons)

- interpretation of the anthropomorphic references to God: literal and metaphorical perspectives and the implications of this for the authority of the Qur'an
- the statement of faith and the position of 'Ali for Shi'i Muslims
- opinions regarding the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet (ﷺ)
- the extent to which Muslims may develop a spiritual relationship with God as expressed in mystical poetry and the controversy regarding the claims of Mansur al-Hallaj.

2.7 The role of religious leaders

Content (4 lessons)

- the Sunni Caliph, as religious and political leader, and Sunni Imams appointed by merit of education and piety
- the importance of the Shi'i Imam, in Muhammad's family line, to make interpretations without error
- the role of a Sufi master (*murshid*) who is given allegiance by followers within a Sufi order (*tariqa*) and guides practices of remembrance (*dhikr*)
- the extent to which individuals may interpret teachings (*ijtihad*) for the modern world, based on their own understanding and the practices of the companions (*sahaba*).

2.8 Judgement and the afterlife ('*akhirah*)

Content (4 lessons)

- interpretations of the Mahdi, the return of the twelfth Imam for Shi'i Muslims
- Sufi focus on rising through the spiritual stations towards union with God, to be fully achieved in the afterlife ('*akhirah*)
- the Mu'tazilah and application of rationalism to achieve justice in the afterlife ('*akhirah*)
- the extent to which humans have free will or whose fate is predestined (*qadar*); the possibility of adjustment to the Divine plan.

2.9 Distinctive positions of Islamic schools of thought

Content (1-2 lessons)

- comparison of the Sunni beliefs to the alternative positions of **all** the following:
 - the Shi'i, Party of 'Ali, and leadership descended from the Prophet's family
 - the Mu'tazilah, the party of Divine Unity, in comparison to the views of al-Ash'ari
 - the mystical approach of Sufism with examples from Sufi orders (*tariqa*)
 - modern Salafi and reformist positions: literal reinterpretations of sources of authority compared to modernist application of the original principles.

Candidates should be able to:

- compare distinctive positions taken by the different schools of thought about the oneness of God (*tawhid*), the role of religious leaders and the afterlife (*'akhirah*).

Paper 3 Heritage of Islam

In Section A, candidates will study the rich heritage of the Umayyads and ‘Abbasids. Candidates will study aspects of their rule and their scientific and cultural achievements. Candidates will critically evaluate the contribution of these caliphates to the development of education, science and other cultural aspects; and reflect on the influence of their legacy for Muslims and the wider world today.

In Section B, candidates will have the opportunity to discuss the extent to which Islam encourages rational scientific enquiry in comparison to acceptance of revelation.

The origins of Islamic art from the removal of idols, to the creation of new works of art and architecture, are also covered. Candidates study famous mosques and compare their styles and features.

Section A: The Umayyads and ‘Abbasids

3.1 The Heritage of the Umayyads

Content (7 lessons)

- leadership of the Umayyad caliphs
- religious, educational and trade policies
- a critical assessment of their rule according to the principles of the Qur’an and Sunnah
- the change in art and culture from the days of pre-Islamic Arabia to the Umayyads; how far the Umayyads accommodated earlier traditions and how far they introduced changes
- the development of the minaret and architecture to reflect distinct Islamic beliefs
- the architectural achievements of the Umayyads including **one** of the following:
 - The Grand Mosque of Damascus

- Masjid al-Aqsa, Jerusalem
 - The Grand Mosque and Palace of Córdoba
- the legacy of interfaith relations in Muslim Spain.

3.2 The Heritage of the ‘Abbasids

Content (7 lessons)

- leadership under the ‘Abbasid caliphs
- religious, educational and trade policies
- a critical assessment of their rule according to the principles of the Qur’an and Sunnah
- the importance of openness to the translation movement
- the development of science, observation and evidenced conclusions, and the differences and similarities with the modern scientific approach
- the scientific achievements of the Golden Age of Islam including **one** of the following:
 - Al-Khwarizmi’s development of algebra
 - Ibn Sina’s Canon of Medicine
 - Ibn al-Haytham’s development of optics
- the legacy of safeguarding knowledge and progress in science.

Candidates should be able to:

- make comparisons between the leadership and policies of the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid caliphs
- compare the extent to which the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid caliphates followed the Qur’an and Sunnah
- analyse the contribution of the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid caliphates to the development of a studied area such as education, or the promotion of religious facilities
- evaluate the influence of the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid legacies for Muslims today.

Section B: Islamic world heritage

Candidates will study how Islamic beliefs are reflected in literature and philosophy and expressed through architecture.

3.3 Literature and philosophy

Content (6 lessons)

- the concept that God sends people knowledge through revelations and through signs in the natural world that may be studied and understood through philosophy (*falsafah*)
- the ways in which Islamic philosophy was similar to and differed from the writings of the ancient Greeks in pre-Islamic times
- a comparative study of **two** significant writings, their contribution to learning and the perspective taken on Islamic beliefs. These must be chosen from:
 - Ibn Tufayl's work *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*
 - Al-Ghazali's *Incoherence of the Philosophers*
 - Ibn Khaldun's work on social science, *The Muqaddimah*
 - the mystical poetry of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya
 - Al-Biruni's work on comparative religion, *History of Religions*
 - a published work chosen by the candidate
- a comparison of the different ways of deriving beliefs through interpretation of revelations
- observation of the created world; philosophical reasoning and mystical meditation
- evaluation of the different ways in which Muslims might explain to others their main beliefs (*da'wah*) today.

3.4 Architecture and design

Content (5 lessons)

- expressions of Islamic beliefs through art and architecture, including God as Creator expressed through geometrical patterns and domes; and the Garden of Paradise expressed in the design of Islamic gardens
- the ways in which Islamic art and architecture differs from pre-Islamic Arabia in the removal of idols and the creation of calligraphy to express the 99 names
- a comparative study of **two** mosques, their main distinctive features and how they reflect Islamic beliefs. These must be chosen from:
 - Timurid *Bibi Khanum Mosque*, Samarkand
 - Ottoman *Sultan Ahmed Mosque*, Istanbul
 - Mughal *Jama Mosque*, Delhi
 - *The Great Ming Mosque*, Xi'an
 - Safavid *Shah Mosque*, Isfahan
 - *The Great Mosque*, Djenne
 - a mosque, such as a local mosque, chosen by the candidate
- discussion of the extent to which artistic expression and cultural diversity should be embraced by Muslims
- the extent to which environmental stewardship and preservation of architecture should be an obligation upon Muslims.

Candidates should be able to:

- compare how an Islamic belief, such as the oneness of God (*tawhid*), is expressed through philosophy and through architecture

- compare the influence of philosophy with architecture for Muslims today
- compare the expression of beliefs in one philosophical text with one mosque chosen for study.

Paper 4 Islam in the modern world

This paper focuses on three contemporary aspects of Islam in the world today: Women in Islam, Islam and pluralism and Leadership of the Muslims. Candidates will consider the current position in each content area; make evaluations of how far this reflects the teachings from the Qur'an and Sunnah and consider examples from the history of the Muslims. They will discuss a range of issues and consider the responses of Muslims in modern times.

4.1 Women in Islam

Content (9 lessons)

- an analysis of the position of Muslim women in society in the modern world; how far they are treated equally to men and the challenges they face
- different Muslim opinions about the role of women and their rights within Islamic law (*shariah*)
- women's rights within married relationships and their roles in family life
- discussion regarding issues of religion and culture, including women's dress, greeting and social relations, professional careers, prejudice and discrimination
- evaluation of how far the position of Muslim women today is in accordance with the teachings in the Qur'an and Sunnah
- the extent to which the rights of women improved with the coming of Islam and how far these improvements have been applied in the modern world
- the influence of Khadija and Aisha, wives of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and his daughter Fatima, as role models

- a historical perspective of the contributions made by **two** Muslim women at different times, including:
 - Lubna of Córdoba, librarian and secretary of Caliph Al Hakam II
 - missionary Ruqayyah bint Ali
 - Queen Arwa al-Sulayhi of Yemen
 - Razia Sultana of Delhi
 - Mughal Noor Jahan
- a study of **one** influential contemporary Muslim woman; evaluation of her contribution to the position of women in Islam and issues she faced, chosen from:
 - a Muslim woman campaigner for human rights (such as Malala Yousafzai) or social issues, **or**
 - a contemporary or recent Muslim woman who has held political office, such as a president, prime minister or member of parliament, **or**
 - an influential Muslim woman chosen by the candidate.

4.2 Islam and pluralism

Content (9 lessons)

- an analysis of the position of minorities within Muslim societies and Muslims living as minorities within mixed societies; how they are treated and the challenges they face
- opinions about the position of people of other faiths living among Muslims and their rights within Islamic law (*shariah*)
- the extent of rights to freedom of individual thought, belief and expression
- discussion regarding issues of religion and culture, prayer during working hours, taking time off for festivals, difficulties establishing mosques
- evaluation of how far the treatment of people of other faiths by Muslims today follows the model of the early Medina community, the Sunnah and the teachings in the Qur'an
- the extent to which the rights of non-Muslims improved with the coming of Islam and how far these improvements have been applied in the modern world
- the influence of Caliph Umar and the Dhimmi contract with those of other faiths living under Muslim rule
- a historical perspective of different approaches taken by Muslims towards those of other faiths, including **either** the contrasting policies of Mughal Emperors Akbar and Aurangzeb **or** the approaches taken towards those of other faiths during the period of Muslim rule in Spain
- a study of **two** countries or communities to evaluate issues of Islam and pluralism, inter-faith and community relations; these may be where Muslims form a minority or are in a majority

living alongside others. Examples might include, but are not limited to:

- Muslims living as a minority in Mauritius
- Muslim minorities living in secular France
- other faiths living in majority Muslim Malaysia.

4.3 Leadership of the Muslims

Content (9 lessons)

- an analysis of the position of leadership of Muslims in Muslim majority countries and communities where Muslims form a minority in the world today
- different opinions about the qualities and characteristics required for eligibility to be a leader
- human rights for Muslims and their responsibilities to their leaders
- discussion regarding issues of just rule, provision for the less fortunate and responses to corruption and oppression
- evaluation of how far leadership of Muslims today follows the teachings in the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad's example of leadership in the city of Medina
- the extent to which leadership improved with the coming of Islam compared to the leadership of the Shaykh in pre-Islamic Arabia
- how far Muslims support the principles of democracy and consultation in exercising leadership and policy-making, including reference to examples from the time of the Four Rightly-Guided Caliphs Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and 'Ali
- a historical perspective of the contribution of **two** Muslim leaders in the development of Muslim practice in the modern world, chosen from:
 - Muhammad 'Abduh

- Syed Abul A'la Maududi
- Hasan al-Banna
- Syed Ahmad Khan
- Allama Iqbal
- a study of **one** influential contemporary or recent Muslim leader.
Candidates should be able to evaluate them in line with the principles of leadership in Islam
 - a Muslim who has held political leadership such as a president, prime minister or member of parliament
or
 - a religious or spiritual leader, such as a famous Imam or preacher, **or**
 - an influential Muslim leader, religious **or** political, chosen by the candidate.

Candidates should be able to (for 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3):

- draw comparisons and make evaluations between the content areas in 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 such as:
 - a comparison of an influential Muslim woman (studied for Section 4.1) with a Muslim leader (studied for Section 4.3)
 - how do Muslims leaders approach living with people of other faiths
 - issues faced by Muslim women compared to issues faced by faith minorities.

(Approximately 124 topics/lessons)