

Examiners' report

GCSE

DRAMA

OCR Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in Drama

J316

For first teaching in 2016

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Contents

Introduction	3
General overview	4
Administration.....	5
Concept proforma.....	7
What did candidates do well?	7
What did candidates find a challenge?.....	9
Texts	12
Performance – acting	13
What did candidates do well?	13
What did candidates find a challenge?.....	15
Performance – design	16
Detailed design guidance.....	17
Lighting and sound design	19
Lighting (LX)	19
Sound (SFX) – Similar additions could be made here based on the info. provided for Lighting	20
Most common causes of candidates not passing.....	21
Avoiding potential malpractice	22
Helpful resources	23
Additional comments	24

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. A selection of candidate responses is also provided. 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 and the mark scheme can be downloaded from [Teach Cambridge](#).

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General overview

Overall, the examinations ran very smoothly. Examiners reported seeing some very exciting and engaging performances, often moving away from the texts often performed. There was evidence that previous reports had been helpful and acted on. A small number of text choices are still not appropriate, but most were exciting and imaginatively interpreted and performed. Design evidence improved considerably with more candidates choosing design actively rather than it being a reaction to not wanting to act.

It is important that the online Visit Booking Form (VAF) is completed in plenty of time to make sure an examiner is allocated. Please note that the 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.

Examiners reported the success of centres carrying out the examination as a twilight or evening performance, with an audience of parents and friends making the examination more of a theatre experience.

Administration

Examiners reported that most centres provided smooth and efficient administrative arrangements and were pleased to meet any requests by examiners. A few did not complete and submit the VAF to help an examiner to be allocated to conduct a visit. This can affect flexibility in responding to requests for dates by centres. If a centre has not had contact from their examiner by the end of the first week of February, contact should be made with OCR as a matter of urgency.

Most centres met the deadline of seven days for sending the examiner the required documentation. This is important so that the examiner can read and understand what the candidate intends from their preparation and development. One of the assessment criteria requires the examiner to assess how the candidate has communicated meaning, so it is important the examiner has good time in which to absorb what the candidate is proposing to perform, and to make sure they are familiar with the text being used.

The time-sensitive paperwork required is important and although most centres met the deadline of seven days for sending the examiner the required documentation, a small number missed deadlines and the concept proforma and running order and associated documentation was received very late. The seven-day deadline for documentation and concept proforma is in place to ensure parity for candidates and is important as examiners need time to familiarise themselves with the text and the ideas and intentions candidates have interpreting them, as well as marking them before they visit. They also need to prepare their paperwork for the marking of the performances. Non-receipt by the seven-day deadline puts candidates at risk of receiving zero for that element of the examination.

The items required are as follows:

- The concept proforma for each candidate as a hard copy. Electronic versions are not acceptable. The proforma must be signed by the candidate with the centre confirming that the work is that of the individual candidate alone. Candidates should make sure their name and candidate number are written in the spaces on each answer page.
- 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. If the examination is to take place out of centre, the examiner will need information as to how to access the site and building as many centres now have secure perimeters and once a reception is closed an examiner can be stuck outside.
- The time the centre wishes the examination to start. An increasing number of centres are opting for after school, twilight and evening visits, and some request Saturday visits so that there is quiet and easier access to facilities that may well be used by the centre during the working day.
- Although the specification refers to photographs being sent in advance, this is not necessarily very helpful, and examiners prefer photos of the candidates in costume to be available on the day. Photographs of the candidates when they were in year seven or eight were not helpful when watching performances and identifying them.

A requirement of the specification is for the performances to be filmed and then chaptered and placed on a DVD or memory stick. These must then be sent to the examiner within three days. Hyperlinks to material stored in the centre is not allowed. At the time of writing there is currently no facility to upload videos using Submit for Assessment for this component so the DVD or USB is the only record of the performance and would be used in the event of a request for a review. If this changes centres will be notified by OCR.

Candidates must introduce themselves before each extract, not just before the first extract. Design candidates must be included in the introduction and state the design area they are submitting. 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 even headbands, all in bright different colours. Examiners appreciated this assistance

It is a requirement of the specification that the centre provide an audience for performances. The specification gives details of the nature of audiences permitted. Most centres had audiences that were 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. An increasing number of centres had invited candidates' parents and friends to watch usually when the examination was taking place after school or in the evening, making it into an event, and this was successful. Some performed on a Saturday in front of an audience of staff, family and friends. Most examiners are willing to examine in an evening or on a Saturday.

An examiner reflected that *'Some centres went to a considerable effort to support performance candidates with costume, set lighting and sound, which gave the showcases a sense of occasion'*. Not all centres have extensive facilities, but much can be done even in the simplest of settings.

Most examiners commented on the high level of behaviour by audiences. One commented, *'Audiences were very respectful and supportive of candidates'*.

Once contact has been made with the examiner allocated, a check list will be sent to the centre by the examiner with reminders about the requirements.

Concept proforma

This section of the examination requires candidates to have good knowledge of the whole of the play. Candidates should not study only the extracts they have used for their showcase.

Candidates need to

- know and understand the original intention of the playwright
- research the social and political context of when the text was written
- comment on the relation of their extracts to the whole text, especially their place in the structure
- 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 own role(s) using drama techniques learnt during the course
- give examples of how they have prepared and developed personally in a role.

The concept proforma guides candidates into preparing thoroughly for their showcase.

One area of potential concern is the use of AI. There were a few examples of this, and candidates need to adhere closely to the Ofqual and OCR regulations. These may be developed further as time passes, but currently there is a clear requirement that if a candidate uses AI for information, they must identify the information that appears in the response, state the source used, and the date and time it was accessed. OCR and Ofqual provide clear guidance on the use of AI in written work.

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 responses 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 responses to Question 1, explaining why the playwright had written it, and setting the text in the social and/or political context of that time. They were able to do this without going into unnecessary detail and swamping the response with a biography of the playwright. In the best responses 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, sometimes taking the best ideas and building on them; sometimes commenting on the weaknesses and suggesting ways they could avoid them.

Well-focused responses 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 while 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 and were able to pick out challenging moments in the text and relate them to their significance in performance. The structure of the text was explained and the location – and importance – of the extracts within the text discussed.

There were some very detailed accounts of the way that the challenges had emerged through the process rather than being clear at the outset.

One examiner commented, *'Candidates identified the demands of the piece and specifically explained how they were going to respond to these. Many candidates demonstrated an excellent understanding of the text and wrote enthusiastically about their interpretation – highlighting moments in the extract when they would use a specific acting skill. Most provided evidence of research undertaken regarding the playwright and their intentions'*.

In Question 2 the focus is on artistic vision. In the most successful responses candidates understood what 'vision' meant and were able to link their 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 allowed 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 and/or workshops 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 responses, where the candidate supports what they have written about vision through practical application. Focusing on just design elements does not provide good evidence in answering this question.

One examiner reported that *'many candidates outlined their artistic visions which, in many cases, linked with those of the playwright. Many candidates offered examples of how they would bring the text to life. Vision encompassed not only details that related to acting but also to the staging and the use of proxemics, semiotics including lighting, costume and set, and consideration of the context. Many used technical language to explain their ideas regarding the ways in which they had developed their role. There were some good examples of candidates linking artistic intention with practical examples, demonstrating how ideas will be realised in performance'*.

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 they were not considering their preparation in isolation. The strongest candidates offering acting considered 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 the roles instead of focusing on their own. There is a good opportunity here to link the demands of the text (explained in Q1), their vision (described in Q2) and how they need to develop their role for the demands to be met and their vision to be 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 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. When compared with last year, 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. References to workshops using current practitioners were well-documented and underpinned technique they wanted to incorporate into their performances. An examiner explained that many candidates had *'addressed the process of developing their roles rather than simply focusing on how they will perform. Some candidates analysed the process and commented on the impact of developments made. Rehearsal techniques were often discussed with some candidates explaining how they explored conventions and practitioners'*.

More successful responses remembered that the focus of the question is on the role of the candidate, not an overarching commentary on the group's performance. While interacting with the rest of the performers is important, the focus must be on the candidate themselves.

Examiners reported last year that a positive feature had been the way successful candidates used the rehearsal process as a scaffold to build their response to Question 3. There was good evidence of this happening again with higher achieving candidates.

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 responses 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 responses is the key to a sound answer to Question 4. One examiner commented '*Many candidates discussed the intended impact of their work on the audience. The best commented on what they intended the audience to think, feel and understand. Candidates of all abilities were able to describe how they would want their audience to react during specific moments with the most successful candidates giving detailed justification*'.

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

What did candidates find a challenge?

There are still some candidates who believe that length is equivalent to quality, with frequent repetition of points. Often there was too much narration of what is going to be seen and heard rather than an explanation of how this was derived in rehearsal.

While there are no marks for SPaG, candidates who mis-spell the names of their plays, playwrights and influences, give the wrong impression of their knowledge and understanding. Simple proof-reading would solve this.

Consideration of structure was absent for many candidates except the highest-achieving, and this is an area that is clearly important when considering how to interpret their extracts. Some candidates placed too much emphasis on the playwright's background, and a literary analysis of the play, rather than focusing on the demands of bringing the play to life and the staging of the play for live theatre. Structure was ignored, even though it is identified specifically in the question.

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 again few examples where candidates referred to subsequent productions where there may have been interpretations that could have influenced the candidates' own thinking.

Question 1 is about the whole play, relevant aspects of the context, the challenges it presents and considering 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 that a surprising number did not provide specific examples from the extract.

Many candidates, particularly less successful candidates, focused on telling the story of the play. Some candidates were unable to specifically describe the demands of the text in terms of communicating with an audience.

There was often little evidence of research other than a very simple exploration of historical content and a brief note on the playwright's background with other plays they had written.

Question 2 then expands on what they are going to do with the extract and why – their own artistic intention. Here the discussion by less successful candidates 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. Many less successful responses did not understand what 'vision' meant and provided another narrative response

Many candidates struggled to identify an artistic vision for their work, especially when one of the extracts was short. In such instances there was an abiding impression that the vision being offered was confined entirely to the extract they had performed, rather than providing this in the broad framework of the whole play. Sometimes there was no reference to the genre and style selected.

There were also acting candidates who wrote only about design elements going into great detail as to how they would design a set, light the stage, costume the characters, with almost no reference to the vision these design decisions would support.

One examiner reported that, *'Candidates often commented on the artistic vision being what would literally be seen on stage rather than their individual intentions/aims as a performer, i.e. what they hoped to achieve in role'*.

Another examiner commented, *'Candidates struggle to describe their artistic vision. Performers often refer to their visual ideas and waste time commenting on the set, lights, sound and use of costume/ props in their extracts when they should be referring to what they hope to achieve through the performance extract and their role, using design elements as a support for their ideas. These should be their intentions or motivations as a performer/group member, with reference to their portrayal of themes, the mood/atmosphere and their character's emotions and relationships'*.

Question 3 is 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. Candidates need to be encouraged to refer to the process taken to get to the final performance. Rather than solely describing how the character will be presented in the performance, they should explain what they did to get to this point and the process and rehearsal techniques used throughout rehearsals. Details should be given through a thorough explanation, ideally with some personal evaluation, of the changes made as the role developed. This is applicable to design candidates also, what was their process from initial ideas to final realisation of design.

Less successful responses here make little or no reference to drama techniques nor do they use appropriate drama vocabulary. Rehearsals and character development is missed as an important element for discussion. A few candidates approached the question not as a process but as a simple outcome. In such responses there was little acknowledgement that this question asked them to discuss the development of their own role. In such responses by less successful candidates, 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.

Last year one examiner wrote, *'Candidates did not give enough information on the 'how' they developed their skills, using, for example, specific rehearsal techniques and tools. They often described the result of their skills rather than how they got to that point.'* This was equally true this series and one examiner reported that *'Many candidates did not reflect on the process undertaken, giving no references to the impact of rehearsal techniques explored, or any evaluation of the exploration. Some candidates made no reference to the process of creating and developing a character'*.

Several examiners commented that some explanations were very descriptive rather than analytical.

Question 4 is about the anticipated reception of their work and how they plan to manipulate that as performers or designers. Good responses here will often cross reference to their vision and intention, and the playwright's original intention where relevant. Less successful responses here were often a vague repetition of what was written in Question 1.

Design candidates sometimes struggled to interpret the questions to make them relevant to design. While it is important in Question 1 to provide the same information as candidates offering acting as their skill, the later questions need to be focused on design while 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
- reference both extracts not just one of them
- reflect on the extract(s) placed within the structure of the text
- identify the different challenges of each extract and how it might impact on the candidate's development of the role being played
- remember to focus on the candidate's own role(s) not on the whole group
- discuss rehearsal techniques to help candidates focus on development
- encourage the use of rehearsal notebooks that document changes, ideas, developments. Plan responses before-hand, draft, edit and check
- ensure students understanding of what is meant by 'Artistic Vision' and equip them with rehearsal strategies /tasks that help develop roles/design.

Some responses to questions were very short. Although there is not a word limit, there is a suggested word count for guidance. Answers that are shorter by half of the suggested length are not likely to be able to develop a response that will address all the elements of the question in sufficient depth.

It is important to note that the space provided for the responses 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. Candidates are requested not to use very small font size to fit more onto a page. Some examples went as low as font size 9, which was difficult for examiners to read comfortably.

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 imaginative and wide-ranging. The trend from the last two years when there was evidence of more examples of classical texts, continued this series, and additionally there was a few examples of contemporary texts, some having been performed for the first time within the last couple of years. Once again plays by John Godber often led to less successful performances where candidates did not demonstrate a range of skills, partly because they did not fully understand the text. While there were some examples that were exceptional, there were others that were not, lacked momentum and missed opportunities for the comedy to be brought out. While the evidence suggests *Girls Like That* by Evan Placey, and *DNA* by Denis Kelly were again reducing in popularity, there were more attempts to interpret those texts more 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. Despite the warning in the last three reports (2022, 2023 and 2024), several examiners reported a failure to have approval resulting in last minute panic and stress on the centre and candidates. There were some examples of texts where the extracts chosen contained many expletives or dealt extensively with incidents of violence, abuse or suicide. The specification makes it clear that such texts are not appropriate at this level. There are plenty of suitable texts that will allow candidates to demonstrate a broad range of skills and be engaged.

The specification gives clear guidance regarding the suitability of content. Care should be taken that centres do not confuse this with the guidance for texts to be studied, as what is allowed is different from what can be performed.

Candidates' performances **may not** contain:

- strong violence acted out against another character which dwells on the infliction of pain or injury
- sadistic violence
- frequent use of very strong language
- detailed or extended portrayals of sexual activity
- scenes of sexual violence
- nudity
- scenes explicitly demonstrating drug taking.

The Text Management Service does not check a text for the suitability listed above – that is the responsibility of the centre - but makes sure it does not clash with texts being used in another part of the examination, or that has been considered previously as being inappropriate.

When selecting a text, centres should consider the opportunities for candidates to demonstrate a range of skills across the two extracts in the showcase. Sometimes, just selecting another similar scene with the same roles being played for the second extract restricted candidates from demonstrating a wider range of skills.

Performance – acting

Last year some examiners felt the impact of Covid seemed to have lingered on in a few cases. They reported a lack of confidence among some candidates, poor performance memory, freezing on stage, or even in some cases a refusal at the last minute to perform. There was evidence of this again, and centres may use prompts where appropriate so that other candidates in a group do not suffer from the poor performance memory of one of their group.

There were a few examples of some short extracts, and in a very small number of cases, they were so short that they did not meet the minimum demands as described in the specification. This results in no marks being given. Extracts do need to provide sufficient opportunity for a candidate to present a range of skills and to interact with other characters. Monologues and duologues were used effectively when matched to the needs of a candidate, to demonstrate a range of skills. Many centres have decided that they will engage their students by using several texts and not relying on a single text for the whole entry. Using a single text across a large group can result in multiple repeats of the same scene or monologue.

If the two extracts chosen appear consecutively in the original text, centres should remember there must be a break between the extracts and names and candidate numbers must be given again before the second extract begins. In such cases, when planning the extracts to use it might be worth centres considering whether running two extracts in this way gives candidates sufficient opportunity to contrast their roles and demonstrate a range of skills, unless they change their role for each extract. Many high-achieving candidates present very different roles and interpretations in their two extracts ensuring they may be seen demonstrating a wide and contrasting range of drama skills.

What did candidates do well?

An exciting feature of this component is the way that some group performances take well-known plays and prepare them so well and so imaginatively that they appear as fresh, thoughtful and engaging pieces.

Transitions were again so much more effective this series with most centres avoiding the frequent tedious blackouts that have been present in the past that broke the momentum of the action.

Candidates brought out the context using acting and well-chosen semiotics and grasping the style of the plays with success. They could also be seen demonstrating performance discipline and crafting characters with both vocal and physical skills.

There were examples of candidates taking on roles that allowed them to become someone completely different, stretching their emotional and physical capabilities.

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. Higher achieving candidates provided good evidence of emotionally connecting with their characters. Some ensemble work was accomplished. One examiner advises candidates to *'Think about the whole character, all the time. One finely-dressed Lady Bracknell had a studied vocal delivery of a grand dame, a stately posture and gliding movement across the stage, then sat down and unfortunately crossed her legs'*.

Candidates accessing higher marks often had more than one role, with each having clear differences vocally and physically.

One examiner explained that *'...a performance of Jim Cartwright's TWO, often performed badly, was so powerful that it brought laughter followed by tears from the teachers and the year 11 audience. One of the most powerful performances I have seen, blending excellent timing, thorough understanding of the text and characters, and accurate accent and register'*.

A second examiner, when asked for some examples of outstanding and imaginative performance said, *'The Girl Who Never Was, by Danny Sturrock was very successful for all three candidates with one candidate producing an extremely engaging performance as a young woman, who having had an abortion, was struggling with the guilt.'*

The 39 Steps - John Buchan, Things I Know To Be True – Andrew Bovell, Girls Like That – Evan Placey; These performances were spirited, strong and engaging. The pieces were also well supported by lighting and sound which enhanced their success.

Oedipus by Sophocles – Refreshing to see an ancient Greek tragedy brought to life for the examination. The challenging play gave opportunities for some creative performances.

The Dumb Waiter- Pinter. A commanding performance with clear understanding of Theatre of the Absurd

Acting candidates tended to use the space well, having clearly considered how proxemics and semiotics can be used to communicate meaning to an audience.

Strong ensemble movement, good physicality and understanding of text/genre in performance.

Another examiner wrote, *'As an examiner, you can see those high-quality candidates who quite literally step into their role, and out of it at the end of the performance.'*

- *The Importance of Being Earnest – some nice comedy by performers who understood it.*
- *The Ballad of Maria Marten – well-crafted performances with candidates acting all the time onstage.*
- *The Wasp - very powerful, convincing performances.*
- *The School for Scandal- a good play, played well, never dates and can be enjoyable and educative for an audience of Year 8s. Rewarding to see their smiles at the characters carefully portrayed.*
- *The Effect-Excellent characterisation and connection with the other actor.*
- *Blue Stockings Great audience involvement. Monologues were amazingly well rehearsed and staged.*
- *Bull -The pace and time taken in this performance was excellent.*
- *Girls Like That -Outstanding ensemble piece – unusually successful compared with other performances of this text.*
- *Julius Caesar – characterisation, vocal command & stagecraft outstanding'.*

What did candidates find a challenge?

There were again some candidates who read from the script, in some cases making use of mobile phones. Some of these candidates delivered quite animated readings with strong characterisation, hence, the potential for much higher marks was clear.

With some candidates there was a lack of variation in vocal pitch, pacing and/or intensity. Vocal delivery was 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.

An examiner reported that *'Frantic Assembly's chair duets seem to arise without much point. If a candidate cannot deliver a consistent accent, do not attempt it. There is no need to strive for non-naturalistic elements in performances that don't suit the play, it doesn't necessarily lead to a stronger mark for trying to innovate a classic text. Most of the plays I've seen this year have been naturalistic; some of the best examples are well rehearsed and stay with naturalistic techniques mentioned in their concept proforma. Comedy can work very well when the candidate understands the joke behind the line or the physicality of slapstick, and comedy needs effective rehearsal time concentrating on the comedy itself. Try not to modify the script to suit the group'*.

Although overall performance memory was very good, a few candidates did not know their lines and froze 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 poor characterisation it was often through a lack of planning and preparation. In some cases, the mature elements of the text were not matched by the maturity of the candidate, and so it was a struggle to be convincing. Such texts are best avoided.

Male candidates playing female roles were often unconvincing.

As in the last series increasingly popular was *Pillowman* by Martin McDonagh, which again was usually very poorly performed with very few high-quality performances. In some cases, the candidates' interpretation came very close to breaching what the specification considers is acceptable at GCSE.

Several centres used the text, *The Play that Goes Wrong*. Because the premise of the play is poor acting and other staging errors, it is difficult for candidates of this age to have the necessary maturity and skills to achieve the right sort of humour while demonstrating acting skills. This text should only be chosen if a centre believes it has the quality of candidate to fulfil the purpose of the text while demonstrating positive acting skills.

Practitioners (Brecht and Stanislavski in particular) are referenced in concept proformas but there is frequently a lack of understanding of how these practitioners' impact on the performance. Stanislavski's rehearsal techniques are understood but again there seems to be a mismatch between work in progress and how these impact on performance. Brechtian techniques are referenced but the performances were generally naturalistic.

Performance – design

The number of design candidates increased significantly again, and pleasingly so has the standard of presentation. Most design candidates took the opportunity to provide an oral explanation of what they had done and why, signposting and in some cases demonstrating relevant areas to the examiner. This included formal presentations, PowerPoint shows, the examiner taken to the lighting desk where explanations were given and several lighting and sound states demonstrated, and costume walkthroughs, where the character wearing the costume(s) was able to demonstrate the effectiveness of the costume in performance.

In recent reports, the following was explained and is just as relevant following this most recent 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 set models to scale, 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, challenges around 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.

One examiner reported that; *'Candidates offering the design area should show the same degree of involvement in the research of past designs, practitioners and theorists as those offering acting. The skill set, while obviously different from those of acting, should also be demonstrated.'*

The suggestion from last year's entry, to create black-painted, plywood model boxes to the scale of the performance area was taken up by one centre with an enthusiastic DT department, who made a set of six. Four were used this year, that offered an immediate high standard for the candidates to work to and provided a novel exhibition (and subject advertisement!) for parents' evenings.

'Designing' school uniform is almost always a weak choice, unless it is very stylised and detailed research and creative input can be shown'.

Another examiner reflected what most of the examining team experienced: *'Fewer centres than in the past saw design as a good option for less successful candidates. It was pleasing to see that many design candidates had a genuine passion for the area they chose to study and worked collaboratively with the actors in their group to achieve their shared vision for the performance. Many candidates had sound knowledge of both their technical equipment and the artistic requirements of their performance pieces'.*

Most candidates took up the opportunity to use a verbal presentation to help the examiner understand their designs. Sometimes such presentations used a PowerPoint. There are no marks for this, but it enables the designer to highlight things that may not be immediately apparent to the examiner. The examiner does not ask questions, and the teacher should not prompt the candidate.

Supporting evidence is a requirement, and there is detailed advice in this report about the nature required. In most cases this year, good evidence was provided. There were two exceptions. One has been referred to already relating to costume when the text has a cast of school children in uniform. It is very difficult to work at the same level of demand as an actor when there are such limitations on the design of costume required. The second is with set design, where there was very few 3D set model boxes provided.

Detailed design guidance

Probably the most important thing to keep in mind is that there should be parity in demand between candidates selecting design and those selecting acting as their performance skill.

The concept proforma can be very helpful by providing evidence of the thought processes of the candidate. Other supporting evidence – as described below - can be very helpful. The concept proforma should signpost and provide details of the decision-making process in preparation for designs the examiner will see.

Fewer candidates now fall into the category of doing design because their attendance is poor or they have difficulty working in a group, although there may still be a few. Therefore, more candidates are choosing design options and need to access the appropriate resources material.

Health and safety

This is an important and essential element for consideration in design work. Whether it is the use of scissors and sewing machines, potential trips and falls in costume design, the danger of heights with rigging or electrocution and overheating with lighting, the level of decibels in sound, or the safe use of tools and weight of materials in manufacturing and the security of sets; all areas of design have their own health and safety challenges and should be considered. It might not be stated explicitly in the specification but is an important element of learning in the different design options.

Costume

It is important that candidates provide evidence that they have, themselves, had the ideas and have knowledge and understanding of how to make them work.

Evidence may include:

- A presentation to explain their ideas (but the examiner will not ask questions)
- Design board of ideas
- Photographs
- Diagrams
- Research
- Swatches of fabric
- Development/progression leading to final design including reasons for choices

The highest performing candidates will include many of the above.

The presentation should provide a clear explanation of the physical evidence or artefacts; this will clarify what is seen, which may not otherwise always be made clear. How the explanation is presented will not be marked.

There should be evidence of understanding of genre, the period in which the play is set, and the social/historical context. Has the candidate considered alternative means of meeting the design? Good candidates will cover this in their concept proforma as well as in the physical evidence presented.

The realisation should match with the ideas presented – changes are acceptable and part of the artistic process but should be explained. The best results show progression and development of ideas from first ideas to the final design

It is not necessary for candidates to make the costume; how the costume was sourced does not affect marking, but the relevance and the manner of, and reasons for outsourcing are important.

Costume can be adapted from charity shop stock, but how and why this is done needs explaining.

There may be some repetition of points made in the concept proforma which is acceptable if it serves to enhance the original explanation and illustrates original ideas.

The final design should illustrate character, personality, mood, relevance to text and its context.

It should be appropriate for the character in the performance at the specific point in the script/the situation at the time.

It is essential that designs consider the practicalities for the actor wearing it – ease of movement, comfort, and that it will not fall apart. Masks will need particular attention.

Set design

- Understand the space available, (studio, proscenium arch stage, in-the-round etc)
- Where located?
- Where is the audience?
- Dimensions available (leads to scale drawing of ground plan) including height, for access.
- Equipment available, boxes, furniture, flats, drapes etc
- Ground plan to scale, indicating entrances and exits, positioning of furniture, flats etc.
- Number of scenes required. Are there any changes of scene? Who is affected? How do the scenes get changed?
- Interior or exterior location?
- What does the script ask for in terms of setting? Anything?
- How many actors on stage and what are their requirements for furniture and props.
- Scale model of the set with video 'tour' around it and voice-over rationale.
- Explanation of what they are trying to represent; is it naturalistic, symbolic or something else?
- What has been the work needed to create the set? What has been made, painted, found or outsourced?
- Practicalities – how the scenery will be moved, by whom, its weight so how many stagehands needed, the time it will take, use of trucks and other devices.

<https://dramatics.org/read-render-realize/>

<https://specialtytheatre.com/set-design-101-basics-designing-great-theatre-sets/>

Lighting and sound design

Lighting (LX)

A strong level of design, technical and practical knowledge and skill is required in order to translate and realise any artistic, creative vision.

- Candidates should know what they've got to use and know how to use it to get what they want.
- What form will the performance take? Dance, text-based theatre piece, physical theatre piece, monologue or musical?
- Would they approach these differently, if so why?
- Can they discuss the differences between Realistic and Non-Realistic lighting design?
- Which have they chosen for this design? Can they talk through their process and decisions surrounding that choice and how it will enhance the performance / story telling?
- Understand the equipment available – How many channels available? Possible limitations on power available?
- Can they provide a simple schematic of how the lighting console connects to the lights.
- The school system may be fairly basic – console, dimmers, tungsten source, generic lighting fixtures.
- Some centres may have more advanced facilities that require a good level of knowledge in System Networks in order to control the lighting console, nodes and intelligent fixtures.
- Clear knowledge and understanding of how the system works is the important part here not the complexity of their system.
- Types of lanterns available/to be used – profile -flood-fresnel- moving heads, parcans and LED varieties. Is there an understanding of the differences between these fixture types. What types have been selected and why have they been chosen for their design?
- Rig plan indicating basic cover and specials
- What does the script ask for in terms of lighting? Anything?
- How many states? Are they interior or exterior? Realistic, Non-Realistic, any stylised concepts or effects used to enhance the story telling.
- Process of building the lighting states in discussion with Director and Creative Team (or other students within the group)
- Annotated script with cues
- Cue sheet for operation Levels, timing, fades are perfect for older systems with preset manual faders. However, modern consoles store all this information. Text can be added within the cue stack on the console to note a cue point, scene or section within a piece to help the operator navigate the cue list.
- Lighting Designers would still create their own cue list and the text on the console would match their list. Except for the script and rigging plan, most professional Lighting Designers are paperless at the production desk.
- Special effects –, e.g. gobo (goes-before-optics) LED Tape, Practical Lamps, Smoke/Haze, Pyro etc. How made? What used? Effect desired? <https://illuminated-integration.com/blog/stage-lighting-101/> is an easily readable introduction to basic lighting principles and tech language

Richard Pilbrow would be considered the British modern equivalent of McCandless. Pilbrow is the author of [several prominent books](#).

Stage Lighting Design: The Art, The Craft, The Life.

A Theatre Project. (The founding of Theatre Projects as a Lighting, Sound, AV design consultancy company and later West End Producers)

A Sense of Theatre – The untold story of Britain's National Theatre.

Sound (SFX) – Similar additions could be made here based on the info. provided for Lighting

- Understand the equipment available – sound desk, any other effects?
- Remember that Sound can be collected on a mobile phone!
- Speaker rig plan- where are they located in relation to the performance space, and can they be moved to locate a sound coming from a specific place/direction?
- What does the script ask for in terms of sound? Anything?
- Process of introducing sounds in discussion with actors to enhance the performance.
- Sourcing of sounds. – internet, CD/Vinyl, live recording
- Annotated script with cues
- Cue sheet for operation to include levels, timing, fades
- Special effects – how made? What used? The “Foley Engineer” etc.
- Voice overs – Who? Why? How executed?
- Achieving balance for audience with actors' voices.
- Is there extraneous noise needing covering?
- Again, useful [blog post](#) from same source as lighting looking at basics.

Health and Safety key areas:

- CDM Regs (Construction Design and Management Regulations 2015 apply to all construction projects, including those for the entertainment industry)
- Risk Assessments
- Method Statements
- Manual Handling
- Working At Height
- Electrical Safety
- Safe Use of Access Equipment
- Slips, Trips & Falls

Most common causes of candidates not passing

Concept proforma

Poor focus and the key elements of each questions have not been addressed

Lack of depth into research into the text and its social/political context

Not understanding the concept of Vision

Repetition

Insufficient reference to drama techniques

Lack of academic rigour for GCSE

Performance

Under-rehearsed pieces

Role not demanding enough to demonstrate a range of skills

Role in both extracts the same

Insufficient exposure/an extract too short

Poor selection of extracts preventing a range of skills to be demonstrated

Poor selection of text with a focus on violence and swearing

Design

The nature of the text means there is insufficient demand, so is not the equivalent of demand for actors

Little or no supporting material

Avoiding potential malpractice

Malpractice is rare in this examination, but one area candidates and centres need to be aware of is the concept proforma. As it is dealing with a group activity, it is likely candidates will have worked together on research and quite properly, on their directorial intentions. They must remember, however, to make sure their responses to the questions on the concept proforma are their own work and not a composite of what their group has done where everyone writes in a similar or same way. It is essential sources are acknowledged to prevent allegations of chunks of material being copied straight from a source. Centres should be aware of the challenge of AI being used to construct responses to questions.

In performances, the opportunities for malpractice are limited. The only example seen in recent years was when sections of text had been written on various pieces of the set and on props, which was easily observed by the examiner. If a mobile phone is to be used as part of a characterisation, care should be taken by the candidate to make sure there is no performance text on it, and it may be advisable to make the examiner aware if the candidate is to have the phone for a considerable period during the performance.

Helpful resources

<https://dramatics.org/read-render-realize/>

<https://specialtytheatre.com/set-design-101-basics-designing-great-theatre-sets/>

<https://illuminated-integration.com/blog/mccandless-method-stage-lighting/>

<https://illuminated-integration.com/blog/sound-design-for-theatre/>

Glossary in the specification

Additional comments

The list that follows gives an indication of the range of texts performed by centres in the 2025 series. It is not exhaustive and is just a representative sample.

Remember to submit your choice of text for 2025 to the OCR Text Management Service.

Aron	<i>The Donahue Sisters</i>
Abbott	<i>I think We Are Alone</i>
Adebayo	<i>Wind/Rush Generation(s)</i>
Anderson	<i>Blackout</i>
Anouilh	<i>Antigone</i>
Atwood	<i>The Penelopiad</i>
Ayckbourn	<i>House and Garden</i>
Bartlett	<i>Bull</i>
Basden	<i>The Crocodile</i>
Beckett	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>
Bovell	<i>Things I Know to be True</i>
Briton	<i>The Muddy Choir</i>
Cameron	<i>Human Nurture</i>
Burke	<i>Black Watch</i>
Cartwright	<i>Bed</i>
Cartwright	<i>Two</i>
Cartwright	<i>The Rise and Fall of Little Voice</i>
Churchill	<i>Top Girls</i>
Coward	<i>Present Laughter</i>
Deegan	<i>Daisy Pulls it off</i>
Duffy	<i>Grimm Tales:Hansel and Gretel</i>
Fo	<i>Accidental Death of an Anarchist</i>
Firth	<i>Neville's Island</i>
Flintoff	<i>The Ballad of Maria Marten</i>
Godber	<i>Bouncers</i>

Godber	<i>Shakers</i>
Godber	<i>Teechers</i>
Golding	<i>Lord of the Flies</i>
Greig	<i>Charlie and the Chocolate Factory</i>
Haddon/Stephens	<i>Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime</i>
Hamilton	<i>The Exam</i>
Holcroft	<i>The Wardrobe</i>
Isitt	<i>The Woman Who Cooked Her Husband</i>
James	<i>Heritage</i>
Jones	<i>Stones in his Pockets</i>
Keatley	<i>My Mother Said....</i>
Kelly	<i>DNA</i>
Kelly	<i>Taking Care of Baby</i>
Kneehigh	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>
La Bute	<i>Reasons to be Pretty</i>
Lansley	<i>Flies</i>
Leigh	<i>Abigail's Party</i>
Littlewood	<i>Oh What a Lovely War</i>
Lloyd Malcolm	<i>The Wasp</i>
Macmillan	<i>Lungs</i>
Mahfouz	<i>Layla's Room</i>
Mahfouz	<i>A Shop Selling Speech</i>
Mamet	<i>Oleanna</i>
McGuinness	<i>Someone Who'll Watch Over Me</i>
Miller	<i>A View from the Bridge</i>
Miller	<i>The Crucible</i>
Neilson	<i>The Lying Kind</i>
Norman	<i>Night Mother</i>
Orwell/Wooldridge	<i>Animal Farm</i>

Osborne	<i>Look Back in Anger</i>
Penhall	<i>Some Voices</i>
Placey	<i>Girls Like That</i>
Potter	<i>Blue Remembered Hills</i>
Priestley	<i>An Inspector Calls</i>
Reza/Hampton	<i>Art</i>
Robbins/ Lewis	<i>The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe</i>
Robins	<i>Votes for Women</i>
Seaton	<i>Red</i>
Shakespeare	<i>Romeo & Juliet</i>
Shakespeare	<i>Macbeth</i>
Shakespeare	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>
Shakespeare	<i>Julius Caesar</i>
Smith	<i>Swallow</i>
Sophocles	<i>Antigone</i>
Steinbeck	<i>Of Mice and Men</i>
Stephenson	<i>Five Kinds of Silence</i>
Stoppard	<i>Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead</i>
Teale	<i>Bronte</i>
Wade	<i>Colder Than Here</i>
Wade	<i>Home, I'm Darling</i>
Wheeller	<i>Hard to Swallow</i>
Wheeller	<i>Too Much Punch for Judy</i>
Whittington	<i>Be My Baby</i>
Wilde	<i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i>
Williams	<i>The Glass Menagerie</i>
Williams	<i>Baby Girl</i>
Williams	<i>Slow Time</i>

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