
AS

Drama and Theatre

7261/C – Process and Performance

Report on the Examination

7261

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Moderators were pleased to report that, as with last year, they had seen some very good work in this component. Teachers appeared to have a more confident approach to the assessment of their students' work, in both the Portfolio and the performance aspects, and their marking was generally both accurate and realistic. This was supported by some excellent comments on the Candidate Record Forms which reflected the level of care taken by most teachers to ensure that their students were awarded appropriate marks. The marking of the Portfolios was, in some cases, a little over-generous and care still needs to be taken that the Portfolios cover the tasks set out in the specification and accurately reflect the work undertaken by the students. Marking of the performance work tended to show the understanding teachers have of the rubric and their careful application of the criteria to the work produced.

Administration

The majority of centres completed their paperwork accurately and most of the work was submitted by the appropriate deadline which is always appreciated by the moderators. However, some centres did not complete all the forms, or did not send everything that was required when submitting the work. This holds up the moderating process as the missing items have to be followed up which can be time-consuming at a busy time of year for both teachers and moderators. One centre sent the work of one student, together with the recording of the performances, some time after the rest of the material without any indication that approval had been granted for the late submission of this work. The Candidate Record Forms have been simplified this year with the Portfolio Cover Sheet and the Statement of Dramatic Intentions now included and this has been helpful, both in reducing the amount of paperwork for teachers, and ensuring that these documents are received by moderators. There were a few instances of the Statement of Dramatic Intentions not being completed and it is important that teachers ensure that each student completes this form as it is used by the moderators to gain an understanding of the students' aims for their work. The items that were often not included were:

- Programme Notes
- Play Approval Forms

The Play Approval Forms are particularly important as the moderation of the work cannot take place without this piece of evidence being in place. There were many instances this year of schools having to be contacted to supply these forms or, in some cases, copies having to be obtained from the NEA adviser for the centre.

There were still a few instances of marks being inaccurately recorded online but there was a higher degree of accuracy than last year which is encouraging.

Statement of Dramatic Intentions

There were no recorded instances of the Statement of Dramatic Intentions being submitted for both Extract 1 and 2 this year, instead the students focused on their Intentions for Extract 2 only and this led to more succinct and appropriate statements being submitted.

As with last year, 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. The most successful Statements made reference to the work of the students' chosen practitioners and offered some useful detail of the aspects of the practitioners' work that they intended to implement in their performances. These offered a good sense of the practical work that the moderator was about to see and of the theatrical effects the students intended to create. The careful thought that had gone into these statements usually led to equally detailed performances which showed a clear understanding of the students' selected texts and of the methodology of their

chosen practitioners. Students who can produce concise and clear statements of their intentions invariably have studied both text and practitioner in sufficient detail to have a strong command of what they are trying to achieve and this is reflected in both their statements and their subsequent performances. Reading these detailed and thoughtful statements gave moderators a clear sense of the level of understanding the students had on how to realise a successful piece of theatre and they appreciated the care that had been taken to demonstrate this understanding.

There were still a few instances where students had offered a more limited view of their intentions, offering a few sentences, or even just bullet points which did not give the moderators a clear sense of what the students' aims were; the statement should give a clear sense of what the moderator is about to see. There were also still a few cases where 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 still some examples that were overlong. Accurate word counts should be given for all written Portfolios.

This year, fewer students chose to produce their Portfolios in one of the different formats allowed; generally the only students who chose the format of a written Portfolio accompanied by annotated photographs were those students who were offering design skills and these achieved varying levels of success.

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. Fewer students this year produced more than the limit of 20 pages, restricting themselves to a more concise and precise account of their design processes without taping in additional pages of photos or downloaded images that did not assist in an understanding of their work. Students should still be aware that pictures of the work of their design practitioner, while useful and often informative, should not be the only reference to the practitioner. There should also be an account of the major features of the practitioner's work, which can be supported by relevant images, and the influence of the practitioner should be evident throughout the Portfolio in the discussion of the practical work undertaken.

The few students offering Acting who did choose this format tended to focus more on the inclusion of photographs, sketches and downloaded images than on an account of their practical workshopping of their roles which limited their level of success in this element. Photographs, sketches or downloaded images without annotation also add little to a student's account of their work and are rarely useful. These few Portfolios at times appeared to have been rather rushed and lacked the detail seen in work that had been more carefully thought through.

There were very few reports this year of students submitting written Portfolios that were accompanied by audio/visual recordings or of Portfolios that were entirely audio/visual recordings. While this is a perfectly valid approach, the majority of students do appear to feel more confident when expressing their ideas and analysing their workshopping process in a largely written format.

The structure of the written Portfolios largely conformed, as last year, to the requirements of the specification with a clear division between Section 1: Research and Performance Development and Section 2: Analysis and Evaluation. Moderators reported that fewer students than last year had written the Portfolios in the two separate sections but without identifying them and also fewer students submitted Portfolios that took the form of a continuous essay with analysis and evaluation embedded within the whole. There were still occasional examples of these Portfolios which made it

hard to recognise and credit all relevant references and 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

As with last year, there were some excellent examples of Section 1 in some of the Portfolios seen. Students who had understood the demands of the task, set out on page 29 of the specification, addressed the various aspects of the task and 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 undertaken detailed practical experiments on aspects of their practitioner's methodology were able to explain clearly how the practitioner's ideas had helped them develop and interpret their chosen text and they wrote in detail about their process of discovering how to realise text in practical ways.

It is important that the Portfolio should have an individual focus and students working in an ensemble piece need to understand that they have to identify their own progress (while being part of a group) through the workshopping process. This can be a challenge but it is one that many students rose to and it was encouraging to see the level of success that many of them achieved. Occasionally a student produced a Portfolio that promised much in terms of the understanding of both practitioner and text which was then not reflected in the actual performance but there were very few instances of this imbalance; more common were Portfolios that lacked depth and detail, appearing to show a lack of understanding of text and practitioner which was then belied by some very good performance work.

Weaker examples of Portfolios, as last year, 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. Biographical detail, as has been stated before, which is not linked in any way to the practitioner's methodology is not useful or required. These weaker Portfolios also made little reference to the social, cultural and/or historical contexts of their chosen texts which is an important feature of the set task; it needs to be addressed with more care than just stating the date the play was written or in which it is set.

In the main, students chose to use the ideas and methodologies of the more well-known practitioners from the prescribed list and moderators reported seeing many examples of work influenced by Brecht, Berkoff, Stanislavski, Artaud, Kneehigh and Frantic Assembly but it was encouraging also to see the influence of the wider range of practitioners now acceptable which often led to imaginative and creative practical work. Examples were seen of work that had been influenced by practitioners such as Dario Fo, Mike Alfreds, Gecko and Polly Findlay along with designers such as Bob Crowley, Tom Piper and Julie Taymor. There is, as always, the need to find a cohesion between the chosen text and the selected practitioner; Portfolios were occasionally seen that showed a difficulty encountered by some students in writing about the methodology of their chosen practitioner when they had been unable, or unwilling, to undertake an appropriate amount of research into their working practices.

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. Others, who chose the same practitioner for both Extracts, were able to build on the knowledge they acquired while workshopping Extract 1 thus giving themselves a firm foundation to build on when approaching Extract 2.

There were still a few examples of students writing about more than one practitioner which is not permitted by the rubric of the specification. At times they appeared to select one practitioner but then made constant reference to another; there were examples of students choosing Berkoff but then writing more about Brecht or Artaud and other examples of students choosing Brecht and writing more about Splendid Productions who are not on the prescribed list of practitioners.

A weakness 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 of how its use was applicable to their chosen pieces. Stanislavski's techniques of 'magic if' or 'emotion memory' would sometimes be mentioned, but then not clearly linked to the work on the text, similarly with Brecht's idea of 'gestus'. The lack of understanding evident in the explanation of these terms by some students is possibly why the links to the selected text were minimal.

Brecht remains a popular practitioner for students to choose as the influence for their performance work but it is important that they choose the relevant aspects of his methodology depending on their nominated skill. Acting candidates should consider his techniques for performers, such as fixing the not/but, stepping in and out of role or demonstrating their character rather than embodying it, as well as those of multi-roling and direct address. However, students often focused on aspects such as his use of placards (often not clearly understood), or his ideas for set, props or lighting as well as his desire to spread a political message. Artaud's influence was also widely seen this year with some students still tending to focus solely on the idea that his only intention is to 'shock' an audience with the rest of his body of work not given any real consideration. However moderators did notice a trend to explore his work in a broader sense this year which is encouraging.

Students are not expected to utilise every aspect of their practitioner's ideas but it is important that they have a full understanding of the aspects that they intend to incorporate and then 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 a particular weakness in the Portfolios of some students offering design or technical skills. The practitioner was often 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. Moderators reported far fewer instances this year of this section being used to evaluate both Extract 1 and Extract 2 which enabled students to write in more detail about their contribution to the success of Extract 2.

It must be remembered that Section 2 is intended to be an analysis and evaluation of each 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 last year and moderators reported that it was still a feature of many Portfolios this year. Students need to discuss their assessment with sufficient focus on their own personal experience of the performance and their own engagement with the work.

Performances

Filming

There were some excellently filmed pieces of work seen this year where centres had accepted the need to ensure that their students identified themselves clearly at the beginning of the recording by name and candidate number, stating their chosen specialism, the title of the extract chosen and the role(s) they are playing. There were fewer examples of this being done before the students were in costume and make-up ready to perform and this made identification much easier for the moderators and was greatly appreciated. Occasionally this initial identification was filmed with a very low sound level but, in the main, this aspect was more successful than last year.

Design work should be filmed before the piece is performed and should conform to the rubric for the relevant skills. Any set designs or costumes should have these filmed after the identification of the students with just the filming being required, without commentary. A costume design student needs to nominate a *single* costume only for assessment and it is this costume that should be filmed. There was one instance of a costume designer who had sourced the various costumes for the cast and was filmed explaining each one to camera which goes against the requirements for filming such work and the permitted specification rubric for this skill.

There were still examples of the work being filmed from an angle that did not allow the performance area to be captured, in full, at all times. One example of a piece influenced by Brecht, that involved the students breaking the fourth wall and moving into the audience area, was filmed from the side which meant that the action was not always recorded and particular students, who were intended to be the focus at a given point, could not be seen. There was some use of 'zooming' and this, provided all the actors who are on stage at any point can be seen, is acceptable and can help show the detail of facial expressions and gestures. 'Panning' that means that not everyone on stage can be seen does not comply with AQA's requirements for the filming of practical work.

There were far fewer examples this year of work being masked by elements of set or by actors waiting to come on stage, which would suggest that centres had taken the opportunity to film some rehearsals, or even the dress rehearsal, to ensure that these problems did not arise. However, there were still examples of staging choices having been made that made it very difficult for filming to encompass all of the action. It is important that students keep in mind that their work is moderated by video and, while being as creative as possible with their staging, they need to ensure that every aspect should be clear and visible. One example was noted this year of a piece of work that had been recorded by three cameras from different angles and the moderator viewed just the version that appeared to show the candidates' work most clearly.

Stage lighting proved less of a problem this year in terms of the filming of the work and there were fewer instances of the camera losing focus because of lighting effects. However sound quality was still not always good and, while it is accepted that different centres have different types of equipment available to them, it is important that the sound levels when recording are appropriate so that the work is clearly audible for the moderator.

The majority of recordings sent to moderators were in appropriate formats and could be watched without problems. However, some instances were still noted of USB sticks or DVDs that would not play or that appeared to have no work on them necessitating contacting the centres for further copies.

Administration

As with last year, many pieces of practical work watched by moderators were entertaining, thought-provoking, amusing, moving and accomplished. There were also still areas which need to be addressed and improved on to ensure that the students are given the best opportunity to achieve their potential. These are areas that were identified in last year's report but which have still been evident this year.

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. There were other instances where students, such as a group of three, all claimed to have performed the same duologue for Extract 1 which appeared unlikely.
- Some pieces of work kept strictly to the lower time limit which, occasionally, did not offer the students opportunity to display the full range of their skills.
- Other pieces were over-long where students had attempted to abridge the complete text rather than offering the extract required. Moderators noted examples of duologues that lasted more than 15 minutes and group pieces that were 40-45 minutes long. These tend to be self-penalising with some students unable to sustain their performances throughout.
- Several 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 what the specification states.
- 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 allowed by the specification.

Choice of Extract and Practitioner

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 still 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. 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.

The choice of practitioner for a given extract is, as always, 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. There was evidence in some cases that students had considered the work of more than one practitioner and then had made an informed choice as to the one that they considered was most appropriate for their chosen extract. This resulted in work that was both creative and skilful and also appropriate to their text and to the playwright's intentions. There were others who appeared to 'tack on' the work of a practitioner after they had already done a great deal of workshopping of their extract; this often led to uneven pieces of work where the extract and the practitioner were not totally compatible and showed little evidence of the practitioner's work being applied. An example of *The 39 Steps* was entertaining and full of energy but it owed more to the West End production than to the work of John Godber, the nominated practitioner.

Overall a wider range of texts were seen this year and moderators reported seeing work that covered texts such as Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* with Mike Alfreds as the practitioner, and Bryony Lavery's *Believers* which used the methodology of Frantic Assembly. *Five Kinds of Silence* appeared popular and was seen influenced by a number of practitioners from Stanislavski to Berkoff with varying degrees of success. *4.48 Psychosis* was still popular and many students chose to work with Artaud's methodology on this text. One group chose this text and worked with Berkoff's ideas which proved both entertaining and insightful. *Things I Know To Be True* was a popular text this year, with the influence of Frantic Assembly, and Berkoff's plays continue to excite students who enjoy his particular style of theatre.

There have also been some interesting pieces of verbatim work this year that have used the methodology of Alecky Blythe; one particularly successful extract was from Gillian Slovo's *The Riots* where the students had done appropriate research into the events that were the basis for the interviews conducted by Slovo when creating her piece. The detail and precision with which Blythe approaches her verbatim work demands an appropriate text and slightly less successful was an extract from *Monsters* by Niklas Radstrom which, although based on real events, is not, in fact, a verbatim piece.

Artaud, Berkoff and Brecht remain popular practitioners for students at this level but moderators have reported an encouraging trend for students to explore the work of the wider range of practitioners that is available to them. For example, Headlong was the practitioner for an extract from *Beginning* by David Eldridge and Polly Findlay the practitioner for an extract from 'The Crucible'.

Kneehigh and Frantic Assembly's styles were seen with many pieces of work and, when students enjoy the physicality and creativity of these particular practitioners, their enjoyment has been reflected in the imaginative practical work they have produced. One particularly successful piece that had Complicite as the practitioner was of Complicite's own text, *Light*. The students producing this text demonstrated not only a very high level of skill but also an equally high level of creativity and understanding of Complicite's style.

In some cases the work of the practitioner nominated in the Portfolios was barely evident in the actual performance piece. There were examples of Brechtian influenced performances that focused almost entirely on his ideas for staging and lighting with scant evidence of his ideas for performers. There were also performances influenced by Frantic Assembly that were largely naturalistic, which their recent work supports, but that also had 'chair duets' or 'round-by-through' sequences included with little precise justification. Some pieces also showed a lack of understanding of the practitioner with a piece of work influenced by Dario Fo that displayed none of his anarchic style but was largely performed naturalistically.

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, as last year, the skill chosen by the vast majority of students who entered this Component. Moderators were encouraged to see the level of experimentation undertaken by students who had taken advantage of the wide range of practitioners available to them to develop and extend their skills in this component. The same level of research was evident in the choices of texts selected for the students' extracts as these ranged from classic Greek theatre to plays written in the last few years. The enthusiasm and commitment seen in the work produced was commented on by moderators who were also impressed by the wide ranging exploration that had been undertaken by students as this had often included tackling social and political issues appropriate to their selected texts as well as investigating the work of both the playwrights and the practitioners. This detailed approach led to some excellent and challenging performances seen by moderators. Several extracts were seen from *People, Places and Things* where students coped in very mature ways with tackling the situation of a recovering addict and *Girls Like That*, with its issues of online bullying, also received sensitive and mature performances. In the extract from Lavery's *Believers*, the performance work, which used the techniques of Frantic Assembly, demonstrated a sensitivity and maturity that was most impressive. The confidence evident in all the performers here maximised their theatrical understanding and clearly demonstrated the level of accomplishment in their physical skills.

Students confident with the concept of multi-role made good use of their opportunities in many cases. An unusual interpretation of *Five Kinds of Silence* with Berkoff as the practitioner involved the students multi-roling and also working in cross-gender roles. Their commitment to their work, and to the practitioner, ensured that they achieved their stated intentions for the extract and were very successful in the final performance.

Directing

This was not an option chosen by many students this year but some confident work was noted by moderators. Students with a clear vision of what they wanted to achieve through their work on a particular text, and who had the confidence to take the lead in the workshopping, produced some pieces of performance work that demonstrated an assuredness and confidence that was evident in the precise execution of the ideas by the performers. An extract from *The Pillowman* was one such piece where the degree of menace and fear created by the performers clearly stemmed from a confident, and assured, director.

Lighting

Fewer students opted to offer lighting this year but those that did select it showed the commitment to their work that is frequently demonstrated by students offering technical skills. There was some excellent understanding of what can be achieved from equipment that was often not extensive and the ingenuity demonstrated by the students was impressive. There were occasional examples of the over-use of effects that were in danger of swamping the piece of theatre being performed but, in the main, the lighting students offered very strong support to the performers whilst also demonstrating their own creativity in this area.

Sound

Very few students chose this option and it was not always successful. There were examples of performances that were intended to be under-scored throughout but which had sound levels that obscured rather than supported the work. More successful pieces were those when students had used sound to support the practical performance and also had sufficient technical knowledge to ensure that the sound levels were not intrusive. There were a few pieces of work seen where the students' understanding of the skill seemed to be restricted to the use of background music which appeared to have been selected fairly randomly with little consideration of the context.

Set

Again, fewer students chose this option this year and the success often depended on the extent of the research that students had done into their chosen practitioner. A set for *The House of Bernarda Alba* appeared deceptively simple but reflected very clearly the work of Ralph Koltai and the detail that often goes into giving his work its subtle illusion of simplicity. Another piece, from *The Crucible* with Alison Chitty as the practitioner, was a reasonably successful design in terms of the text but showed little evidence of Chitty's ideas and an extract from *Teachers* was seen where the set design appeared to be comprised of just a few chairs that were available to the student and this did not enable them to demonstrate their skill in realising a set design.

Costume

As with the other design skills, very few 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 *After Mrs Rochester* by Polly Teale had a costume designed for Bertha Mason, the 'mad woman in the attic' that reflected both the period of the piece, in its overall style, and the 'madness' of the character with rips in the red silk fabric of the dress and attached pieces of lace that symbolised her ill-fated marriage to Mr Rochester. A less successful design was that for *The Servant of Two Masters* where the student had assembled a costume for Silvio that involved an elaborate period jacket that was at odds with both the contemporary trousers worn by the actor and the equally contemporary costumes worn by the other performers.

Puppets

At this point, not enough work has been seen of this skill for a realistic assessment to be achieved. Some interesting work with puppets was mentioned by moderators, most notably in the extract from *Light by Complicite* but this work was integrated into the extracts by the performers and was not offered as a specific skill by an individual student.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)