
AS

Drama and Theatre

Non-Exam Assessment
Report on the Examination

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All moderators reported seeing some very good work for this component where both teachers and students had come to a good understanding of the requirements of the new specification both in terms of the practical work itself and in terms of the assessment by video. The marking of the Performance pieces was, in many cases, accurate and realistic and teachers had applied the criteria with care and understanding. This was also true for the Portfolio element of this component although there was a tendency for the work in many of the portfolios to be over-credited.

Administration

Paperwork and submission of work

Moderators were pleased to note that many centres had completed the paperwork accurately and efficiently which was encouraging. However, several centres did not complete all the forms or did not send everything that was required when submitting the work and moderators had to spend some time contacting centres to request the missing items.

There were no reported instances of Candidate Record Forms not being submitted but it should be noted that, in addition to these, each student needs to submit:

- A Portfolio Cover Sheet
- A Statement of Dramatic Intentions

For each group whose work is sent for moderation the group also needs to include:

- Programme Notes
- Play Approval Forms

Ensuring all the required forms on this checklist are completed should help both teachers and moderators avoid the necessity for requests for additional paperwork being made to centres at a busy stage of the term.

By far the majority of the marks entered online were accurate but there were a few cases where the marks had been incorrectly entered and care should be taken to ensure accuracy when submitting these online marks. There were also a few instances of work not being sent to the moderator by the deadline.

Statement of Dramatic Intentions

A Statement of Dramatic Intentions is only required for Extract 2, not for both of the chosen extracts, as it is used to support the assessment of the piece of practical work submitted for moderation.

The majority of students had completed statements that showed clear evidence of them having given careful consideration to the piece of work that they were about to undertake. These offered a good sense of the theatrical effects the students intended to create and of the audience experiences they were hoping to achieve. Those students who had written comprehensively about their intentions in this document invariably produced performances that were highly detailed and which exhibited a strong sensitivity to the text as it was written, with the writer's intentions having been fully considered and realised. Good statements were also indicative of a clear awareness of the methodology of the practitioner and of how it was being used to interpret the text. Having read a thoughtful, thorough and personal statement, moderators had the sense that they were in the hands of a student who understood the theatre-making process and the performance was anticipated with some excitement.

A few students had paid less attention to this element and offered only a few words, or a few bullet points, on their Statements of Dramatic Intentions which did not give the moderator a clear sense of what the students' aims were; it should provide a clear sense of what the moderator is about to see.

In a few cases all students in particular groups had submitted identical Statements of Dramatic Intentions which is inappropriate as it is intended to be an individual task and not a group one.

Portfolios

Most Portfolios conformed to the word limit but there were examples of some that were overlong. Accurate word counts should be given for all written Portfolios.

Many students took advantage of the different formats allowed for their Portfolios and moderators reported seeing some interesting and well-structured examples. The rubric states that written Portfolios accompanied by annotated photographs have a maximum limit of 20 pages but, of course, photographs, sketches or downloaded images without annotation add little to a student's account of their work, are rarely useful and can become mere decoration.

A few students submitted Portfolios that were written and accompanied by audio/audio visual recordings. While valid, within the word and time limits allowed, it is important that students choosing this option should give a clear indication of when the written aspect changes to the audio/audio visual sections in order that the moderator has a clear sense of the structure of the Portfolio. Very few students chose the entirely audio/visual/audio visual recording option and some of these did not seem to give appropriate attention to this aspect of their work, offering audio visual recordings filmed, for example, on their phones in their bedrooms. This rather casual approach suggested that they considered this element of the assessment as insignificant or unimportant.

There were some very good examples of design Portfolios that clearly showed the development of the design ideas and the process of realising these ideas in practical terms. Better examples recognised the 20 page limit as a requirement of the assessment thereby achieving the appropriate focus and economy. Some students unfortunately saw it as an unnecessary imposition and tried to find ways round the regulations such as taping additional pages on to the 20 as a way of exceeding the permitted limit. It is important that the limits set for the different styles of Portfolio are adhered to and all students should be aware that additions that are not permitted may not count towards the final mark awarded.

The structure of the written Portfolios conformed, in the main, to the requirements of the specification with a clear division between Section 1: Research and Performance Development, and Section 2: Analysis and Evaluation. Some students had written the Portfolios in the two separate sections but had not identified them as such leaving the moderator to work out at what point the Portfolio moved from Performance Development to Analysis and Evaluation. A few students submitted Portfolios that took the form of a continuous essay with analysis and evaluation embedded within the whole which made it hard to recognise and credit all relevant references. In some examples the teacher had quite helpfully written 'evaluation' against certain statements but it is important that students understand the need to separate the process of development of ideas from the analysis of the final performance.

Section 1

There were some excellent examples of Section 1 in some of the Portfolios seen. Students had given careful consideration to the demands of the task, set out on page 29 of the specification. They had managed to give a clear sense of the possibilities offered by each of their extracts, of the opportunities and challenges offered by the social, cultural and historical contexts of these and by the ideas and methodologies of their chosen practitioner. They had given useful detail of how they refined their initial ideas, keeping the practitioner in mind throughout, and had explained how these ideas were realised in performance. Students who had clearly had an exciting time exploring their texts, using a wide variety of their practitioner's methods, were able to write purposefully about the discoveries they had made and how these had influenced their artistic decisions concerning their interpretation of the text. Students who played just one character (usually in a naturalistic style although not always) seemed to find this easier than those who had worked in an ensemble style where there was little differentiation between what they were doing as individuals and what the rest of their group was doing.

One such student, playing Blanche in 'A Streetcar Named Desire', had written extensively about how her research into the period fashions, social class and context of the play had helped her adopt the precise regional accent, including reference to diphthongs and breathing. She also considered her decision regarding the exact style that her robe should be, as well as whether she should wear it tied or untied. Such was her attention to detail that she also explained that the way she held her cigarette was both of the period and relevant to the disintegration of Blanche at that point in the play. This attention to detail was very evident in her performance leading to a realisation of a complex role that far exceeded her own years.

In contrast another student who had clearly researched the period of 'Machinal' in her Portfolio, demonstrated none of that research in her actual performance. Students need to remember that the Portfolio should have a practical focus and should be evidence of a creative theatrical process. They need to understand the reasoning behind the research that an actor does and how it is used to inform artistic decisions concerning interpretation.

Weaker examples of Portfolios offered considerable extraneous references which failed to differentiate between the initial general research into the practitioner and the precise details of the working methods selected and applied to the performance. For example, biographical detail, which is not linked in any way to the practitioner's working methods is not required or useful and it uses up the word allowance unnecessarily.

In the main, students chose to use the ideas and methodologies of the more well-known practitioners from the prescribed list but it was encouraging to see the research and exploration carried out by some students into the work of the wider range of practitioners now acceptable which often led to imaginative and creative practical work. Some students had obviously taken great pleasure in doing research into their chosen practitioner based on first-hand experience of the work of the individual or the group. However, all students should consider their choice carefully in the light of their text and its functional requirements; they need to feel secure in their choice of practitioner. One group, for example, choosing Nicolas Kent as their practitioner, found themselves unequal to the task of identifying clearly his working methods and ideas.

Students are only required to incorporate the work of a practitioner in Extract 2 although it is perfectly acceptable to choose a practitioner for Extract 1 as well. Many students did select a practitioner for both extracts, usually a different one for each, which was often appropriate given their different choices of text. This sometimes helped them to show a clear understanding of the

different approaches a practitioner can apply to the task of creating theatre which helped the students have a structure for their work and clarify their intentions for the pieces.

Occasionally students wrote about one practitioner initially whose ideas they then decided not to employ and this was not useful. A few also attempted to write about more than one practitioner, in one example students attempted to incorporate the ideas of both Stanislavski and Brecht to their chosen extract and in another a design student wrote about two practitioners, one of whom was not on the prescribed list.

A feature in Section 1 of several Portfolios was the lack of specific detail. Practitioners' ideas were identified with little indication of what the technique really meant or how its use was applicable to their chosen piece. Brecht's ideas were largely referred to as 'multi-roling', 'placards', 'costume changing on stage' and 'breaking the 4th wall' with some considerable misunderstanding of this practitioner evident in the references to his supposed use of 'minimal' or 'abstract' sets, 'freeze frames' and 'soundscapes'.

Shared Experience was the selected practitioner for one group whose exploration of their work stopped at their intention that they would create a 'shared experience' with the audience. Artaud's methods were rarely discussed beyond the need to 'shock' the audience without any reference as to why his ideas were chosen for the piece of practical work and how they were actually incorporated. Students are not expected to identify every idea and technique used by their selected practitioner but they need to have a good understanding of the elements they do choose and they need to link these clearly to their selected extract throughout Section 1. Even students who demonstrated a good understanding of the methodology of their practitioner often failed to give specific examples, from their text, of ways and moments in which these ideas were incorporated. This was particularly evident in the Portfolios of some students offering design or technical skills. The practitioner was identified in the first paragraph of Section 1, with some biographical detail being offered, but then the practitioner was not referred to again and was often not linked in any real sense to the student's work on the extract. Many students wrote fluently and interestingly about their practitioner but did not then make the links to the development and refinement process explicit enough, leading to some pieces being over-credited.

Section 2

Nearly all students seemed to find Section 2 of the Portfolio easier to write than Section 1, addressing the requirements with more precision. However, this section was quite often used by students to evaluate both of the extracts chosen whereas it is intended to be only of Extract 2. Extract 2 is the extract that is required to be formally presented to an audience (page 24 of the specification) and is therefore the one referred to in the rubric for Section 2.

Section 2 is also intended to be an analysis and evaluation of the student's individual contribution to the success of their final performance and not an evaluation of the success of the group as a whole. This was a common misunderstanding reported by many moderators that students were not discussing their assessment with sufficient focus on their own personal experience of the performance and their own engagement with the work.

Performances

Filming

Many centres were well prepared and managed to record the pieces very clearly. They also managed to tackle issues such as the identification of candidates, the audibility of speech, the focus on performers and the visibility of facial expressions.

It is important that centres are aware of the requirements for recordings laid down by AQA. Before the piece is filmed students are required to identify themselves by name and candidate number, stating their chosen specialism, the title of the extract chosen and the role(s) they are playing. These details were often only partially given and there were many instances of the identification having been filmed with the students in their ordinary clothes before they got into costume and make-up for the piece which did not help the moderators identify them clearly in the actual practical work.

The performances are to be filmed by one camera from a single position. The majority of centres had complied with this requirement but there were examples of filming from more than one camera – in one case filming by three cameras, one from each side of the acting area and one from an overhead perspective.

It would be useful if students took the opportunity of filming their work at a late stage, or even at a dress rehearsal, so that they can view it as it will be seen when moderated and ensure that their work is fully visible to the moderator. It is important that students should be able to be creative with their stagecraft but they also need to be reminded of the fact that their work is assessed by video and every moment and aspect should be clearly audible and visible.

There were many examples of work where the camera did not show the entire acting area so scenes were taking place 'off camera' meaning that students' work could not be viewed. Pieces that were in-the-round, or which used traverse staging, had moments when some candidates could not be seen, and pieces which involved the performers moving in and around the audience were also often lost as the work was not picked up by the camera. In one piece a student, waiting to enter the acting area, stood immediately in front of the camera thus masking a whole scene.

One centre set the camera at an angle that meant that the students were only visible from the waist up and a large amount of the studio ceiling was visible. Practice with the camera should be part of the preparation and a quick check on the equipment before filming started could have identified this problem.

Likewise, stage lighting often affects the focus of the camera being used for filming so the use of special effects, particularly by lighting candidates, needs to be carefully considered. One Frantic Assembly movement piece was adversely affected by the lighting state which meant that the sequence was out of focus and difficult to assess or appreciate fully.

The sound quality was not strong at times. Centres have different types of equipment and that is accepted but noise from students in the background while other students are filming their initial identification could be avoided, as far as possible, as should noise from audience arriving late or noise from outside the performance space. In one example the sound level on the camera was so low that the students' identification of themselves was inaudible and it was only the programme notes that enabled the moderator to identify the different students. The actual performance piece in

this instance was a little better but straining to hear the dialogue detracts from the effectiveness of any theatrical performance.

Practical pieces

Administration

Many pieces of practical work watched by moderators were enjoyable, impressive, thoughtful, disturbing, entertaining and accomplished. There were also areas which need to be addressed and improved next year in order for students to do themselves justice.

For example:

- It was clear from the Portfolios that some students had performed monologues for Extract 1 and this is not permitted under the rubric for this component.
- Some centres had used non-examinees which are not permitted for this component. The rubric on page 29 of the specification states that a non-examinee may only be used if the centre does not have sufficient students to make up the minimum number for a group. As the minimum number for a group is two this means that a non-examinee may only be used in a centre that has just a single student being entered for the examination.
- Some centres, wanting to work on duologues with the students, interpreted this ruling as meaning that a group of nine could work in pairs and the remaining single student could work with a non-examinee to make up their 'group' to the minimum number but this is not permitted by the requirements of the specification.
- If a non-examinee is used this must be a student and may not be a member of staff.
- There were instances, reported by moderators, of students who appeared in one group and were assessed on that work, but then also appeared in other pieces of work from the centre. In this instance they would be considered 'non-examinees' in the piece in which they were not assessed which is not permitted by the specification.

Choice of Extract and Practitioner

The choice of practitioner for a given extract is something that both teachers and students need to think carefully about and this also has to take into consideration the playwright's intentions.

Many centres had chosen extracts that challenged their students and offered them opportunities to demonstrate the skills they had acquired during the course. They had made a judicious choice of practitioner to link to their extract and they produced work that was creative and skilful.

Unfortunately others instead chose to perform a section of their text that showed little evidence of the practitioner's work being applied.

Overall the range of texts chosen was not extensive and many examples were seen of 'Teachers', 'Bouncers' and 'Pool (No Water)'. The text most seen by moderators was '4.48 Psychosis' which was frequently linked to Artaud's ideas and, although this could be an effective choice, was more often interpreted as an opportunity to shout and scream.

The requirement for the extracts to be 'continuous' and for the 'wording not to be modified' was adhered to by the majority of centres. However there were also a few examples of scripts that had

been cut or severely edited and some in which characters had been omitted and their lines given to other characters or cut altogether. One group had chosen just isolated words from their extract as their practitioner was Artaud and they justified it on the grounds that he disliked using words, ignoring the evidence of his work on 'The Cenci'. Whatever practitioner the students choose, their main task is to interpret the text they have selected and they need to ensure that both text and practitioner are compatible.

Artaud was a popular choice of practitioner and it is a shame that students seem to focus almost exclusively on his intention to 'shock' his audience and do not consider the other elements of his work. In addition to the screaming already mentioned, moderators reported instances where the cast climbed over the audience and, on occasion, the actual text was lost. There were instances of students using inappropriate props and methods designed to shock the audience that brought up issues of health and safety and age-appropriateness.

Berkoff was another popular practitioner and students who chose his own texts and who were confident in tackling his particular style were often very successful here. A performance of an extract from 'Dahling You Were Marvellous' when the students obviously enjoyed creating the stereotypical theatrical types was both entertaining and skilful. However, a group performing an extract from Berkoff's 'Agamemnon' was less successful as they appeared uncomfortable with his style and instead resorted to a more naturalistic performance.

Brecht was the chosen practitioner for many extracts seen by moderators and, in some cases, it was difficult to equate his ideas and methodologies with the texts chosen for the extracts. Some students chose his own plays and there was a particularly successful version of an extract from 'The Threepenny Opera' that showed a clear understanding of both Brecht's intentions and his methods as well as making good use of the students' musical abilities.

A version of Arthur Miller's 'The Crucible' was less successful when linked to Brecht's work as the dilemma faced by John and Elizabeth Proctor was obscured by the attempt to link the text to a political point about racial discrimination in today's world. This work also used cross-sex casting with a female student taking the role of John Proctor. This approach, while being potentially acceptable, is not one specifically advocated by Brecht and is another area that needs careful consideration by teachers and students. While students should be given every opportunity to explore different ways of characterisation and of contrasting roles, they should also be given the opportunity to achieve their full potential. In considering this, they should think about their strengths as performers and ensure that they make choices that will allow them to play to these strengths which might affect their decision as to whether or not to tackle a cross-gender role.

In some cases the work of the practitioner nominated in the Portfolios was barely evident in the actual performance piece. There was an example of a Brechtian influenced performance that was performed naturalistically but with a 'minimal set' and some Frantic Assembly pieces that were, again, largely naturalistic with 'chair duets' or 'round-by-through' sequences apparently tacked on with little precise justification. In some pieces there also appeared to be something of a mismatch between the practitioner chosen and the text selected. Moderators also saw examples of students attempting to apply Stanislavski's methods to a play that was very clearly expressionist (which they themselves had identified in their Portfolios) and they really struggled to achieve their desired realism against the episodic nature of the play.

There were some examples of centres where all groups performed extracts from the same text and, in some cases, performed the same extract. This is a perfectly valid approach but again one that needs careful consideration as not all students respond to the same challenge in the same

way. This can lead to less confident students merely copying the work of others. They may have been more successful, and have gained a greater sense of achievement, by tackling a piece in which they could focus on their own strengths.

Skills

Performer

This was the skill chosen by the vast majority of students who entered this Component. There is a wide range of practitioners available for students to choose from in the new specification and the hope is that, through research, experimentation and exploration, they will be able to discover the style and approach to performance which is best suited to their own talents, abilities and interests. There was clear evidence from the enthusiasm and effectiveness of some of the performance work that many teachers and students had recognised and appreciated these opportunities and worked hard on applying the relevant techniques to scripts which were appropriate and informed choices. This led to some excellent and challenging performances seen by moderators. An extract from 'The Effect' showed a sensitive understanding of the situation that Connie and Tristan find themselves in ably supported by other performers playing the parts of the Doctors. There was a confidence evident in all the performers here that maximised their theatrical understanding and clearly demonstrated the level of accomplishment in their skills.

Some groups had clearly gone to a great deal of trouble to evoke the world of the play with as much accuracy as they could, leading to a theatrical authenticity and validity. One example was a group performing an Extract from 'East' where the students had realised that Berkoff's style is not all about white faces and choral speaking and who had created dangerous and vicious characterisations as befitted the meaning of the play. Along with highly appropriate but stylised costumes and lighting they amused and repulsed in equal measure.

Students confident with the concept of multi-role made good use of their opportunities in many cases. One example of an extract from 'Our Country's Good' had a student playing the parts of both Governor Arthur Phillip and Dabby Bryant. The cross-gender casting worked well here with the student managing to convey the dignity of the Governor and the more brash character of Dabby with equal ease.

Other, less successful, performances included those which appeared to incorporate sequences that appealed to the students but were not really compatible with either the text or the practitioner. Several dance sequences fell into this category and there were examples of incongruous movement elements that suited some performers more than others. Care should be taken with the selection of the extract and the play if dance is to be incorporated into the performances.

Lighting

Several students opted for this skill and there were some very effective designs realised in the performed pieces. Some pieces suffered from the lighting designer's attempt to include every technique they knew whether it fitted the needs or the piece or not. Others tempered their ideas ensuring that they demonstrated their skill but also, most importantly, served the needs of the piece. One extract from 'Stolen Secrets' by Fin Kennedy that had Artaud as the practitioner showed a clear sense of Artaud's ideas for lighting and made particularly good use of a variety of lighting techniques. Another from 'People, Places and Things' by Duncan Macmillan with Headlong as the practitioner, was also very successful in itself although the lighting suffered somewhat as the camera was adversely affected by the different lighting states.

Sound

Fewer students chose this option and it was not always successful. Better pieces used sound to support the practical performance and had sufficient technical knowledge to ensure that sound levels were not intrusive. Others, such as an extract from 'Bouncers' used such a high level of sound that the performers' voices were not heard clearly enough, affecting their level of success. Some students chose to underscore an entire piece with a soundscape which sometimes had a distracting effect and made the audience more aware of the sound than the designer perhaps intended. For other students, sound seemed to mean solely the use of background music, sometimes with little consideration of the context and suitability.

Set

A number of students chose this option. At times insufficient work appeared to have been put into this element with, in one example of '4.48 Psychosis', the use of rostra from the drama studio to add levels to the piece but without any apparent design idea beyond that; the background, flooring, textures of the materials did not appear to have been considered or developed. A set designer for an extract from Timberlake Wertenbaker's 'The Ash Girl', while having put thought into the design, had not fully considered the audience's perspective. Small pictures on the side of large rubbish bins, while having a definite purpose, could hardly be seen by the audience. The fact that the bins were also on wheels and performers climbed in and out of them were also a possible health and safety hazard that had not been addressed.

Costume

Some students opted for costume design and the most successful were those that had clearly thought about the play and characters and had designed costumes that helped the performers with their characterisation. An extract from Sartre's 'No Exit' had a monochrome design for two of the characters but added bright red in the flamboyant dress worn by Estelle which clearly showed the superficiality of her character, being of a satin fabric with a fitted bodice over a considerable number of underskirts which clearly reflected the character's self-awareness and vanity. A less successful design was that for 'The Dumb Waiter' by Pinter which, in the Portfolio, appeared to promise much in terms of detail. However, the actual costumes had not been realised in the way intended and therefore much of the characterisation that they would have shown was lost.

Puppets

Very few students chose this option but extensive research into Handspring Theatre Company, through their book and on the internet, helped the most determined students to master the specific demands and unique possibilities of this skill. Those who made the slightly less demanding choice of glove puppets or finger puppets sometimes produced effects which were difficult to see on video. However, an Extract from 'Haroun and the Sea of Stories' which represented the Water Genie with a puppet operated by two of the performers in the piece added a dimension to the work that was entirely appropriate for this fable.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.