

**GCSE (9-1)**

**Examiners' report**

# **DRAMA**

**J316**

For first teaching in 2016

**J316/03/05 Summer 2022 series**

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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 concept proforma and performances, highlight good practice 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.

This was a very unusual and challenging year in the context of covid amendments and illness of candidates, sometimes at the very last minute before a performance.

### Advance Information for Summer 2022 assessments

To support student revision, advance information was published about the focus of exams for Summer 2022 assessments. Advance information was available for most GCSE, AS and A Level subjects, Core Maths, FSMQ, and Cambridge Nationals Information Technologies. You can find more information on our [website](#).

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## Administration

Most centres met the deadline of seven days for sending the examiner the required documentation. The items required are as follows, and this remains for future series when visiting examination returns:

- the concept pro-forma for each candidate as a hard copy. Electronic versions are not acceptable. The pro-forma must be signed by the candidate with the centre confirming that the work is that of the individual candidate alone. Covid amendments did not affect this at all. The only impact was the reduction in the number of texts to be considered from two down to one
- the running order of showcase performances. This must have candidate names and candidate numbers and be organised in order of performances
- details of the centre such as location, availability of parking, and any ID required. (Not relevant for 2022)
- the time the centre wishes the examination to start. (Not relevant for 2022)
- although the specification refers to photographs being sent in advance, this is not necessarily very helpful, and most examiners prefer photos of the candidates in costume to be available on the day. For this series most centres sent photographs of the candidates in their costume and made sure they identified themselves on camera. Photographs of the candidates when they were in year seven or eight was not helpful.

It is essential that the seven-day deadline is met to ensure parity for candidates and to give examiners sufficient time to mark the concept pro-formas and to prepare their paperwork for the marking of the performances. Non-receipt of the concept pro-forma by the seven-day deadline puts candidates at risk of receiving zero for that element of the examination. Some passwords did not work on some computers, and occasionally the format of a DVD recording did not work.

The quality of the recordings varied enormously, potentially affecting the outcomes irrespective of the ability of the candidates: extraneous noise, the quality of equipment available for recording, the positioning of the camera, the location of the microphone, all could affect what the examiner could see and hear. Large numbers of centres commented to their examiner that they were desperate for live marking in the centre to return.

In normal times a requirement of the specification is for the performances to be filmed and then chaptered and placed on a DVD or memory stick. Most centres did this with just a few having a continuous run which made it very difficult for examiners to find individual or groups of candidates. Candidates must introduce themselves before each extract. When candidates are in a group of four or more it is important that their costume makes them easily identifiable by the examiner. Some centres were imaginative about this providing sashes, arm or wrist bands and in one case headbands, all in bright different colours.

In normal times it is a requirement that the centre provide an audience for performances. The specification gives details of the nature of audiences permitted. The majority of centres had audiences made up of the actual examination class, taking it in turns to perform and to watch their peers. Some centres also had other classes watching from younger years or future GCSE students. Despite covid, several centres had invited candidates' parents and friends to watch.

Most centres kept to the performance and submission windows they had chosen, and examiners were able to be flexible if a centre met with a problem.

Attendance registers were not sent by OCR this series, and it was helpful when centres indicated clearly candidates who had not attended the performance element of the component.

The recordings provided the biggest challenge for examiners, and although examining by video was a one-off, these comments could be applied to the recordings of live performance when visits resume. Considerable amounts of time were spent by examiners negotiating with centres when the USB sticks.

## Concept proformas

This section of the examination requires candidates to have good knowledge of the whole of the play, not just the extract that they have used for their showcase. Candidates need to

- know and understand the original intention of the playwright
- research the context of when the text was written
- identify the challenges the text provides for a performer and/or designer and how they might be met
- decide on their own intention and how they want an audience to respond
- plan how to develop their role using drama techniques learnt during the course
- have examples of how they have prepared as an individual in a role, not the group as a whole.

Examiners reported, almost without exception, how good preparation for the concept proforma informed and supported candidates' performances.

## What did candidates do well?

Examiners reported many candidates wrote in good detail, the most successful focusing on and addressing the elements asked for by each question. It isn't necessary to write in great length, and there were good answers that were succinct in their writing yet covered all the essential information, without repeating themselves in later questions.

The best candidates were able to provide information about the origins of the play in their answers to Question 1, explaining why the playwright had written it, and setting the text in the social and/or political context of that time. In the best answers candidates' research had uncovered previous performances and they were able to compare the original to subsequent interpretations, and then compare it to their own intentions. Well-focused answers kept to the brief. For example, Question 1 is asking about the challenges and refers to structures. The best candidates were able to reference the whole play and avoid just describing the plot. The key word is *demands* and whilst there will be challenges linked with character, the most successful candidates avoided going into detail about their role and avoided discussing general issues about the plot.

In Question 2 the focus is on artistic vision, and the most successful answers were able to link candidates' own vision for their extracts with the original intention and how they had interpreted it. Where there had been subsequent productions of the play, research had enabled some candidates to discuss their own interpretation in the context of how others had interpreted the text. Another aspect some successful candidates used was to apply knowledge of practitioners to inform how they wanted to present their extracts. Some discussion of design and how it might support their vision was evident in well-rounded answers. Examiners reported that more candidates were able to reference the style they would choose in the context of intention and what they had written in their answers to Question 1. The most thorough answers went on to describe and explain design elements that would support their personal vision in practice, providing even more context for what they wanted to happen.

The question answered most successfully was Question 3. Most candidates understood their role, and that they needed to carry out preparation if their performance was to be successful. Some linked this with the demands of their vision so didn't consider their preparation in isolation. Actors needed to consider the Drama techniques they had used and how that linked with the demands of their own role. Higher achieving candidates avoided the trap of writing about all of the roles instead of focusing on their own. There is a good opportunity here to link the demands of the text (explained in Question 1), their vision (described in Question 2) and how they need to develop their role for the demands to be met and their vision achieved.

Another element that helped contribute to the achievement of high marks was explanation of how the role itself developed from first beginnings, how perhaps peers had commented on the success of their character interpretation, and how they changed their presentation of role to overcome challenges – a recognition of when something wasn't working and attempts to modify their character.

Most of the higher achieving candidates were clear about the demands of their own role and the relationships with other characters, and such candidates provided some good comments on specific vocal and movement ideas, semiotics and emotional expression. There were more examples of the use of drama technical language and fewer examples of generic reference to Brecht and Stanislavski, candidates instead focusing on a particular technique, naming it correctly and then explaining how its use had an impact on how they prepared their role.

Answers to Question 4 were usually very clear on the kind of audience reaction that they wanted and might get. This question is underpinned by the previous three and the most successful answers managed to blend in the intentions, challenges, and vision with their own character interpretation into an intended and expected audience response. Cross referencing rather than repeating information given in the other three answers is the key to a sound answer to Question 4.

Those answers where good marks were not achieved often gave a description of what happens in the play for Question 1 and Question 2, a vague commentary on what all the character were for Question 3, and a bland comment on audience reaction without any consideration of what the candidate might have written in the earlier answers. The most successful candidates were those who stuck rigidly to the elements of each question and avoided repetition.

It is important to note that the space provided for the answers is considered sufficient for an answer that could achieve full marks, and although there is no penalty for exceeding the suggested length, some of those candidates who did have long responses took the risk of being self-penalising through generalisations and repetition.

## What did candidates find a challenge?

The temptation to describe the plot was again too much for some candidates, especially because there was only one extract to write about. Some candidates went into great detail describing the plot, ignoring completely the requirements of the question. Consideration of structure was rare, and this is an area that is clearly important when selecting an extract.

Although the majority identified the playwright and when the play was written, some candidates did not go on to explain succinctly the social and/or political context. There were fewer examples this year where candidates referred to subsequent productions where there may have been interpretations that could have influenced the candidates' own thinking.

Some candidates did not seem to understand what was meant by *vision* in Question 2 and ended up repeating much of what had been written as an answer for Question 1.

Question 1 is about the whole play, relevant context the challenges it presents and noting the way the extract(s) fit into that whole. There need be no mention of roles played or group / individual intention here. It is better that there is some consideration of previous presentations of the play that may inform what they are going to do. The structure of the play as a whole and the relevance of the extract chosen is an important consideration.

In relation to this question, one examiner reported '*...in many cases it felt like reading an English essay and there was no sense that candidates were exploring the text with the intention of performing it.*'. Another examiner reported, '*Answers that offered a balanced view of the whole performance were rare. Candidates were often focused on the issues of the text rather than its performance demands; these were frequently concerned with social or cultural matters, often with the assumption that a contemporary audience would be unable to understand what life was like in a previous generation when the play was written. In other case candidates appeared to be answering the question, 'what are the demands of the role you are playing?'*'.

Question 2 then expands on what they are going to do with the extract and why – the artistic intention. Here the discussion often seemed to be about how all the characters are to be played rather than discussing the individual's approach, the overall vision of the candidate, with references to genre and style of performing the whole extract. Where appropriate, candidates could support their vision and intention with decisions on design elements.

Question 3 is then about the role(s) the candidate is taking on, how they worked on them, indicating understanding of what happens to that character and their relations with others both before and after the extract that makes this selected section significant for that role. Good answers here will refer to drama techniques using appropriate drama vocabulary. Rehearsals and character development is also an important element for discussion. A few candidates approached the question not as a process but as a simple outcome. In such answers there was little acknowledgement that this question asked them to discuss the development of their role. In such answers, at best there were specific examples of choices they had made; at worst, it was an analysis of character as it appeared on paper. Asking candidates to discuss rehearsal techniques would really help them to focus on development.

Question 4 is about the anticipated reception of their work and how they plan to manipulate that as performers or designers. Good answers here will often cross reference to their vision and intention, and the playwright's original intention where relevant.

Design candidates sometimes struggled to interpret the questions to make them relevant to design. Whilst it is important in Question 1 to provide the same information as candidates offering acting as their skill, the later questions need to be focussed on design whilst still being specific as described above.

In summary,

- address each question as precisely as possible focusing on the elements of each question
- avoid repetition
- provide supporting and specific examples
- in future series reference both extracts not just one of them
- in future series, identify the different challenges of each extract and how it might impact on the candidate's development of the role being played.

One examiner wrote:

*'The best concept proforma were those where the candidates were concise, had disciplined themselves to addressing the four questions, and therefore did not need to repeat themselves.'*

It is important for centres and candidates to remember that the concept proforma provides a third of the marks for this component.

## Texts

The range of texts continues to be more imaginative and wide-ranging. There were more examples of classical texts, and some of the frequently performed texts such as DNA and Girls like That were performed imaginatively.

Requests to use a text must be made to the OCR Text Management Service each year as there is no guarantee that a text will remain on the approved list. Some texts were approved this series in error. Despite the warning in the last report (2019), several examiners saw some examples where the extracts chosen were full of expletives or dealt extensively with incidents of violence, abuse or suicide. The starting point for this is that it is not appropriate; other examiners saw very sensitively chosen extracts that had just the occasional expletive, where candidates had been able to bring out the full power of the text. There are plenty of suitable texts that will allow candidates to demonstrate a broad range of skills and be engaged.

Centres must read and abide by page 48 in the specification to ensure that appropriate extracts are chosen. This page states clearly what candidates' performances may not contain. Most candidates and centres took an imaginative approach to the texts, and there was some creative and imaginative risk-taking.



Some texts that examiners had commented on being particularly successful include:

- Pool No Water – Ravenhill
- Several Shakespeare texts
- Antigone
- Medea
- The Woman Who Cooked Her Husband
- Top Girls
- DNA.

## Performance - Acting

There was an inevitable tension this series between monologues, duologues, and group performances. Monologues had the challenge of needing to be long enough and having sufficient content for there to be evidence to support marks, and to have a focus and use the stage space effectively. The report in 2019 referred to pieces that were too short and not enabling the demonstration of a full range of skills, and the same was true for 2022.

### What did candidates do well?

- Performance memory: there were very few examples of candidates reading the script.
- Fluency: there were few examples of obvious breakdown in delivery.
- A fair attempt at focus, although in the absence of a sleeping partner in individual pieces this was less successful.
- Inhabiting of the role, at least to the extent to conveying some level of emotional truth.

There were some excellent monologues and duologues with detailed and intricate characterisation.

Some group performances took well-known plays but prepared them so well and so imaginatively that they appeared as fresh and thoughtful pieces.

This year there seemed to be more naturalistic acting, with many very strong examples of doing this successfully. More centres had the faith to let the script and actor do their work without thinking they had to add lots of stylistic extras. Transitions were also much more effective without the frequent tedious blackouts that have been present in the past.

Most candidates delivered scripts as the characters they were meant to be playing. There was some very effective use of dramatic conventions. Semiotics were used in many performances as an aid to enhance the extract.

Examiners reported a strong commitment to the role being played and that there were some good examples of creative and thoughtful staging. When used, physicality was appropriate, well-planned, and effective.

## What did candidates find a challenge?

With some candidates there was a lack of variation in vocal pitch, pacing and/or intensity. Vocal delivery not always matched by physical agility and/or good use of stage-space. There were examples of a variable sense of ensemble, especially where one or two group members were dominant. Poor articulation – often more noticeable in boys' performance – impeded effective delivery.

Although overall performance memory was very good, a few candidates did not know their lines and froze up on stage. It should be noted that if a prompt is used this does not automatically lead to lower marks. Even well-known actors sometimes freeze, and it is clear to an examiner when the 'freeze' is unexpected and the candidate is well prepared, as opposed to forgetting lines through poor rehearsal and lack of preparation.

Where there were examples of weak characterisation it was through a lack of planning and preparation.

## Performance - Design

The number of design candidates is increasing but remains small compared with acting.

In the 2019 report, the following was indicated, which is just as relevant for the last series and for the future.

'Before anything else, the candidate must recognise that when selecting a design option, it must be the equivalent of the acting option. There is a heavy demand in, for example, learning lines, blocking, choosing and applying a style, and spending considerable time rehearsing. The design element chosen must be of similar demand. Choosing to light an extract with very simplistic lighting changes cannot be said to be the equivalent of an acting role. In the same way, choosing to do costume and make-up when the play is about school children so that the only costume is school uniform that is easily sourced is unlikely to place much demand in terms of research, design, sourcing and realising and so cannot be said to be equal in demand and will not attract marks because it is not possible to show a range of skills in the area of design chosen.'

Page 29 in the specification gives a clear description of the demands and the supporting material required for each of the design options. The best set designers this series provided photographs of model to-scale sets, with scene changes indicated clearly, and photos of how it was replicated in the performance. The best costume and make up design candidates gave supporting material detailing their research into colours and fabrics, issue about designing and making, and photographs of the final product, including issues about wearability. Lighting and sound included rigging, selecting appropriate technology, proof of operation of equipment and details of different options to support the vision of the text. All design options need to provide evidence as to how their design supports the vision and intention of the extract to be performed, and any trials they conducted along the way.

## General

Centres should ensure that they are aware of the changes from the covid amendment series in 2022 to the normal visiting examiner series in 2023. It is important that the online Visit Booking Form (VAF) is completed in plenty of time to ensure an examiner is allocated. Please note that concept proforma must not be sent digitally but must be sent as a hard copy to the examiner at least seven days before the visit to mark performances.

The list of the plays that follows gives an indication of the range of texts performed in this series. It is not exhaustive and is just a representative sample. Remember to submit your choice to the OCR Text Management Service.

<b>Name of text</b>	<b>Playwright</b>
<i>Blackout</i>	<i>Davey Anderson</i>
<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	<i>Samuel Beckett</i>
<i>Metamorphosis</i>	<i>Steven Berkoff</i>
<i>Things I Know To Be True</i>	<i>Andrew Bovell</i>
<i>The Caucasian Chalk Circle</i>	<i>Bertolt Brecht</i>
<i>Two</i>	<i>Jim Cartwright</i>
<i>Road</i>	<i>Jim Cartwright</i>
<i>Top Girls</i>	<i>Caryl Churchill</i>
<i>The Insect Play</i>	<i>The Brothers Copek</i>
<i>Private Lives</i>	<i>Noel Coward</i>
<i>Daisy Pulls it Off</i>	<i>Denise Deegan</i>
<i>A Taste of Honey</i>	<i>Shelagh Delaney</i>
<i>Gut Girls</i>	<i>Sarah Daniels</i>
<i>Mudlarks</i>	<i>Vickie Donaghue</i>
<i>Grimm Tales</i>	<i>Carol Anne Duffy/Tim Supple</i>
<i>Mind Games</i>	<i>Paul Elliott</i>
<i>Medea</i>	<i>Euripides</i>
<i>Neville's Island</i>	<i>Tim Firth</i>
<i>Dancing At Lughnasa</i>	<i>Brian Friel</i>
<i>Parliament Square</i>	<i>Jim Fritz</i>
<i>Bouncers</i>	<i>John Godber</i>
<i>Shakers</i>	<i>John Godber</i>
<i>Government Inspector</i>	<i>Nikolai Gogol</i>
<i>The Magdalen Whitewash</i>	<i>Valerie Goodwin</i>
<i>Fathers For Justice</i>	<i>David Hughes</i>
<i>Chalk Farm</i>	<i>Keiran Hurley</i>
<i>The Woman Who Cooked Her Husband</i>	<i>Debbie Isitt</i>
<i>My Mother Said I Never Should</i>	<i>Charlotte Keatley</i>
<i>DNA</i>	<i>Dennis Kelly</i>

<b>Name of text</b>	<b>Playwright</b>
<i>Blood Wedding</i>	<i>Frederico Lorca</i>
<i>Yerma</i>	<i>Frederico Lorca</i>
<i>People Places and Things</i>	<i>Duncan MacMillen</i>
<i>The Wasp</i>	<i>Morgan Lloyd Malcolm</i>
<i>The Woman in Black</i>	<i>Stephen Mallatratt/Susan Hill</i>
<i>Child's Play</i>	<i>Don Mancini</i>
<i>Beauty Queen of Leenane</i>	<i>Martin McDonagh</i>
<i>Someone Who'll Watch Over Me</i>	<i>Frank McGuinness</i>
<i>Welcome Home</i>	<i>Tony Merchant</i>
<i>The Crucible</i>	<i>Arthur Miller</i>
<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>	<i>Adrian Mitchell</i>
<i>100</i>	<i>Kass Morgan</i>
<i>The Secret Garden</i>	<i>Marsha Norman/Lucy Simon</i>
<i>Mugged</i>	<i>Andrew Payne</i>
<i>Agnes of God</i>	<i>John Pelmeier</i>
<i>Girls Like That</i>	<i>Evan Placey</i>
<i>Blue Remembered Hills</i>	<i>Dennis Potter</i>
<i>An Inspector Calls</i>	<i>JB Priestley</i>
<i>Art</i>	<i>Yasmina Reza</i>
<i>Equus</i>	<i>Peter Shaffer</i>
<i>Macbeth</i>	<i>Shakespeare</i>
<i>Midsummer's Night Dream</i>	<i>Shakespeare</i>
<i>Othello</i>	<i>Shakespeare</i>
<i>The Tempest</i>	<i>William Shakespeare</i>
<i>Journey's End</i>	<i>R C Sherriff</i>
<i>Antigone</i>	<i>Sophocles</i>
<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog.....</i>	<i>Simon Stephens</i>
<i>Five Kinds of Silence</i>	<i>Shelagh Stevenson</i>
<i>Real Inspector Hound</i>	<i>Tom Stoppard</i>
<i>Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead</i>	<i>Tom Stoppard</i>
<i>Bronte</i>	<i>Polly Teale</i>
<i>Chatroom</i>	<i>Enda Walsh</i>
<i>Too Much Punch For Judy</i>	<i>Mark Wheeler</i>
<i>Lord of the Flies</i>	<i>Williams/Golding</i>
<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i>	<i>Tennessee Williams</i>
<i>Be My Baby</i>	<i>Amanda Whittington</i>

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