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# A-LEVEL DRAMA AND THEATRE

7262/C CREATING ORIGINAL DRAMA  
Report on the Examination

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7262  
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**General points**

This has been an extraordinary year and for many teachers and students a very difficult one. It was gratifying, therefore, to have once again seen some excellent work clearly reflecting students' understanding of the subject, their theatrical intentions and their enthusiasm for communicating with their audience.

Much of the marking was within tolerance but, possibly inevitably after a break of nearly three years, mistakes were made in the application of the demands of the specification and in the application of the mark schemes. This applied to both the Working Notebooks and the performance marks.

The main reason for the discrepancies was due to over-rewarding of work with a tendency to very enthusiastic commentaries on the Student Record Forms. To access the top mark bands student work has to be 'excellent' or 'exceptional'. Work that was 'good' was often rewarded in these bands. Although it is understandable that teachers wanted to reward students for their achievements under difficult circumstances, the standard needs to be consistent across all centres. Additionally, moderators reported many instances where the teacher had not differentiated between students either within the same group or across groups, where there were very apparent differences in their achievements.

There was some misunderstanding of the implications and application of the changes in the demands of the component for this year. Centres are reminded that in cases where they need information or clarification, to contact their NEA adviser for help or refer to the subject office. Although there has occasionally been some helpful information shared on social media platforms, there has also been a great deal of mis-information, so it is always wise to check with the official sources.

**Examples of good practice in relation to administration and recordings**

- Almost all centres submitted their marks on time using e-subs and sent the moderation sample shortly afterwards. The majority of centres who could not do this due, in the main, to staff illness, contacted both AQA and their moderator so that the difficulties were known.
- The majority of centres completed the paperwork efficiently and sent this with the sample.
- Most paperwork was completed fully and there were helpful comments on the candidate record forms and in the body of the Working Notebooks.
- Clear identification of each performance group, supported by clearly presented programme notes, showing photographs of the students in costume and make-up, gave their candidate numbers, the part they played and the piece they were in.
- Students introduced themselves clearly to camera, plus any useful identifying information, such as a change of costume during the piece.
- Design students demonstrated their designs, for example set design, in a clearly filmed sequence demonstrating all aspects of their design before the filming of the performance.
- Recordings were clear both visually and aurally, allowing the moderator to check that the marks awarded were accurate.

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**Less successful practice**

- There were several centres that submitted incomplete forms and there were some missing forms.
- In some cases there was missing work, including missing pages from the Working Notebooks, which required moderators to contact the centres.
- The list of required documentation is on the front of the Candidate Record Forms and all documents listed, including a Centre Declaration Form, must be included in the work submitted and this did not always occur.
- Several centres had not encrypted the work, which is a requirement, or had used an incorrect password. The passwords are in place for the security of the candidates' work.
- In some cases the work was not recorded in line with the guidance issued by AQA resulting in moderators having difficulty accessing the work.
- In a few cases students were not identified at the start of the performances.
- Occasionally poor recordings were submitted where the candidates were not consistently visible or were out of shot.
- The moderation process was sometimes hampered by poor lighting or sound quality.
- The setting of the piece sometimes presented challenges in terms of recording which were not met, for example pieces set in traverse or as promenade. Centres are reminded to contact their NEA adviser for advice in these situations and to consider producing a clear filming script to be sure that the students are properly represented.
- Programme notes which used photographs of the students at a time when their appearance was different, examples included Year 8 photographs, or presentation to camera out of costume with students looking very different to when in performance.
- There were many instances of the use of non-examinees this year, this was an understandable consequence of the pandemic, but without an explanation from the centre identifying that students had dropped the course since the work had been completed, moderators were left guessing. In all other cases the use of a non-examinee should have been accompanied by a letter from AQA accepting this.
- Some centres had not referred to the rubric in the specification and had included more than 6 students in the piece.
- Poorly annotated work was submitted and comments were given on the CRF which did not link to the marking criteria or the requirements of the task.

**Good practice in relation to the Statement of Dramatic Intentions and the Working Notebooks**

- Good statements would in more usual times make clear reference to the working methods and aims of the practitioner, but in this unusual year moderators expected to see specific reference to the effects the student wanted to create and the way in which they would apply and develop their skills to achieve this. An encouraging number of Statements of Dramatic Intention did this.
- Most of the Working Notebooks were presented in a "Written Only" format and were in two clear, distinct sections which were evenly balanced in terms of word count and followed the requirements of the task set out in the specification on page 28 and 29
- In many pieces of work there was evidence of impressive research, including personal collection of verbatim, interviews, and archive research.

- Although the application of a practitioner in performance was not a requirement for this year, it was still a requirement for the Working Notebooks. Good notebooks showed a clear connection between the practitioner's methodology and aims and the developing performances. The practitioner's aims worked in sympathy with the aims of the student performances.
- One effect of the pandemic has been that students have had less opportunity to see live theatre. However, good working notebooks showed enthusiastic responses to filmed and live theatre, with judicious selection of aspects of those productions which were influential in the development of the students' own work.
- When stating their own and the group's aims, they avoided generalisation but were specific about their own role and their part in the whole piece.
- The notebooks were written, particularly in Section Two, from their own perspective as performer, director, or designer and explained how the students developed and applied their skills to achieve their aims.
- Good working notebooks never lost touch with their practitioner, often using the specific development ideas explained in the practitioner's own work.
- When analysing their work these students were specific in their evaluation, often drawing on specific performance moments, and often commenting on their personal development in terms of their skills.
- Many teachers wrote incisive comments on the mark-sheets and annotated the body of the notebooks clearly and with focus.

### **Less successful practice in relation to Statements of Dramatic Intention and Working Notebooks**

- Statements were generalised and gave no specific detail in relation to the effects to be created or the development of personal skills.
- In some cases the specific requirements of the task as set out in the specification were not adhered to.
- Some centres had not recognised that the suggested Word Count for the Working Notebooks had not changed for this series and students had offered short and under-developed work.
- Conversely, some work was overly long. Work which exceeds the maximum of 3,000 words cannot be credited and where, for example the student had used the majority of their word count on Section A, moderators were only able to credit up to the 3000-word limit on Section B, resulting in work that almost certainly fell out of tolerance.
- Some students had offered notebooks that were written and accompanied by photographs. The word count must still be within the required limits. The commentaries and annotation need to show the analytical and evaluative qualities expected. Some students seemed to have spent more time on the presentation of the work than the content and in some cases the content was more indicative of GCSE standard than A Level.
- Work must appear in the appropriate section of the Working Notebook or it cannot be credited. There were several examples of notebooks which had no clear division between the sections, including some audio-notebooks.
- Some students had written lengthy accounts of initial stimuli which had been rejected, often for good reason, but thereby limiting the words available to explore their research. Most of this debate was not relevant to the eventual performance.

- There was evidence of some students selecting stimuli which had limited depth or specificity, for example “we were all interested in the environment”, which led to unfocussed research that often lacked depth or impact on the final performance.
- Several students included limited reference to their personal focus on skill and contribution to development, and instead offered a rather generalised comment on group development, with limited reflection on personal aims and contribution to the work, or skills.
- At times there was insufficient secure focus on the practitioner. Some students gave lengthy descriptions of investigating several practitioners, before selecting the most appropriate practitioner for their stimulus. This did not contribute to their accounts of the rationale behind the work and had a negative impact on the words available for a focused exploration. Some made more reference to an additional practitioner to one prescribed in the specification. This was especially true of students referencing Splendid Productions when their specified practitioner was Brecht. As has been noted in previous examiners’ reports, Splendid Productions offer many students an inspiring and immediate experience of live theatre and many of their practices are inspired by Brechtian Theatre, but as a touring company their brief and methodology is qualitatively different. For example, Brecht’s practice includes the specific and detailed use of key props and costume there are clear design elements in his productions and the terminology is not the same.
- It has admittedly been difficult for students to access live theatre, but many students only explored very short clips from productions and did not make clear connections to their own work. Some students only referenced TV or film, which is not appropriate for this subject.
- Copied and pasted material is not acceptable. Similarly, over-long quotation is unhelpful as moderators are looking for the candidates’ own ideas and interpretation.
- Reference needed to be made to a range of the selected practitioner’s methodologies and students need to show understanding beyond a limited selection of techniques, for example, “we used emotion memory and the magic if”. It is also important that any rehearsal methods which are mentioned are clearly part of the practitioner’s rehearsal process, or are justified as linked, for example with Katie Mitchell, “role on the wall” and “hot seating” needed justification in this context.
- Whatever methods and techniques were applied, there needed to be specific detail of the impact of these methods and how this developed the work.
- In Section Two, students need to maintain a perspective on their nominated skill and how this had informed their work. In the case of performers, less successful Working Notebooks often spent more time discussing decisions on technical and design issues, for example set and costume, but failed to discuss how this informed their skill as performers. This was particularly true of students discussing Katie Mitchell’s “Live Cinema”, where there was informed by discussion of camera angles, placement, technical considerations, but their performance was not mentioned.

### **Examples of good practice in relation to the performances**

- Good work chose a stimulus that was important to the students and was achievable as they had considered the time restraints and had chosen a message that was inspiring and well communicated.
- A variety of structures were used and there was some inspiring work, based on history, Art and contemporary politics. A key to success was the candidates’ evident investment in their work.

- Popular practitioners this year included Stanislavski, possibly as a result of the greater number of monologues, with some impressive, detailed naturalistic work. Frantic Assembly were also popular and successful groups showed a confident mastery of their physical techniques. Paperbirds were also a very popular choice, with students tackling their approach to verbatim theatre with varying degrees of success. There was also successful work based on DV8, Mike Alfreds and Complicite. In all cases of successful work it was clear the students had engaged with a practitioner whose methods were appropriate to the performers' skills.
- There was an awareness of time limits and these were not only adhered to but used in the devising process.
- Visual elements had been considered, with designers working in harmony with the group. At times, designers were working with an alternative practitioner but consonance with group aims and total effects had been well considered.
- Lighting and sound supported the work effectively.
- Even where it was not possible for an audience to be present, there was a sense of occasion and a gravitas that showed that the work was valued.
- There was a maturity to the work which showed performance detail, but also a real commitment and enjoyment in performing.

### **Less successful practice in relation to performance**

- The work needed to be coherent and intrinsically theatrical. As in past series, there were examples of pieces which were linked monologues but without a clearly discernible aim. This indicated a rather naïve understanding of the potential impact on the audience.
- Some centres had awarded identical performance marks, irrespective of the candidate's individual contribution to the performance.
- Marks need to be awarded for performance, not for the effort or contribution to the development and rehearsal process. It was clear, as in previous series, that marks had been awarded inappropriately in some cases.
- Not all groups had selected their starting point judiciously, or had chosen a very broad topic such as "Abuse", which did not allow for a focused, well researched outcome that created an impact and dramatic effect for the audience.
- This year the influence of the practitioner on the performance was not credited, as it would have been difficult for some shorter pieces to demonstrate this influence effectively. However, where students stated in their dramatic intentions that they intended to show the practitioner's influence, this should have been evident.
- The performances were generally within the specified time limits although some very brief pieces gave the moderator only a glimpse of the candidate's skills.
- Moderators noted that a lot of work this year was towards the upper time limit, where students' outcomes would have benefitted from some judicious editing and refining.

### **Specialisms**

Students do need to consider the requirements for each specialism and to consider how these impact on what they want to achieve in this component of the examination and their own development as a theatre practitioner and as a member of a devising group. Moderators reported that most students had selected an appropriate practitioner for their own work. In some cases, in working notebooks, the student appeared to change their mind about their practitioner during the

early stages of the process, as has been explained earlier, discussion of the rejected practitioner is not helpful and reduces the word count available.

### **Performer**

Performers needed to consider what skills they were aiming to develop and how the supporting input of the group (where applicable) helped them to achieve their aims. The focus needed to be on how they had utilised the rehearsal strategies and any technical or design elements to help convey, through their performance, their intended effects. Moderators did note this year that although there were many examples of excellent or exceptional work, there were also frequent examples of students who had not, perhaps through lack of rehearsal or experimentation, achieved the necessary vocal and physical precision in their performances to access the highest bands.

### **Directing**

A number of students offered directing as their chosen skill. In the Working Notebooks there was generally secure evidence of intention and of specific detail given for the actors, which was then evident in the performances. However, some students appeared to find it difficult to discuss the refinement of their own skill and where this was the case, they tended towards a very narrative based approach to the work. Moderators also reported seeing less evidence of supporting documentation, for example prompt copies, rehearsal schedules and director's notes.

### **Lighting and Sound Design**

Some lighting and sound design students demonstrated a very good technical understanding in the Working Notebooks. However, this often needed to be balanced with the demands of the emerging work and what effects could be created. Better Working Notebooks were able to balance the demands of the devising process, working with the rest of the group and their own process as a designer. In some instances, students only discussed their own process without making any reference to the development of the piece. The inclusion of supporting documentation in terms of cue sheets and lighting plots could have elevated some students' marks.

### **Set design**

Moderators reported seeing some very imaginative set designs that clearly contributed to the overall success of the piece. Conversely in some cases, it would appear that the set designer had worked in isolation from the performers and that in these cases, the set did little more than provide a 'backdrop' for the action. The majority of set design working notebooks provided some detail about the process but as with lighting and sound, there were some examples where the student appeared to have not contributed to the development of the emerging piece.

### **Costume design**

There were some quite secure costume designs showing some knowledge of period and fabric, for example. It is important, however, that the costume designer works with the performer as to how the costume will be used. A costume needs to be functional to enhance the production aims. In some cases, this was only partially achieved.

Costume designers need to focus on one costume explicitly in the Working Notebook. This does not preclude providing other costumes, but the selected design should evidence their best work.

### **Puppet Design**

Although not a popular skill, some students using Kneehigh as their practitioner, had thought very carefully about the style, construction and use of puppetry in their piece. Students should be reminded that a performer using a puppet, needs time to work with it and become familiar with the performance skills associated with puppetry. There were a couple of instances of students taking



influence from Splendid Productions creation of very simple puppets and linking these, as has previously been stated, to a Brechtian intent. These were rarely successful in their simplistic construction.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.