

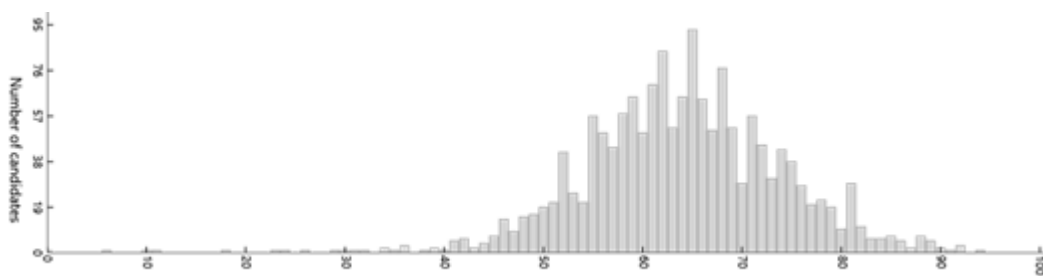


## Summary report of the 2021 ATAR course examination report: Literature

Year	Number who sat	Number of absentees
2021	1587	19
2020	1453	21
2019	1461	10
2018	1456	11

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

Attempted by 1586 candidates      Mean 63.91%      Max 94.03%      Min 0.00%

Section means were:

Section One: Response - Close reading Attempted by 1581 candidates	Mean 63.02% Mean 18.91(/30)	Max 30.00	Min 0.00
Section Two: Extended response Attempted by 1585 candidates	Mean 64.30% Mean 45.01(/70)	Max 68.83	Min 0.00

### General comments

Questions in the 2021 examination drew on a range of course concepts, including the way that texts can be interpreted from a range of perspectives and using a variety of reading strategies; the impact of particular literary conventions and elements; the ways that literature can provide insight into and representation of aspects of national identity and history; ideological perspectives and functions of literature; and how ideas, values, and assumptions are conveyed by literature. Candidates were invited, both explicitly and implicitly, to connect their own experiences with literature to these concepts. Questions were constructed to encourage candidates to respond authentically rather than to reproduce memorised school-based assessments.

Candidates used their knowledge of their texts and contexts to draw out relevant evidence to support their responses. While they tended to demonstrate an improving knowledge and use of critical, stylistic, and generic terminology to support their responses in relation to Drama texts, this remains an area for improvement across all genres. Patterns of text use similar to those of previous years were observed in 2021 with the perennial favourites of Shakespeare, Shelley, Harwood, and Wagan Watson dominating. However, a small number of frequently used texts are beginning to emerge such as Shaffer's *Equus*, and Hwang's *M. Butterfly*.

### *Advice for candidates*

- Allocate time to plan your answer. Markers commented that it was difficult to read responses that had many additions, deletions, and editing. While it is encouraged that you reread your response and make such changes as needed, five minutes of planning at the start may help you to organise your ideas and avoid the need for such excessive editing.
- Choose your question carefully and ensure the text you plan to use will actually support it. For example, there is little purpose in choosing a Drama text that has limited explicit use of stage directions for a question asking you to discuss this element.
- Ensure you understand the keywords of the question so that you can use them to guide your response. Explain what they mean in the context of your response so that your marker can follow your line of reasoning. For example, what are ‘gaps and silences’ in the context of a nation’s history?
- Avoid repeating phrases such as ‘this shows that’. Consider the way that the writer is crafting their work to do something specific. Avoid ambiguities (‘this’ and ‘that’) in your response so that you are making your points and explanations of evidence clear.
- Aim to use the language of the course and the genre when writing your response. Take the time to go through the syllabus materials and make note of the language that arises. When writing about a genre, use the terminology that is particular to it. Ask yourself, ‘is it clear that I am writing about a Prose fiction/Drama/Poetry text?’
- Avoid the temptation to memorise an in-class assessment to use in the examination. It is obvious when this has been done as the response will not engage with the question.
- It is your responsibility to write clearly and legibly. If your marker has difficulty reading your writing then they cannot follow your response. The coherence of the response can be lost when markers need to slow down to try to decipher your writing letter-by-letter. Ensure your writing is well-formed, of an appropriate size, and not excessively slanted. Be mindful when editing your answers that excessive use of asterisks and writing that travels up and across margins is difficult to locate and read. If there are problems in your handwriting that you are aware of then it is your responsibility to improve them prior to sitting the examination.

### *Advice for teachers*

- Avoid schooling your students to memorise essay openings or generic quotes from articles and critiques. Instead, help them to understand how to structure a response and to address questions authentically.
- Spend time using previous examinations to break down keywords and phrases with students, and to consider how they might (or might not) work with the texts studied. In doing so, remind students that they will need to take this sort of active approach in the examination – not all questions will suit their studied texts. Understanding what the questions are about is vital, and with that knowledge, they must not make quick assumptions about what is required. Once again, a lack of engagement with questions was noted frequently this year.
- Work with students to understand the contexts of their texts beyond superficial and stereotypical judgements of gender, race, and class. Help students to see the nuance in their texts, to read between the lines, and to look for the ways that characters represent a range of experience that does not fit into one narrow view.
- Ensure that you are giving your students frequent and regular opportunities to handwrite, and provide them with honest feedback about it. They should be reminded that it is not in their interests to ignore the importance of writing legibly. Students whose handwriting is poor or difficult to read need to be assisted to improve it so that their examination responses can be read with ease. It does students no favours to make allowances for handwriting in class that will cause problems in an examination setting.

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

For the Section One unseen text, there was a reasonably even distribution of responses to each of the genres. However, the average marks in all criteria, and overall, tended to be highest for responses to the Drama text. After previous examinations, advice was given that this genre needed attention in terms of the way that candidates were responding to it (i.e., as though it was prose). It appears that such advice has been taken on board. It is now important that similar attention is given to the Poetry and Prose fiction genres to ensure that candidates are able to respond to the specific features and conventions of those genres as well, and that the gap in marks between the genres does not widen. Candidates are reminded that the Response–Close reading section provides them the opportunity to search for meaning and articulate how they got there, without having to limit themselves to a particular reading ‘lens’. Often candidates describe what they see in the text’s construction but do not go on to articulate ‘so what?’ They need to make clear how the text shapes their understanding. Furthermore, candidates are reminded that in Section One they should respond to the text itself and avoid investing heavily in the very limited contextual information they receive.

#### **Section One: Response - Close reading (25 Marks)**

Text A (Poetry) attempted by 548 candidates	Mean 15.07(/25)	Max 25	Min 0
<i>Reading/s of text</i>	Mean 4.09 (/7)	Max 7	Min 0
<i>Close textual analysis</i>	Mean 3.52 (/6)	Max 6	Min 0
<i>Linguistic, stylistic and critical terminology</i>	Mean 3.40 (/6)	Max 6	Min 0
<i>Expression of ideas</i>	Mean 4.06 (/6)	Max 6	Min 0

Responses to the Poetry text were wide-ranging in their understanding of the poem, from the insightful and interesting, to those that seemed to rely on enormous stretches of the imagination. While contextual information is presented to candidates to acknowledge the author and to position the text in a time and place, candidates should avoid using such limited information to completely drive their reading. They need to respond to the text, rather than to the very limited contextual information. For example, a number of responses seemed to latch onto the information that the poet had ‘lived most of her life in the United States’ and drew dubious conclusions that therefore the poem must be about migration, or that the poet must loathe America, despite the limited availability of further evidence of this. Candidates are reminded that when they take context into account in their in-class study of texts they learn much more about its influences; using such limited information as given in the examination to provide a basis for a reading is problematic and unwise.

Similarly, candidates seemed to pin entire readings of the poem on very small aspects. For example, with little else to support their presumption, many honed in on the words ‘you flew over’ to assert that the persona’s significant other must be a pilot. Others, perhaps grabbing onto ‘defense’ and ‘crenellated’ constructed readings that this must be a poem about the United States’ involvement in war, then had to work very hard to try to force the rest of the available evidence to fit this assumption.

Text B (Prose fiction) attempted by 446 candidates

	Mean 15.64(/25)	Max 25	Min 0
<i>Reading/s of text</i>	Mean 4.32 (/7)	Max 7	Min 0
<i>Close textual analysis</i>	Mean 3.74 (/6)	Max 6	Min 0
<i>Linguistic, stylistic and critical terminology</i>	Mean 3.46 (/6)	Max 6	Min 0
<i>Expression of ideas</i>	Mean 4.12 (/6)	Max 6	Min 0

Candidates generally constructed readings of the Prose fiction text that focused on ideas of racism and ‘small town, small mind’ points of view. Greater depth in such readings should be encouraged, for example, considering how the protagonist appears to experience conflict between the way she is viewed (and how she views herself) in the city compared to when she is outside of its influence. Candidates are also encouraged to avoid retell and description of what the text says or does. Instead, they might consider what is unsaid and not done. For example, commenting on the way that both characters of Candy and the post office worker are constructed to communicate their attitudes indirectly, both with each other and with the reader, could open up more insightful readings than simply describing the dialogue of the characters. Candidates are also reminded, strongly, to avoid stereotypical and often offensive descriptions or labelling of groups of people.

Text C (Drama) attempted by 587 candidates	Mean 16.48(/25)	Max 25	Min 0
<i>Reading/s of text</i>	Mean 4.59 (/7)	Max 7	Min 0
<i>Close textual analysis</i>	Mean 3.98 (/6)	Max 6	Min 0
<i>Linguistic, stylistic and critical terminology</i>	Mean 3.65 (/6)	Max 6	Min 0
<i>Expression of ideas</i>	Mean 4.26 (/6)	Max 6	Min 0

Candidates responding to the Drama text did so in almost universal agreement that OLD LAWYER was the victim of, at the very least, rudeness, and at the worst, bullying by YOUNG LAWYER. For some, this presented an opportunity for self-reflection on their own attitudes and technology-driven lifestyles. Few candidates suggested that YOUNG LAWYER might have some cause for irritation at OLD LAWYER’s lack of workplace savviness. Astute responses picked up on the way that props conveyed a sense of the YOUNG LAWYER’s unhinged busyness, such as by entering carrying multiple items while also talking frantically on the phone, and the large array of instruction sheets he had printed for OLD LAWYER. However, the ponderous and wandering (perhaps even inappropriate) nature of OLD LAWYER’s dialogue went largely unremarked upon. Responses which picked up on other directions such as the sound of the radio playing, and YOUNG LAWYER’s incessant typing were able to deepen their responses by drawing on a wider variety of dramatic elements. A key feature of dramatic texts that seems to be frequently misunderstood is the use of ‘beat’. This is a relatively common instruction to indicate a ‘pregnant pause’ but, perhaps due to it not being used in many studied texts, candidates do not seem to be familiar with this and often misinterpret its meaning (e.g. by suggesting it means the beating of a drum). Such instructions help to create pace and often imply particular reactions from characters, and are hence important to understanding the text.

### **Section Two: Extended response (60 Marks)**

There appears to be an increasing prevalence of prepared responses making their way into the Literature examination. Markers are noticing many responses beginning with the same quotes, or the same opening sentences, or containing the same pieces of evidence and interpretation, regardless of whether they suit the question. It is unclear whether this is a deliberate strategy – in some cases it certainly appears so, such as when a series of responses all begin in exactly the same way – or whether this is simply a response to a stressful situation. Regardless, this is a practice that ought to be discouraged. Rather than spending study and revision time memorising past assessments or opening sentences, candidates should instead revise the key course concepts and be provided with many opportunities to unpack lots of past examination questions to gain experience in being able to quickly and confidently identify what they are being asked to do in any given question.

Frequently, candidates appeared to forget or ignore key parts of the question they were answering. Candidates are reminded that the whole question needs to be engaged with, not just the part they like. Additionally, simply tacking that particular keyword onto the final sentence of the response is not going to be enough to convince the marker that they are really engaging with the question. In support of these two points, it was noted that the average mark (out of 6) for *Engagement with the Question* was approximately 3.6 marks. In only one genre for one question did the average for this criterion creep over 4 marks.

While only a small number of candidates made the error, they are reminded that three of the questions in the examination relate to specific genres and the text they discuss must be carefully chosen. Candidates must carefully read the question and ensure that they are clear as to whether they must use a specific genre in their response. When discussing Drama texts, candidates should be extremely cautious as to how much of their response they devote to specific productions of such texts (this same advice applies to filmic adaptations of Drama and Prose fiction texts). For example, it is not appropriate to suggest that any particular production of a play is evidence of the text's use of stage directions. This issue most often arises when candidates attempt to respond to a question asking about staging elements by using one of Shakespeare's plays. With such little textual evidence to use, many resort to discussing a specific production's use of costume, sound, movement and so on, none of which are drawn from the actual text as written.