



A-LEVEL

DRAMA AND THEATRE

7262/X: Making Theatre
Report on the Examination

7262
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General

Unlike a written paper, where questions are different from series to series, while general demands remain the same, this externally examined practical component asks the same of every cohort that takes the examination.

This component asks students to make a contribution, as performer, director or designer to the practical exploration and interpretation of three extracts, taken from different plays and to present Extract 3 to an audience and to the Visiting Examiner for assessment.

It asks students to apply the work and methodology of one of the prescribed theatre practitioners in their interpretation and presentation of that extract and to produce an individual Reflective report, analysing and evaluating their theatrical interpretation of all three extracts studied.

The fact that the demands are identical, series on series, means that any report on an individual series, although it can record trends and comment briefly on good and less good achievement, noted in the series, will inevitably tend to make many very similar points from the first to the last series of the specification.

The Play Approval Process

The role of the NEA Adviser and the play approval process

Role of the Adviser

The role of the Non-Exam Assessment (NEA) Adviser is three-fold:

- to support teachers in their interpretation and thus delivery of the specification
- to uphold the integrity of the specification in accordance with OFQUAL requirements
- to implement the play approval process.

Who are the advisers?

- NEA advisers are a team of highly experienced A and AS Level teachers drawn from both the independent and state sectors, selected by AQA to offer advice and guidance to teachers of the AQA specification
- They are not AQA staff, working out of AQA offices.

What advice may NEA advisers give to teachers?

- Advice on the administration of the practical components of the course (Components 2 and 3)
- advice related to play combination choices (Comp 3)
- advice related to the requirements of the specification where teachers require **clarification** of points made in the published specification.

What advice falls outside the remit of NEA advisers?

- Recommendation of plays; although advisers may be able to suggest possible avenues for teachers/students to explore for themselves
- choice of practitioners; although they may offer advice on which plays may be appropriate for the application of the selected practitioner's methodology.

The Approval Process:

- the play approval requirement still caught some centres unawares in this second year of certification of the new A Level
- some centres seemed to have missed the requirement that the play approval form(s) must be submitted for approval **at least six weeks** before the examination is to take place
- there were still instances of late submission of forms • Page 32 in the specification states '... centres... are urged to seek approval as early as possible' and all advisers would strongly concur with this advice
- it is an Ofqual requirement that no examination takes place unless the signed PAF has been received by the examiner
- advisers were always looking for reasons to approve combinations and the majority of PAFs were approved at their first submission
- where combinations were not approved it was, as last year, for the following reasons:
 - very obscure plays which had been downloaded from the internet and had not been professionally commissioned or produced but had been self-published online
 - plays which would not last more than 35 minutes if performed in full
 - plays not offering an appropriate level of theatrical challenge to students at A Level
 - plays that were too similar to each other in terms of social, cultural **and** historical context 'as depicted in the plays'
 - plays that were the same genre as one of the set texts chosen for Component 1; the most common were those plays that were historicised drama if studying *Our Country's Good*, 20th century expressionist plays combined with the study of *Metamorphosis* and 19th century naturalistic plays where *Hedda Gabler* was a set text selected.

Administration

Pre-exam Arrangements and Paperwork

Most centres responded to initial contacts promptly, and mutually convenient dates and times were arranged. As last year, a few centres did not realise the urgency of responding or the initial contact with the centre was not forwarded to the appropriate person. Most centres were, however, very helpful and flexible with their arrangements.

Although the majority of centres dispatched all paperwork promptly, some centres did not include all the necessary paperwork in the first batch to examiners, which must be sent **at least** four weeks before the examination. The documentation should include;

- the examination Schedule
- play Approval Forms (signed)
- selected texts with the extract and any abridgements clearly marked.

Some centres sent just the extract of the (texts) studied, which was acceptable **only** if **pre-agreed** with the examiner prior to sending the paperwork to him/her.

Exam Day Arrangements:

- most centres arranged for a parking space to be available and reserved for the visiting examiner which was much appreciated

- almost all centres had also arranged for a private marking space to be made available to the examiner, away from the performance space; this was a much-appreciated courtesy, although it was not always necessary, for example, if the centre's cohort were all performing monologues
- most centres provided running orders, programme notes and statements of dramatic intentions at the start of the session
- some programme notes included very small photographs that were unhelpful; ideally, the photographs should be taken *specifically* for the purpose of identification in this exam, with students wearing the costumes and hairstyles that they are to wear in the performance; teachers are reminded that the recording may be included in examiners' samples to their Team Leaders, may be used at the Awarding of grades meetings and/or be required to support an EAR request for a review of marking; if programme notes do not identify students clearly, these processes may be compromised
- some teachers had not appreciated that Reflective reports had to be completed by students, before the examination, and, in these instances, the reports were not made available either for the examiner to check that they were complete or to take away with them for marking
- some teachers had, mistakenly, marked the Reflective reports, having been confused by the phrase in the specification about Component 3 'It is marked by AQA'
- some centres had to be reminded of the requirement for students to state their name, number, specialism and role(s) played if performing
- the vast majority of exam performances ran smoothly and on or ahead of the running order timings
- some centres had pieces that were slightly over-long for the number of students in the group which was frequently self-penalising
- many centres were able to provide recordings and Reflective Reports on the exam day and almost all ensured that materials not taken by the examiner reached them within the ten-day period stipulated in the specification.

Statements of Dramatic Intentions:

- although these statements do not attract any marks in themselves, they are crucial to the exam as they enable the examiner to see what each student is trying to achieve through their interpretation of the text and the application of their chosen practitioner's methodologies
- this document gives the student the opportunity to say a little bit about why and how they have interpreted the text as they have and could include, for example, references to changes of location, updating or an unorthodox approach that requires justification
- unfortunately, many of the statements seen this series were either so generalised that they could have applied to almost any play or all students in the group had the same dramatic intentions.

Selection of the extracts:

- many students had selected their texts and their extracts with care and allowed themselves maximum opportunity to demonstrate their strengths as performers, directors or designers
- some students appear to have been told by their teachers what they would be performing

and, while it is inevitable that some teacher guidance is offered, especially as extracts and practitioners need to be so harmoniously matched, it was also noticeable that students tended to fare better where they were performing in a piece that either they had selected for themselves or that had great appeal to them if selected by another

- several centres had misunderstood the term “abridgement” in the specification and offered an edited version of the entire script, sometimes taking ‘extracts’ from the whole, sometimes taking individual lines from sections, with no consideration of the playwright’s intentions; this is a rubric infringement
- other centres had permitted their students to perform a number of separate extracts taken from very different parts of the play but presented as a single entity. In many of these cases this decision negatively impacted upon the mark for ‘appropriateness’
- some groups omitted characters without considering how this might distort the meaning of the extract
- some teachers/students chose a broad range of extracts and practitioners across the cohort and where these practitioners had been thoroughly researched and applied to an appropriate text, students benefitted from being exposed to a range of work
- students need to be advised of how many marks are allocated, in both Part B of the Performance mark and in the mark for the Reflective report, to the successful application of features of their chosen practitioner’s methodology; if students do not understand this, or if, understanding it, they do not act upon it, they jeopardise their achievement in this examination
- some teachers had failed to understand the regulations regarding non-examinees in this new specification where they are only permitted to ‘*make the group size up to the minimum of performers*’; as students, at A level, may perform a monologue for each of their extracts, there is no occasion where any individual A Level student requires the support of a non-examinee; students should be encouraged to select extracts that suit the group size that they are working in
- in a very few cases, it appeared that teachers had offered too much direction of the work in contravention of the rubric in the specification.

Practitioners:

- both in performance and in the reflective reports it was clear that some students had only a very limited understanding of the working methods of their chosen practitioner. Sometimes this was restricted to having seen just one production, for example the Frantic Assembly’s *Things I Know to Be True*, without any idea of the vast range of their techniques.
- some thought that if they had a projection on stage that was sufficient proof of the influence of Katie Mitchell. Indeed, there was much evidence of a lack of understanding of how and why Mitchell uses multi-media in many pieces seen
- occasionally, students who chose non-performance specialisms struggled to access enough material from their chosen practitioner on which to base their own work
- the specification offers students the opportunity to choose from a very wide range of practitioners but unless students undertake the requisite amount of research into their selected practitioner, they cannot hope to achieve a finished product which will convince an examiner of ‘wholly’, ‘highly’ or even much consistency with the practitioner’s dramatic intentions and methods
- Students performing monologues are able to access the full range of marks for the application of their chosen practitioner’s work/methodologies but must ensure they give careful consideration to how they will demonstrate this within the 2-5 minutes allowed.
- students who chose and researched and applied the methodologies of practitioners with a very distinctive style fared best

- students who choose practitioners who are also playwrights such as Berkoff, Brecht and Godber are advised to focus only on their practitioner techniques, i.e. as a director and not on the features of their playwriting
- some students appeared to think that adopting the ideas of a practitioner who would not normally be associated with the style and genre of their selected text would demonstrate some creativity; in fact such an approach is to be discouraged as it inevitably resulted in a performance that jarred because of the incompatibility of the methodology of the practitioner with the intentions of the playwright. For example, Artaud would never have worked on a play such as *The Crucible*, nor is *Yerma* best served by the application of Frantic Assembly tropes
- in a very few cases, students chose practitioners who do not appear on the prescribed list in the specification, for example Samuel Beckett; this mistake impacted on both Part B of the performance mark and also on the mark awarded for the Reflective report.

The Reflective Reports

While some centres clearly acted upon the advice in last year's Report on the examination, in terms of the Reflective report, it appeared that some teachers had not fully absorbed the need to guide their students in the structure and required context of the Reflective Report.

In particular, it should be noted that, as in a written examination, no credit is awarded to material which is irrelevant to the published requirements. Many students included some of the following irrelevant material in their reports which meant that time and valuable 'words' had been wasted in the place of what might have attracted credit.

Irrelevant to the Reflective report:

- biographies of the chosen practitioner
- references to the methodologies of additional practitioners (i.e. not nominated as practitioners for any of the 3 extracts)
- photographs of practitioners or of productions that they have been involved in
- comparisons or contrasts between the chosen extracts, unless to make specific points about how skills were applied similarly or contrastingly
- texts rejected
- the plot of the play from which the extract has been taken
- character sketches of the role(s) played
- rehearsal techniques that are not part of the chosen practitioner's practices
- evaluation of the final production (i.e. written after the examination has taken place).

Positive aspects seen

- students used a variety of structures for their Reflective Reports, which was entirely acceptable where the structures were clear and focused
- accurate **word counts** were included and the maximum of 3,000 words was adhered to: please note that words beyond the 3,000 maximum (which includes quotations and only excludes headings and any bibliographies referred to) are not credited by the examiner
- there were fewer instances of students believing that they must compare and/or contrast their chosen extracts in their reports
- good reports had taken into consideration the demands of the task, as outlined in the specification and repeated, for convenience, below:

For assessment, students **must** discuss:

- the opportunities and challenges presented by their three extracts
- their theatrical interpretations for each key extract, including how this was informed by:
- the genre and style of the play
- the social, cultural and historical contexts of the play
- the work and methodology of their selected prescribed practitioner, where appropriate.
- how successful their theatrical interpretations are in fulfilling their aims and communicating intended meaning, during the workshopping of material.
- the majority of reports gave reasons for their choices and showed a secure understanding of the social, cultural and historical context of their chosen extracts which was reflected in students' approaches to their extracts
- good reports showed how all aspects of their research and development had impacted on their interpretation and development of their three extracts
- the most effective answers gave clear, detailed and specific illustrations of the practical development of the piece with reference to moments of preparation and performance
- some reports had adopted a "holistic" approach very successfully and others simply resulted in students tying themselves in knots
- good answers showed detail of the development of all extracts and evaluated both the development of their interpretation and the development of their personal skill/specialism
- good reports used the practitioners' methodologies to develop their work, particularly, but not exclusively, in relations to Extract 3
- some students made useful reference to productions that they had seen and how these had influenced their own work – this was most relevant where the productions were in the style of the chosen practitioner
- students discussed the positive effect that research and experience had had on their exploration
- reports often commented on how the production "team" worked together to problem solve and develop production ideas
- good reports made reference to specific key moments in the extracts, often linked to succinct reference to text; this clear illustration allowed examiners to visualise the interpretative process with more clarity and understanding
- good design reports were well illustrated with annotated photographs and diagrams which were integrated in the text of the report, including cue sheets and design sketches as appropriate.

Areas for improvement:

- despite what was said in the report on this component last year, some students appeared to think that they had to adopt a comparative approach to the extracts leading to a loss of focus on the actual requirements of the report
- however, presenting the report as three *entirely* separate documents, each covering work on a different extract is not in the spirit of the report which should indicate that the student's approach to component 3 had been a 'holistic' learning experience
- some students appeared to believe that had to evaluate the final performance in their Reflective report which is not the case and it is clearly indicated in the specification, P. 37 that this is not the case.
- less effective reports made very generalised comments about their discoveries during the process, revealing limited application of both practitioner and any live productions seen; these documents tended to be descriptive and narrative rather than analytical and

evaluative

- less effective reports omitted to mention opportunities or challenges or if they did consider challenges, they did not explain how these were met
- self-imposed challenges which were not recognised as such, for example playing a character of the opposite sex or adopting an unfamiliar accent that they were unable to ‘do’
- some students did not realise that the marking criteria refer to detail in “all three” extracts and offered considerably more detail about Extract 3 with only perfunctory detail of Extracts 1 and 2; this was self-limiting
- occasionally a practitioner had been listed on the Student Record Form for either Extract 1 or 2, but the student failed to refer to that practitioner, at all, in the Reflective report
- some students gave insufficient consideration to the development of their own skill; more effective reports offered good detail of how exploration of each extract had contributed to their personal development
- many students made reference to several practitioners’ work for Extract 3 which contravened the rubric, resulting in a confused focus
- others cited one practitioner, but gave more detail of the work of another, sometimes one which does not appear on the list of practitioners in the specification, for example Laban or Le Coq
- some students wrote about a very narrow range of their chosen practitioner’s methods, for example, only referencing ‘emotion memory’ for Stanislavski
- some students revealed a very restricted understanding of their chosen practitioner; as last year, the least understood practitioner was Brecht, although Artaud was frequently applied to inappropriately wordy texts, suggesting a lack of understanding of his dramatic intentions and methods
- some students did not understand what ‘interpretation’ means and failed to offer an interpretation of their chosen extract or role
- some reports revealed that the teacher had intervened in their work in ways that contravene the spirit of the specification
- students sometimes failed to include word counts or labelled the word count at 2,999 when the work was clearly closer to 4, 000 words

Contribution to Performance:

- an understanding of the extract, its contexts, and the playwright’s intentions should be evident in the performers’, director’s and/or designers’ interpretation
- good performances were characterised by attention to detail, recognising that this is an examination and an “event”. While there is no requirement for groups to provide full costume and set unless these skills are offered by a group member, good performers made sure the performance space was prepared appropriately
- less effective performances were frequently characterised by an overly casual approach, with, for example, curtains badly drawn or piles of school bags and coats clearly visible in the performance space
- it is important that designers realise that their designs will be marked in terms of their contribution to the performance as a whole rather than as a simple artefact.

Skills and specialisms

Performer

Positive achievements:

- sections from texts that were unedited, or completely appropriately edited, and of the correct length to enable students to demonstrate performance skills in accordance with the playwright's intention
- entirely appropriate 'marriage' of practitioner with text and where the choice of practitioner **enabled** the student(s) to reveal the playwright's intentions
- perfectly executed and appropriate accents to suit the piece; clarity of diction, good projection, irrespective of accent/dialect
- precise vocal and physical performance skills that revealed understanding of the demands of both practitioner and text, as well as of the role selected
- interpretations of individual roles in relation to other roles being performed and careful attention to the social milieu of the role being performed
- attention to detail in relation to creating a meaningful theatrical experience for the audience even where all group members were performers
- some extremely successful performances were seen, showing a secure command of skills and clear dramatic intentions.

Less successful work:

- over length; whereby, groups of 2-4 students would have been well-advised to cut down on the amount of material they presented
- ill-chosen monologues that failed to give students adequate opportunity to demonstrate the range of skills or understanding required to access the highest bands – where these were chosen from monologue books, it was evident that not all students had accessed the whole text
- monologues were often performed directly to the examiner with no apparent awareness of the context of the speech or any consideration of the characters on stage that the speech would be directed at, in a full performance of the play; this is especially inappropriate where students have nominated Stanislavski as their practitioner
- occasionally students chose a text that they had seen in live performance; and, while this could help develop their ideas and creativity, it occasionally led them into copying the performance they had seen which restricted their own interpretative approach
- completely inappropriate choice of practitioner or understanding of practitioner so limited that it was impossible to detect their influence in the work
- merging of practitioners' ideas, for example a piece of Brechtian theatre where 'chair duets' made a 'guest' appearance
- failure to understand the context of the play – poor use of accent or performance style
- failure to recognise own abilities or limitations on those abilities – attempting physical work without the necessary agility or flexibility.

Direction:

- there were several more student directors this year and, in the main, this was a very successful skill
- there were some very good pieces seen which showed clear directorial intention and this

- was supported by the confidence of the performers
- the most successful were those who communicated clear directorial intention and showed clear influence of the practitioner’s style; the hand of the director was evident throughout the piece
- good work showed consistent evidence of the practitioner’s methods throughout. The focus and security of the performances indicated thorough and targeted rehearsal, with good communication between director and performers
- less effective performances suggested that the director had failed to gain the respect of the performers or had limited skills in the role.

Lighting design:

- there was some very good work seen indeed for this specialism where inventive students made a virtue of a limited range of specialist equipment because they were able to make the most of what they had
- others may have had more sophisticated equipment but did not seem to know how to use it effectively; for example, poorly-timed cues can never be covered up - however good the equipment
- the most successful students had chosen a practitioner with a very specific style and these were not always the current lighting designers. There were some very effective resplendent lighting effects created for an Artaudian production of ' *Attempts on her Life*'
- one stunning lighting design was for an extract from ' *Frankenstein*' using practitioner Paule Constable, that totally supported the work of the performers and the sound designer
- there was generally good, and some exceptional understanding of how lighting could contribute to mood and atmosphere
- successful lighting designers:
 - used colour appropriately to support the action on stage
 - understood the need to light from all angles
 - had made the decision to work with a different, but appropriate, practitioner from the performers
 - refrained from 'excess' unless the practitioner demanded it
- less successful lighting designers:
 - designed states which were incongruous with the style of the piece
 - were over reliant on 'intelligent' moving lights to change colour in an almost random way
 - lacked understanding of how to use the equipment
 - failed to understand the height required to adequately light from above
 - lacked awareness of use of side lights.

Sound design:

- as with lighting, this was a minority skill but there were several confident and accomplished sound designers - some using rudimentary equipment with intelligence and imagination, for example using live percussion during *The Trial*
- the most effective work created sound which was significant within the performance and added meaning. An example of good work was from *Pool, No Water*, where the soundscape brought out the contrasts between the urban environment of the artists, and contrasted that with the gently lapping 'Pool' and the later hospital scene
- successful sound designers:
 - understood the scope of a sound designer’s role

- manipulated sound to create effect and understood the technical aspects of the equipment they were working with
- created and worked with both recorded and live sound
- less successful sound designers:
 - created designs incongruous with style of the piece
 - offered a series of music tracks, unedited and not always appropriate to the mood/practitioner chosen
 - lacked creative awareness of the scope of sound design
 - revealed an apparent lack of rehearsal with performers.

Costume design:

- relatively few costume designs were seen but there were some; where designers were intent on creating specific effects, in line with the intentions of their chosen practitioner, they were successful
- too many costume designers failed to appreciate that they are assessed on a **single** costume and that costume has to be **very effective** and **appropriate** to the role to the play and to the practitioner to achieve higher band marks
- some students had been allowed to design a ‘corporate effect’ for an ensemble of players; while the ‘mass’ effect may have been striking the nominated costume had much to do
- a few designers had not considered the impact of their costumes in performance, or how the performers might use them
- there were designs which showed understanding of the practitioner but needed to further consider the effect of the costumes when on stage
- successful costume designers:
 - understood the brief to design **one** costume
 - revealed skills that were consonant with the demands of the piece and the practitioner
 - used materials creatively; understanding the potential effects of design fundamentals, colour, shape, fabric, ornamentation, style, fit, condition, headgear, footwear, accessories
 - understood the importance of creating a **wearable** costume
- less successful costume designers:
 - failed to recognise the requirement of the specification – generally resulting in a large number of costumes being ‘created’ with little focused detail for any of them.

Set design:

- only a few set designs were seen but of those that were, there was again creative use of design and imagination shown
- designs frequently demonstrated how an effective design can be achieved on a budget, through use of colour, shadow screen and representative set dressing, to name but a few elements
- good designs often showed clear evidence of inspiration, often from a practitioner’s key works
- a very few set designers had assembled inappropriate or underdeveloped work, showing more limited appreciation of the set designer’s role in supporting the action of the performance
- as with other design skills, the successful designs showed understanding of the demands of the performance and ways in which to support the performers

- some designs claimed the influence of a practitioner, but this was insufficiently evident in the final work for performance
- successful set designers:
 - understood the brief
 - revealed skills that were consonant with the demands of the piece and the practitioner
 - used materials creatively; understanding the potential effects of design fundamentals, use of space, scale, use of levels, perspective, relationship with the audience
 - chose appropriate materials with which to construct the set
 - accommodated the action of the extract perfectly including positioning of entrances and exits and/or projection screens, if used
 - understood the importance of creating a **useable** setting
- less successful set designers:
 - assembled a collection of items from 'stock' and rearranged them to vaguely approximate the requirements of the setting.

Puppet design

No puppet design has been reported to the Principal Examiner at the time of the compilation of this report

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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