

DRAMA

Paper 0994/12
Written Examination

Key messages

- Candidates continue to write too much for 2 and 3 mark questions leaving less time to answer the more substantive questions in **Sections B** and **C**.
- Candidates need to read the question carefully and respond directly to what is being asked. For example, in questions that ask about detail relating to a specific character, or a specific section of the extract, no marks can be awarded if the candidate chooses to refer to a different character or section.
- **Section C** questions require candidates to evaluate aspects of their devised work. Candidates need to be able to communicate what their intent was, in relation to the question, and then respond as to whether this was effective or not, and why.

General comments

The extract from *The Watsons* seemed to be both popular and accessible, with many candidates showing an excellent understanding of its central premise, as well as its attendant themes and the possibilities and challenges it presents to those preparing it for a live performance in front of an audience.

Not all candidates recognise that the number of marks available is a guide as to how much time to spend on each question. Some candidates continue to write at great length in **Section A** and leave themselves insufficient time to construct a strong response to **Sections B** and **C**. Candidates need to be precise and concise in order to write successful answers, focusing on the specific ask detailed in the question.

There was a range of responses from those attempting to answer questions on a devised piece, but understandably very few appeared to have had the benefit of performing their work to an audience. Stronger candidates were able to offer well-supported evaluations based on how they met their dramatic intentions and solved the practical problems they faced.

Evaluation is a critical skill in the paper, but many candidates did not demonstrate a confident grasp of either the skill or the ability to frame the skill in their writing. All too often simple unsupported assertions of effectiveness were offered. Candidates aspiring to the higher mark bands need to produce a detailed explanation of intention, with a description of the techniques employed and a clear evaluation of the impact achieved.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

There was a good response to the first part of the question, with most candidates focusing on either awe or awkwardness. A small minority of candidates described an atmosphere and justified their selection rather than identifying one way in which the atmosphere could be created.

This was an example of a question where many candidates wrote far more than was needed for two marks.

Question 2

The question asked for 'one point' where the volume of the music could be varied. Candidates were also asked to provide a brief reason why they had chosen this particular 'point'. The 'point' could be an

appropriate line number, quotation, or a description of a moment, but it needed to fall within the section specified in the question – a few did not. The explanation was frequently to allow the speech at that point to be audible to the audience, but other reasons were accepted, too. A few candidates missed out on the second mark because they focused on the importance of their selected ‘point’ instead of explaining why the volume of the music needed to be varied.

Question 3

This question is a good example of why candidates need to focus on what specifically is being asked for in the question. Generally, candidates spent too long on this question with many candidates going to considerable lengths to justify their suggestions. The question asked for three suggestions as to how the actors could vary physical distance not for why they should do so.

Question 4

The majority of the candidates recognised that there were only two characters, Emma Watson and Mr Howard in this section. Many candidates gave appropriate pieces of acting advice and convincing explanations that were based on the context of the encounter and the personalities involved.

Candidates need to take note of questions where specific line references are given. Some responses did not relate to the section of the extract specified in the question.

Question 5

Candidates needed to ensure that their response related to the section of the extract specified and to Lord Osborne.

Some candidates did not demonstrate a confident understanding of the term ‘timing’.

A significant minority wrote about ‘the servant’, particularly the timing of her intervention, which could not be credited unless the timing of Lord Osborne’s reaction was explored.

Question 6

Candidates who scored at least three marks did so because they were able to explain the relationship between the two characters and made specific suggestions about how the director could ensure that aspects of the relationship could be revealed in performance.

Many candidates offered a limited view of the relationship, with several ideas for direction, or a more detailed understanding of the relationship, with fewer ideas for an effective performance.

Question 7

Most candidates were able to identify and give a simple description of a moment in their devised work that communicated strong emotion to the audience, but few were able to discuss the moment in detail and explain how the emotion was communicated.

There were many purely descriptive responses and some narratives which simply recounted the plot of the devised piece. Indeed, some candidates failed to mention any emotion at all. Some candidates focused on the emotions their piece elicited in the audience, which was acceptable where it accompanied an explanation of the aspects of the performance responsible for the audience’s reactions. However, there were a few candidates who gave a detailed discussion with plenty of salient references to the piece, and frequently cited design elements as well as acting.

Question 8

Many candidates provided narrative responses. To access the full range of marks available, candidates needed to ensure they were analytical when addressing contrast, rather than descriptive. Successful answers looked at character differentiation, design elements and mood.

Section B

Question 9

This question proved to be popular with candidates. Many candidates displayed both knowledge and understanding of Laura's intriguing role in this extract and produced some interesting responses. Most made many textual references, although a significant number restricted their responses to Laura's interactions with Emma, which are obviously crucial but do not constitute a well-rounded approach to playing the role. Some did not explain how the role would be performed from an actor's perspective or only offered a few general, simplistic suggestions for performance that were not tied to the demands of the text. A few candidates focused chiefly on costume and appearance, which in this instance was potentially a fruitful avenue to explore and some very sound suggestions were put forward, but this should not be to the exclusion of everything else.

Candidates need to ensure they have understood the focus of such a question. Some candidates discussed Emma instead of Laura.

Question 10

The strongest responses were those where candidates recognised that the focus of the question was not on set design but on directorial decisions about all aspects of staging this short section of the play. Nevertheless, it was not possible to successfully tackle the question without having some clarity about the performance space in which directorial decisions may be executed. There are stage directions within the extract that need to be taken note of, even if different solutions are to be implemented. The strongest answers not only acknowledged the challenging concept of different locations and temporal settings, but offered imaginative solutions involving the use of lighting, sound, props and stage trucks, as well as the blocking of the action. There were some excellent practical and detailed responses, closely related to the demands of the text and the dramatic intentions of the piece, sometimes accompanied by diagrams to further elucidate the answer.

Question 11

Candidates who recognised that the question asked for an 'approach' to costume design were able to access the full range of marks available. There were some detailed discussions about costume design which focused on a limited selection of characters but, given the question asked for an 'approach' to design for the whole extract, it was obviously preferable for all characters to be acknowledged, although detailed suggestions could be restricted to a selection of 'examples'.

Many candidates offered general ideas about their approach to costume design, commonly based on wealth and status, personality, and period. Many candidates were able to tie their suggestions very closely to specific references to the text and showed an awareness of how costume can be used effectively to enhance performance and to create an intended impact upon the audience. Those candidates who were able to describe costume design in detail, with reference to fabric, shape and cut, accessories, function, style etc. tended to produce much better answers reflecting their thought processes.

Section C

Question 12

This proved to be a challenging question for those who attempted it. Candidates need to use the appropriate vocabulary to discuss the action on stage. Stronger examples were able to specify the type of performance space in which their piece was performed.

Candidates need to avoid narrative responses particularly when the information shared does not address the specifics of the question.

Stronger responses from candidates discussed the use of lighting to change the space. Others provided detailed accounts of how they presented or intended to present their pieces to their audience.

In order to access the full range of marks available, candidates needed to incorporate a clear discussion of their dramatic intentions, with a detailed account of their use of the space available to accommodate the action, manage transitions and communicate effectively with the audience.

Question 13

Many candidates were able to confidently share ideas around design elements but candidates needed to link these to acting. Some candidates linked design elements to performance, offering generic observations about the impact of their piece on their audience but, most often, the question of the relationship between acting and design elements was not addressed.

Question 14

Many candidates recognised the importance of both physicality and stage movement in creating live theatre and endeavoured to discuss their use in terms of their dramatic intentions and their impact on the audience.

Some responses dealt with physicality and not stage movement, or *vice versa*.



DRAMA

Paper 0994/02
Coursework

Key messages

- The session produced some very creative work, despite the constraints of working during the pandemic.
- The selection of appropriate performance texts is critical to candidates being able to perform to the best of their abilities.
- The creation of effective devised drama is often inhibited by an over-reliance of creating naturalistic dialogue – the most successful pieces combined vocal and physical aspects effectively.

General comments

This was an atypical assessment session and many changes were made to normal procedures to enable candidates to undertake their practical assessment in abnormal circumstances. This report does not comment on these special arrangements as they are unique to this session. Suffice it to say that the moderating panel was extremely grateful for the additional work undertaken by centres and their flexibility in ensuring that all candidates had the best opportunity to succeed. The enthusiasm of candidates in showcasing their performance work was undaunted and there were many examples of exciting and creative work despite the constraints of working in a socially-distanced manner.

Administration

The administration of the session ran smoothly. There were very few problems with the recordings and those that were encountered were generally with recordings submitted on DVDs rather than USB memory sticks. Most centres submitted a memory stick which was very easy to navigate. There were occasional issues with candidate identification, and centres are reminded of the need for candidates to identify themselves on the recordings, preferably in a slow-moving line-up at the start of the recording, before the performance starts.

Despite having to use some quirky performance spaces, the filming was mainly good. Most of the home monologues were of acceptable quality although a few relied on close-ups that were unrepresentative of stage drama. Sometimes the room used had an echo, which affected being able to hear easily; some recordings in theatres in schools were muffled and the camera was not static. Zooming in and out was distracting.

Most centres were unable to provide an audience although there were examples of where this had been possible. Many performances were in non-performance spaces ranging from tiny bedrooms to mansions, and beautiful scenery with birdsong to outdoor where there was ice on the ground; and a number where it started pouring with rain during the performance.

There was a variable level of detail on the ICMS forms. The most helpful comments pointed to specific aspects of the performance work that had been credited; the least helpful simply re-stated the assessment criteria from the syllabus. Several centres had transcription errors, especially where the form had been adapted for partial submissions. Some comment was too thin to be useful.

Scripted performances

All candidates presented a monologue and there was a higher-than-usual number of duologues. There was no diminution in the level of challenge of the performance texts selected and most teachers chose scripted material with care to suit their individual abilities and interest, while continuing to stretch and challenge. There were fewer large groups for group text pieces with more twos and threes. This worked better for candidates as exposure was easier to achieve and there were hardly any examples of performances where

candidates lacked adequate exposure. Despite the performance restrictions, there was some excellent use of costume, lighting, sound and sets.

There was evidence of extensive preparation with most candidates being adequately prepared for the demands of script-based performance. The strongest performances demonstrated thorough research and preparation, including an understanding of stylistic demands of the performance text. Weaker interpretations lacked authenticity at times and it was clear that thought needed to be given to the playwright's original intentions irrespective of the setting of the performance. Weak presentations offered little emotional depth and there was no real understanding of the life of the character and their place in the full text. These performances tended to be a little naïve and hesitant with a sense that the candidate might not make it through the piece.

Those candidates who had to perform wearing masks or face shields did extremely well and all worked hard to overcome the challenges this presented. There were very few problems with articulation and enunciation, although in their efforts to project well some candidates tended towards shouting.

There were many examples of excellent pacing and contrast in the scripted work, with clear use of performance space and a good sense of contrasts. However, there were also a significant number of pieces where the lack of pace was a problem, which led to some bland performances. As in previous sessions, the pacing of scripted pieces was impeded by an over-reliance on the use of chairs and tables, which pushed the performers towards a static, two-dimensional approach. There were a few instances where classical monologues were selected, most notably from Shakespeare, which often proved unsuccessful, mostly because candidates found the speaking of verse challenging. This often resulted in a lack of fluency, which in turn interfered with overall communication of the piece.

Devised performances

There were many exciting and innovative devised pieces, the best involving controlled movement and impressive physicality, judicious use of props/effects and pushing at boundaries. At the other extreme, weak devised pieces adopted a narrative, quasi-naturalistic approach that attempted to spell out every detail of the imagined plot. Most candidates struggled with the creation of believable dialogue and several produced lengthy, wordy expositions that tended to slow down the pace of the performance.

There was a tendency for candidates to adopt formulaic approaches to ensemble work in which vocal and physical methodology was predictable and slightly lacking in the required dynamic energy necessary to overcome the anxieties of working without a script. Subject-matter was often challenging, dealing fearlessly with current issues but for the reasons given above the impact of these pieces was diminished in terms of driving home the intended message. There were a few examples where the collective abilities of the performers overcame this, and as would be expected from a company of naturally strong ensemble players, the outcome was both compelling and stimulating.

A number of candidates struggled to create physical performance from their chosen stimulus. This was often because of a desire to create story/plot wherever possible rather than the physical building of character and setting. As a result, there were several uninspired devised pieces that consisted of wordy, action-free performances that did not allow characters to develop. The best devised work experimented with different styles and genres, used space and staging in interesting ways and allowed characters to be explored. There was a good deal of abstract/physical work where the piece did not rely on narrative.

Where technology was featured it worked effectively. Back projections and simple but well-considered lighting effects were put to good use in pieces; sound, though not incorporated in all the work seen, was certainly helpful in achieving atmosphere and mood where intended.

Examples of repertoire seen in 2021

Jean Anouilh Aristophanes Alan Ayckbourn	<i>Antigone</i> <i>The Birds</i> <i>Invisible Friends</i> <i>Absurd Person Singular</i> <i>Confusions</i>
Steven Berkoff Bertolt Brecht	<i>The Trial</i> <i>Fear and Misery of the Third Reich</i>

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	<i>The Life of Galileo</i>
Jim Cartwright Anton Chekhov Carol Churchill Noël Coward	<i>Road Two The Cherry Orchard Uncle Vanya Top Girls Blithe Spirit Easy Virtue</i>
Shelagh Delaney Christopher Durang	<i>A Taste of Honey Laughing Wild Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You</i>
Euripides	<i>The Bacchae</i>
Dario Fo Athol Fugard	<i>The Virtuous Burglar My Children, My Africa</i>
John Godber	<i>Teechers Bouncers Shakers</i>
David Hare	<i>Stuff Happens</i>
Henrik Ibsen Eugene Ionesco Debbie Isitt	<i>A Doll's House Rhinoceros The Woman Who Cooked Her Husband</i>
Sarah Kane Charlotte Keatley Dennis Kelly	<i>4:48 My Mother Said I Never Should DNA</i>
Sharman Macdonald Arthur Miller Mischief Theatre Company Michael Morpurgo	<i>After Juliet Death of a Salesman A View from the Bridge All My Sons The Crucible The Play That Goes Wrong War Horse</i>
Peter Nichols	<i>A Day in the Death of Joe Egg</i>
John Osborne	<i>Look Back in Anger</i>
John Pielmeier Evan Placey	<i>Agnes of God Girls Like That</i>
Yasmina Reza Willy Russell	<i>Art Blood Brothers Educating Rita</i>
Peter Shaffer William Shakespeare	<i>Amadeus Equus The Royal Hunt of the Sun Hamlet Julius Caesar A Midsummer Night's Dream Much Ado About Nothing Macbeth Othello Romeo and Juliet</i>

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George Bernard Shaw Neil Simon Sophocles Gordon Steel Simon Stephens Tom Stoppard August Strindberg Jessica Swale	<i>Richard III</i> <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> <i>The Tempest</i> <i>Pygmalion</i> <i>Brighton Beach</i> <i>Antigone</i> <i>Like a Virgin</i> <i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> <i>Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead</i> <i>Miss Julie</i> <i>Blue Stockings</i>
Don Taylor	<i>The Roses of Eyam</i>
Laura Wade Enda Walsh Keith Waterhouse Tennessee Williams Oscar Wilde Olwen Wymark	<i>The Watsons</i> <i>Chatroom</i> <i>Billy Liar</i> <i>The Glass Menagerie</i> <i>The importance of Being Earnest</i> <i>Find me</i>