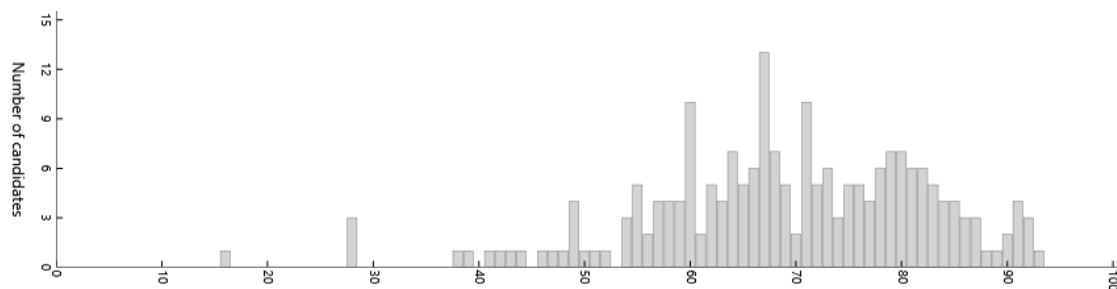




## Summary report of the 2018 ATAR course examination: **Philosophy and Ethics**

Year	Number who sat	Number of absentees
2018	209	5
2017	196	4
2016	195	2

### **Examination score distribution–Written**



### **Summary**

This is the third year that candidates have sat the Philosophy and Ethics ATAR examination. Overall, this was a successful examination. There was plenty of opportunity for candidates to show what they knew from across the course curriculum and enough in the examination to discriminate across the full range of marks. The examination paper seemed to provide a fair assessment of the ability of the candidates. The length of the examination was appropriate for the three-hour time frame; however, based on the mean, the paper seemed to be slightly less difficult than the 2017 examination.

Attempted by 209 candidates    Mean 68.75%    Max 93.00%    Min 16.00%

Section means were:

Section One: Critical reasoning	Mean 69.47%
Attempted by 209 candidates	Mean 20.84(/30)    Max 30.00    Min 4.00
Section Two: Philosophical analysis & evaluation	Mean 69.78%
Attempted by 208 candidates	Mean 27.91(/40)    Max 39.00    Min 7.50
Section Three: Construction of argument	Mean 67.43%
Attempted by 208 candidates	Mean 20.23(/30)    Max 30.00    Min 1.50

### **General comments**

Section One was well done generally. A very broad range of curriculum dot points in critical reasoning were examined.

In Section Two, Question 11 (the passage analysis) seemed slightly more difficult than Question 10 (the dialogue). Both of these questions were done well generally by most candidates. However, there is simply no requirement to provide a diagram of the argument and candidates should only do so if they are certain that it will help to clarify their evaluation of the text. Detailed diagrams are rarely helpful in clarifying the argument to anyone other than the person drawing the diagram. This advice relates to Question 10 as much as Question 11. Poorly understood or unnecessary diagrams confuse rather than clarify the argument.

Section Three of the examination, where candidates could choose one question from five alternatives, appeared to be the most challenging. Because of the vastly different numbers of candidates choosing each question, it is difficult to draw clear conclusions about the relative difficulty of the questions in this section.

#### *Advice for candidates*

##### **Section One:**

- Read the questions carefully. Read each question twice before you answer it.
- A clear understanding of the meaning (truth conditions, as in, what makes the statement true or false) of the connectives (if/then, and, or etc.) is important. This includes a grasp of how the conditional is used to express necessary and sufficient conditions.
- A clear understanding of the difference between the concepts of argument evaluation is crucial.
- It is important to always check your work thoroughly and to make sure you have answered all of the questions.

##### **Section Two:**

- Focus on writing succinct answers. Avoid repetitive responses that lead to spending too much time on this section of the paper.
- Be very careful not to write too much and thus compromise your performance elsewhere in the examination (typically Section Three).
- Succinct analyses are far better than lengthy descriptions.
- Lists of statements (premises and conclusion) are acceptable but should not be a rewording of the passage verbatim. Instead you are required to paraphrase the argument in the passage into a list of statements that is a succinct and accurate representation of the argument in the passage.
- Lengthy and verbatim descriptive recounts of the argument in the passage must be avoided.
- You should only diagram an argument if doing so will help to clarify your analysis.

##### **Section Three:**

- Inadequate time management contributes to poor performance and there appears to be a pattern of poor performance where too much time and effort is put into Section Two, and little time is left for Section Three.
- You need to read the question carefully and engage with the actual question. The practice of just writing down your knowledge of the topic will not gain full marks. You must answer the question as stated.
- It is recommended that you complete the construction of argument section first, using the entire ten minutes of the reading time to select a question to complete and construct a cogent line of reasoning in your head. It might be difficult to focus for ten minutes on a single argument but this might help avoid constructing and detailing a superficial response to the statement you have selected.

#### *Advice for teachers*

- See above.
- Ensure that students understand the meanings of the various connectives. Their knowledge of the basic terms and concepts of critical thinking should be thorough and exhaustive.
- Teachers are recommended to have their students practice using ten minutes (i.e. the length of reading time) to construct a cogent line of reasoning for the construction of argument section.

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

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

Candidates demonstrated a range of ability in Section One. On the whole though, candidates appeared to be more proficient in answering this section than in previous years. This speaks to the quality of the teaching in the course. There were some questions that many of the candidates did not perform as well on and they will be discussed individually.

The reasoning section could benefit from the questions (especially those that require bracketing, circling, underlining or any other 'marking up') having more space between lines and between words. This would make it easier for candidates to make their answers clear and for markers to read those answers.

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

Both parts of Section Two exhibited a fairly similar range of candidate performances when compared to past examinations. The community of inquiry in Question 10 was slightly longer than in 2017. The length was manageable for the candidates and the community of inquiry included a sound amount of explicit propositions and a number of fallacies of reasoning that provided focal points for candidate analysis. Candidates are encouraged to apply the skills and language of critical reasoning where appropriate, particularly in the process of evaluation.

Question 11 in Section Two produced a typical range of candidate performance with regard to the analysis and evaluation of the passages. Each passage attracted a broad range of candidates, but there was a clear preference for either passage two or passage three. The passages seemed slightly more difficult and complex than those of previous years' examinations, but this was a virtue as there were many contentious claims in the passages that candidates focused their evaluation on.

As is the case with the community of inquiry, written responses of about three pages in length that are succinct and precise in clarification and evaluation were evaluated positively. The advice to candidates remains broadly the same as in previous years. Lists of statements to clarify the argument are encouraged but statements ought to be *paraphrased* accurately and succinctly. Verbatim lists of sentences are not rewarded, nor are overly lengthy lists of statements. A list of succinct and precise statements also has a positive impact on the analysis of the argument. That said, simplifying the argument too much can result in candidates missing important points. A balance must be achieved.

It bears repeating that candidates must evaluate cogency correctly and use the technical language appropriately and accurately. Statements can be either premises, sub-conclusions or conclusions, but not more than one. Premises are those assertions in an argument that are assumed, whereas conclusions and sub-conclusions are the product of a set of one or more premises. These must not be confused. Premises and conclusions can only be true or false, acceptable or not acceptable. They cannot be valid/invalid, cogent/not cogent as these terms can only refer to arguments (i.e. to the relationships between premises and conclusions, not to the premises and conclusions themselves). Cogency refers to the whole argument and is the sum product of premise acceptability and inferential strength (i.e. nil, weak, moderate, strong or deductively valid). Using the disciplinary terminology correctly is essential. Not handling the terminology properly was a weakness in a large number of papers.

Candidates who performed well on Question 11 gave good reasons for their evaluations of premise acceptability, inferential strength and overall cogency.

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

Section Three exhibited typical trends in performance from the candidates. There was the usual time-management problem with candidates hastily producing an argument that had merit but lacked structure and clarity of expression. Candidates are strongly urged to allow for the suggested working time of 50 minutes (or more where possible) and to plan before committing pen to paper. This will alleviate the tendency to drift away from questions or to interpret only half of a question. This section included more approachable statements compared to previous years. This is a great improvement.

Candidates often failed to respond to the statement in its entirety and instead focused on one element. While some modification of a thesis is possible when arguing for or against a statement, missing out a major component of the statement (e.g. 'liberal' in Question 13 or 'death' in Question 15) severely impacts the cogency of the response.

There was a common tendency for candidates to provide a diagram (or 'natural deduction' style representation i.e. a list of premises and conclusion) of their argument as part of their essay. Most philosophical arguments made in this section will be conductive arguments, that is, they will be arguments where a number of considerations in favour of the conclusion will be put forward (i.e. a number of convergent premises) and where at least one counter consideration will be discussed. Providing a diagram does not add anything to the clarity of such an argument, in the case where a candidate had written a clear, concise introduction which set out their conclusion and stated explicitly how they intended to argue for it. That said, in a situation where the structure or form of the argument was crucial to the support for the conclusion (i.e. the argument being given was formally valid, for instance an argument of the form *modus ponens*) a diagram might be helpful. But this would be very rare and hard to do well. Candidates should focus on giving well supported reasons for their conclusions, for instance, using relevant examples or counter examples, to plan and structure a systematic and well supported argument. If their examples come from the philosophical tradition (e.g. thinkers and ideas) then candidates are expected to refer to philosophers and their ideas in a way that shows an understanding of the relevance, rather than doing so simply to display knowledge.