



## Political and Legal Educators Association of Western Australia

# 2017 Examination Good Answers Guide: WACE Politics and Law ATAR Units 3 & 4



### Section Three: Essay

#### Essential attributes of a strong essay response

- The essay section of your examination accounts for 30% of your marks and is therefore important to your overall achievement. The key to this section is a clear examination of the question and planning prior to the commencement of writing.
- Politics and Law requires a high order of critical thinking. It is not enough to simply describe or recall an aspect of the course in detail. It is necessary to analyse, compare and contrast as well as synthesise the information.

#### Introduction

- The introduction is important as it is the first impression you give to the marker.
- A strong introduction should establish your argument, define key terms and outline your thesis statement.
- Answer the question 'put to you' and not one that you have prepared in advance. Your thesis statement must directly address the question being asked.
- Avoid trying to cover everything in your introduction.

#### Body

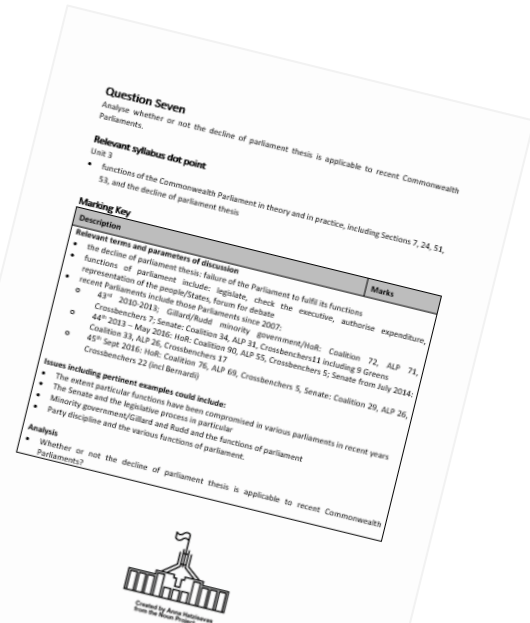
- Each body paragraph should discuss one point of your argument. Paragraphs should be organised in a cohesive and logical sequence.
- Commence each paragraph with a topic sentence which clearly signposts the key idea to be discussed.
- Expand on your topic sentence with two or three explanatory sentences which outline key information.
- Provide relevant supportive evidence e.g. statistics, case studies, quotations, research, legislation. Ensure that this is included so that markers can fully reward your understanding of the subject matter.
- Finish each paragraph with a concluding statement linking the paragraph back to your thesis statement.

#### Conclusion

- Use your conclusion to re-emphasise your thesis statement to re-establish in the markers mind that you have successfully argued your point.
- Use together the key evidence in your essay that support your thesis statement, highlighting the relevance of each point.
- Your responses might use the conclusion to look to the 'future' and speculate on trends thus demonstrating your understanding.

#### Additional attributes of a strong essay response

- Answers should be clear and concise. Lengthy compound sentences lead to confusion and often obscure the overall point.
- Avoid repetition of favoured terms e.g. 'this', 'these', 'furthermore'.
- Avoid the use of abbreviations unless you spell them out on first use.
- Avoid dropping in examples unless you plan to use them in greater detail.
- Answers should be neatly written and make reference to the wording of the question.



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#### Features:

- Brief outline of the PAL Syllabus and Examination Design Brief
- 2017 WACE Politics and Law ATAR Examination dissected with links made to the syllabus and marking key included
- 'Good answers' from the top performing WACE students provided for each question with commentary provided for sample answers highlighting what makes each of the responses a 'good answer'.

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#### Exemplar responses

##### Sample answer one:

##### Clear definition of the decline of parliament:

##### Clear and concise explanation of the four key functions:

##### Decline of parliament is defined and three causes are provided to explain the decline.

##### Strong thesis statement:

##### Clearly identifies topic of paragraph:

##### Clearly differentiates between the function in 'theory' and 'practice':

##### Relevant use of specific examples with appropriate evaluation to explain their significance to the question:

##### Demonstrates a clear understanding of legislative process and tactics employed to limit the function:

The decline of Parliament thesis refers to the belief that Parliament no longer fulfils its functions and merely acts as a 'rubber stamp' for the will of the executive rather than the people. The Australian Commonwealth Parliament is responsible for many roles including: the legislative function, where it enacts policy for the good of the country; the representative function, where it offers a voice for the opinions and values of voters; the responsibility function, where it holds the executive to account, and the debate function, to allow legislation and executive action to be scrutinised. Recent Commonwealth Parliaments have shown that these functions have been limited in their effectiveness due to executive dominance, the rising adversarial nature of the political parties and the problems with the partisanship that occurs. However, the decline of parliament thesis is based on a 'Golden Age' comparison of the British Westminster system, and since Australia has a unique Westminster system, it is not completely valid to apply the decline of parliament thesis to the recent Commonwealth Parliaments. Thus, to a rather great extent, the decline of parliament thesis is not applicable to recent Commonwealth Parliaments.

The legislative function refers to the Commonwealth Parliament's ability to initiate, amend and pass laws. In theory, bills come from a diversity of sources such as pressure groups, private members, the Cabinet and the public. However, in practice this is limited by the executive dominance that exists in the lower house. Due to party discipline, most policies passed are from Cabinet, which is composed of senior ministers and the prime minister who initiate and pass policies that were on their party platform and agenda during election, e.g. ABC law (2017). Only 28 private member bills (e.g. RU486) have been passed since federation and the diversity of legislation is highly limited, especially since the executive virtually won't pass any Private Member bills unless it supplements their agenda (e.g. Euthanasia Law 1997). The legislative function of parliament also ensures bills are scrutinised in great detail so that they are of high quality and do not infringe on human rights. This is enabled through the highly detailed process of passing bills and committees, which can provide non-partisan recommendations to improve the quality of legislation e.g. Turnbull referred the High Court's decision in the Citizenship 7 to the Joint Standing Committee On Electoral Matters (JSCoEM) to see if it can have a recommendation on amending electoral laws to ensure that 'Australians can be confident to stand for parliament in our multicultural society' and to diminish any future potential breaches of s44 (i). However, in practice, this is undermined by tactics that the Cabinet has, including gaps, which curtail debate, guilottines, which minimise the time set for debate and floodgating, where a lot of legislation is passed simultaneously and overwhelms the deliberative process of the bill. Hence, the legislative function is greatly undermined and can be seen to be not

PLEAWA is a not-for-profit organisation that exists to foster the development of Politics and Law as a subject both for its students and teachers. It seeks to assist teachers in the preparation, discussion and clarification of material associated with the course as well as conduct professional development in conjunction with other educational providers. We also aim to provide opportunities to extend the knowledge and skills of students by conducting seminars or workshops on topical issues or events. You may find more information at <http://www.pleawa.com.au> or @PLEAWA on Twitter.

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