![Government of Western Australia — School Curriculum and Standards Authority]

Summary report of the 2021 ATAR course examination report:
English

Year	Number who sat	Number of absentees
2021	9955	152
2020	9823	150
2019	10 275	102
2018	10 926	125

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
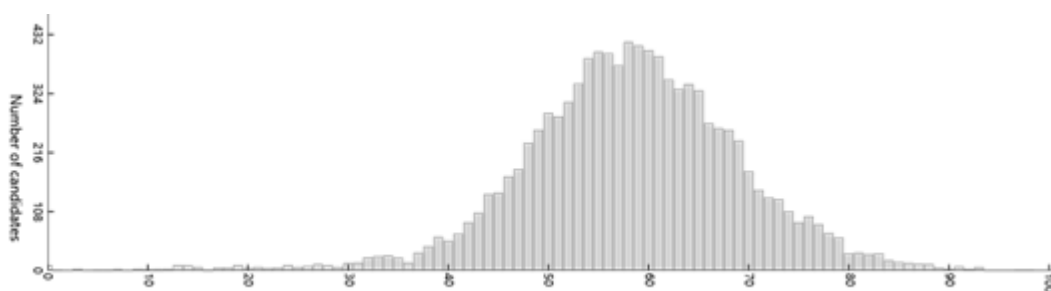
Summary
Overall summary for written examination
Attempted by 9947 candidates   Mean 57.86%   Max 96.50%   Min 0.00%

Section means were:
Section One: Comprehending   Mean 55.86%
Attempted by 9923 candidates   Mean 16.76(/30)   Max 30.00   Min 0.00
Section Two: Responding   Mean 57.77%
Attempted by 9870 candidates   Mean 23.11(/40)   Max 40.00   Min 0.00
Section Three: Composing   Mean 59.98%
Attempted by 9916 candidates   Mean 17.99(/30)   Max 30.00   Min 0.00

General comments

It was pleasing to see a higher mean for Section One this year, compared to the 53.30% of 2020. Candidates seemed to find the texts and questions largely accessible and were able to offer a range of responses to each. The choice of texts allowed candidates to offer simple interpretations, while also allowing more capable candidates to explore more nuanced aspects of meaning and construction. It is worth noting that some candidates scored full marks for Section One questions.

The mean for Section Two was slightly down on 2020, but only by 0.52%. This year, the examination panel again limited the number of syllabus concepts that were clearly linked to individual syllabus points to two per question. There was an uneven distribution of responses to the questions in Section Two, with low uptake of Question 4 on language patterns and Question 9 on style. The most popular question, which was not always addressed comprehensively, was Question 7 on personal context. Markers identified the concepts that seemed most problematic for candidates were those of style, voice and mode. Many

candidates were unable to distinguish style from genre, or simply identified language or generic features without articulating why they qualified as stylistic choices. Voice was often described at a superficial level, and candidates found analysing its construction challenging. Mode, despite being a foundational concept when analysing a text, was frequently confused with genre, subgenre, medium or indeed, a simplistic articulation of style.

Section Three produced the highest mean of 59.98%, up on the 59.15% mean of 2020, suggesting that not only were the questions accessible, but that candidates appeared to be comfortable with this part of both the course and the examination. Candidates composed an array of text types and interpretations of the stimuli.

Advice for candidates
- All ATAR courses require regular revision and practice to develop a thorough understanding of the course and its examinable content. There is terminology and concepts to learn. ATAR English is all about the application of your knowledge and understanding to unfamiliar contexts – whether it is the unseen texts in Section One or the unseen questions in Sections Two and Three. The only way to develop the ability to apply your knowledge in such ways is through practice. Revise your syllabus understandings and studied texts by writing practice essays to apply this revision.
- Do not pick a question on 'mode', for example, if you do not know what the term means. You generally cannot attain success in a response that demonstrates a basic misunderstanding of a central concept.
- Beware of addressing the question only in a throwaway line at the end of each paragraph or, worse still, only in the conclusion. If a concept is central to the question, it needs to be central to your discussion. It is not sufficient to mention a key concept from the question, such as *personal context*, only in the concluding sentence of the paragraph to engage with the question.
- Be prepared to adapt what you know. You are highly unlikely to see a question that you have written on before. You cannot reproduce the same essay you wrote at some other point throughout the year. Instead, take your understanding of the texts and the syllabus and apply them to the new question in front of you.
- Familiarise yourself with the syllabus documents, including the glossary.

Advice for teachers
- Ensure student familiarity with the specific examinable content from the syllabus – the individual bullet points – and not just the concepts embedded within them. Questions, particularly in Section Two, are drawn from these points.
- Candidates must be able to draw connections between various concepts as dictated by the syllabus points. Spend time developing your students' ability to map and explain connections between various concepts.
- Have your students practise writing multiple essays on studied texts. If your students have only ever written one essay, addressing a couple of concepts, they are unlikely to develop the adaptability required to apply their understandings to the unfamiliar questions within the examination.
- Candidates will always have a choice of questions in Sections Two and Three. Spend time developing your students' ability to select the most appropriate or optimal question for the texts they have studied. Help them learn to recognise the specific requirements of individual questions, map the connections between concepts within questions, and how the questions apply to their studied texts. It is unavoidable that not all questions will suit all texts, given the vast array that are taught across the state, nor what individual teachers may have focused on in their teaching of a single text.
- Make it clear that an answer must directly address the question requirements. This is unlikely to be achieved by reproducing pre-prepared essays.

Comments on specific sections and questions

Section One: Comprehending (30 Marks)
Feedback from schools generally suggested that the texts and questions were accessible and clear. Some commented that the texts, particularly Text 1 and Text 3, were perhaps too 'easy'. However, it is perhaps candidates' ability to interpret and deconstruct unseen texts – even accessible ones - that should be a continued focus in our classrooms. As the Marking key demonstrates, while there were clear and easily identifiable features within each text for candidates to seize on, there were plenty of subtle, nuanced or more complex ones for capable candidates to explore. Stronger candidates should be able to look beyond the obvious in their analysis of texts. Furthermore, stronger responses were those in which candidates were able to explain their interpretation with detail and clarity.

The texts included in this section represented imaginative and interpretive texts, and a variety of contexts: contemporary and historical, child and adult, male and female, socially privileged and marginalised.

Most candidates wrote concise answers in the form of either extended paragraphs, or several shorter paragraphs attending to different textual features.

Section Two: Responding (40 Marks)
The fact that many candidates struggled to frame arguments around what were often clear translations of single points from the syllabus, suggests that they need to continue to be familiarised with the dynamics of how the course concepts are framed, and the specifics of their employment.

Differences in the means achieved between questions indicated two causes – unfamiliarity or lack of confidence with syllabus pointers that may seem minor in the face of the larger concepts such as genre, perspective and context (for example, 'language patterns') and particular concepts that are still quite misunderstood by candidates (such as 'mode' or 'style').

The main issue in this section was candidates not adequately engaging with their chosen question. A number of candidates wrote a simple generic conventions essay which was not sufficient to meet the demands of the course. Despite this, it is clear from the spread of results that many candidates came to the examination well-prepared, and with the ability to apply their understandings of the course context in new contexts. Indeed, each question attracted candidates who attained full marks.

Section Three: Composing (30 Marks)
This section achieved the highest mean, at 59.98%, reflecting pleasing growth in skills when composing texts, as well as the accessibility of the questions. A range of text types was evident, and varied responses to the stimuli reflected that many candidates were confident expressing their creativity. There were a variety of forms chosen including: film review, Buzzfeed Top Ten article, text messaging conversation within a narrative, film script, social media post with comments and replies, narrative with sustained/extended metaphor, radio drama and podcast transcript. Questions were crafted and stimuli carefully chosen to allow candidates to draw on their experiences and contextual understandings to create authentic and thoughtful responses, and to be open to varying interpretation, rather than being overly prescriptive. It was good to see candidates writing titles or trying to somehow orientate their

audience and indicate the form they were writing in. There also seemed to be an overall understanding of interpretive text forms demonstrated.

However, many candidates wrote lengthy, uncontrolled responses, suggesting a lack of planning and control over form and structure. Poor paragraphing, particularly within narratives, and the incorrect punctuation of dialogue were two other significant limitations.

Careful planning in this section, and an emphasis on quality over quantity, should be key takeaways. This is particularly the case with narratives. Those that dealt with a limited chronological span, such as a moment in time, were often more successful in this section than those that attempted to write stories that covered lengthy periods of time.

The most successful responses were those that made their form of writing appropriate to a specific audience, purpose and context. Authenticity was a clear discriminator too; some candidates chose voices or contexts outside of their realm of experience or skill, and thus failed to be convincing.