



A-LEVEL

DRAMA AND THEATRE

7262/C: Creating Original Drama
Report on the Examination

7262
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General

In this, the second year of the examination, moderators were once again able to report seeing some excellent work that reflected high levels of understanding of the potential for this component. It was evident, in many cases that students had taken great care in taking ownership of their work, researching the content thoroughly whilst considering exactly the impact they wanted to have on their audience. At their best, the work clearly reflected the students' understanding of their chosen practitioner.

The marking of the performance pieces was, in many cases, more accurate and realistic than in the first year and it was clear in many cases that teachers had applied the criteria with care and understanding. At times this was less true for the Working Notebook element of this component where there was a tendency for generalised work to be over-credited.

The main reason for the discrepancies between teacher marks and moderated marks was the failure by students to address the tasks set for the Working Notebook, which are clearly listed on the Student Record Forms and the failure of the teachers to take this into account when assessing students' work.

Examples of good practice in relation to administration and recordings

- Almost all centres submitted their marks on time using e-submissions and sent the moderation sample immediately afterwards.
- Given the number of documents teachers have had to deal with, it is creditable how many sent all the right paperwork with the sample.
- Accurate and efficient completion of paperwork.
- Clear identification of each performance group and organisation of the documentation accordingly. This was particularly useful with the work from very large centres (i.e. over 20) where teachers had grouped the sample students' work according in their groups.
- Clearly presented programme notes showing students, their numbers, part played and title of the piece they were in.
- Photographs of the students taken in costume and make up. This made it so much easier for the moderator to identify them on the film.
- Students that announced themselves and their numbers clearly and loudly and included additional information regarding their appearance or the character(s) they were playing.
- Recordings that were clear both visually and aurally that allowed the moderator to check that the teacher had applied the mark scheme correctly.

Less successful practice reported by moderators in relation to administration and recordings

- Incomplete forms
- Missing work that required moderators to contact centres to request the missing items.
- Centres should be reminded that they need to submit (in addition to the Student Record Forms) for each student:
 - A Statement of Dramatic Intentions
 - Programme Notes
- They also need to complete a Centre declaration form, which must be included with the work.
- A number of centres had not encrypted the USB which was a requirement this year. One or two had created their own password and had provided details of this with the sample. This

actually defeats the purpose of encryption which is to prevent unauthorised persons accessing students' details.

- No identification by the students at the start of the work.
- Poorly annotated work and/or negligible comments on CRF.
- Recordings sent loose in the sack with no means of identification e.g. centre number an/or the name of the group piece.
- Poor recording of the work, including the camera being positioned behind the heads of the audience or out of focus or too far away to be able to see nuances of performers' expressions or to hear them properly.
- Poor lighting. Sometimes too dark, sometimes with flare on students' faces making it very difficult to see expressions.
- Students out of shot so that their whole performance was not captured.
- Completely different appearance in identification, i.e. not in costume, different hairstyle (this was most often the case when the identification appeared on a different file to the recording of the performance).
- The requirement to send recordings on USB was not adhered to – DVDs often caused problems with jumping/sticking or the moderator not being able to access the work at all and therefore having to contact the centre to ask for another copy.
- Recordings that had clearly not been checked by the centre.
- A failure to film the set or costume that the student has designed prior to the start of the piece.
- Use of non-examinees with no explanation as to whether this had been agreed by the board or whether the student(s) since the recording had been made had subsequently dropped the course.

Good practice relating to the Statement of Dramatic Intentions and Working Notebooks

- Good statements always revealed an understanding of the working methods and aims of the specified practitioner and as this is the core aspect of the devising task, a clear statement about the way in which the devised piece exemplifies the chosen practitioner's methodology and intentions enabled the moderator to approach the marking of the Working Notebook and the viewing of the performance piece with both anticipation and an understanding of what they would expect.
- The vast majority were presented in the 'written only' format and adhered to the word limits and at their best made a wide range of points that were entirely focused.
- The most successful notebooks were divided into two clear and equally balanced sections required by the specification. Students had used the bullet points on pages 27 and 28 in the Specification as sub-headings and wrote sections that directly addressed those points, thus ensuring that each of the specified tasks was addressed head-on.
- The amount and range of research evident in the most effective Notebooks was most impressive.
- It was apparent where students had appreciated the importance of selecting their influential practitioner in conjunction with the content of the piece as these showed the greatest understanding of the purpose of this component and more effective work justified the choice of practitioner making strong connections between that practitioners intentions and methods and the subject matter they had chosen to explore.
- Some students had clearly seen a lot of live theatre and were able to identify precisely the ideas, methods and techniques they had appropriated for their own use.
- When stating their and their group's dramatic aims, they avoided generalisation but were specific about their own role and their part in the piece as a whole.
- In section 2 the most effective notebooks revealed an understanding of how the students'

approach to the task of devising replicated that of their chosen practitioner and balanced their work between what the group did and what they did in order to create their role.

- Good working notebooks never lost touch with the practitioner.
- When writing about final ideas and the comparison between initial ideas and the final product students based their critique on their own thoughts rather than just stating what the audience had said afterwards.
- Teachers on the whole annotated the notebooks and wrote succinct comments on the mark sheets to support the marks awarded.
- Some teachers made reference to the whole mark scheme in a realistic assessment of their students.

Less successful practice reported by moderators in relation to statements of dramatic intention and working notebooks

- Students in a group submitting identical Statements of Dramatic Intentions, which is inappropriate as it is intended to be an individual task and not a group one.
- Statements of Dramatic Intention that were generalised or that were not achievable.
- A failure to recognise the importance of the Working Notebook in relation to the number of marks associated with it and the need to write to the specific criteria.
- Word count not given (or clearly invented) – over length notebooks and a lack of recognition from the teacher that, as stated in the specification, words over the limit cannot be counted towards assessment.
- Work being credited by the teacher where it appeared in the wrong section.
- Evidence that final work deviated from the initial stimulus to such an extent that it wasn't actually what stimulated the final piece.
- Students writing collectively as 'we' rather than singularly as 'I'.
- Insufficient linking of content to the practitioner or vice versa in the rationale.
- Very little reference to Live Theatre or simply irrelevant statements of what had been seen that bore little or no relation to their practitioner or content.
- A failure to recognise that the 'Written accompanied by annotated photographs' format, although 20 pages long must still adhere to the 3000 word limit.
- Copy and pasted material that had not been detected or commented on by the teacher.
- Over crediting by teachers. Many notebooks marked right at the top end had to be brought down fairly significantly because of a lack of specific detail and explanation of how the student had combined theory and practice or more commonly to a lack of adherence to the required tasks.
- Writing about two or more practitioners.
- Limited knowledge and understanding of practitioner making reference to only one or two conventions and ignoring basic intentions, this was particularly egregious with Brecht. There was also a limited context for their methodology for example, from practitioners with a broad canon of work, e.g. Katie Mitchell or Frantic Assembly who were frequently reduced to 'round by through' and 'chair duets'.
- Basing all knowledge of a practitioner on a single production or indeed just an on-line trailer, which resulted in explanations that were very superficial. Some, rather than research the practitioner her/himself relied on the practice of other companies influenced by that practitioner. This was particularly true of work intending to reflect Brecht, where continual reference to Brecht as 'Abstract'/'non naturalistic' revealed a lack of understanding of his ideas on costume and props. There was a lack of reference to gestic acting or actor as demonstrator when referring to Brecht's theories of acting and considerable misunderstanding of the term Spass; similarly for Artaud, there was rarely any mention of affective athleticism or breathing.

Examples of good practice in relation to the performances

- Many centres had clearly taken last year's criticisms to heart regarding the use of Brechtian techniques. There were a number of very successful political pieces that contained a clear left wing dialectic on issues such as the 'MeToo' movement, Donald Trump and the plight of refugees. Such work had been researched in a great deal of detail and woven into a very clear story even if structured episodically. Often these pieces were successful because they did not try to cover too much ground and focused, as Brecht usually did, on the story of one character and their encounter with various adversaries. For example in a piece called 'Making America Great Again' which closely followed the structure of *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*. Costumes made a clear statement about the characters and were changed visibly on stage and the use of satirical songs between each episode were genuine examples of spass rather than the obvious slapstick.
- Kneehigh was a very popular practitioner this year and students had been clearly influenced by seeing *The Tin Drum*, *Dead Dog in a Suitcase* and *Wise Children* to produce work that was both playful but with a hard edge. Also impressive this year was the amount of live music played by the performers on stage and some expert puppetry.
- Frantic Assembly was again very popular with the most successful pieces focusing on family or romantic relationships; with those that captured the gentle side of their work along with a 'text first' approach being the best.
- In stark contrast, some groups, influenced by *Black Watch* and *The Unreturning*, really pushed the boundaries for example in a piece about 'The Disappeared' in Chile, Frantic Assembly's techniques were pushed to the limit; based on meticulous research, it was astonishing and shocking to see the ubiquitous 'chair duet' used to convey scenes of torture and to see a high flying lift to convey the rise and fall of Pinochet. The piece started and finished with the same repeated motifs of grieving women who sang hauntingly.
- There was an understanding of the time limits and groups adhered to these.
- Visual elements had been considered with characters in appropriate costume.
- Pieces were well lit.
- Music was used judiciously.
- No scene or sequence went on for too long or conversely each scene was well developed and not left hanging.
- The piece generally reached a climax/anti-climax/ denouement.
- Students produced work that was genuinely laugh-out-loud funny.
- There was a genuine sense of occasion and the work was presented as a final and valued performance.
- Everything that happened on stage was consonant with the practitioner's methods and purpose.
- Work that was created at such a time in the course as to have allowed the students to move beyond a naïve approach and had developed skills consonant with the content and practitioner.

Less successful practice reported by moderators in relation to the performances

- Pieces with no discernible practitioner influence or where there was a lack of understanding of the scope of the practitioners' work, some students had failed to recognise that their choice of practitioner needed to help them to convey their chosen aims and intentions.
- Adopting a practitioner but where the group (or members of the group) didn't have the necessary skills to fulfil their own or the practitioner's intentions, equally true for both physical and naturalistic work.

- Failure to recognise the need for coherent theatrical work. There were several examples of pieces that were little more than a series of linked monologues demonstrating a lack of theatrical awareness or pieces that consisted almost solely of direct address with the performers hurling statistics at the audience. These issues were frequently exemplified in work where there was obvious ‘cherry picking’ of a practitioner’s ideas.
- The awarding of skill marks where every member of the group was given exactly the same marks regardless of differing achievement evident.
- Marks being given for ‘success in realising artistic intentions’ by awarding marks for process/ rehearsals rather than the performances themselves.
- Mental Health became an almost ubiquitous theme and was used in conjunction with almost every practitioner, many of whom for which it would not be appropriate. Students should be aware that although subject matter is entirely their choice, they should also consider what their intentions are for the audience and therefore mental health, although obviously very personal to them, rarely made for work that was exceptionally inventive or original.
- The TV/Game-show format was also used extensively and there were many occasions when students would have been well advised to find alternative methods for getting a particular point across.
- Applying Frantic Assembly as a purely ‘physical theatre’ company and using ensemble movement and symbolism throughout with no understanding of the naturalistic relationships at the heart of their productions. Conversely creating work that relied heavily on quasi-naturalistic scenes with a chair-duet thrown in for good measure.
- Brechtian inspired pieces that revealed a serious lack of understanding of Brecht’s own techniques, where it was very apparent that the students had clearly only seen or read work by Theatre in Education companies who purport to use his techniques. Elements of the v-effekt were therefore reduced to random ‘placards’, a complete misunderstanding of Spass (interpreted as anything comical no matter how inappropriate or misplaced), or a set comprised of two school chairs with no evidence of costume.
- All performers wearing black leggings and t-shirts contrary to the practitioner’s methods.
- No thought given in Stanislavski pieces to the overall look of the work, for example, using a mixture of mimed and real props.
- In Artaudian pieces, the students’ ‘interference/interaction’ with the audience often revealed just how un-shocking the performers’ work really is, the camera often highlights the students’ embarrassment for the performers and their own embarrassment at being filmed with a performer getting unduly close to them. There were also some concerns expressed by moderators that Artaudian work appeared to exploit the vulnerabilities of some of the performers with what could be deemed unacceptable levels of semi-nudity and subject matter that raised some concerns.
- There were many examples of actors not acting in the style of the chosen practitioner, true for almost all practitioners: Brecht, Berkoff, DV8, Complicite and Frantic Assembly and this may well be reflected in the mark awarded for both skill and practitioner.
- Frequently duologues well exceeded the ten-minute maximum time permitted.

Specialisms

Students should be reminded to look closely at the requirements for each specialism as outlined in the specification and to then consider how best to fulfil these whilst working as part of the devising group.

Directing

- Moderators reported seeing an increase in the number of students opting for this skill. Students should be reminded of the need to provide evidence of what they have actually done. The working notebook format of 20 pages 'written plus diagrams' allows them to supply extracts from their prompt copy, rehearsal schedules, blocking diagrams, props lists, rehearsal notes, draft bits of script. Without this kind of information it can be very difficult to determine the significance of any directorial input into the piece.
- Directors need to have an overall vision for the piece and it is essential that they are adopting the same practitioner as the performers. It should be apparent through the rehearsal techniques used that the director has been influenced by their chosen practitioner.

Lighting and Sound Design

- The more information that students provide either in the working notebook or as an attachment to the statement of dramatic intentions, in relation to cue sheets, rig and plotting charts, the clearer it becomes to the moderator how much input the lighting or sound designer has had in the piece. Students (and teachers) need to be aware that the moderator is viewing the work as a recording and subtle lighting changes might go unnoticed.
- A sound design that consists of little more than the occasional unedited music track as a backdrop for a chair duet is unlikely to score highly, as it can neither be considered inventive, original or demonstrating much in the way of skills. There were however some highly detailed examples of sound that demonstrated a real understanding of the possibilities of this medium and clearly supported the performance of the rest of the group.
- Some Lighting and Sound designers had attempted to replicate the design elements seen in a production but had not been guided to research the individual designers for those companies which would have helped them be more specific in their planning.

Set Design

- Moderators reported seeing few examples of set designs and fewer still that were particularly successful. There were several examples where it felt to the moderator, that the designer having agreed on the basic themes/outlines of the devised piece had then worked in isolation to produce what was often little more than a backdrop containing images or pieces of text. This, although possibly providing information, was often too small to be legible to an audience.
- In other instances, the design consisted of little more than a few school chairs and tables.
- There were, however, reports of some very good and detailed designs for interiors of rooms for naturalistic pieces where the group used everything that was there.

Costume Design

- Moderators reported one or two cases where the designer had created more than one costume without specifically indicating which one was the assessed piece.
- There were some excellent examples of costumes that had been designed not only with the piece in mind, but the practitioner and the student who was to be wearing it in performance. Conversely, there were several examples of students who had not only failed to exhibit any level of creativity in their choice of costume but had also paid little attention to what the performer was going to have to do whilst wearing it.

Puppet Design

- Although not a popular choice, there were a couple of excellent examples of puppet design being used in Kneehigh inspired pieces. At their best, the puppets were fully articulated, of an appropriate size that allowed the audience to appreciate not only the skill of the design but also of the performers who were required to manipulate the puppet.
- It was very apparent where the puppetry was an integral part of the work and also when it revealed that the puppet served a purpose that could not be met as effectively by a performer alone.
- In a couple of pieces citing Brecht, there were some very basic puppets (little more than socks with painted eyes on) that demonstrated not only a lack of understanding of puppetry but also of Brecht.

Finally teachers are reminded to use the TOLS and other supporting material in order to gain fuller understanding as to how to best advise their students in the delivery of this component.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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