



## How to write gobbets

The first question in many of the Cert HE examinations asks students to analyse the context, meaning and significance of a passage of Scripture. These are commonly known as ‘Gobbet’ questions.

### What is a gobbet?

A gobbet is a short extract from a book that needs some explanation. Usually it will be one verse of scripture that you’re asked to comment on though in some modules it may be from some other source such as the Book of Common Prayer.

### What makes a good gobbet answer?

In the exam, you will be asked to comment briefly on the context, meaning and significance of various gobbets. To do this well, you need to be clear in your own mind what the difference between these three concepts are.

- Context: how does the gobbet fit in with the material around it?
- Meaning: what is the gist or purpose of the gobbet?
- Significance: why is it important? What are the implications and applications?

It is probably best to write three short paragraphs for each gobbet, one for each of the three concepts above. This is a good way of ensuring that you give equal coverage to each of the three and do not miss out on any aspect. Each gobbet answer should take about 7-8 minutes to answer. You will need to think quickly and clearly, and then write concisely and accurately. You will not have much time, so make sure that every word counts! Answers can and do vary in length quite considerably. Some people obviously write much faster than others. But as a general rule: if your answer is only 4 or 5 lines long, it is likely to be too short to pass. If you are writing much more than a page per gobbet, it is likely that you are spending too long on the question and are probably leaving yourself too little time to answer the other questions.

### Commenting on the context

You should explain where the gobbet comes from (which book of the Bible and, if possible, which chapter), and then address issues such as:

- What form of text is it? (is it narrative, prophecy, a letter etc?)
- Who is saying these words, and to whom? (if appropriate)

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- ◀ • When was the gobbet written, and why the date might be relevant?
- What comes immediately before and after it?
- To what extent does the gobbet touches on wider themes?

These comments must be brief and, as time does not allow you to be exhaustive, you must select what you consider to be the most important points. For example: an explanation of the context of Romans 6v23 might look something like this:

*This verse can be found towards the end of chapter 6 of Paul's epistle to the Romans (his letter to the Christians in Rome). In chapters 1 to 4, Paul has been arguing that all people, Jews and Gentiles, can only be justified by faith in Jesus. In chapters 5 to 8, Paul discusses the new life that Christians are called to live – a life lived out conscious of their past justification and future glorification at the end of time. Chapter 6 in particular looks at the question of sin in the life of the believer.*

### Commenting on the meaning

Here you need to analyse the gobbet – what is it saying and what does it mean? You may find it helpful to consider:

- What are the key word(s) in the gobbet?
- What are the main ideas contained within

the gobbet? (Is it rebuking some particular heresy?; encouraging Christians to act in specific ways?; teaching a point of doctrine?; or revealing some truth about God?).

It is important not to simply re-write the gobbet – instead you need to try and explain what the author's intent and purpose was. For example, you may have a gobbet about Jesus calming a storm (e.g. Mark 4v39). To say that this verse teaches that Jesus can calm storms is accurate but not deep enough to get any marks. You would need to reflect more along the lines of:

*This incident from Jesus' life shows that he has power over nature. The wind and the waves respond to his command instantly – chaos turns to calm when he speaks. This power is beyond that of any normal human being and so this verse helps to identify Jesus as divine – indeed it is one of the many proofs that Mark uses to demonstrate to his readers that Jesus is the promised Messiah. It's interesting to note that the Old Testament also speaks of God as one who is Lord over the sea (e.g. Psalm 65/89/107).*

### Commenting on the significance

Finally, in your third paragraph, you should consider the significance or importance of the gobbet. You should consider such questions as: ▶





- What does it add to our understanding of the book as a whole?
- Why is it so important in the overall scheme of the module being studied?
- Are there any direct applications?

If the gobbet is from the Bible, you should evaluate how it relates to the main themes of the book it is in, as well as its relation to the overall themes of the Bible. If the gobbet comes from a non-biblical source, you should explain how the quote contributes to the understanding of the particular doctrine or idea with which it is concerned.

A significance gobbet would look something like this.

*Exodus 20v8: This verse helps orientate the people of God to keep their eyes fixed on the future. Believers are people heading towards eternal rest in the presence of God – this fact should affect daily living. It is appropriate to use this command as a spur to ensure that our lives contain rest – a regular Sabbath – something that helps us to remember the glory to come. In this way, this commandment is similar to the other nine commandments that spur us to live in certain ways in the period before that eternal rest comes. It is also similar to the rest of Old Testament law in that human beings can never manage to keep this command fully – therefore the command also points to the need of a saviour, Jesus, whose death on the cross makes entering into the eternal rest possible.*

**\*\*please note that while it may be appropriate to briefly mention campaigns such as “Keep Sunday Special”, your exam is not the time or the place to have a rant or even a passionate plea to support any human organisation, however worthy it may be!\*\***

### What does a good gobbet answer look like?

In summary, A good gobbet answer will:

- identify the main point of the gobbet, along with the key themes
- make some relevant comments on the authorship, nature and setting of the gobbet
- comment briefly on other relevant issues
- explore the significance of the gobbet, with relation to other concepts or texts

A great gobbet answer will also:

- be well structured and expressed
- contain neither error nor irrelevancy
- demonstrate familiarity with the texts being considered

There is no substitute for practice. Answering gobbet questions under the time pressures of a mock exam will enable you to refine your skills. As you then go over your answers, assess how well you did on the three criteria of context, meaning and significance. Perhaps ask a friend, or your group leader, to go over them with you.

