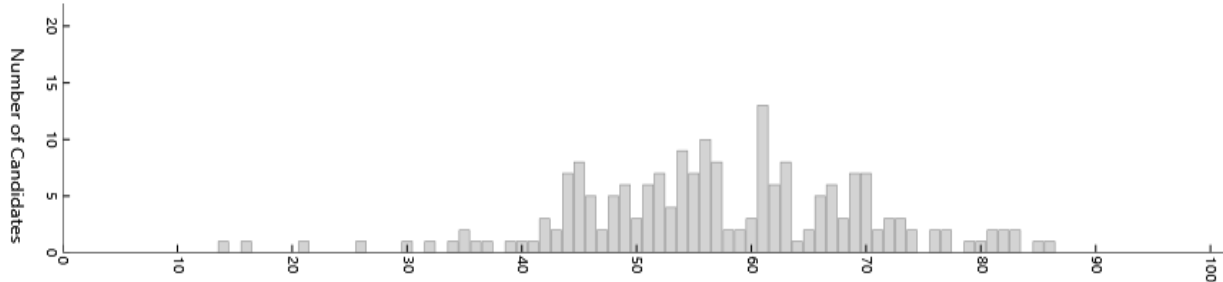




Summary report of the 2016 ATAR course examination: Philosophy and Ethics

Year	Number who sat	Number of absentees
2016	195	2

Examination score distribution



Summary

This is the first year that candidates sat the Philosophy and Ethics ATAR course. The examination paper seemed overall to be well designed and effective in giving the candidates an opportunity to demonstrate what they had learned while providing a means by which to discriminate between candidates of different ability. The length of the examination was appropriate for the three-hour time frame; however the level of difficulty of the paper seemed from the mean to be slightly more difficult than the previous year's WACE examination on Philosophy and Ethics Stage 3.

The examination mean was 56.76% with a standard deviation of 12.56%. The examination seemed to function as a good discriminator, where the minimum mark for the examination was 14.00% and the maximum mark was 88.50%.

Section means were:

Section One: Critical reasoning	Mean 16.51(/30)	Max 28.00	Min 5.00
Section Two: Philosophical analysis and evaluation	Mean 24.23(/40)	Max 37.00	Min 3.00
Section Three: Construction of argument	Mean 16.31(/30)	Max 27.50	Min 0.00

General comments

Section One and Section Three of the examination appeared to be the most challenging for candidates, with some questions (for example, Q1 part (b), Q2 part (b), Q8 part (c), Q9) in Section One being especially difficult. This section examined a very broad range of curriculum dot points in critical reasoning. In Section Two, question 11 (the passage analysis) seemed slightly more difficult than question 10 (the dialogue). In Section Three candidates could choose one question from five alternatives. Questions 12, 13, and 16 appeared to be of a comparable level of difficulty attaining relatively similar means. Question 15 appeared to be the easiest question with a noticeably higher mean; however, the number of attempts at this question was only six. The level at which these candidates engaged with the question issues was highly sophisticated, so it would be presumptuous to conclude that the question was easier. Question 14 appeared to be the most difficult with a notably lower mean than the other questions. The very different number of candidates who attempted each question in this section (ranging from six to 54), makes it challenging to gauge the comparative level of difficulty of each item.

Advice for candidates

Section One

- It is important to always check your work thoroughly.
- 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.
- Answers benefit from a clear understanding of the differences between the various causal fallacies.

Section Two

- Formulaic responses are not encouraged. Many candidates are clearly structuring their response strictly according to the marking key. This is acceptable, but neither necessary nor particularly desirable.
- 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.
- You are encouraged to summarise the argument in the passage accurately and succinctly.
- Lists of statements (premises and conclusion) are encouraged 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.

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.

Advice for teachers

- See above.
- It seems clear that there is a difference in knowledge among teachers with regard to the skills and understandings in critical reasoning. It is essential that teachers ensure their basic understanding of the meanings of the various connectives are thorough and exhaustive.

Comments on specific sections and questions

Section One: Critical reasoning

Attempted by 195 candidates

Mean 16.51(/30)

Max 28.00

Min 5.00

Section One contained some items that typically challenged candidates. The section contained similar items to 2015; however the improvement in regard to difficult items such as the meaning of connectives and the rewriting of premises and conclusions that was evident in 2015, seems to have stagnated.

Section Two: Philosophical analysis and evaluation

Attempted by 194 candidates

Mean 24.23(/40)

Max 37.00

Min 3.00

Section Two was similar to past WACE examinations, though the passages were perhaps slightly longer and more complicated than in 2015. The range of performance on the passage analysis was typical. As with the dialogue, the length of responses had an impact

on the markers. Candidates generally were far more succinct and targeted (e.g. three pages maximum) with their analysis and evaluation. Candidates also engaged well with the elements of cogency (statement acceptability and inferential strength).

Candidates must be mindful of the need to balance their time on the dialogue and the passage. The disproportionate time spent on the dialogue compared to the passage often results in a loss for the candidate in both sections. Generally this is because lengthy responses on the dialogue tend to be heavy on recounting the dialogue rather than engaging with the cogency of the arguments of each participant using the language of critical reasoning. This tends to result in better marks for clarification than evaluation, but not necessarily higher marks. Also, a lengthy response to the dialogue often results in a lean response to the passage, with a resultant loss in marks on all criteria.

Section Three: Construction of argument

Attempted by 193 candidates

Mean 16.31(/30)

Max 27.50

Min 0.00

Section Three allows candidates to demonstrate their philosophical understandings and ability to construct a philosophical argument. There were candidates who planned/constructed an argument exhibiting a strong performance on the criteria in the marking key and executed a commendable response to the question. However, it was clear that many candidates spent too much time on Section Two, with these candidates rushing the extended argument to their detriment. This is no different from previous years.

Teachers are strongly urged to give students practice at organising their examination technique to use the suggested working time of 50 minutes (or more where possible) and to plan before committing pen to paper. This will alleviate too the tendency to drift away from questions or to interpret only half of a question or to write descriptions of the arguments of others.

In arguing for or against their chosen question candidates need to remember that the examples they use are there to support their argument, rather than describe a position. Candidates must plan and structure a systematic argument as articulated in Philosophical Argument. Candidates must use rather than recount concepts and arguments from the tradition. Describing the ideas and arguments of others does not constitute an argument. Candidates must not describe their own argument in list form and proceed to evaluate it. Candidates who evaluate their own argument are not building an argument and will be scored low according to the Philosophical Argument criterion.