

# Assessing Progress in RE

## Guidance

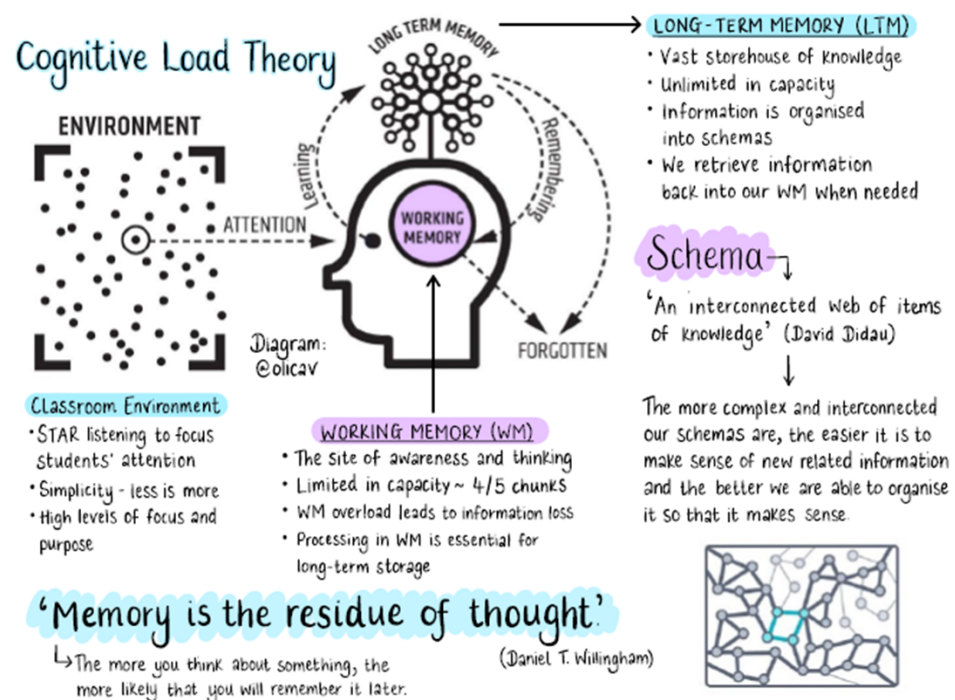


This guidance is intended to support your thinking about assessing progress in RE. It focuses on the different types of knowledge that can be developed through the RE curriculum and offers some pragmatic suggestions for monitoring and evaluating pupil progress over time.

## How Learning Happens

It may be more useful to start this section with considering how learning **does not** happen: progress in learning very rarely happens in neat 'tickable' incremental steps, which is, of course, one of the reasons why we have moved away from using levels to articulate pupil progress. Learning does not progress at a steady rate that is the same for every pupil—different pupils have different starting points and make progress at different rates. Perhaps most importantly, *making progress takes time*.

The graphic below, produced by Grace Hudson, provides an evidence-based summary of how learning happens:



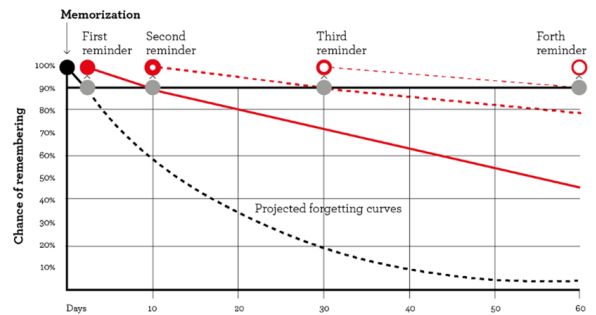
### Notes

## Purpose of Assessment

We need to be clear that we assess learning for three key reasons:

1. To check our curriculum design is appropriate (*the curriculum should be the progression model*)
2. To check our teaching and learning is effective
3. To check that all our pupils are making progress in the subject

To put it another way, the assessment should focus on pupils and the ways in which the curriculum and its implementation is enabling them to make progress. Assessment is not primarily for school accountability.



The 'projected forgetting curve' - notice how many times you need to revisit something before it is moved into the long-term memory...



### Want

- Model connected to curriculum
- Useful model that is fit for purpose
- Model that understands that progress is not always linear and uniform



### Don't Want

- Model that categorizes progress by levels and numbers (*not what Ofsted expects*)
- Model that is primarily about school accountability
- Model that places a ceiling on achievement for any learner

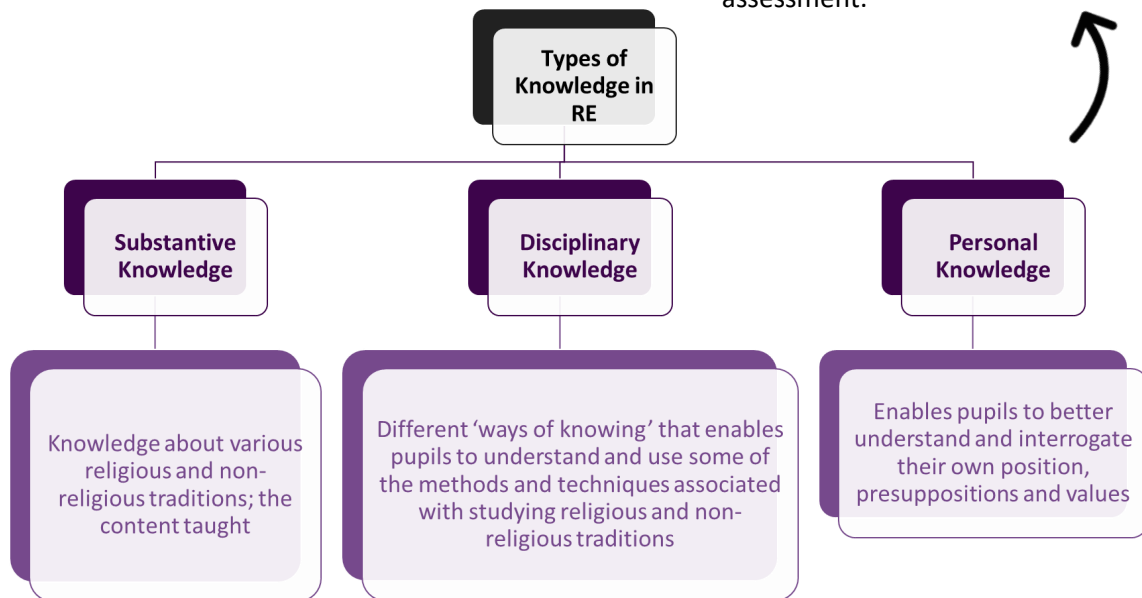


### Notes

## Types of Knowledge in RE

The recent [Ofsted RE Research Review \(May 2021\)](#) outlined three core types of knowledge that we develop through the teaching of RE:

Ofsted acknowledges the challenges of assessing progression in relation to pupils' personal knowledge and suggests that this might be "an aspect of RE that ought to be 'unencumbered' by assessment."



“ High-quality assessment in RE uses assessment sufficiently, but not excessively. ”

“ Formative assessment is granular. For the pupil, it provides feedback, ‘in the moment’, to improve. ”

“ When the curriculum is treated as the progression model, summative assessments attempt to determine how much of the curriculum pupils know and remember. This can be done by sampling from the knowledge that teachers expect pupils to retain through the curriculum journey. As part of this, it is important that instances of summative assessment take place at sufficiently long intervals, to allow time for the RE curriculum to be taught and learned. ”

“ RE assessment needs to relate to the curriculum, which sets out what it means to ‘get better’ at RE. ”

“ Leaders and teachers can design RE assessments that are fit for purpose, in that they are precisely attuned to the knowledge in the RE curriculum that they intend for pupils to learn. ”

# Substantive and Disciplinary Knowledge in RE

## Substantive Knowledge

The **content** delivered - the 'what'

Christianity	Hinduism	Islam
E.g. Church Christmas Baptism	E.g. Mandir Diwali Pilgrimage	E.g. Mosque Eid Zakat



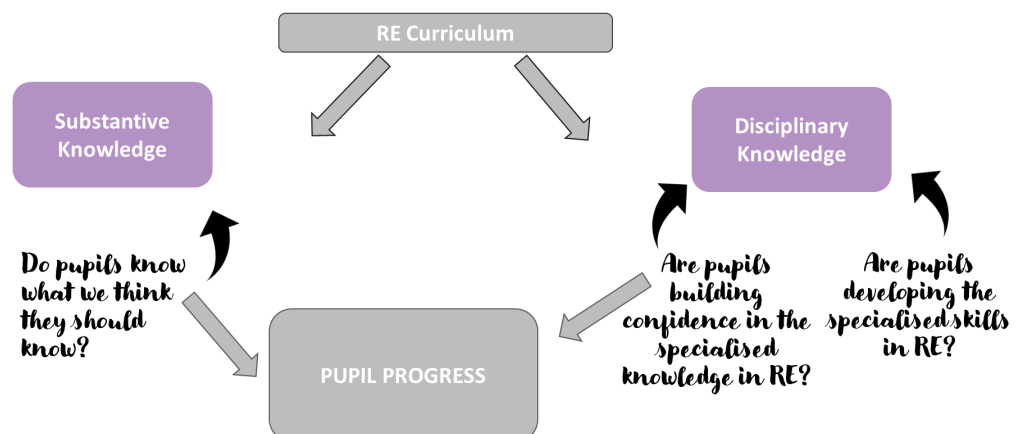
## Disciplinary Knowledge

How the **substantive knowledge** has been **handled** in different fields of enquiry over human history

	Theology	Human/Social Sciences	Philosophy
E.g. Mosque	What a mosque tells us about Muslim beliefs about God and harmony	How a mosque is used; how it has different functions in different contexts; how a mosque relates to communal identity for Muslims	How a mosque relates to questions of morality in Islam, e.g. how coming together in a mosque can function as part of what it means to be a 'good' Muslim

## Assessing Pupil Progress in RE

When we are assessing pupil progress in RE, we need to think about where there are opportunities to assess *both* substantive *and* disciplinary knowledge.

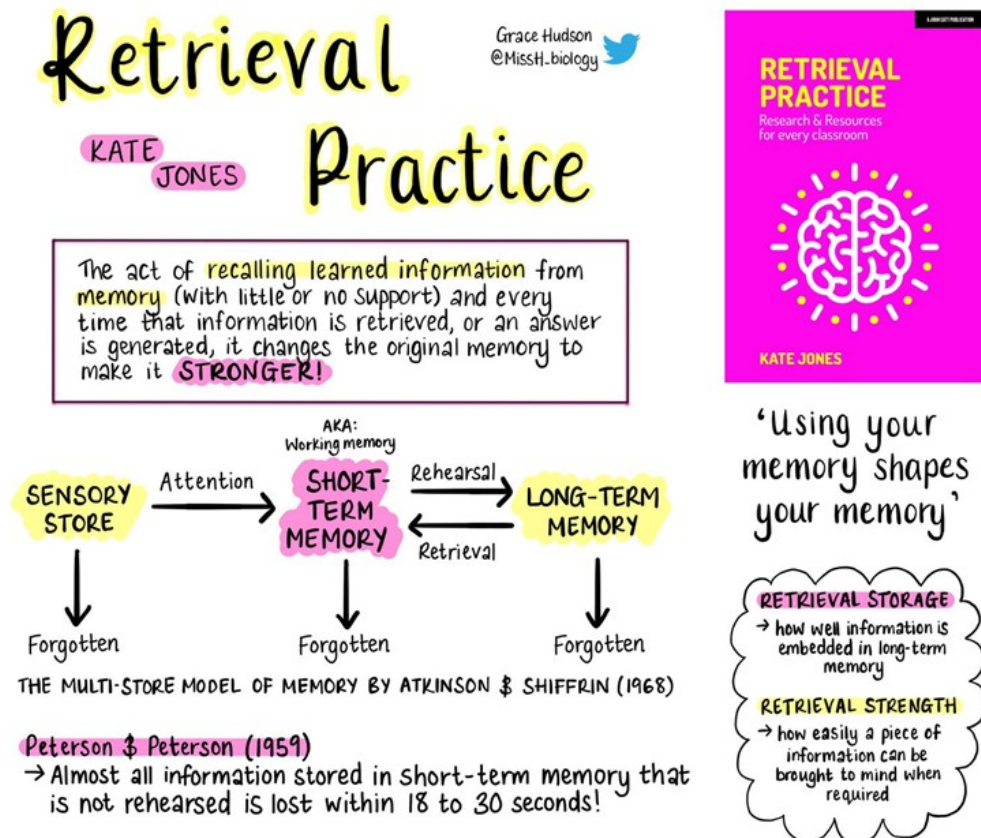


Notes

# Assessing Substantive Knowledge: Recall and Retrieval

Assessing substantive knowledge is about checking that pupils 'know more and remember more' through engaging with the RE curriculum.

The graphic overview below was created by Grace Hudson and draws from Kate Jones' *Retrieval Practice* (John Catt, 2019).



Learning = a change in long-term memory  
‘if nothing has changed nothing has been learned’

Meaningful learning is about producing organised, coherent and integrated mental models that allow people to make inferences and apply their knowledge. (Karpicke, J. 2012)

### THE BENEFITS:

- ① Retrieval practice aids later retention  
‘every time you retrieve a memory it becomes deeper, stronger and easier to access in the future’
- ② Testing identifies gaps in knowledge
- ③ Testing causes students to learn more from the next learning episode
- ④ Testing produces better organisation of knowledge
- ⑤ Testing improves transfer of knowledge to new contexts
- ⑥ Facilitates retrieval of material that wasn't tested
- ⑦ Improves metacognition
- ⑧ Prevents interference from previous material when learning new content
- ⑨ Provides valuable feedback to teachers
- ⑩ Regular testing encourages students to study more



## Assessing Substantive Knowledge:

# Recall and Retrieval Examples

## Retrieval Practice Principles (TOM SHERRINGTON)

### ① Involve everyone in the retrieval practice and review process

‘Good techniques involve all students checking their knowledge.’



### ② Make checking and correcting accurate and easy to do

‘The best person to mark the test is the person who has just took it.’  
- Dylan William



### ③ Specify the knowledge

‘It’s better if students know the set of knowledge any retrieval will be based on, so they can study, prepare and self-check.’



### ④ Keep it generative

‘Students need to explore their memory to check what they know and understand. This means closing the books and making students think for themselves.’



### ⑤ Vary the diet and mix it up

‘This will allow students to explore their schema in different ways, strengthening future recall.’



### ⑥ Make it time efficient

‘A good technique can be used repeatedly in an efficient manner without dominating whole lessons.’



### ⑦ Make it workload efficient

‘The best methods do not involve the teacher checking the students’ answers, creating unsustainable workload.’



‘The closer you are to forgetting a piece of information, the more likely it is that you will benefit from revisiting it.’

(BUSH & WATSON (2019))

## Retrieval Practice in the Classroom

### ① Retrieval Practice Placemat

Example questions:

- What keywords did you use last lesson?
- State 3 key facts from last lesson.
- Explain a key concept from last lesson.
- Ask your partner 3 questions based on the content covered this term.

### ② Brain Dumps

- Dumping as much information from the brain about a specific topic
- Low effort, HIGH impact!

### ③ Cops & Robbers

- Cops - students write as much as they can from memory about a certain topic.
- Robbers - students get out of their seats, sharing and stealing ideas from their peers.

### ④ Retrieval Grids

- A grid with a range of questions that vary in the level of difficulty.
- Each question is worth a certain amount of points. The points increase with the level of difficulty.

### ⑤ Flash Cards

- How effective flashcards are depends on how they're USED!
- It is important that students consciously recall the answer to the question on their flashcards, either verbally or through writing.

### ⑥ Flashback Friday

- As an end of lesson task on a Friday ask students to create a series of 5-10 questions based on the lesson content.
- Students answer these a week later.

# Activity 1

Choose an RE topic you will be teaching soon

Identify key vocabulary/concepts from this topic

Create an activity that will require pupils to show this knowledge and connections between this other knowledge

How might you build in opportunities for pupils to draw on learning from the previous term/year?



### Make the Link

Angel Jibril	Muhammad	Khadijah	Hijrah
Makkah	Qur'an	Prophet	Jerusalem
Night Journey	The Night of Power	Battle of Badr	Allah
Tribe (Quraysh)	Idols	Ka'bah	Monotheism

**Instructions**  
Pick two terms from the table above and explain what links them.

**Rules**  
Don't repeat your explanation for what links the two different terms.  
Don't choose a term more than twice.

Term 1	Term 2	What links them?

### If this is the answer, what is the question? Write answers on next slide.

The black, cube shaped building in the centre of the Grand Mosque in Makkah; the holiest place in Islam	A person who proclaims the message of God e.g. Muhammad, Isa (Jesus), Musa (Moses).	The Arabic name for Gabriel, the archangel who brought God's message to the prophets, particularly to Muhammad
The name of the religion followed by Muslims; to surrender to the will of God; peace	'There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah'	Ritual washing before prayer
Fajr – just before sunrise Zuhr – just after midday Asr – afternoon Maghrib – just after sunset Isha - night	Prayer with an in worship of God, performed under conditions set by the prophet Muhammad	the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, during which Muslims have to fast from dawn to sunset

### Create three challenging multiple choice questions on Islamic Practices

Create three questions based on the content of our Islamic Practices lessons. Highlight the correct answer.

Question	Answer A	Answer B	Answer C	Answer D

### Make the Link

Crucify	Acts	Pentecost	Mary Magdalene	Resurrection	Prophecy
Pontius Pilate	Ascension	Jesus	God	Palm Sunday	Saul/Paul
Persecution	Judas	Miracle	Garden of Gethsemane	Barabbas	Reconciliation
Sin	Martyr	Saviour	Thomas	Treason	The Last Supper

**Instructions**  
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Term 1	Term 2	What links them?
Ascension	Jesus	40 days after his resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven. He told his disciples that he was returning to heaven but that they would receive the Holy Spirit which would give them the power to spread the message of Jesus.

These examples were all created and shared by Joe Kinnaird, who can be found on Twitter at @josephkinnaird.



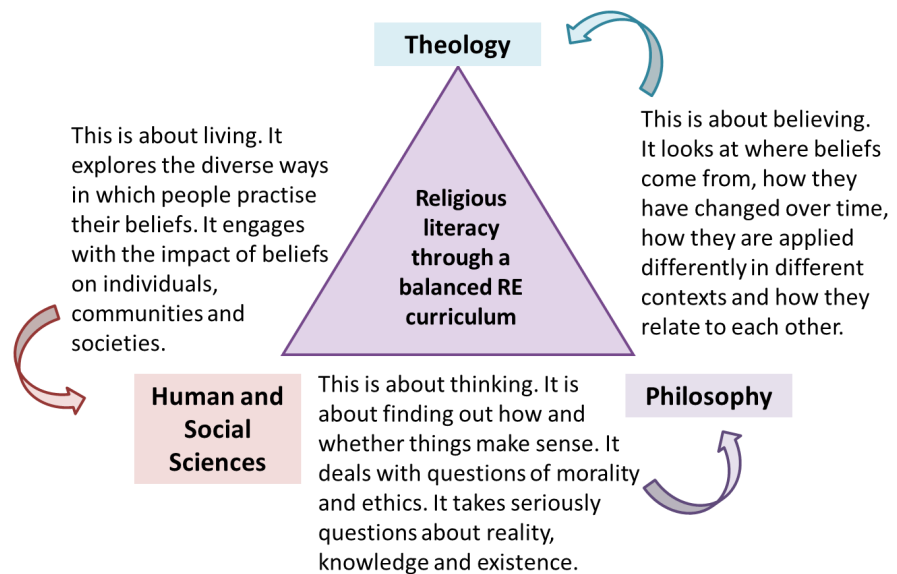
## Disciplinary Knowledge in RE

Disciplinary knowledge involves the 'ways of knowing' associated with the academic disciplines that engage with religious and non-religious worldviews.

It involves developing the **specialised knowledge** and **specialised skills** associated with studying religion and worldviews.

Note that this means that assessment will not just be a straight dichotomy between knowledge (*substantive knowledge*) and skills (*disciplinary knowledge*); instead, we are looking at **substantive knowledge** (*the content taught through the curriculum*) and **disciplinary knowledge** (*specialised knowledge and specialised skills*).

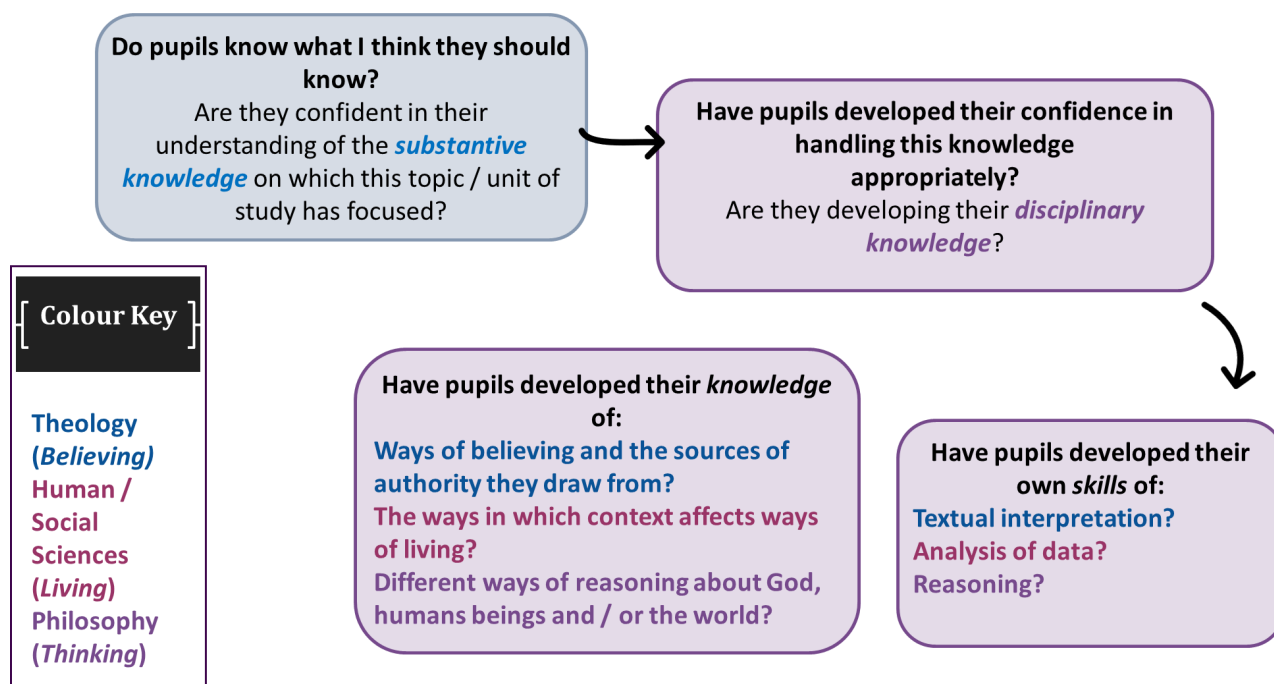
When we are talking about this in the classroom, it can be helpful to talk about looking through the lenses of believing, living and thinking.



This has implications for the knowledge we seek to include in the RE curriculum. If we need to look at our content through various different lenses, then we are going to have to carefully select what content we include on the curriculum. Ofsted refers to this as delivering 'collectively enough' without seeking to cover too much in a superficial way. This, in turn, has implications for the way in which we seek to assess pupil progress in RE.

### Notes

## Assessing Disciplinary Knowledge



This specialist knowledge and specialist skills have been drawn from some end-of-phase expectations for the Lincolnshire locally agreed syllabus, which in turn were drawn from the [primary and secondary RE audit tools](#) for the [Balanced RE approach](#).

This updated guidance contends that the end-of-phase expectations may not be the most helpful model of assessing the progress of disciplinary knowledge, insofar as they break progress down into neat, end-of-phase incremental steps, which we have already noted is not reflective of how progression in learning happens.

### Assessing Progression of Disciplinary Knowledge

This is not about building up disciplinary knowledge in pre-determined incremental steps covered in a set order through the phases of learning: pupils should cumulatively build their confidence in each of these areas over time. This will mean revisiting different elements (e.g. processes of reasoning) at different times during their learning journey, rather than 'ticking off' a specific element in KS1 and covering different elements in KS2 or KS3.

Assessment of progress is about making a professional judgement about the pupil's confidence in each of these areas *appropriate to the individual pupil and what they have been taught* in order to build up a picture of the quality of their disciplinary knowledge overall.

**The implication of this is that we have to be able to trust our own professional judgement of pupil progress in RE, which means we need to know two things really well:**

1. **Our pupils**
2. **The RE curriculum**

[This article](#) raises some really interesting questions about issues of trust in teachers' assessments.

## Assessing Disciplinary Knowledge

### Activity 2

Identify a topic you will be teaching in RE

Select a key piece of knowledge from this topic

Create targeted questions about that knowledge that reflect the three disciplinary lenses in RE



Theology	Human/Social Sciences	Philosophy
Sources of authority	Affect of context on practice	Different ways of reasoning
Textual interpretation	Analysing data	Processes of reasoning

#### Example

Louise Hutton and Dawn Cox, *Making Every RE Lesson Count* (Crown Publishing, 2021)

Topic	Theological question	Philosophical questions	Social science questions
The Fall	What are the different interpretations of the Bible account?	Does it matter if it actually happened or not? Why? What does it mean to be 'free'?	Why do humans break rules?
The life of Guru Nanak	What message did Guru Nanak teach on equality?	Can there ever be true equality amongst humans?	What laws do we have to promote equality?
Hindu caste	What do sources of wisdom and authority in Hinduism say about caste?	Do people deserve to be treated differently?	What is the current law(s) on caste in India?

#### Questions for Reflection

How easy is it to construct questions that reflect the disciplinary lenses?

How will these questions enable me to assess the progress of pupils' disciplinary knowledge?

## Frequency of Assessment

As the old phrase has it, “weighing the pig more often doesn’t make it fatter”.

It is important that **pupils are given enough time to make progress** before we carry out assessment.



To put this in context, RE should receive a minimum of 5% curriculum time. This equates to between 36 and 45 hours per year.

It is unlikely that we would carry out a major summative assessment of pupil progress or attainment in English after one half term, so it doesn’t make sense to carry out multiple summative assessments in RE over the course of a single academic year. If we do this, we are simply not giving our pupils sufficient time to actually make progress.



*Pupils receive roughly the same amount of input in one half-term of English.*



**Pupils need time to make progress in RE—assessment processes must reflect this.**



For this reason, it makes sense to make no more than a single **summative** judgement on pupil progress in RE per year.

This judgement could be based on a portfolio of evidence gathered over the course of the year. We have already noted that it is essential to assess what has been taught, that is, substantive knowledge, and to ensure that we are capturing evidence of pupils’ growing confidence in disciplinary knowledge (*specialist knowledge and specialist skills associated with studying religious and non-religious worldviews*).

Alongside this will be regular **formative** assessment that is enabling us to check that the curriculum design is working and to review the impact of teaching and learning. For this reason, it will be useful to build in regular ‘knowledge checks’ to ensure pupils are acquiring or developing the knowledge we think they should be getting from their RE lessons. These ‘knowledge checks’ could take a variety of forms: multiple choice quizzes, knowledge organisers with gaps that need filling in, concept maps that need the connections between pieces of knowledge to be explained, and so on.

### Notes

## Finding the Evidence



Evidence of pupil progress and attainment in RE can come from a wide variety of sources. This does not have to be limited to retrieval activities like the 'knowledge checks', but should include them.

➤ **Source interpretation**

*(Where sources includes anything that can be 'read', including written sources, such as key sources of authority, sacred texts and historical sources, as well as photographs, artworks, etc.)*

➤ **Written activities**

*(Including opportunities for extended writing)*

➤ **Data analysis**

*(Where data is understood in its broadest sense to mean anything that gives us information about religious and non-religious worldviews, e.g. artefacts, buildings, census data, social media, etc.)*

➤ **Creative activities**

*(In which pupils are asked to clearly explain connections between their creative work and their learning from the RE curriculum)*

➤ **Discussion-based activities**

*(In which pupils are asked to both represent their own views and the views of others using a clear process of reasoning and a range of evidence to support what they say)*



### What Next...?

- Think about **feedback**—once you have gathered evidence, how are you going to use it to help pupils know where they are now and what they have to do next?
- Think about **teaching and learning**—what does the evidence tell you about the impact of teaching and learning? Do you need to make any adjustments to the way in which the curriculum is implemented?
- Think about **curriculum**—do you need to make any changes to the curriculum design itself to better enable *all* pupils to make progress?

### Notes

## Enabling the Academic Flourishing of All Pupils

*Assessment helps build our confidence that all our pupils are flourishing academically in RE.*

The approaches outlined in this guidance are intended to support you to monitor and be able to capture evidence of the progress of *all* pupils in RE. In particular:

- It recognises the centrality of understanding **the curriculum as the model of progression**
- It recognises that **progress happens at different rates for different pupils**
- It recognises that assessment relies on the teacher **knowing the curriculum** and **knowing their pupils**

*This has implications for the curriculum design itself—has it been designed to be accessible to all pupils? Is it appropriately inclusive?*



*This also means you will have to be able to trust your own professional judgement...!*

**All** schools and academies should be monitoring pupils' progress in "knowledge, understanding, and skills towards defined end points" in all subjects on the broad and balanced curriculum (cf. [Ofsted Education Inspection Framework](#)), which includes RE. Church of England and Methodist schools are also expected to be regularly monitoring pupil progress and attainment in RE under strand 7 of the [SIAMS Evaluation Schedule](#).

However, it can take time to build regular assessment of RE into teaching practice, particularly if it has not been carried out before. It might be useful to take a strategic approach to embedding assessment into RE, for example, by initially tracking the progress of a particular group of pupils in order to reflect priorities on the school development plan. The Education Endowment Foundation has some [excellent guidance on implementing change](#) that may be of use when developing your assessment procedures in RE.



## Questions for Reflection

1. How do we currently assess pupil progress in RE?
2. Are we confident that our RE curriculum facilitates pupil progress?
3. Are our assessment processes tightly aligned to what is taught on our RE curriculum?
4. Do we assess both substantive and disciplinary knowledge in RE?
5. How frequently do we assess pupil progress in RE?
6. Do we give pupils enough time to make progress before we assess their progress?
7. What sorts of activities do we use to capture evidence of pupil progress?
8. How confident are we that *all* pupils are flourishing academically in RE?
9. Are we currently meeting the expectations of Ofsted and, where relevant, SIAMS in relation to assessing pupil progress in RE?
10. Do we have a clear and strategic plan to develop our assessment procedures in RE?



## Notes

**Targets:**

**1.**

**2.**

**3.**

The Diocesan RE Adviser is happy to support primary, secondary and special school teachers and subject leaders of RE in all schools and academies in Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire. If you would like further support to develop the assessment of RE in your school or academy, please email her at [gillian.georgiou@lincoln.anglican.org](mailto:gillian.georgiou@lincoln.anglican.org).

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