

## **A LEVEL**

*Examiners' report*

# **DRAMA AND THEATRE**

**H459**

For first teaching in 2016

## **H459/44 Summer 2019 series**

Version 1


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## Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

## Paper 44 series overview

The single Assessment Objective – *demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how drama and theatre is developed and performed* – is examined through how *Stockholm* is interpreted for performance to others by a director.

The play needed to be deconstructed, analysed, dismantled, exposed, explored, experimented with and interpreted before being shaped into a credible performance.

This requirement led to some exciting, innovative and unusual ideas for production. While it is not expected that each one of the four strands in the level descriptors grid will be in evidence in equal measure in both responses, there was credit for responses that recognised directing is a layered and often collaborative process.

It was expected that candidates would refer to acting and design as well as simply telling everyone what to do or simply slavishly follow the stage directions from the text. Costume, props and effects played a part in most responses. The use of contemporary technology to tell the story and explore/expose the complex relationship between the couple was often well exploited, but sometimes ignored.

A few candidates discussed budgets that a director might have or wish for. This was a relevant aspect of the directorial vision, as the reality of financing has to be addressed, though imaginary limitless resources were accepted as part of the vision.

The specification makes clear that the production process and theatrical practices should be part of the learning. While many candidates referred to Brecht and Stanislavski, some Artaud and Le Coq and a handful to Boal, there were few references to how the study of practitioners, dead or alive, had informed their ideas and experiments.

With their learning from the other AS and A Level components, research into performances, staging styles and dramatic exploration of the themes, there was an expectation of inspiration drawn and ideas applied from the work of practitioners; some they'd seen, some they'd actually studied.

There was rarely a sense that practical work had been undertaken on and around the text as part of the journey candidates had made. Sometimes it was superficial or simplistic. 'We used a Brechtian technique' showed neither knowledge nor understanding.

If that kind of sweeping generalisation was expanded with a sentence on what they understood about *verfremdungseffekt*, the 4<sup>th</sup> wall or *spass*, then they demonstrated learning from a practitioner. Illustrations of processes and theories could be implicit, if explained.

In *Stockholm*, the influence of Frantic Assembly is integral to understanding how the play was created and works in performance. The use of Frantic Assembly's rehearsing and devising techniques was often patchy. Where they were used as devising and explorative tools, responses were more effective.

Some candidates had been prepared with generalised directorial responses, local settings and political interpretations before knowing the wording of the questions. While that formulaic or pre-prepared response is understandable, it limits candidates' creativity and originality. Centres should not offer candidates ready-made directorial ideas, but help them work towards finding, exploring and presenting their own.

The understanding of how staging underpins a performance was generally well understood. Whether to use a proscenium arch, thrust, traverse or in-the-round layout was crucial to realising the vision. Staging was particularly important in a drama of such agonising intimacy.

**What is a Director?**

- Has responsibility for an overall concept, direction, purpose, imagining, shaping, guiding.
- Works with performers, designers (of costume, set, lighting, effects, props, staging), venues, stage management and box office.
- Is often all things to all people in a production while being the boss!


Candidates often found inventive ways of introducing the extract vision (Q1) and the whole play vision (Q2) using different words and expressions. Some felt that copious background and/or biographical information on the play, Bryony Lavery, first performances, Frantic Assembly and well-known examples of Stockholm Syndrome were needed. Only when such information was made relevant to addressing the question from the directorial viewpoint was it truly helpful.


**Directorial focus**


The sole focus of this component is directorial. Examiners looked for any aspect of the director's function, including an overall dream of what a show would look like, the aim of conveying meaning and/or a message to an audience, staging, blocking, levels, proxemics, semiotics, set design, lighting, sound, effects, costume, props, stage furniture, genre and contexts.

The handwriting of a small minority of candidates presented something of a challenge for examiners and it was noted that several candidates opted to type their work, although most of the annotations needed in Q1 were handwritten. Centres may wish to give thought in future sessions to advising candidates on handwriting or word processing.

<i>Most successful approaches</i>	<i>Least successful approaches</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considered the directorial purpose is to convey meaning to an audience.</li> <li>• Frequently used examples from the play to support discussion and ideas.</li> <li>• Demonstrated learning from directorial practices and processes, methods, techniques and applied them.</li> <li>• Commanded the language of drama and theatre knowledgeably and with understanding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussed text as a piece of literature rather than as a blueprint for live performance.</li> <li>• Began both responses with identical wording and explanation.</li> <li>• Produced very few annotations to the extract in Q1 or simply repeated the given stage directions.</li> <li>• Relied solely on the Q1 extract to provide material for the Q2 response.</li> </ul>

	<p><b>AfL</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Besides reading and discussing the play text, work through a number of Frantic Assembly and other drama exercises, exclusively from the directorial viewpoint.</li> <li>• Use techniques and ideas from Brecht, Stanislavski, Boal, Artaud, Grotowski, Berkoff, Katie Mitchell in turn to interpret a particular section.</li> <li>• Encourage students to direct their peers in those particular sections and try them out in front of an audience.</li> </ul>
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	<b>OCR support</b>	The OCR resources for this component and for <i>Stockholm</i> in particular are invaluable <a href="https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-a-level-gce-drama-and-theatre-h059-h459-from-2016/delivery-guide/component-dt041-deconstructing-texts-for-performance-4148/delivery-guide-dtdq004-deconstructing-texts-for-performance">https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-a-level-gce-drama-and-theatre-h059-h459-from-2016/delivery-guide/component-dt041-deconstructing-texts-for-performance-4148/delivery-guide-dtdq004-deconstructing-texts-for-performance</a>
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	<b>Resource</b>	Frantic Assembly's own resource on their original production of <i>Stockholm</i> is a must for every teacher to see <a href="https://www.franticassembly.co.uk/productions/stockholm">https://www.franticassembly.co.uk/productions/stockholm</a>
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## Question 1

- 1 As a director, describe and justify your vision for directing this extract to show its significance within the play as a whole, and annotate how you would bring this out. [30]

This question is not in two parts – the explanation and the annotations are marked holistically. Annotations should generally support and expand on the account of the vision written about as the opening.

Some candidates felt that the single page of lines offered before the extract was a limit to their account. It is not. They may continue on the extra pages after the extract, if they wish.

The question asks for a description and a justification of the directorial vision. It requires a view on its significance within the play. The annotations should demonstrate how the vision would be brought to life on stage – page to stage.

If examiners felt as they read the response that they could visualise the section on stage, that it worked, that it achieved the artistic intentions and that it was a series of credible ideas, then they credited responses accordingly. How directors' creative and artistic choices influence how meaning is communicated should be on show in this response.

Annotations took many forms. Some candidates drew lines across page from text to note, some drew thumbnail sketches of blocks, levels, stage layout or even a costume while others compartmentalised ideas into voice, tone, physicality, proxemics and intention. Some saw annotations as space to confine themselves to the actors' perspectives. A minority used annotations to mention influences from practitioners they'd studied.

A few candidates highlighted themes, characters or specific instructions with different colours. Unfortunately the scripts are scanned in black and white, so it is not a helpful practice.

### Exemplar 1

First extract from candidate response

Stockholm was written by Bryony Lavery in collaboration with Frank Assembly, telling the story of a young couple trapped in an abusive relationship. This extract takes place ~~to~~ at the end of the play and is significant to the play as a whole because it shows the cyclical nature of their <sup>toxic</sup> relationship; how it goes from romantic, to jealous to violent and back to romantic, which is what I particularly want to communicate as a director.



The extract begins with a fight - the climax of the violent element of Todd and Laili's relationship. Throughout the whole play, there is a ~~few~~ dance motif that is repeated which I would use as a semiotic to show the changing ~~stages~~<sup>phases</sup> of their relationship. I would therefore represent this fight as a the actors using high body tension, making the gesture aggressive and performing parts of it on the kitchen counters, showing the danger and violence at this point. I would use erratic piano music to compliment this, and also to ~~start~~<sup>with</sup> contact ~~bet~~ the other times the dance is used. ~~to show~~ This would allow me as a director to communicate to an audience how their relationship goes through phases of romance through to violence by using dance as a semiotic to represent the fight.

#### Second extract

from the climax and the return to the passion and romance of the <sup>cyclical</sup> relationship. To show this, I would have Laili and Todd maintain eye contact with each other, even though they are addressing the audience, to show how they are completely infatuated with each other. I would have them make love very tenderly and passionately, to show the romantic phase of their relationship - but Laili would be on top to show that she does still have some control and power, even at this point. This would



allow me as a director to show how the romance <sup>I to an audience</sup> has returned to their relationship after the climax of the fight; cycling back to the passion <sup>at the start of the play.</sup>

As a director I interpret the cell or as being a metaphor for the bleak future of their self-destructive relationship, and I want to communicate to an audience what the future holds if Hali and Todd can't escape this vicious cycle. To show this I would name Todd and Hali...

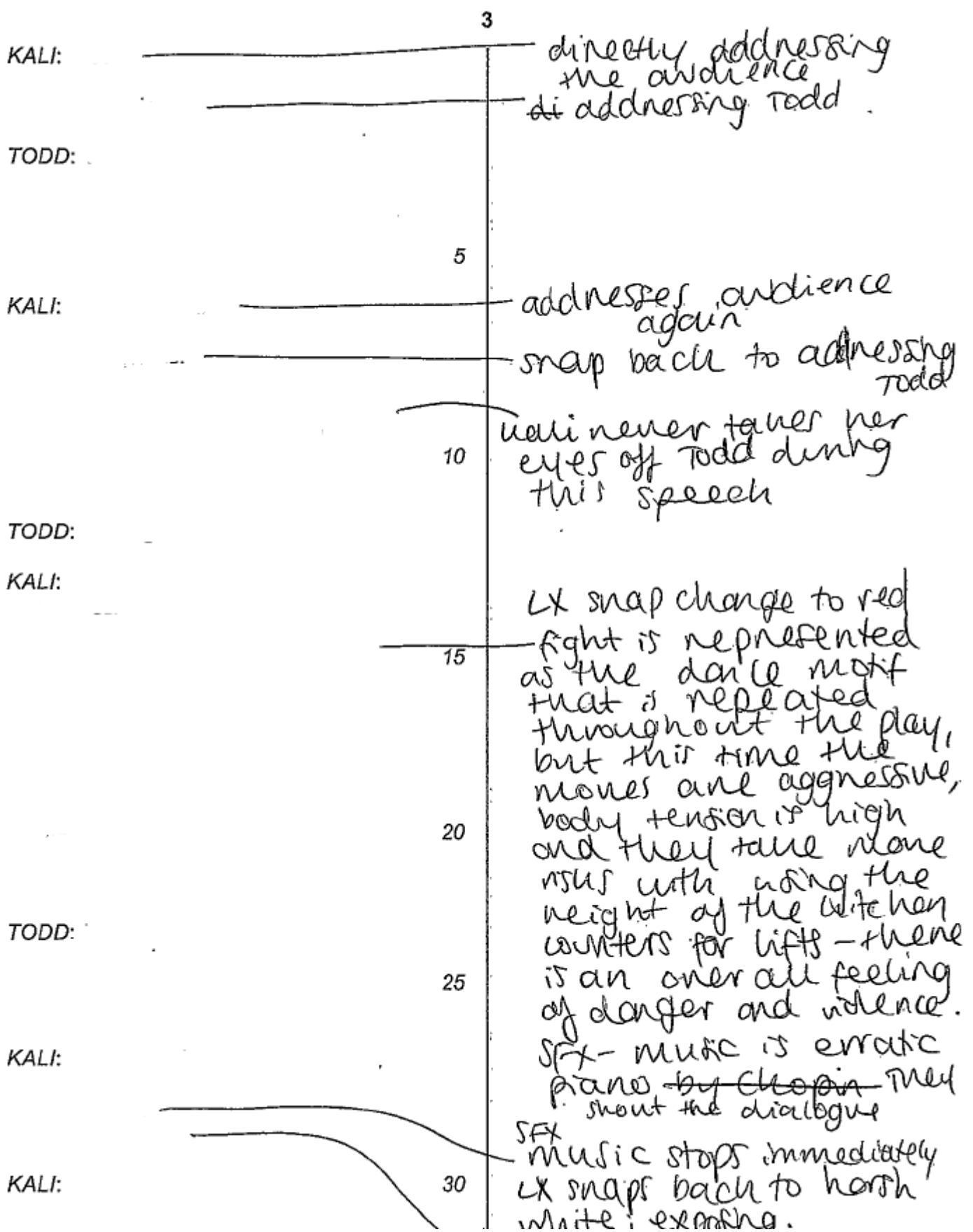
The response is articulate and knowledgeable. It opens with a succinct sentence giving all the information needed before explaining where the extract is drawn from. By the end of the first paragraph we have a statement of intent of the directorial vision and sufficient information to consider the details of the text.

The response continues by explaining what happens in the extract without falling into the trap of giving too much narration, and expands on what could be done by a director.

The relationship that is at once loving and toxic is certainly understood and the justification for directorial decisions is made explicit.

The full response shows highly developed grasp of how theatrical processes and practices interpret theatre and how the performance text was constructed and can be performed. Later on in this response there was discussion about cultural and social contexts in today's world view about relationships, though that was more implicit than explicit.

Exemplar 2



This is the first page of annotated text from the same candidate as Exemplar 1. The lines from the play have been removed for copyright reasons.

It is an example of how annotations do not have to be dense hieroglyphics nor be a regurgitation of the stage directions. It is information of what the candidate envisages and is explained clearly and with focus on stagecraft and how meaning is conveyed to an audience.

The 'terrible, beautiful fight' is a key moment in both the extract and the play as a whole. It is handled in this exemplar with simplicity and clarity and was referenced in the written part of the response, too. In many responses it was the choreographic aspects that featured most, sometimes with reference to Le Coq or Laban.

## Question 2

- 2 As a director, explain and justify how you could stage a performance of *Stockholm* using both traditional and contemporary techniques. [30]

As this play is relatively contemporary, the question was generally interpreted as how to produce it to appeal to a contemporary audience with its concerns about domestic abuse, personal relationships, gender and the dynamics of personal relationships.

Candidates needed to address an explanation and a justification and both traditional and contemporary techniques. Some arrived at a production that encompassed both traditional and contemporary techniques (particularly demonstrating the poorer technology of a decade ago compared with today's). Others suggested two entirely separate productions, a traditional one and a contemporary one. Both approaches were equally valid.

Question 2 did not require coverage of every single section in the play but was addressed when candidates selected and justified scenes and sections they felt were important to demonstrate their overall directorial vision.

## Exemplar 3

As a director, staging a performance of the 2007 play *Stockholm* by Bryony Lavery, I would consider the traditional techniques of staging for example lighting ~~and~~ changes but I would also include a mixture of contemporary techniques for example fly ins and rotatory set to create smooth flowing scene transitions where the audience's attention is held.

I would also stage this performance on an end-on proscenium arch stage because it would allow my audience to watch the play but not get lost in the emotion. By doing this I would be using a traditional Brechtian technique where my audience watch the performance objectively, with the hope that they leave considering their own role in society making the performance impactful and memorable.

The use of rotary set is a contemporary technique which I took inspiration for from a performance of 'Madness of George III'. As an audience member there use of a revolving set held the audience attention and made each scene exciting and different. When thinking about the staging for the kitchen I would use rotating flats which join together upstage to create a free-standing



cyclorama. I would use, as said before, a mounted magnetic wall mount at eyelevel on the flats, by doing this it also creates an illusion for the audience, because when the flats part and rotate, as an audience member, it would create the illusion of travelling through danger which is effective when entering following scenes i.e. the bedroom. I would also use traditional techniques such as the colour of the set and lighting to create an environment for the two characters but also an atmosphere for the audience which will effect their judgement of the characters. For example, Kali

This is a good, promising opening which immediately addresses the question and begins to provide practical suggestions for staging a performance. The justification for using end-on proscenium includes one explanatory point about a Brechtian technique.

It is not expanded but identifies inspiration for the revolving set idea from a live production seen. There are no further details, but the candidate has established that there is some drawing from practices and processes of others to formulate the vision.

There is more discussion about the staging requirements before leading into the issues around the characters themselves. This exemplar demonstrates that a great deal of introductory background is not needed and while it starts off at a higher level, overall it finished in Level 3 for Q2 as the justifications thinned out and it became more descriptive without much depth.

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