Composing an analytical response

This section provides advice, guidelines and examples to help you compose analytical responses in the form of short answers, essays and oral presentations.

Short-answer responses

Short-answer responses require you to write in a clear, concise manner in 200–300 words. A short-answer response does not require an introduction or conclusion.

There are two common structures used for short answers:

- a single extended paragraph, with a clear topic sentence supported by analysis of appropriate examples
- a discrete topic sentence, followed by two or three concise paragraphs analysing appropriate examples.

The type of structure you use depends on the question. For example, if you are asked to consider three language features, you might choose to write three brief paragraphs. However, a stronger response may look at how those three language features work *together*, and thus explore them in a single paragraph.

Here are two important tips for succinct writing.

- **Be precise.** Use specific language when introducing and explaining your points. For example, 'the author uses persuasive language' could be better written as 'the author provides confronting statistics in a matter-of-fact tone.'

- **Be concise.** Get to the point quickly. Outline the point you are making, provide an example or two, explain them and *move on*. For example: 'The audience of the interpretive text, a feature article titled "Losing our Minds: Screen Time Linked to Shorter Attention Spans", is teenagers who rely on technology. They are likely to respond with shock at the article's findings, which suggest that excessive screen time can impact on their attention span, dramatically decreasing it.' This could easily be condensed to half the original length: 'The tech-reliant teenage audience of "Losing our Minds" would likely be shocked to learn that excessive screen time is linked to a decreased attention span.'

Types of short-answer responses

There are two approaches to structuring short answers: the feature-led approach and the idea-led approach. The most appropriate choice will depend largely on the question.

FEATURE-LED APPROACH	IDEA-LED APPROACH
1 Start with a concise topic sentence identifying a particular textual feature operating in the text and connect it to the specific idea or effect it generates.	1 Start with a concise topic sentence identifying an idea, syllabus concept or effect arising from the text, and connect it to one or more textual features that contribute to that idea or effect.
2 Provide a clear example, with evidence from the text.	2 Provide a clear example, with evidence from the text.
3 Give a clear explanation of how that example functions.	3 Give a clear explanation of how that example functions.
4 Repeat 2 and 3 as necessary.	4 Repeat 2 and 3 as necessary.

| EXAMPLE | Sample short-answer response |

This short answer responds to an extract from the article '2020: The Year of Reckoning, not Reconciliation' by Teela Reid, a Wiradjuri woman, published in *Griffith Review*.

Explain how two language features have been used to suggest an idea about belonging in Text 1.

In '2020: The Year of Reckoning, not Reconciliation', Teela Reid uses descriptive language that suggests alienation and anaphora to emphasise her struggle as an Aboriginal woman to feel any sense of belonging to Australian culture.

> Clear topic sentence identifies two specific language features and an idea about belonging – a feature-led approach.

Descriptive language creates the idea that Reid feels alienated from Australia. In particular, Reid suggests she feels caught between two cultures as her Aboriginal heritage prevents her from identifying with Australia's dominant cultural identity. Attending school, where she was taught the colonial history of Australia, 'was like entering a foreign world', the simile highlighting her feeling of being alienated and that the image of Australia being taught was unrecognisable to her. This is reinforced when she writes that she felt 'lost' in her 'own country'. She also graphically describes her experience as 'a constant battle of two worlds colliding', creating a strong and violent image of the cultural conflict she feels.

> Sentence builds on the idea about belonging.

> Appropriate metalanguage used.

Furthermore, Reid uses anaphora to highlight her deliberate exclusion from an Australian identity. She writes that she 'was deceitfully taught' that Australia was peacefully settled, following this up with 'I was told that only white ANZACS went to war' and 'I was made to believe' that Aboriginal history was irrelevant. This repetition suggests multiple deliberate attempts to marginalise Reid and her Aboriginal culture. It explains the 'struggle' she experienced to reconcile her identity. Together, these two language features emphasise how difficult it has been for Reid to feel any sense of belonging to Australia, as the dominant culture marginalises Aboriginal people and their histories.

> Several well-explained quotes are used.

> Transition marker connects the two parts of the response.

> Succinct concluding sentence reinforces the idea introduced in the topic sentence.

Tips for successful short answers

- Don't waste time writing mini-introductions or conclusions that simply restate the points explored in your response.
- Make sure that every sentence earns marks by developing, rather than repeating, ideas in previous sentences.
- Use evidence from the text, and analyse it, rather than assuming the significance of the quote or reference is self-evident.
- Use appropriate metalanguage and avoid vague generalisations such as 'diction'.

Exam structure

There are three sections to the ATAR English examination. It is likely that your paper will follow the format and timing of the final Year 12 English exam, as described below.

Reading time: Ten minutes

Writing time: Three hours

This table outlines the three sections of the exam.

SECTION	NUMBER OF QUESTIONS	NUMBER OF QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED	MARKS AVAILABLE	SUGGESTED WORKING TIME (MINUTES)	PERCENTAGE OF EXAM MARKS
One: Comprehending	2	2	30	60	30%
Two: Responding	6	1	40	60	40%
Three: Composing	4 or 5	1	30	60	30%

Section One: Comprehending

In the Comprehending section you comprehend and analyse unseen written and visual texts and respond in a concise, short-answer format. Each response in this section should be 200–300 words in length. The format of the Comprehending section is as follows.

- This section contains **two texts**. These will include a written text and one other text, which may be written, visual or multimodal – that is, incorporating both written and visual elements.

- Typically, there are **two** questions. You must answer **both** questions. There may be a question requiring you to **compare** texts.

- Each question is **equally weighted**.

- This section is worth **30 per cent** of the total exam.

Section Two: Responding

The Responding section requires you to respond analytically to texts studied throughout the course. The format of the Responding section of the exam is as follows.

- This section contains a **choice of six** questions. You will answer **one** question.

- Questions may ask you to interpret, analyse, compare, contrast, reflect on and/or evaluate a studied text or texts.

- You should write an **analytical essay** with a clear introduction and conclusion, and three to five main body paragraphs. Ensure your response is detailed; but also remember that quality of analysis is preferred to quantity.

- This section is worth **40 per cent** of the total exam.