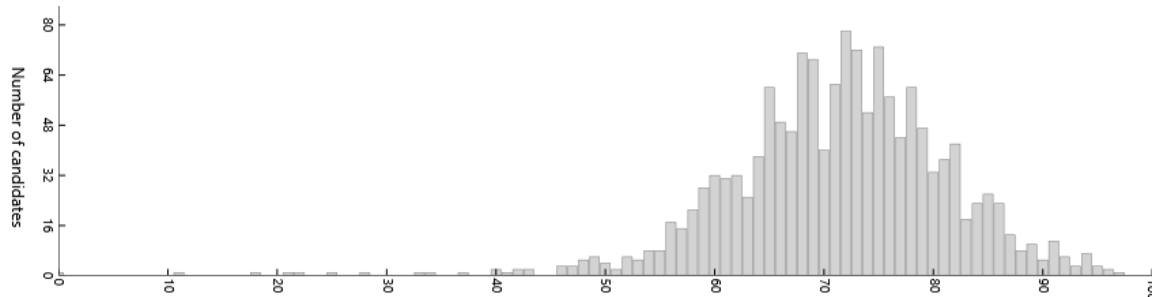




Summary report of the 2018 ATAR course examination: Literature

Year	Number who sat	Number of absentees
2018	1456	11
2017	1518	8
2016	1606	13

Examination score distribution–Written



Summary

The Literature examination was attempted by 1456 candidates and produced a mean of 71.30%. Scores ranged from a maximum of 97.00% to a minimum of 10.50%. The high mean for this course is a result of Literature attracting a high-achieving cohort.

Section means were

Section One: Response-Close reading	Mean 69.42%		
Attempted by 1452 candidates	Mean 20.83(/30)	Max 30.00	Min 1.20
Section Two: Extended response	Mean 72.19%		
Attempted by 1456 candidates	Mean 50.53(/70)	Max 70.00	Min 9.33

General comments

This was the third examination based upon the ATAR Literature course. 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. In Section Two, candidates were required to select two from a choice of nine 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.

The ATAR Literature course draws heavily on concepts that are specific to the study of literature and literary texts. This year, a number of concepts were included in questions, namely *ideology*, *identity*, *aesthetics* and *intertextuality*. Candidates who performed well in the examination demonstrated a sound working understanding of concepts and had frameworks by which to apply them. At times, candidates struggled to understand what a question required of them and then how to shape their response to meet these requirements.

Candidates showed a sound knowledge of their studied texts and could draw on relevant and varied evidence to support their responses. As in previous years, a small number of texts were used extensively. Texts such as the poetry of Gwen Harwood, Shakespeare's *Othello*, and Blake's poetry from *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* constituted the bulk of texts used. While these are important texts, candidates' approaches to these texts did at times lack currency and they struggled to discuss how, for example, their contemporary identities can shape responses. It is pleasing to see some more local, interesting and modern texts being used, such as Reg Cribb's *The Return*, and Gail Jones' *Sorry*.

Advice for candidates

- It is fantastic to see quotes being used in different ways. Quotations may be used effectively and for stylistic effect to describe the text from which they come; however, do take care not to overdo this and to ensure that markers are reading your own words. On occasion, there were some large sections of paragraphs in which texts were described using direct quotes from texts, but without acknowledging them as such.
- Take care to explain the quotes and examples you select from texts. Their relevance needs to be carefully signalled to the reader through a couple of sentences of direct commentary and explanation. Aim to use examples and quotations strategically, which means analysing quotes and explaining them in detail using literary terminology in order to develop your argument.
- All questions require that you construct an argument which is defended. Writing strategies such as paragraph transitions can help to explain ideas, develop arguments and to make your writing fluent.
- The course is concept rich and examination questions require a solid working understanding of these concepts. It is important that you are familiar with key concepts in the syllabus and that you have a framework so that you can use these to interpret texts. Some particularly important concepts this year were *identity*, *intertextuality* and *aesthetics*.
- It is important to know the appropriate conventions of each genre and be able to write with confidence about a number of these. For example, it is important to understand characterisation and the ways characters can be constructed in texts.
- Remember that plays are written to be performed and therefore the performance aspects of these texts are important. Consider how movement and voice, sound, stage settings and objects and symbols on the stage are all important.
- The quality of your handwriting in a written examination is important and it goes without saying that markers cannot mark what cannot be read. Additionally, overly slanted writing, very fine pens, lots of crossing out, highlighting and arrows to all parts of the answer booklet, all make marking answers very difficult.
- Take care with expression and allow time for reviewing and proofreading. Remember that marks are allocated for expression and that this can impact positively or negatively on your final mark.
- Take the time to analyse the questions carefully and to plan a response; every word in a question has a purpose and has been carefully selected. It can be tempting to rush in and begin answering a question; however, a thoughtful plan will help to ensure that the question has been answered as was intended and that your answer will be well-organised.
- Words and phrases embedded in questions such as 'shaped your understanding', 'allow readers to appreciate', 'explore an issue' and 'the interaction of' are designed to help you answer the question. Take the time to consider how you will use these and what they are asking of you.
- There were many fine introductions written this year. These could be strengthened with a brief description, even in a sentence phrase, of the ways you are using concepts and terms. For example, if you have selected a 'generic reading' in section One, write a few words outlining what this means and what you will be doing.

Advice for teachers

- A number of candidates are still struggling to respond to all aspects of Section Two questions and particularly are not analysing words and phrases that are designed to provide guidance, such as 'appreciation', 'interpreted as' and 'created a sense of'. Your students are to be encouraged to take the time to deconstruct what these words and phrases mean and build this into their plan.
- The importance of taking the time to plan responses to questions needs to be stressed to your students as some are missing important aspects of questions.
- There are a small number of candidates still struggling to complete three answers in the allocated amount of time. It is important that your students are given practice at managing their time and planning to complete three responses.
- While it is important for candidates to provide a thoughtful description of the text(s) they are writing about, there has been a tendency in this paper for candidates to write quite large tracts of description. Encourage your students to limit the amount of text description they write in favour of text interpretation.
- Teach students to support a point of argument with supporting explanation, detail and text example. A number of excellent points were made by candidates which were not explained in sufficient detail or clearly supported by examples from texts or references to context. This is always likely to be the case in an examination; however, there were some lost opportunities for explanation and interpretation.
- A number of terms have been used by candidates, particularly in Section One, that need to be explained. Two which have emerged in this year's paper are the 'dominant reading' and the 'generic reading'. It is important that your students explain the meaning of these terms so that the approach or strategy they are using is clearly signalled to the reader.
- Remind your students of the genre-specific terminology covered in Year 11 of the course that can be used to help frame their analysis and explanation of text construction and meaning.
- Make sure your students are conversant with the generic fundamentals and conventions characteristic of poetry, drama and prose fiction. This year, a number of candidates struggled to identify the genre-specific aspect of text construction. In some instances, candidates lacked understandings of poetic conventions, narrative techniques and characterisation.
- The current syllabus encourages a contemporary study of Literature. Your students would benefit from being able to articulate the contemporary relevance of the texts chosen for study and to interpret them through the lens of contemporary issues and experiences.

Comments on specific sections and questions

Section One: Response-Close reading (30 Marks)

The passages/texts in Section One of the paper were accessible to candidates across a wide range of ability levels. It is particularly pleasing to see that there is a much more even spread of response to each of the three genres than there had been in previous years. While poetry remains the most popular choice, the gap between Drama and Prose, and Poetry has considerably narrowed.

There were a number of strong close readings where candidates offered confident, eclectic and valid readings of the texts. 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. Strong theoretical readings demonstrated an understanding of theory such as in the gender readings of the drama passages and were able to apply frameworks in their reading. It was also pleasing to see contemporary issues and experiences such as the uses of technology, urban isolation, shifting gender roles and family dynamics incorporated into close readings. Weaker readings were characterised by large sections of description and a lack of attention to generic conventions and the construction of texts. Weaker responses also sought to

identify the 'meaning' of the text and demonstrated a discomfort with ambiguity and potential multiple meanings.

Section Two: Extended response (70 Marks)

The questions in this section drew attention to key aspects of the syllabus such as a focus on concepts, textual analysis and responses to literature in general and the literary text from a personal perspective. It was pleasing to see a number of candidates write confidently about their own personal experiences of, and responses to literary texts, and to interpret a range of literary texts for their contemporary significance. 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 *The Return*, and the stories contained in *The Turning*.