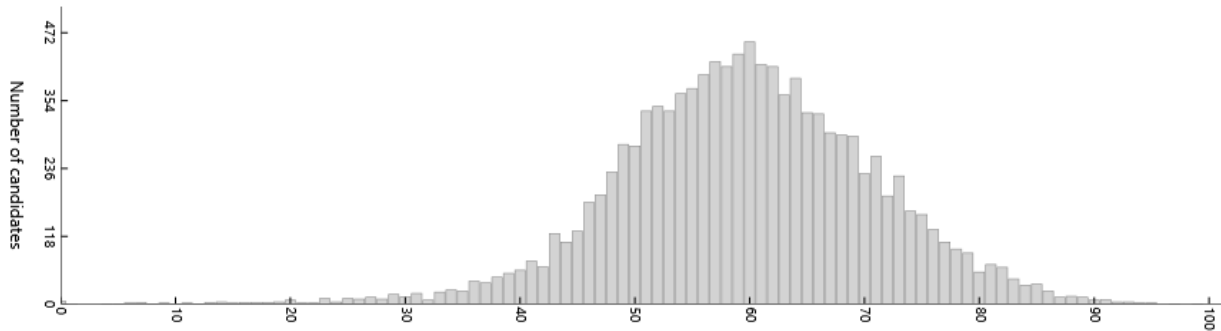




## Summary report of the 2017 ATAR course examination: English

Year	Number who sat	Number of absentees
2017	11 161	121
2016	11 288	159

### Examination score distribution – Written



### 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 examination was attempted by 11 161 candidates and produced a mean of 59.30%. Scores ranged from 0% to 99.00% and the standard deviation was 11.26%.

Section means were:

Section One: Comprehending	Mean 57.47%		
Attempted by 11 147 candidates	Mean 17.24(/30)	Max 29.00	Min 0.00
Section Two: Responding	Mean 61.28%		
Attempted by 11 119 candidates	Mean 24.51(/40)	Max 40.00	Min 0.00
Section Three: Composing	Mean 59.05%		
Attempted by 11 127 candidates	Mean 17.71(/30)	Max 30.00	Min 0.00

### General comments

The performance this year was pleasing across the three sections and many markers noted that most candidates made a reasonable attempt to complete all three sections.

It is evident from Sections One and Two that teachers and candidates alike are becoming more familiar with the syllabus content for Units 3 and 4, and it is heartening to see a number of candidates in Section Two showing a greater depth of understanding of genre (particularly *adaptation* and *transformation*), comparison of texts and representation.

While there were some outstanding compositions in Section Three, the skills required to compose successfully in a particular form under timed conditions need further attention in classrooms to strengthen this section. There is an evident need for further preparation of composition skills for candidates during their ATAR English experience.

### Advice for candidates

- When required to make a selection, choose the right question for your texts and skills. For Section Two, prepare your texts by making a list of the syllabus terms and applying them (in charts, mind maps, sketch-notes, lists, and practice essays) to every single text, therefore increasing your chances of offering complex ideas in timed conditions.

For Section Three, prepare your composition skills during the year by practising the structural features (listing, sketching, drawing, writing in full) of the forms in which you feel that you can move a reader to respond in some way. What are your strengths? Play to them ... and rehearse them often.

- Avoid quoting large chunks of text in Sections One and Two. While quotes can be helpful in order to strengthen your understanding of character, setting, theme and representation, quotes longer than two sentences are not helpful in presenting your own ideas and understandings. They can fragment the response so that it is ineffectively linked to the question asked. This is particularly applicable to Section One responses, where references to the text should be paraphrased or partially quoted within the body of a sentence.
- Answer the question asked of you. In all sections, plan carefully to unpack all of the key words and return regularly to these terms – either literally, structurally or figuratively – to ensure that you are attending to the requirements of the question in front of you.
- Plan your response in Section Three. Write with the ending in sight, so that you are crafting a text with a sophisticated understanding of structure and completion. Plan a title, plan your structural features, plan your language for a particular audience and context, and plan how you will finish the piece. Aim to complete Section Three by offering sophisticated writing that shows your understandings of the complexity of the world.
- Practise composing. Section Three is an opportunity for you to respond to a prompt or question using twelve years of English learning. This means you need to be confident and composed in your use of language and structural features to affect a reader in a particular way. Consider your purpose deeply – what is it that you wish a reader to feel? To experience? To know? Write with purpose and use language to show your ability to move a reader – intellectually, emotionally, psychologically – through whichever form you select.
- Avoid the use of *often* or *certain* in your first sentence in an essay introduction as a way to ‘write your way in’. These terms are vague and result in a weak introduction that shows limited understanding of the syllabus concepts required. Begin and end your work powerfully to remind your marker of your writing skills and complexity of thought.

#### *Advice for teachers*

- Perspective. Most candidates are writing about perspective as an opinion or idea, but the glossary – which underpins understanding and teaching of the syllabus – states that perspective is positional and strongly influenced by context. This concept needs re-teaching so that students are able to recognise perspectives in texts, as well as their own.
- Text choice. The wide range of texts being used by ATAR 12 English teachers is evident and there are some teachers who have developed exciting, dynamic textual studies based on the syllabus, which invite comparison between and evaluation of texts based on genre, mode, context and language. Be exciting! Seek to offer your students the opportunity to engage in lively, thought-provoking comparisons of representations, ideas or perspectives across a wide range of texts that represent ideas relevant to their understanding of the world. This need not mean the inclusion of lengthy, ‘heavy’ or profoundly upsetting texts.
- Controversy. This concept in Unit 4 is one that requires more depth and understanding of perspective than an *issue*. Candidates need to be prepared to justify why a particular controversy is a subject of debate – public or otherwise – and offer an understanding of more than one ‘side’ in their discussion of a particular controversy represented within a text or related to a specific context. Teachers need to be selecting texts that truly deal with a controversy, not just a problem or issue.
- Metalanguage and visual language. Candidates are showing gradual improvement in the recognition of prose language features and a corresponding ability to use the metalanguage of prose, but not so with visual language. Strengthening students’

understanding of how to analyse multimodal and visual texts using more complex frameworks for reading, including the correct use of terminology, will help to convey more sophisticated readings of texts, particularly in Section One.

- Titles in Section Three. Regardless of form, candidates are strongly encouraged to write a relevant and enlightening title for their composition, perhaps even including a subtitle, as a generic convention for the form of their choice. This will be a strong beginning for the text and assist in clarifying their purpose, context and audience.
- Composition skills. The Section Three questions require candidates to engage with syllabus concepts, and this needs to be reflected in teaching composition skills throughout the year. Offering students the opportunity to write an assessment during the year using composing skills is not enough. Candidates need repeated and regular composition practice to enable them to unpack examination questions and prompts in a more erudite manner and to write with control of language features for sophisticated effect.
- Particular terms to revisit with students: the terms *lexical choice* or *diction* were very popular, but essentially meaningless unless paired with metalanguage and analysis appropriate to the form. The simplistic term *descriptive language* leads to very minimal analysis. *Rule of thirds* must be revisited in terms of its definition and application in answers. Teachers are encouraged to offer ATAR English students the opportunity to thoroughly study and understand the elements of *mise en scène* to approach a visual text for sophisticated interpretations and responses.

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

#### **Section One: Comprehending (30 Marks)**

This section examines the candidate's comprehension of the texts and application of analytical skills. It also requires succinct responses. There were very few candidates who did not attempt all three questions this year, which is a sign of developing familiarity with the current design brief and an increase in candidates' willingness to 'have a go'.

This year's paper offered a comparison question for the first time and markers were generally heartened by candidates' efforts. Interestingly, those who misread Text 2 and wrote a poor response for Question 2 were able to re-read the text and approach it differently through Question 3, often demonstrating more appropriate comprehending skills in their second attempt.

Text 1 proved to be difficult for candidates to answer the accompanying question in a sophisticated way, whether that was because it was the first question in a long-awaited examination and candidate nerves took over, or it was too subtle a text for the purposes of assessing comprehension.

Compared to Text 1, candidates were more confident in their approach to and analysis of both Texts 2 and 3, which are rich in language features and significance. They were effective in eliciting a range of responses, and as such made it easy to differentiate answers working in the tight 10-mark range.

#### **Section Two: Responding (40 Marks)**

Many of the questions in the responding section had multiple facets, which proved difficult for some to manage with confidence. This question format followed the 2016 paper for the sake of stability and to help teachers and candidates feel confident about the 2017 examination. The questions were difficult because of the rigour required for an examination of an implied twelve years of formalised English study. Continued familiarity and confidence with the syllabus in the years to come will show an improvement in managing these multiple terms in each question, as we have already seen an improvement this year compared to 2016. Students need continued practice to unpack and address several key concepts in a synthesised and structured manner.

Some markers questioned the number of questions involving context. Three questions in this section asked candidates to demonstrate their understanding of context in relation to genre, voice and perspective, and this is commensurate with the importance placed on understanding this concept by the ATAR English syllabus. The first stem sentence of learning content in Unit 3 is focused on teaching candidates the ability to 'compare texts from similar or different genres *and contexts*'. The Unit 4 examinable content is similarly focused on teaching candidates the ability to 'investigate and evaluate the relationships between texts *and contexts*'. The fact that these are the first points of each unit content therefore frames the rest of the syllabus, which focuses on the teaching of skills, knowledge and concepts ... all related to a particular context. Candidates need to study texts that focus on all of these key concepts, not a particular text for each one. The close study of each text is framed through all of these concepts – and definitely a focus on text and context - for successful study of the Unit 3 and Unit 4 examinable content.

One of the purposes of this section is for candidates to demonstrate their textual knowledge and understanding of metalanguage specific to the form. It was disappointing to see a lack of specific textual evidence in many answers. As noted in the marking key: *Higher marks should be given to responses that develop an argument, sustain a point of view and use evidence from studied texts to support a point.* Learning how to embed evidence in sentences, and where to place this in paragraphs is crucial.

When the design brief for the ATAR English examination was written, the 40% weighting allocation to the Responding section was intended to confer the significance that is placed on textual study in the English discipline. A consequence of this weighting is that it is interpreted in terms of length of response, with many candidates writing sometimes as much as eight or nine pages, but too often at the expense of their argument. Candidates and teachers are advised that such length is not required. A thoughtful, planned and proofread answer is always preferred over lengthy, unstructured rambling that doesn't focus deliberately on the question. This is especially the case if candidates are loading this section in terms of time and effort at the expense of Section Three.

It should be noted that using a second text, when not explicitly asked to do so, may enhance an answer if executed well; but if it is just employed to fill space or because it is considered 'impressive', candidates are more likely to write their way out of marks instead of gaining them. The combination of texts is crucial from both a teacher and candidate perspective.

There was a good variety of texts chosen for discussion in this section, and evidence that many teachers have now selected their texts to align with the new syllabus. The majority of responses were about novels, feature films and full length texts. It was pleasing to see some graphic novels being taught, and it was noted that stage drama seems in decline (with the exception of perennial favourite *No Sugar*). Some evidence of candidates studying poetry was seen in Section Two, but more focus on drawing closer ties with all concepts covered in the syllabus is recommended when teaching each poem, rather than selecting a poem to study as an example of voice.

### **Section Three: Composing (30 Marks)**

In preparing this section, the examining panel reflected on the 2016 Examination report and encouraged more positive, lighter themes in the composition answers, particularly in the wording of Questions 10, 11 and 13. Sadly, while these were crafted to encourage positively-themed writing, many candidates inverted or wrote against the question to offer texts that were bleak or dark in tone.

Candidates are encouraged to plan their response before beginning, and focus on thoughtfully structuring their composition leading up to a strong and evocative conclusion,

regardless of form. While there were some really strong candidates whose control of form and use of language was mature, sophisticated and profoundly engaging, the quality of many compositions was disappointing. Some answers were brief, underdeveloped, poorly structured and reflected little thought or planning. Paragraphing, in imaginative, persuasive and interpretative forms of writing, was an area that needs repeated examination as to its purpose and structure. Similarly, the skill of punctuating direct speech in narrative writing needs explicit and repeated revision as part of students' preparation for their assessments and examinations.

Candidates are reminded that there are syllabus concepts in each of these questions.

Candidates are also strongly reminded to create a meaningful title as a generic convention of the form of their choice. A helpful tip would be to include a subtitle to clarify purpose, audience and/or context, but this is not a requirement, just a suggestion.

While candidates were more assured in writing persuasively about topics they either had prepared or knew something about, narrative writing on the whole was more often than not quite dire. Some made a poor selection of topic, and some mismanaged timing, as evident from overly ambitious, yet curtailed or unfinished plots.

There are more and more 'retellings' or plagiarism of recognisable texts appearing in this section. Candidates are warned that originality is expected, and teachers are advised to direct students accordingly.