![Government of Western Australia — School Curriculum and Standards Authority]

Summary report of the 2020 ATAR course examination:
Literature

Year	Number who sat	Number of absentees
2020	1453	21
2019	1461	10
2018	1456	11
2017	1518	8

The number of candidates sitting and the number attempting each section of the examination can differ as a result of non-attempts across sections of the examination.

Examination score distribution–Written
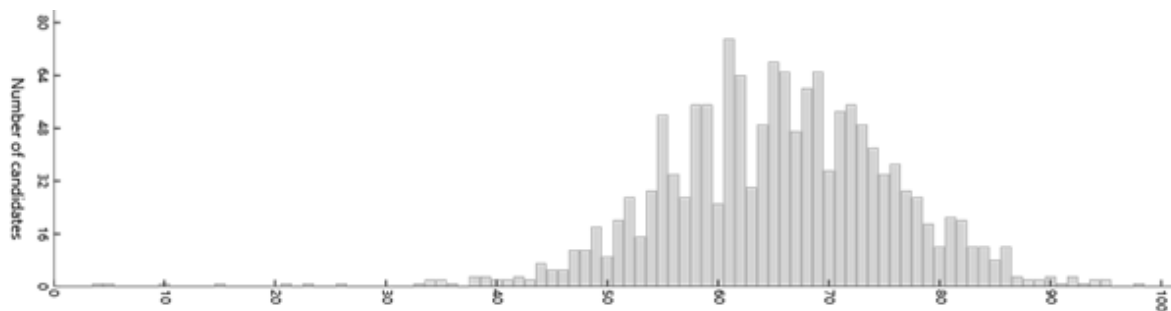
Summary

Attempted by 1452 candidates	Mean 65.42%	Max 97.65%	Min 4.08%
Section means were:			
Section One: Response – Close reading	Mean 65.10%		
Attempted by 1445 candidates	Mean 19.53(/30)	Max 30.00	Min 0.00
Section Two: Extended response	Mean 65.56%		
Attempted by 1452 candidates	Mean 45.89(/70)	Max 68.25	Min 4.08

General comments

Questions in the 2020 examination drew on a range of course concepts including, among others, the influence of the reader's social position, cultural assumptions, and gender; the way that literature represents and reflects cultural change and difference; ideological perspectives; aesthetic considerations; and how specific literary elements and forms shape meaning. Candidates had the opportunity to connect such concepts to their own experiences with literature, and to the significance of literature in society. Questions were designed to discourage candidates from memorising school-based assessments to reuse in the examination.

Candidates demonstrated a sound knowledge of their texts and are usually able to draw on relevant textual evidence to support their responses. However, it was frequently observed that candidates often struggle to effectively use relevant critical, stylistic and generic terminology consistently. As has been noted in previous years, a small number of texts dominate responses. This year, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and *Othello,* Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead,* Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the poetry of Eliot, Harwood and Wagan Watson were frequently seen. Of the work of these poets, a very small selection of their oeuvre are being drawn upon with the same titles appearing time and again.

Advice for candidates
- Allocate time to plan your answer. Avoid jumping into writing before you are clear about what you want to discuss. Planning will help ensure your response is clear, covers all parts of the question, and is structured well. Five minutes of thoughtful planning time will be time well-spent.
- Choose your question carefully and make sure that the text you're using to support your response is fit for the purpose. For example, if a question asks for a discussion of the 'experimental' use of language or form then you need to choose a text which actually does this.
- When you use the keywords of the question, ensure you understand what they mean and that you elaborate on how they are being applied in your response. Avoid just restating the keywords or phrases without any explanation.
- Try to avoid repeating phrases such as 'this shows that'. Consider the way the writer is crafting their work to do something specific (e.g. 'using colours in this way highlights that …' or 'the typography used in this poem can be interpreted to represent …').
- Aim to use the language of the course and the genre when writing your response. Take the time to go through the syllabus materials (including for Units 1 and 2) and make note of the language that arises. When writing about a genre, use the terminology which is particular to it. Ask yourself, "is it clear that I am writing about a prose/drama/poetry text?"
- Avoid the temptation to memorise an in-class assessment to use in the examination. It is very obvious when this has been done as the response will not engage with the question.
- Make sure your handwriting is clear and legible. This is your responsibility. Markers cannot award marks for writing when they cannot read it. When a marker has to slow down to read your writing letter-by-letter, trying to decipher each word, it slows down their reading often to the point where the coherence of the whole is lost. Do not underestimate the importance of legible handwriting.

Advice for teachers
- Spend time using previous examinations to break down keywords and phrases with students, and to consider how they might (or might not) work with the texts studied. In doing so, remind students that they will need to take this sort of active approach in the examination – not all questions will suit their studied texts. Understanding what the questions are about is vital, and with that knowledge, they must not make quick assumptions about what is required. A lack of engagement with questions was noted frequently this year.
- Help students to become more deeply engaged with their own contexts so that they can avoid superficial phrases like 'as a girl' or 'being from a middle-class background'. Unpack the concepts of gender, class, social position, and so on, in the 21st century and beyond.
- Work with students to understand the contexts of their texts. Reductive and superficial assumptions to do particularly with the place of men and women in societies, and of race, are often underpinning responses. Help students to see the nuance in their texts, to read between the lines, and to look for the ways that characters represent a range of experience that does not fit into one narrow view.
- Ensure that you are giving your students opportunities to handwrite, and provide them with honest feedback about it frequently. They should be reminded that it is not in their interests to ignore the importance of writing legibly. Students whose handwriting is poor or difficult to read need to be assisted to improve it so that their examination responses can be read with ease.

Comments on specific sections and questions

Section One: Response – Close reading (25 Marks)

While the numbers attempting each genre in Section One were reasonably close, a movement away from Prose in favour of Poetry and Drama was noticed this year. The rich use of conventions relevant to these genres, in comparison to the perhaps more 'traditional' construction of the Prose text, may have given candidates a clearer 'way in' to these texts. Candidates who responded to the Drama text achieved more highly (with a higher mean and lower minimum mark) than the other two genres where achievement was similar. Candidates and teachers are reminded that the Close Reading section gives them the opportunity to search for meaning and articulate how they got there, without having to limit themselves to a particular reading 'lens'. Often candidates describe what they see in the text's construction but do not go on to articulate 'so what?' Candidates need to make clear how the text shapes their understanding. It is also worth noting that linguistic, stylistic and critical terminology continues to be the weakest aspect of close readings of all passages and this is something to focus on in future preparation.

Text A (Prose Fiction) attempted by 404 candidates	Mean 15.37(/25)	Max 24	Min 0
Reading/s of text	Mean 4.21(/7)	Max 7	Min 0
Close textual analysis	Mean 3.73(/6)	Max 6	Min 0
Linguistic, stylistic and critical terminology	Mean 3.44(/6)	Max 6	Min 0
Expression of ideas	Mean 3.99(/6)	Max 6	Min 0

Responses to the Prose text often effectively discussed the valorisation of the natural world, and colonialism, as represented or suggested by the text. A notable number of responses attempted a reading which considered the depiction of the female character in comparison to the male. This was done with varying degrees of success. Candidates should be aware that just including a male and a female character does not necessarily mean that there will be enough evidence to support commentary on the place of women and men in our world. However, some candidates were able to develop their reading to consider the differences in characterisation of the male and female, with the male being more active and effusive, and the female demure, restrained, and silent. It is noteworthy that the linguistic, stylistic and critical terminology criterion had the lowest mean for this genre, highlighting a need for a perhaps more active approach to incorporating generic language in responses to prose texts.

Text B (Poetry) attempted by 518 candidates	Mean 15.83(/25)	Max 25	Min 0
Reading/s of text	Mean 4.37(/7)	Max 7	Min 0
Close textual analysis	Mean 3.86(/6)	Max 6	Min 0
Linguistic, stylistic and critical terminology	Mean 3.52(/6)	Max 6	Min 0
Expression of ideas	Mean 4.09(/6)	Max 6	Min 0

Some sound cultural understanding of relevant issues (such as the experience of women in male-dominated arenas such as aeronautics) was demonstrated in responding to the Poetry text. It is worth noting that few candidates demonstrated any knowledge of women who have travelled into space (such as the first all-woman space walk in October 2019) or even suggested that the persona of the poem may have 'paved the way' for women who came after her. The poem provided fertile ground for a reading examining the way that the typography, structure and language conventions represented physical experiences, but this was rarely discussed in depth. Readings focussing on the treatment of the woman under patriarchal structures certainly dominated. Some thoughtful responses noted the way that imagery was used to convey ideas about people's value, noting the 'cost per pound' of the persona and the incorporation of numerical quantities throughout the poem.

Text C (Drama) attempted by 523 candidates	Mean 17.43(/25)	Max 25	Min 9
Reading/s of text	Mean 4.77(/7)	Max 7	Min 2
Close textual analysis	Mean 4.33(/6)	Max 6	Min 2
Linguistic, stylistic and critical terminology	Mean 4.00(/6)	Max 6	Min 2

Expression of ideas   Mean 4.34(/6)   Max 6   Min 3

Candidates demonstrated strong opinions and knowledge of migration and asylum seeker issues in Australia, which is commendable; however, sometimes the response became a platform to voice their displeasure rather than a clear reading of the text. Many markers commented that it is pleasing to see that candidates really seem to understand that drama is a performance, and incorporate strong linguistic, stylistic and critical terminology into their response (as evidenced by the higher mean for this criterion in this genre).

Section Two: Extended response (60 Marks)

Questions which dealt with cultural concepts saw large numbers of responses, whereas questions focused more on language and generic features were less popular. Mean marks were similar across all questions and genres. A noticeable number of responses which appeared to be school-based assessment answers with minor changes to language or final sentences to make them seem like they were genuinely responding to the examination question were seen. Candidates need to be aware, and their teachers need to make clear, that memorising a response which scored well in class and simply 'massaging' it to superficially suit an examination question is unlikely to result in high marks.

Several questions in this, and previous, examinations have specifically called for a personal response. However, it appears that candidates are still often uncomfortable using first person. This is an acceptable (and sometimes necessary) way of writing responses and candidates should note whether a question asks for a personal connection to the question (e.g. with words such as 'your' and 'with you'). Another noteworthy issue was the frequency of candidates repeating the keywords and phrasing of the question without really interpreting what the question was looking for. It is important that they understand the words they are using, and explain their interpretation of them where necessary, rather than simply repeating them. Even a single sentence will often suffice, for example to explain what a text resonating with a reader means or entails, or what makes a particular issue or idea confronting.

Written expression is generally strong in Literature responses; however poor use of correct punctuation and spelling, and paragraphs and overall responses which are extremely (and unnecessarily) long, abound; length and quality do not always go hand-in-hand. Examination responses are of course a 'first draft' and perfection is not expected. However, candidates are being assessed on the quality of their written expression and marks in this area can make a big difference to their overall score. While it is to be commended that candidates are being exposed to academic and critical literature that supports their understandings of texts, candidates should be encouraged to draw on their studied text to provide evidence and examples to underpin their responses, rather than memorising unhelpful (and often not entirely relevant) quotes from literary 'experts'.

While only a small number of candidates made such an error, it should be reiterated that three of the questions in the examination relate to specific genres and the text they discuss must be carefully chosen. Candidates must carefully read the question and ensure that they are clear as to whether they must use a specific genre in their response.