

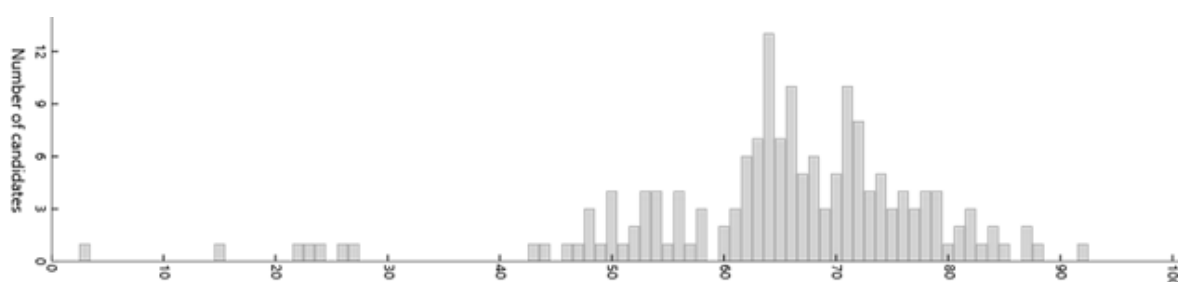


## Summary report of the 2023 ATAR course examination report: Philosophy and Ethics

Year	Number who sat	Number of absentees
2023	165	3
2022	158	3
2021	230	5
2020	211	2

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



### Summary

The examination consisted of three sections. In Section One: Critical reasoning, candidates were assessed on their skills in critical reasoning and methods of inquiry. Section Two: Philosophical analysis and evaluation assessed the candidate's inquiry skills (i.e. to summarise, clarify and critically evaluate the cogency of arguments and assumptions in dialogues and passages). In Section Three: Construction of argument, candidates selected one question from a choice of five.

Attempted by 165 candidates                      Mean 64.49%    Max 92.00%    Min 3.00%

Section means were:

Section One: Critical reasoning                      Mean 73.58%  
Attempted by 164 candidates                      Mean 22.07(/30) Max 30.00 Min 0.00

Section Two: Philosophical analysis and evaluation                      Mean 61.87%  
Attempted by 164 candidates                      Mean 24.75(/40) Max 38.00 Min 0.00

Section Three: Construction of argument                      Mean 58.89%  
Attempted by 159 candidates                      Mean 17.67(/30) Max 28.00 Min 0.00

### General comments

Overall, this was a successful examination which provided plenty of opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge from across the course curriculum. Many questions successfully enabled discrimination between candidates, with the full range of marks being awarded. The examination paper seemed to provide a fair assessment of the ability and knowledge of the candidates, with a select number of candidates performing at an exceptionally high level. While the mean score for Section One was higher than in 2022, Sections Two and Three exhibited a similar range of candidate performances when compared to past examinations.

### *Advice for candidates*

#### Section One

- Make sure that you learn the relation between logical connectives, such as how to convert disjunctive statements into conditionals, or vice versa.
- Be aware that disjunction statements are to be read as inclusive, not exclusive, statements.
- Avoid erroneously circling 'if' and 'then' as inference indicators. The antecedent and consequent components of a conditional statement are not independent assertions.
- If finding an argument not cogent, it is not enough to simply assert that the argument fails the criteria for cogency. You must provide a reason as to why a premise is unacceptable, or an inference weak.

#### Section Two

- Avoid producing a convoluted diagram of numbers and arrows as a 'clarification' of the argument in a passage, leaving it to markers to interpret it. The task of clarification is to explain the argument in a way that illuminates its structure and demonstrates a clear comprehension of what has been said and why. You need to show that you understand which details in the passage are most important and which are extraneous, and which details are amenable to simplification. Merely providing a diagram is insufficient for realising these aims.
- It may be helpful to think of the task of clarification as explaining what is going on in a passage or dialogue to someone who has not read it, or to someone who has read it, but who needs help in understanding what it all means.
- Avoid supplying verbatim reproductions of statements from the passage or dialogue. The goal should be to demonstrate your understanding by paraphrasing the claims and putting them in your own words. Some use of quotation is fine, but it should be the exception, not the rule, and it should be clearly identified as such (i.e. punctuated with quotation marks).
- Ensure that conclusions and sub-conclusions of arguments are evaluated as such, and not simply assessed for their acceptability as though they had been independently asserted.
- Practise applying general syllabus points, such as issues around obligation to future generations (or around social identity and marginalisation) to specific cases, such as those around global warming (or the use of social media).

#### Section Three

- Ensure that you represent your opponent's position accurately and engage with it fully; avoid constructing straw men or being superficial in considering their point of view.
- Avoid brash overconfidence in your tone. It may help you to imagine, as you are writing, that your reader holds the polar-opposite opinion to whatever it is you are arguing for. Such a reader does not want to be ridiculed.
- Take care to engage with the prompt in a way that directly answers the question, and which connects general principles with the specific case at hand.
- Study widely, so that you are fully prepared for the number of different questions in your examination.

### *Advice for teachers*

- Provide students with regular practice at writing essays to unfamiliar prompts.
- Prepare students with the philosophical skills of applying a general principle to a specific case at hand (and vice versa) so that they are better equipped to tackle such questions when they arise. This develops in them the important philosophical skills of abstraction and reasoning by analogy, which will improve their overall ability in the course.

## ***Comments on specific sections and questions***

### **Section One: Critical reasoning (30 Marks)**

Candidates demonstrated a range of abilities in Section One. The mean score of 73.58% for this section was elevated in comparison with previous years' results, suggesting that this section of the examination was found to be straightforward. Some parts in Questions 4 and 5 had very high means, with nearly all candidates giving correct answers.

### **Section Two: Philosophical analysis and evaluation (40 Marks)**

In Section Two, candidates displayed a variety of approaches in composing their analyses. Responses were rewarded to the extent that they succeeded at fulfilling the tasks of summary, clarification, and evaluation. A small number of candidates simply produced a convoluted diagram of numbers and arrows as their 'clarification' of the argument in the passage, leaving its interpretation to the marker. There were also many candidates producing verbatim reproductions of statements from the passage or dialogue.

### **Section Three: Construction of argument (30 Marks)**

In Section Three, candidates selected one question from five alternatives, on which to write an extended essay. As indicated by the section means, it was the most challenging section of the examination, which is in line with previous years. It was encouraging to see candidates making efforts to include consideration of objections to the positions they were arguing for in their essays. However, some candidates were not taking to this task in earnest but simply erecting and dismissing straw men, sometimes in a brash and overconfident tone.