

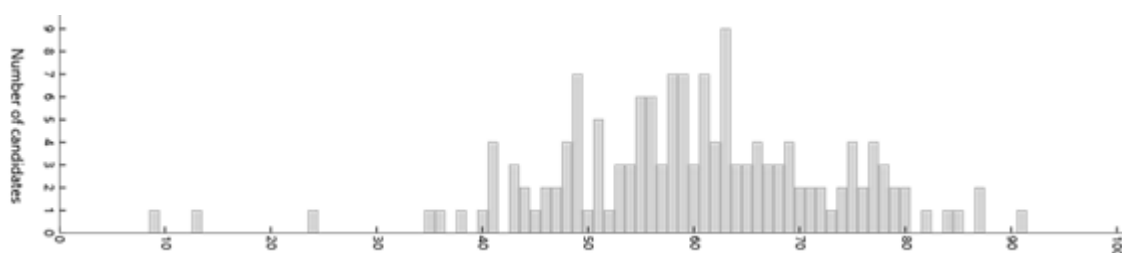


Summary of the 2024 ATAR course examination report: Philosophy and Ethics

Year	Number who sat	Number of absentees
2024	149	3
2023	165	3
2022	158	3
2021	230	5

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 candidates' 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 149 candidates Mean 59.46% Max 90.50% Min 9.00%

Section means were:

Section One: Critical reasoning	Mean 61.1%
Attempted by 149 candidates	Mean 18.33(/30) Max 29.00 Min 5.00
Section Two: Philosophical analysis and evaluation	Mean 59.52%
Attempted by 148 candidates	Mean 23.81(/40) Max 37.00 Min 0.00
Section Three: Construction of argument	Mean 57.75%
Attempted by 146 candidates	Mean 17.33(/30) Max 27.50 Min 0.00

General comments

The examination provided plenty of opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge of the syllabus. The paper provided a fair assessment of the candidates' ability and knowledge, with a select number performing at an exceptionally high level.

Advice for candidates

Section One

- Be aware that disjunctive statements are to be read as inclusive, not exclusive, statements.
- When finding an argument not cogent, ensure that you supply a reason why a premise is unacceptable, or a reason for why an inference is weak. It is not sufficient as a

justification to simply assert that the argument fails to satisfy one or other of the criteria for cogency.

- When identifying weasel words or phrases, remember that not everything that is a little unclear or undefined is a weasel word or phrase. Some things are general by nature. People have to be able to use implication, idiom, shorthand, etc., and to make assumptions about background knowledge in speech and writing. Weasel words or phrases occur when these normal practices are intentionally exploited.
- Ensure that when explaining why a particular word or phrase is a weasel word or phrase, you explain how and why the phrase is vague, ambiguous or euphemistic by identifying or suggesting a meaning that is being intentionally obscured through these techniques.
- Remember that 'inference indicator' is a functional term. Any word or phrase that is performing the function of indicating that an inference has been made is an inference indicator.
- When you are asked to write out separable statements in full, inference indicators should be eliminated, and you must clarify the referent of any demonstrative pronoun appearing in the statement so as to remove any ambiguity of reference.

Section Two

- Avoid supplying verbatim reproductions of statements from the passage or dialogue. Whether producing a standardisation of an argument or trying to clarify it in a more discursive fashion, 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).
- 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.
- Ensure that conclusions and sub-conclusions of the arguments are being evaluated as such, and not simply assessed for their acceptability as though they had been independently asserted.

Section Three

- Ensure that you represent your opponent's position accurately and engage with it fully; avoid constructing straw man arguments or being superficial in considering their point of view.
- Ensure that you engage critically and in depth with theories and theorists used to support your position.
- Ensure that you directly address the prompt; do not attempt to fit a prepared essay to one of the available prompts to which it is only generally or tangentially related.

Advice for teachers

- Understanding the connectives, especially conditionals, is a crucial element in the syllabus and has ramification for other content points. A thorough grasp of the connectives will aid students in recognising relations of logical equivalence, and to recognise valid and invalid arguments. It will also aid them in comprehending the structure of arguments more generally, in focusing their attention on ways in which arguments can be criticised, as well as in constructing their own arguments.
- Expose your students to a wide variety of inference indicator words and phrases. Support students to identify inference indicators by the function that they perform in an argument rather than from a list that has been rote-learned.
- Provide opportunities for students to practise planning relevant essay responses to unfamiliar essay prompts. Assist students to practise using the full 10 minutes of reading time to select a question for which they can best construct a line of reasoning in their heads.

- Ensure that your students have a working understanding of the overarching topics that an examination could focus on and provide practice for them to scrutinise that their answers to Section Three engage explicitly and carefully with each philosophical term or phrase within the prompt.

Comments on specific sections and questions

Section One: Critical reasoning (30 Marks)

Candidates demonstrated a range of abilities in Section One. Many candidates found this section challenging, while some achieved very high results.

Section Two: Philosophical analysis and evaluation (40 Marks)

Candidates displayed a variety of different approaches in composing their analyses for Section Two. Answers were rewarded the extent to which they succeeded in fulfilling the tasks of summary, clarification, and evaluation. On the whole, candidates found it difficult to clarify and evaluate arguments. A number of candidates prefaced their clarifying remarks with the phrase, 'the argument can be listed as ...', and proceeded to provide a numbered list of the propositions appearing in the passage, copied out verbatim, while providing no indication of the way in which the statements were working together to make inferences. There was a notable trend among answers to simply and mechanically consider the independent acceptability of each key proposition in the passage. It was imperative that candidates provided evaluation of inferences and that they substantiated any claim that an inference was weak by explaining a way in which the premises could be true and yet the conclusion (or sub-conclusion) false. Mechanical approaches to evaluation had an additional flaw in that candidates taking this strategy were neglecting the sometimes more significant criticisms that could be offered by way of counter argument, counter example, or refutation by logical analogy.

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. 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 did not take to this task in earnest but simply erected and dismissed straw man arguments. Another general issue with some essays was the attempt to use too many theories and theorists to support their thesis within the one essay. Three weaknesses in argument followed from this error. One is that it allowed for only superficial analysis of each theory. Another is that the contradictions and tensions between the different theories assembled together in the same essay were not addressed. Lastly, expending too many words on exposition often left little room for serious consideration of an objection or counter argument.