

A-level Drama and Theatre Notes and guidance: Practical guidance

Component 3: Making Theatre (7262/X)

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Introduction

This component involves a practical exploration of three extracts (Extract 1, 2 and 3) each taken from a different play. The methodology of a prescribed practitioner must be applied to Extract 3 which is performed as a final assessed piece to a visiting examiner. Students may contribute as performer, designer or director. They can choose to be assessed on one, two or three specialisms for this component.

In addition students are required to submit an entirely written Reflective Report evaluating the theatrical interpretation of all three extracts. This is also externally assessed by the visiting examiner.

In exploring the three extracts students need to apply an understanding of the connections between theory and practice in a range of periods, theatrical styles, social, historical and cultural contexts, and the ways in which theatre makers collaborate to create theatre.

Choice of plays

With well over 2,000 years of world drama to choose from this can appear to be a daunting task but the specification provides the requirements and many guidelines that will help to whittle down the choices open to students.

Play choices must meet the criteria for approval, which are listed both in the specification and on the Play Approval Form (PAF) itself. This is a form which must be submitted to the centre's Non Exam Assessment adviser, at least six weeks before the date of the Component 3 exam. It is strongly recommended that this should be submitted as early as possible and before practical work has started on the extracts, in particular Extract 3. Further explanation of the criteria for approval that plays must meet are as follows:

- Each have been professionally commissioned or professionally produced – most plays will meet this criterion but note that it does exclude self-published plays, plays that have only had an amateur production (for example in US high schools only) and monologue websites/podcasts/blogs where no play actually exists.
- As a whole be a minimum of 35 minutes in duration if performed in full – a great number of plays will meet this criterion but plays that consist of a series of short individual monologues only linked by theme and plays that are as series of monologues all by different playwrights will not meet the criteria for approval. It is advised that teachers check the playing time of student choices, for example some Anton Chekhov's one act plays meet this criterion and some do not. Similarly some of Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads* are long enough and some are not.
- Offer interpretive opportunities for performers, designers and directors – the vast majority of plays will meet this requirement.
- Be rich and of substance in terms of content, context, theme and/or characterisation – again most plays meet this. [AQA publish a suggested play list](#) on the website and all plays on that list would be approved depending on the other plays being used.
- Offer an appropriate level of theatrical challenge to students at A-level – this criterion indicates that students should not choose plays that are obviously targeted and marketed as suitable for Key Stage 4 or lower, eg in collections labelled as such.

- Be different plays from those set plays studied by the student(s) for Component 1 – however, students can choose any of the other set texts. They could even choose plays by the same writer as one of their set texts as long as the chosen play is not the same genre as the set text. For example students studying *Our Country's Good* could use Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* because the former is defined as an historicisation and the latter is a social comedy.
- Not be similar to each other in terms of their social, cultural and historical context – for this criterion it is the context 'as depicted in the plays' that is checked by advisers. If students have chosen plays from very different periods they are likely to be approved. In addition, students may choose a combination of plays that were all first produced within a few years, but if the social and cultural and historical contexts as depicted in the plays are very different these too will be approved. Note that theme and style are not mentioned here. Therefore students could explore three extracts which are all naturalistic for example, and the plays would still meet the criteria provided the historical, social and cultural contexts are very dissimilar.
- Not contravene the prohibited play combinations – these are listed in the specification and are the only time when the genres of plays are checked against the criteria. The genres are precisely defined which still allows for plenty of choice for plays as given below:
 - *Antigone* – cannot choose plays that are classical Greek tragedies which include modern translations such as Ben Power's *Medea* or Don Taylor's version of *Women of Troy*. However, students can choose a classical Greek comedy and Roman tragedy.
 - *Much Ado About Nothing* – cannot choose comedies from the Elizabethan period (1558 to 1603) but can choose any Elizabethan tragedy, Jacobean comedy or earlier Tudor comedy.
 - *The Servant to Two Masters* – cannot choose any other Commedia dell'Arte play but can choose other comedies from the same period eg *She Stoops To Conquer*, *School For Scandal* etc, and any Dario Fo play, as his plays are defined as political farce in the specification.
 - *Hedda Gabler* – cannot choose a 19th century naturalistic tragedy but can choose a 19th century social comedy eg *Caste*, any 19th century comedy of manners play eg *The Importance of Being Earnest*, any 19th century melodrama eg *The Bells*, and any post 19th century naturalistic tragedy.
 - *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* – cannot choose another post World War 2 epic play, but can choose a pre-World War 2 epic play eg *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* and a late 20th/21st century epic play eg *Enron*.
 - *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* – cannot choose any other 20th century political farce but can choose any other farce from any period eg plays by Georges Feydeau, Ben Travers, Ray Cooney etc.
 - *Jerusalem* – cannot choose 21st century anarchic realism (neorealism with a context which dictates certain behaviours and priorities) but can choose any 20th century anarchic realism eg Martin McDonagh's *The Lonesome West* or any 21st century play that is not realistic
 - *Yerma* – cannot choose any early 20th century Spanish tragedy but can choose any pre 20th century Spanish tragedy or post 1950 Spanish tragedy.

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- *The Glass Menagerie* – cannot choose another 20th century American memory play eg *Our Town* but can choose other plays by Tennessee Williams which are naturalistic, and any non-American memory plays eg *Dancing at Lughnasa*.
- *Metamorphosis* – cannot choose any other 20th century expressionist play but can choose any pre or post 20th century expressionist play eg *Spring Awakening*, Steven Berkoff's *On the Waterfront* or any of John Godber's more naturalistic/realistic plays.
- *Cloud Nine* – cannot choose any other 20th century political parody but can choose any 21st century political parody play.
- *Our Country's Good* – cannot choose any other historicised play but can choose verbatim, drama documentary and post war epic plays.
- *Bronte* – cannot choose any other 21st century feminist play but can choose any 20th century feminist plays or 21st plays by women writers which are not feminist in perspective.
- *The Convert* – cannot choose any 21st century post-colonial drama (drama that focuses on issues surrounding oppressed peoples) but can choose any 20th century post-colonial dramas eg Lorraine Hansberry's *Les Blancs* or Caryl Phillips' *Strange Fruit* and *Small Island* (creative adaptation of a novel).
- *Three Sisters* – cannot choose an adaptation of a classic play that has been completely re-worked by the writer eg Richard Bean's *One Man Two Guv'nors* or Polly Stenham's *Julie* but can choose any pre 21st century adaptations of a classic play eg Patrick Marber's *Miss Julie*, modern translations of classic plays, and creative adaptations of novels, poems or short stories.

One approach to selecting plays may be to check potential choices against the set texts first, before checking them against the other criteria.

All centres have a non-examined assessment (NEA) adviser who can help in the search for plays that meet the criteria prior to the submission of PAFs. In addition there is [a suggested play list](#) on the AQA website. Depending on the combination of plays your students are considering and their set texts, the plays on the list meet the criteria for approval. It is not an exhaustive list but it contains some old favourites as well as many new plays with varied approaches.

Choice of practitioners

There is a list of over 60 prescribed practitioners from which to choose. The only condition is that the choice of practitioner must be different to the one selected for Component 2. Some on the list are more suited to students who are performers and directors and some more suited for students who are offering a design specialism. Some are known for their text based work and some for devised work. A few are writers as well as practitioners.

Whichever one(s) is chosen it is advisable to choose the one(s) in which the teacher feels most confident in teaching. This is because the Areas of Study, which are listed in the specification, require specialist knowledge and understanding. Students who rely solely on reading about their practitioner and/or watching a few short clips online are more likely to have only a theoretical or superficial understanding of the practitioner's purpose and methodology. The application of a practitioner is fundamental to the practical exploration and interpretation of the chosen text(s).

It is the intention of the specification that the practitioner is taught and studied first and then a play found that enables the student(s) to demonstrate as many of the practitioner's methods, style and theatrical purpose as possible in their Extract 3 examined performance.

There are many permutations on how practitioners may be applied to the three extracts.

- Only apply a practitioner to Extract 3 – this is a requirement.
- Apply the same practitioner to Extracts 2 and 3 or even all three extracts. This will allow students to develop a more broad and in depth knowledge and understanding of the practitioner's methodology in practice. This is especially possible with practitioners who have directed many different plays with different genres and styles and from different periods, for example Mitchell.
- Apply a different practitioner to each extract – this can be beneficial in Extracts 1 and 2 in ascertaining the style of acting that best suits the student in terms of their skills before making a decision on the Extract 3 play.

Therefore there is a free choice in how the teacher wants to approach the application of the practitioner to different extracts.

If choosing a practitioner who is also a writer, do remember the focus should be on their practice as directors and actors rather than their writing techniques. For example if choosing Brecht the focus needs to be on his ideas on approaches to acting (histrionic v effekts) if performing, and his ideas on set and props, costume, lighting, music (technical v effekts) if offering a design specialism. Similarly if choosing David Mamet the main focus should be on his ideas on acting and stage presentation rather than the literary techniques in his writing.

Students offering performing and directing specialisms are required to choose the same practitioner.

Students who are offering a design specialism may choose the same practitioner as the performers. This is particularly useful if the group are using a company that have a distinct

presentation style such as Kneehigh or Frantic Assembly. Alternatively design students could choose a designer who has had a long association with the performers' practitioner such as Gareth Fry and Complicite, or Paule Constable and Katie Mitchell. They could also choose another designer whose ideas and style fits the chosen play.

It is not advisable for a design student to choose the same practitioner as the performers if the practitioner has no record of ideas or practice in design eg Dario Fo is not known for any ideas on lighting.

A starting point for students to find a suitable play for the application of a practitioner's ideas could be plays they themselves have directed. For example, Max Stafford Clark has directed Shakespeare *Restoration Comedy*, verbatim plays, and championed contemporary writers such as Caryl Churchill. Kneehigh have produced plays by Euripides, Shakespeare and Frank Wedekind, as well as overtly political plays such as Carl Grose's *Dead Dog in a Suitcase* and adapted folk tales such as Anna Maria Murphy's *The Red Shoes*. The plays of practitioners who are also writers could be the starting point for students, for example John Godber has written more naturalistic plays as well as his well-known expressionist comedies.

It is essential that the play and practitioner chosen for the examined performance of Extract 3 are completely compatible with each other and that the text chosen allows the student(s) to demonstrate the methods of the practitioner in its purest form.

Extracts

Having chosen suitable plays students, aided by their teachers, need to select just one continuous extract to workshop and perform. The extract must be significant to the play as a whole, which means the students need to know the whole play in order to place the extract in context. It must last at least 10 minutes in performance. There is no upper limit for the length of extract but students should be guided by the numbers in the group (see later). They should not try to do too much but focus on quality of exploration and interpretation rather than quantity.

If the extract is a monologue, which may last between 2 and 5 minutes when performed, students should still workshop the parts of the play immediately before the monologue and/or after it in order to meet the minimum extract length of 10 minutes.

The students can explore the beginning of the extract, the middle or the end, remembering to explore and workshop only one extract from each play and that it must be continuous.

Abridgements are permitted in very few cases and should only be of the one continuous extract and not of the whole play. Students must not splice together different parts of the play as this is a rubric infringement. To do so will also affect the potential student's achievement in part A of the mark scheme (see below) as the appropriateness of interpretation is affected as well as the writer's intentions for their play.

Cutting the odd line here and there is permitted to meet the timing requirements of the exam, but the wording of the text must not be changed. For example, bad language should not be cut because the language a character uses is one of the means the writer defines the character. If the use of such language is not permitted in the centre or the student feels uncomfortable saying it then another play should be selected.

Students should not re-attribute lines as writers attribute the lines to specific characters for a reason. To do so would distort the meaning of the play and affect the potential achievement of students as re-attribution would indicate a lack of understanding of the text as it is written and the writer's intentions.

Neither should entire characters be cut in order to meet the size of the group. Again, writers have characters there for a reason. Similarly students should not cut characters or lines in order to create a monologue for themselves as this would not be appropriate for the whole play and is likely to affect the potential achievement of the student in part A of the mark scheme.

Sometime students find monologues in monologue books or online and teachers should check the original texts from which the monologue originates as many of these contain cuts such as described above. These are intended as audition pieces rather than work for an A-level practical exam.

Cross sex casting is permitted but the lines should not be modified as this is a rubric infringement and could reflect a lack of appreciation of the context of the extract within the play as a whole.

In addition, if students are considering abridging or cutting their Extract 3 text in any way, it is strongly advised that the extract is scanned indicating the potential cuts and emailed to the NEA adviser who can check that the proposed cuts meet the rubric of the exam.

Having selected a play, the extract and a practitioner (where applicable) students should explore the extract, taking it through to rehearsal and on to performance in order to analyse and evaluate their interpretation in their reflective reports more effectively.

For Extract 1 and 2, this means that they should be at least 'off the book'. They could perform their extract just to other class members in a lesson or series of lessons without any other theatre elements, such as costume and lighting. Alternatively either Extract 1 or 2 could take the form of a mock practical exam using other theatre elements, which could be performed to a wider invited audience. It is the teacher's choice how they want to work.

Work on Extract 1 and 2 should not be restricted to a few theatre games and exercises. As well as benefiting the student when it comes to writing their report work on these extracts, it also help to develop and hone their practical skills in readiness for the examined Extract 3.

Extract 3 is taken to full performance ideally under stage lighting. Although it is not a requirement for performers to work with a full set and costume, many students find that it helps to elevate their performance and reveal further personal understanding of the role and play they are presenting.

It is a formal occasion and students should ensure theatre discipline is maintained. Further information about good practice can be gleaned from the Examiner's report published each year and from the centre's NEA adviser.

Audiences are encouraged but are not compulsory for the examined performance but if present, audiences need to realise that it is an external public exam first and foremost.

Group composition and timings

Students can work on their own on a monologue, with someone else on a duologue or in a group of three, four, five or six on a longer group piece.

Students offering a design specialism are in addition to the performers in a group. For example at one extreme a solo performer working on a monologue could potentially have a design student offering lighting, sound, set, costume, puppets or directing working with them. Although these students would need to consider very carefully how many of their skills they could evidence in a performance that would last a maximum of 5 minutes.

At the other extreme a group of 6 performers could have in addition a director, lighting designer, sound designer, puppetry designer, costume designer and a set designer, making a group of 12 all working on the same extract. The performance can last a maximum of 30 minutes which would provide plenty of opportunity for design and directing students to demonstrate a wide range of skills.

The length of the performance is dependent on the number of performers in the group. The timings for performances are listed in the specification but as a reminder they are as follows:

- Monologue (one performer) – between 2 and 5 minutes.
- Duologue (two performers) – between 5 and 10 minutes.
- Group (between three and six performers) – between 6 and 30 minutes.

Smaller groups should aim at a performance lasting at the lower end of the timings and larger groups should aim at the higher end.

Note that all performers do not need to be on stage at all times; neither is there any kind of 'rule' regarding student 'exposure' time. They should aim to perform the text as it is written with characters coming and going as indicated by the text.

Students are not assessed on the size of their role but what they have done with it. However, the role undertaken should enable the student to access the full range of the Component 3 assessment criteria.

If the minimum performance times are not met a penalty is applied on a sliding scale. There is no actual penalty for over running and the examiner does not stop marking when time is up, but the students' work may be self-penalising. Such over-running will be reported to the board as a rubric infringement.

As monologues are permitted for this component there is no need for the use of non-examinees. However, students who are performing a monologue that is addressed to another character on stage are permitted to have a silent partner to whom they can address their lines. The silent partner may not move or respond in any way but is there to help the student's focus thus lending greater authenticity and veracity to the performance. Students who are performing a monologue that is directly addressed to the audience do not need a silent partner.

If there is a single student in a centre they should offer performing as their specialism, but if there are special circumstances that may prevent this the teacher should contact the NEA adviser.

Reflective reports

Centres are reminded that the reflective report is an extension of the students' practical work and therefore students should approach the requirements of the report with lots of specific practical details and examples. Overly theoretical work will not attract many marks no matter how clever the work is. This is not like a piece of English coursework as the focus is on the analysis and evaluation of the practical interpretation of each extract.

Students may write about each extract in turn or adopt a more holistic approach. Both are acceptable because it is marked holistically however the student has structured their report.

It is an extended piece of writing with a suggested word length of between 2,000 and 2,500 words a maximum of 3,000 words. Anything over this length will not be assessed.

There are no 'rules' about how many words should be about each extract but students need to balance their work so that each extract is fully addressed.

The specification provides details of the requirements of the reflective report and students should take care that they address each of these requirements for each of their extracts.

Opportunities and challenges – should be what arise out of the text itself. For example communicating effectively a character's descent into madness at a given point, achieving the fine comic timing to produce humour, or creating the effect of a sunset on stage etc. It is not about self-imposed challenges eg playing against gender or age which is the student(s) own choice rather than a challenge or opportunity arising from the text itself.

Genre and style – students should analyse how they have used this in the preparation/rehearsals/workshopping of their work, eg how they have applied a comedy of manners vocal style in terms of line delivery when playing Marjorie in *The Country Wife* given the length of the sentences, or how they have used the naturalism in *Look Back in Anger* in playing Jimmy without seeming to overplay the emotion. Design students will analyse how the style has influenced their design.

Social, cultural and historical contexts – students should analyse how they have applied their research into the precise context of each extract to their interpretation of their role or design. This may include, for example, the development of an appropriate accent in playing a character in *Road* or developing a sense of social class in *Lady Windemere's Fan* in terms of their period movement. They should not just list a load of research. They must explain **how** the immediate social, cultural and historical circumstances have informed their work. Neither should they write a potted history of the period in which the play is set.

Practitioner – students need to analyse how exactly they have applied a **range** of techniques to develop and interpret their character/role/design using the practitioner. They should not restrict themselves to just listing a game or two. It has to be linked to their interpretation of their role or design.

How successful were they? – They may return to the opportunities and challenges of each extract and assess how well they have addressed them. Did the interpretation work for an audience in the context of the play as a whole? How successful were the practitioner's methods in interpreting the extract?

Students do not need to evaluate the final performance of any of their extracts, rather they should evaluate the success of their interpretation of each. The reflective report is a personal piece of writing where they reflect on the work they have done as an individual, although they will also discuss how they have collaborated with others in the group to interpret the extract. There is no requirement to compare or contrast each extract so students should avoid this approach.

The keys to success in the writing of the reflective report are to keep it practical and to include plenty of precise examples from their practical work which reveal a thorough engagement with the texts.

Statements of dramatic intentions

Whilst these do not attract any marks in themselves they are crucial in alerting the examiner to what students are trying to achieve with their work. One of the criteria for assessment is the achievement of individual intentions so students should be encouraged to be precise in what they say. For example if they merely state that they want to make the audience laugh and the end result is not funny, it will affect achievement in terms of this criterion. Those statements that are closely linked to the extract they are presenting and their personal individual role in it will be more helpful for the examiner in terms of assessment. Students need to fully justify the theatrical decisions they have made as an individual. This is especially important if they are presenting a more mysterious interpretation, such as setting the extract in another period or location to that stated in the text.

Mark scheme

Attention should be drawn to the specific criteria on which students are assessed in their performances. The criteria bands are qualitative but essentially these aspects of the student's presentation are assessed.

Part A

- range of skills – the skills for each specialism are listed in the specification
- deployment and effectiveness of skills
- appropriateness of the interpretation to the play as a whole
- sensitivity to context
- achievement of intentions and engagement of the audience

Part A of the mark scheme is not just assessing performing or design skills. A student could have terrific performing skills and been accepted into a top Drama school, but if they have ignored the context of the extract or the interpretation is not appropriate in terms of the play as a whole, they will be missing opportunities to achieve the highest marks. Similarly a set or costume designer may have terrific artistic vision but if they have created a set or costume that is at odds with the context of the play, they too cannot achieve the highest marks.

Part B

- consistency of personal interpretation in relation to the practitioner's dramatic intentions and methods
- evidence of the practitioner's work and methods
- effectiveness of the application of the practitioner's work and/or methodologies

As previously mentioned, it is vitally important to marry the choice of play to the practitioner in order to maximise achievement for the first criterion. How many methods are in evidence and are they executed effectively? Students who have a superficial knowledge and understanding of the practitioner, because the areas of study listed in the specification have been given limited attention, will only be able to demonstrate a few methods in performance.

Administration paperwork

As early as possible and **at least six weeks before the exam** date:

- PAFs submitted to the NEA adviser for checking and approving. All centres are notified of their adviser's name and email address every September via the exams officer so teachers should check this in their own centre. It is customary that centres keep the same adviser from year to year.
- There will need to be a separate PAF for each combination of plays being used. For example if all students do a monologue for one of the extracts there will need to be a different form for each student.
- Any choices which do not meet the criteria for approval will need to be changed and the form resubmitted to the adviser.
- If students change their mind about any of their plays it is permitted, but the new choices should be submitted on a new form to the adviser.

One month before the exam date send the following to the visiting examiner:

- Signed off play approval forms.
- Play extracts being used. If it is a play with which the examiner is unfamiliar the whole play needs to be sent so that they can prepare for the exam effectively. Centres get these back on the day of the exam.
- Schedule order – this is emailed to the centre by the examiner when the exam date is arranged.

On the day of the exam the following should be ready for the examiner:

- Programme notes – the format of these is up to the centre but should include; the title of the piece and the practitioner being used, the name and candidate number with photographs of each student in the group preferably in costume, their chosen specialism, and the part they are playing if performing.
- The statements of the dramatic intentions which the examiner will read before they examine each group.
- Candidate record forms (CRF) signed by both the teacher and the student.
- The reflective reports which the examiner will take away with them at the end of the exam.
- A USB stick containing the recording of the performance(s) if possible.

After the exam the following should be sent to the examiner within 10 working days of the exam: A USB stick containing the recording of the performance(s) if not available on the day of the exam.

Helpful resources

- The centre's NEA adviser can advise and guide on both practical components.
- The Examiner's reports are produced each summer and are available on [Centre Services](#). They provide plenty of examples of good practice and pitfalls to be avoided.
- [Teaching Guide: Suggested plays](#)
- [Assessment Resources](#)
- [A-level Drama and Theatre specification](#)