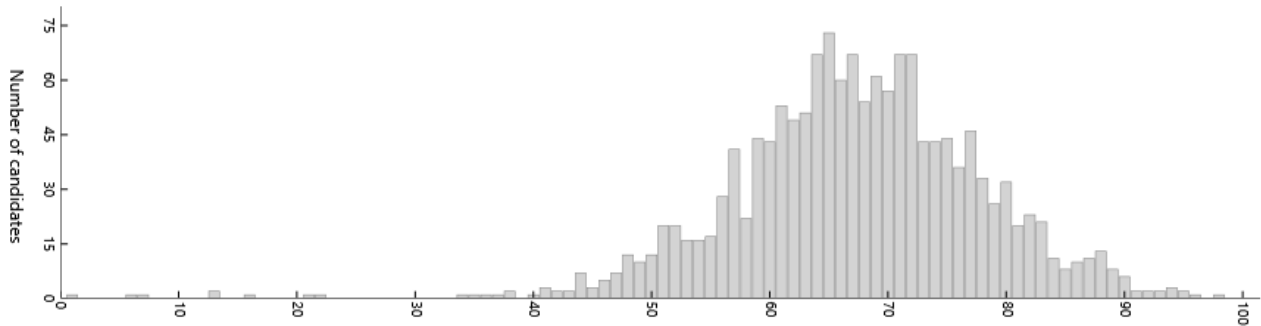




Summary report of the 2017 ATAR course examination: Literature

Year	Number who sat	Number of absentees
2017	1518	8
2016	1606	13

Examination score distribution – Written



Summary

The Literature examination was attempted by 1518 candidates and produced a mean of 67.30%. Scores ranged from a minimum of 0.70% to a maximum of 97.50%. The standard deviation was 10.65%.

Section means were:

Section One: Response-close reading	Mean 65.80%	
Attempted by 1510 candidates	Mean 19.74(/30)	Max 30.00 Min 1.20
Section Two: Extended response	Mean 68.18%	
Attempted by 1516 candidates	Mean 47.72(/70)	Max 69.30 Min 0.70

General comments

This was the second examination based upon the new ATAR Literature course and reflected a focus on the importance of concepts and critical analysis of texts. The examination consisted of two sections. Section One offered candidates the choice of a drama extract, prose extract or poem in order to make a close reading. For the first time, candidates were supplied with the texts for Question One in a separate text booklet in order to eliminate page-turning in the Question/Answer booklet. This was received favourably by teachers and candidates. In Section Two, candidates were required to select two from a number of questions that included three genre questions specific to poetry, prose and drama. This was a successful examination by which to assess the syllabus and allowed candidates to demonstrate their understanding of the course and the concepts that form its basis.

Candidates showed generally good knowledge of their studied texts and could draw on relevant and varied evidence to support their responses. This year, many demonstrated a solid knowledge of the key concepts that form the basis of the course. However, candidates would benefit from developing a stronger study framework as a means of preparing selected texts in terms of concepts such as *ideology*. This need was particularly evident in both sections of the examination, where writing about language lacked depth and structure. At times, candidates struggled to understand what a question required of them and then how to shape their response to meet these requirements. This year's examination highlighted the importance of expression and the skilful writing of responses and essays. While these were

generally well-structured, and candidates took care to write clear introductions, they needed to take more care in sentence construction, spelling and the quality of their handwriting.

Advice for candidates

- Use the concepts and terminology of the course and become familiar with the syllabus. Ensure that you have a framework for important concepts so that you can use these to interpret texts.
- Know the appropriate conventions of each genre. In particular, develop a sound knowledge of language as it is used in literature.
- Refer closely to texts – use examples and quotations strategically, which means to analyse quotes, explain them in detail using literary terminology in order to develop your argument.
- Articulate your argument clearly at the beginning of your essay - this clarity will frame the rest of your essay and lead to a more focused and nuanced response.
- Take care with expression and allow time for reviewing and proofreading. Please remember that marks are allocated for expression.
- Engaging your reader is to be applauded. Do take care when using philosophical or 'inspiring' quotes at the beginning of your answer that they are very relevant and usually explained.
- Take the time to analyse the questions carefully and to plan a response – remember that every word in a question has a purpose. Words embedded in questions such as *capture points*, *wrestling*, and *appreciation* need to be used to shape answers. Take the time to 'pull apart' how you might appreciate a text and then use this to help plan your answer.
- Take the time to make your writing legible. Markers are willing to spend time trying to decipher writing in order to give a candidate the best chance of success. However, they cannot reward what they cannot read.

Advice for teachers

- A number of candidates are still struggling to respond to Section Two questions and particularly are not analysing words that are designed to provide guidance, such as *appreciation* and *wrestle*.
- Give your students practice in creating a definite reading(s) for Section One and to assert it clearly in their introduction.
- Students need to analyse quotes with literary techniques and concepts in mind, particularly in the close reading section.
- Encourage your students to limit the amount of text description they write in favour of text interpretation.
- Ensure your students are familiar with the genre-specific language they need to use to demonstrate knowledge of *Literary concepts and literary terms* (a marking criterion). This is of particular concern in writing about drama where candidates continued to write about *stage directions* as a dramatic technique without adequately referring to, for example, sound and music, stage setting and objects and symbols on the stage.
- Remind your students of the genre-specific terminology covered in Units 1 and 2 of the course that can be used to help frame their analysis and explanation of text construction and meaning.
- Ensure your students know the year of production or publication of each of their studied texts. Given that they generally spend many weeks with each of their texts during the year, it is surprising how often they are incorrectly noting such information. Having correct knowledge of details like this adds credibility to a candidate's response.

Comments on specific sections and questions

Section One: Response-Close reading (25 Marks)

The passages/texts in Section One of the paper were accessible to candidates across a wide range of ability levels. While the poem continued to be the most popular text, a larger number of candidates analysed the drama and prose texts than was the case in recent years. This may have been in part a product of placing the texts in an unexpected order. The quality of the close reading was generally sound and stronger responses were notable for a close attention to the construction of the text/passage. There was a declining number of theoretical readings which imposed a reading on the text and which largely ignored text construction. Some stronger responses incorporated more than one strategy, which served to highlight that there is not always one preferred reading. Weaker responses tended towards a description of the text at the expense of 'reading' possible meanings, text construction and the implications of these meanings. More attention needs to be given to genre and genre conventions and particularly to the language of literary texts.

Section Two: Extended response (50 Marks)

It was encouraging to see a wide range of texts being used to respond to the questions in this section. While old favourites such as *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Othello*, *Heart of Darkness*, and Gwen Harwood's poetry were still popular choices, there were many responses which drew on less popular texts such as *M. Butterfly*, *The Return*, and the stories contained in *The Turning*. This year, responses referring to the poetry of Samuel Wagan Watson and *The Poisonwood Bible* were particularly numerous. The questions in this section drew attention to changes in the syllabus such as a focus on concepts, textual analysis and responses to literature in general and the literary text from a personal perspective. Question Two, which focused on reading practices was the most popular, and no question was avoided entirely. A candidate's first response generally produced a higher mean than their second response.

Candidates are to be applauded for using critical and scholarly works in their extended responses. In some cases this was done well and served to support their own ideas. At times, however, it resulted in essays that became a string of other people's ideas rather than the candidate's own response to the question. While it is encouraging to see that candidates are reading widely in the study of their texts, such references need to be used sparingly and judiciously and to be drawn from legitimate sources. Candidates also needed to provide some reference details about citations.