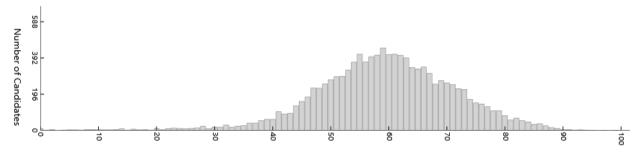


Summary report of the 2016 ATAR course examination: English

Year	Number who sat	Number of absentees
2016	11288	159

Examination score distribution



Summary

The examination consisted of three sections with candidates being required to answer all three questions in Section One: Comprehending; one question from a choice of six in Section Two: Response, and one question from a choice of five in Section Three; Composing. The spread of marks ranged from 0% to 98.50% and the standard deviation was 12.07%.

Attempted by 11285 candidates	Mean 59.12%(/100)) Max 98.50%	Min 0.00%
Section means were: Section One: Comprehending	Mean 16.69(/30)	Max 30	Min 0
Section Two: Responding	Mean 24.98(/40)	Max 40	Min 0
Section Three: Composing	Mean 17.70(/30)	Max 30	Min 0

General comments

Candidate performance demonstrated that the examination was accessible and fewer incomplete examination responses were found than in previous years. An observation made regarding the new Composing section of the examination is that many responses were characterised by graphic and sensational content, even though the prompts were open to various thematic directions. Creative or imaginative writing does not have to explore the extremes of human experience and emotion, and writing from one's own experience can often lead to stronger expressions of thematic concerns and representations of people and places.

There are sometimes external factors that influence the examination circumstance that cannot be predicted. This year the closeness of English to the History examination in the examination timetable certainly led to particular influences in the Composing section. The number of narratives, speeches and interpretative texts based on Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia were noticeable. The volatile political situation in the United States, and the controversial nature of political figures, also influenced many candidates' responses. The proximity of the United States election to the examination was noticeable and evidence of candidates' engagement with their context. It is always emphasised to markers, however, that originality is not a requirement of the marking guide, and it is to be expected that due to candidates' context, and the nature of examination writing, similar ideas and answers will be seen and marked on their merits against the marking guide.

Advice for candidates

- Write concise, specific answers. There is no need for pages of writing in any section of the examination. A higher weighting is not necessarily a requirement for more pages. Think more, write less, write better.
- Address the question. This is the fundamental component of any examination response, yet it is the most common mistake made. With every response that you choose, unpack the question and make sure your answer addresses it by planning your ideas and then evaluating them against the question before writing.
- For Section Two of the examination, where you are required to write about studied texts, you should study a number of texts and choose to write about text(s) that is/are most relevant to the question you are answering. Coming to the examination with only one text in mind, only one text studied, is not a good idea. The questions for this section are specific and complex, and it is not possible to use just any text to answer the question. Some candidates this year tried in vain to answer a question with a text that simply wasn't appropriate.
- Revise concepts and language, not just texts. Revising for English is not simply a matter
 of knowing the narrative or argument of studied texts. You must look closely at the
 textual elements and understand the various concepts that your texts engage with. Your
 study notes for each text should cover the syllabus content. You might even use that
 document to cross reference your notes so that you know you have understood the text
 in relation to the main syllabus concepts.
- Practise composition skills. Just like playing a sport, writing demands that you use various skills to be able to 'play the game'. If athletes don't practise skills, perform drills and train, they will struggle to play well when it comes to the big game. Watching the sport from the sidelines won't be enough. Completing the Composing section of the examination is just like that big game. Reading others' works or watching characters come to life on screen is not enough preparation. Practise the elements of composition across various forms and genres, and remember also to do this in timed conditions.

Advice for teachers

- Teachers are advised that neither a sample examination, nor the last examination held, provide a mandated format for any future examination. Later examinations can, and should explore other variations possible in relation to text choice and section structure within compliance to the design brief in the syllabus. Teachers are reminded that commercial sample examinations are not to be taken as representative or predictors of the ATAR course examination.
- Text selection. With the close assessment of studied texts in the Responding section, it is apparent that some texts that have been popular for study in the past are not useful for the requirements of this section. Teachers are encouraged to look carefully at the texts in their teaching program and consider that students are now required to have an understanding of a range of concepts, as well as a closer comprehension of compositional elements of the text. Teachers might also consider to balance the range of texts chosen for study so that some at least, are uplifting.
- Metalanguage. Teaching students to be in control of the metalanguage of this course empowers them. Being able to allocate a name to the features they observe creates greater confidence in close reading tasks, and it also allows students to write more concisely and focus on the effect of certain textual features rather than description.
- Close reading skills. It is important to consider that the emphasis of Section One is on comprehending text. This explains the specific targeting of skills in questions or the restriction to one element/technique/device in this examination. The emphasis on the reader is lessened, with questions targeting specific textual or language devices in more detail.
- Composing skills. It appears that composing still needs to find a comfortable place within the Senior Secondary English disciplinary space. It is an area teachers must

- address. So many candidates seemed to forget generic conventions or using language to shape readers' responses.
- Consider the marking guide. This is extremely detailed and documents the qualities, as well as the skills and knowledge that markers are looking for candidates to demonstrate in their responses.
- Statements of intent. Candidates should not write statements of intent. While they are
 encouraged to consider the context, audience and purpose of their 'Composing'
 response, and may make notes to this effect, such statements are considered part of the
 candidate's planning process and will not be read by markers or considered in the
 awarding of marks.

Comments on specific sections and questions Section One: Comprehending

Attempted by 11270 candidates Mean 16.69(/30) Max 30.00 Min 0.00 While not all candidates followed the instruction of the question, strong answers that demonstrated a good engagement with central syllabus concepts and provided insightful discussions of the texts were plentiful and could be easily rewarded. Candidates should be familiar with various forms of texts, understand typical methods of construction, as well as possible variations to generic and language conventions, and be confident in using the terminology appropriate to the analysis of these texts. A large number of candidates did not pay close enough attention to the questions, providing a general summary of the text instead of a response to the question. There was no comparative question in the Comprehending section, instead comparative requirements featured in questions of choice in Section Two.

Section Two: Responding

Attempted by 11220 candidates Mean 24.98(/40) Max 40.00 Min 0.00 Questions in this section required close discussion of studied texts and great control over essay structure and expression. The larger weighting for this section is not a signal for a longer answer. While candidates might chose to allocate a little more time on planning for a section with a larger weighting, the response should be a tightly structured and focused answer to the question. Too many candidates felt obliged to write lengthy responses that they were unable to control under examination conditions, and many candidates wrote strong responses for three to four pages and then continued beyond their natural conclusion simply to add more length and ultimately harming their mark. The principles of clear and focused essay writing apply to this section.

This section saw the introduction of some questions requiring comparative study. Many candidates chose to write about multiple texts in their discussions, but few were able to synthesise this discussion into comparative conclusions. This was a clear problem for many candidates in Question 4, but each question had its stumbling block for those who didn't read the questions carefully e.g. 'effectiveness' in Question 4, 'patterns' in Question 6, 'differences' in Question 7, 'compare' in Question 8 and 'adapted' in Question 9.

Candidates referred to a broad range of texts. Unfortunately there were also many texts that were popular in the previous WACE course and were still being explored and discussed in terms of that course's concepts. This created awkward approaches to the questions for many candidates as they attempted to reshape the question to suit their study, rather than address the question on the examination.

There was overwhelming popularity for Question 5, with Question 9 being the second most popular. Questions that required a comparative discussion were not popular but a large number of candidates did choose to write about more than one text, even when this was not required by the question. As questions in this section were clearly targeting particular elements of construction, style, or form, as well as ideas and concepts,

candidates needed to be aware that not all texts will help them to respond to questions. In fact, some texts chosen made the question very difficult to answer.

Section Three: Composing

Attempted by 11236 candidates Mean 17.70(/30) Max 30.00 Min 0.00 This section offered candidates a range of stimuli and the opportunity to write in various forms. Many candidates chose Question 12, but controlled, persuasive responses were rare.

The subject matter of imaginative writing needs careful consideration. A number of candidates seemed to believe that for responses to be effective, they needed to address topics of a grave and dire nature, use language that is contextually inappropriate and depict human relationships simplistically and sensationally. The graphic nature of so many responses appears to have been an attempt at originality. A noticeable problem for many candidates in this section was time management. With so many writing overly long responses in Section Two, many were left short of time in this section of the examination. Candidates needed to have time to develop ideas and structure, as well as finesse their expression in this section of the examination. Careful planning and editing can make an important difference to responses, as can explicit knowledge and revision of compositional elements and language devices.