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# A-LEVEL

# DRAMA AND THEATRE

7262/C Creating original drama  
Report on the Examination

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## Introduction

It was wonderful to see some very high quality work this year. Much of the work clearly reflected students' understanding of the subject and their enthusiasm for communicating with their audience.

Much of centre marking was within tolerance although a few mistakes were seen by examiners in the application of the mark schemes. This applied to both the Working Notebooks and the performance marks. This is possibly because the effects of the pandemic are still with us, and some teachers are either new to the specification or to teaching.

Mainly, discrepancies between the centre marks and the subsequent moderated marks arose because of some over-generous marking. To access the top mark bands students' work has to be 'excellent' or 'exceptional'. Moderators reported that work which was 'good' was often rewarded in these bands. It is understandable that teachers who have seen students' hard work during the devising process would want to reward this, but it is important that a common standard is maintained across all centres.

Centres are reminded that in cases where they need information or clarification, to contact their NEA Adviser for help. Using social media groups to answer queries should be avoided, as misinformation can sometimes be shared through these sites.

There were some infringements of the Specification requirements. These covered group sizes, use of non-examinees and choice of practitioners. Centres are particularly reminded that a non-examinee is only permitted if there is one student in the cohort (ie in order to make a group of two).

## Administration and Recording of Performance Work

### Good practice:

- Almost all centres submitted their marks on time using e-submissions and sent the moderation sample shortly afterwards.
- The majority of centres completed the paperwork efficiently and sent this with the sample.
- Many centres completed the Mark Sheets for their students with thorough commentary on their written and performance work.
- Many centres annotated the Working Notebook with comments that related to the Mark Scheme. This is vital in order for moderators to understand how marks have been awarded by the centre.
- Programme Notes were provided, separating students clearly into their performance groups and showing photographs of the students in costume and make-up. Good Programme Notes included student numbers, the part(s) students played and their chosen practitioner.
- Centres where students had left the course since the filming took place clearly identified these individuals through a covering letter (on headed notepaper) included with the work.
- Students introduced themselves clearly to camera, plus any useful identifying information, such as a change of costume during the piece.
- Students choosing design skills showed their design in a filmed sequence (without any commentary) that allowed the moderator to see the full design in detail from all relevant angles.
- Recordings were filmed from one camera in a fixed position throughout the performance, that covered the whole of the performing area.
- Recordings were clear both visually and aurally, allowing the moderator to check that the marks awarded were accurate.

**Less successful practice:**

- Centres had omitted one or more of the following:
  - The Centre Declaration sheet.
  - Programme Notes.
  - Candidate Record Forms with signatures, including Statements of Dramatic Intent
- Student's Mark sheets contained very brief comments to justify the mark given, or contained comments that had no relation to the mark scheme. Some Mark sheets referred moderators to a general summative comment at the end of the Working Notebook sections.
- Working Notebooks were not annotated, which is a requirement.
- Programme Notes did not identify which students were in which piece.
- Programme Notes used photographs of the students that did not show them in costume for the piece. In some cases, old photographs of the students were used, making it very difficult for moderators to identify students.
- Students did not identify themselves to camera.
- For a number of centres using end on staging, the camera did not remain in one fixed position, and camerawork included panning, zooming in for close-ups etc. This is not permitted, and often results in some students' work being missed. Where the piece uses promenade or traverse, centres are advised to contact their NEA Adviser for advice on how to record this work effectively ensuring all students are visible.
- A common issue was pieces being over-long. The upper time limit for a group of 3-6 students is thirty minutes. More frequently, centres with groups of two students working together did not seem to be aware of the different time limits for duos. A group of two must produce a piece of between 5 and 10 minutes. Failure to observe these time limits often does not support student's achievement and many pieces would have benefited from being edited.
- A number of centres failed to encrypt their USBs before sending them through the post, which is a requirement and a safeguarding issue. Some centres had used passwords that were not the AQA designated password, which posed difficulties in accessing the work. Occasionally, the non-AQA password was included in the package, which is also a safeguarding issue.

**Statements of Dramatic Intentions**

The fulfilment of student's Dramatic Intentions is assessed in the fourth section of the Performance mark. Therefore, the Statement of those Intentions is an opportunity for the student to express what they hope their audience to experience from their work.

The best practice saw Statements that were individualised and clear in their intentions for the audience, with 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.

Good statements made reference to the chosen practitioner's aims and methods and how these would be seen in their work.

Less successful Statements were brief and very generalised. Some cut and pasted the section on Individual Aims from their Working Notebooks, which is not advisable.

## Working Notebooks

The vast majority of centres ensured that Working Notebooks were split into two sections, with a separate word count for each. However, there were many instances where students penalised themselves by including Section 1 information in Section 2 or vice versa. This was particularly in evidence where students had included research in Section 2 or discussed the final piece in Section 1. Information cannot be credited in the wrong section.

Most of the Working Notebooks were presented in a “Written Only” format. Most were evenly balanced in terms of word count and followed the required areas set out in the specification.

Many teachers annotated the body of the notebooks clearly and with focus.

Many Working Notebooks included images that were not annotated. If images are used, they should be annotated to demonstrate why they have been included. Some students included images of word clouds/written notes etc that were not possible to read, making these unhelpful.

## Working Notebook Section 1

### Good practice:

- The **Rationale** for the work was clear and reflected the student’s own ideas and enthusiasms.
- Many interesting stimuli were chosen, giving ample opportunity for theatrical expression.
- Dramatic influences on the piece covered all the required areas listed in the Specification: **research, the student’s chosen practitioner and relevant experiences of live theatre productions.**
- **Research** contained links as to how it was used in the piece. For example, students choosing practitioners who use verbatim material often showed a thoughtful approach to the conduct of their interviews **and the use of the resulting material.**
- Reference to the chosen **practitioner** included a justification as to why they were being used. Effective work referred to a wide range of the practitioner’s aims and methods.
- The **live theatre** seen was relevant in some way to the chosen practitioner. Students had clearly engaged with a number of relevant productions digitally and/or through live theatre visits.
- References to **live theatre** included details about which elements of the pieces seen were influential on their own work.
- References to **stylistic and contextual factors** were clear and relevant eg to the time period of the piece.
- **Aims and intentions** of both the individual and the piece were distinct and were in sympathy with the aims of the chosen practitioner.
- When stating their own and the group’s aims, students avoided generalisation but were specific about their own role and their part in the whole piece.

### Less successful practice:

- The **Rationale** included reference to the student having been ‘given’ a stimulus or a ‘task’ by their teacher. This detracted from the student’s personal engagement with the chosen stimulus. Centres are reminded that students are required to choose their own stimulus.
- References to dramatic influences neglected either research or live theatre productions seen.
- **Live theatre** was reduced to YouTube clips of some of the practitioner’s work or the trailers for productions.

- Reference was made to other **practitioners** discarded during the process. This does not attract credit. Some students also wasted words describing stimuli that were not used.
- There were many examples of centres where the chosen **practitioner** did not appear to be fully understood. A reductive approach was sometimes seen. Examples include reducing Brecht's style to only direct address and placards, or Artaud's aims to wanting only to 'shock' the audience.
- Some students did not include their own or their group's **aims** for the piece.

## Working Notebook Section 2

### Good practice:

- Successful working notebooks never lost touch with their practitioner, often using the specific development ideas explained in the practitioner's own work. This was particularly evident when students explained their **Approach** taken in devising their piece, which in some cases followed closely that of the chosen practitioner's devising practice.
- Examples of the **Development** of the piece showed how elements of the work changed ie were **experimented with, developed and refined** throughout the process.
- Students' decision making with reference to their **own individual theatrical skill** also showed how their work changed and developed throughout the process and was closely influenced by the chosen practitioner's approach to that skill.
- The **final ideas** for the performance were clear and showed a sophisticated level of connection of theory to practice.
- The **comparison of the outcome** of the piece with the initial aims took account of both individual and group aims and referred to specific moments within the piece.

### Less successful practice:

- The **Approach** taken to devising the work was neglected, meaning it was not clear how the piece came to be created.
- Examples of **Development** occasionally focused less on identifying connections between theory and practice and more on group dynamics or the difficulties faced due to time constraints.
- Examples of **Development** showed a lack of refinement or fairly simplistic ideas about theatrical effectiveness.
- Attention to a student's own **theatrical skill** consisted of a detailed description of a section of the performance, without any indication of how this had been arrived at throughout the process.
- Performers spent a long time describing the set, costume and/or lighting used for the piece, but neglected their own chosen **theatrical skill** of performing.

## Performances

This year it appeared that a broader range of practitioners were explored. The most popular practitioner appeared to be Brecht; frequently however centres using Brecht had a large proportion of over marked students, due to some fundamental misunderstandings about the nature of his work. These did sometimes include factual errors, such as attributing to Brecht a use of 'minimal' set or costume, which is categorically not the case. There were misunderstandings about his style of theatre, of gestic acting, his use of 'placards' and of the socio-political left-wing foundation of his work. A number of centres appeared to derive their understanding of Brecht's work from visits by touring companies rather than any contact with his own writings and theatre work: Brecht's work exists in play form and in huge volumes of writing by the practitioner himself, and students choosing Brecht as a practitioner would be well-advised to gain their understanding of his work

from his own words rather than contemporary companies who use their own interpretation of a few elements of his influence.

Kneehigh, Frantic Assembly and Artaud remained popular practitioners. There appeared to be some more well-rounded grasp of Artaud's intentions and methods, although many students choosing Artaud still rely on a spoken language and logical narrative within their pieces. Sometimes the fundamental use of relationships at the heart of Frantic Assembly's work was neglected in favour of a cherry-picking approach to their well-documented physical techniques. Some joyous Kneehigh-influenced work was seen, adapting existing narratives in a playful, exuberant and inherently theatrical manner that was a joy to watch.

Verbatim practitioners such as The Paper Birds and Alecky Blythe are also increasingly popular, although too often the distinction between these two practitioners is not fully grasped. It was refreshing to see some less well-known practitioners used, such as 1927.

There were a few cases of centres using practitioners who are not on the list in the Specification. This occurred where there was a relationship between the stated practitioner and one of the set practitioners eg Emma Rice and Kneehigh, or Bill Mitchell and Wildworks. This is an infringement.

#### Good practice:

- Some theatrically impressive and inspiring work was seen, and a variety of structures were used.
- The choice of stimuli evidently showed students' engagement and ranged from folk tales and myths to contemporary issues such as the #metoo movement. This often fed into students' high achievement for **Inventiveness and originality**.
- There was frequently a sense of occasion to the performances with an invited audience viewing the work and supporting the students.
- Students choosing design skills worked in harmony with the performing group.
- The chosen **practitioner** was evident throughout the piece in style, choice of subject matter and execution of the performance.
- There was a maturity to the work which showed detail in the **execution of skill set**, but also a real commitment and enjoyment in performing.
- Work achieved the stated **dramatic intentions** quite clearly.

#### Less successful practice:

- Occasionally some work lacked theatricality and relied on conventions of television and film.
- The convention of having a series of monologues linked together by a common theme was still seen often and did not tend to show off students' inventiveness.
- In their marking some centres did not distinguish between students, awarding identical marks within a performance category or even occasionally across all areas.
- There was poor preparation of the performance space which did not support the students with a sense of the value of their work.
- Some centres tried to credit students for their hard work or effort with a mark for exceptional skill.
- There were a number of centres who overmarked their students for **Consonance with the chosen practitioner**. This seemed to be owing to a reductive approach to a practitioner as outlined above, where some small elements of the piece contained references to the work of a practitioner, but this had been over-credited as showing a 'high degree of compatibility' or above.

## **Theatrical Skill**

### **Performer**

Most students chose to be assessed as performers and a range of success was achieved with Moderators reporting a generally higher level of achievement this year. There were many examples of excellent or exceptional work. There were also a few 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.

Performances do need to reflect the work of the practitioner and it was unfortunately true that students who did not show a secure understanding of methodology and aims in their performances could not achieve the highest marks.

### **Directing**

Only a few students nominated directing as their chosen skill but those seen were often effective. In the Working Notebooks there was generally secure evidence of intention and examples of specific instruction given to the actors, which was then evident in the performances. There was detail given of rehearsal processes in line with the chosen practitioner. Some students supplied supporting documentation, for example prompt copies, rehearsal schedules and director's notes and, where this was integrated, this was effective.

### **Lighting and Sound Design**

There were a few examples seen, and some demonstrated a very good technical understanding in the Working Notebook; in less successful notebooks this was sometimes done without considering the integration of technical effects into the meaning being created in performance. Better Working Notebooks were able to balance the demands of the devising process, working closely 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 overall development of the piece. Supporting evidence in terms of cue sheets and lighting plots could have elevated some students' marks.

### **Set design**

There were a few very imaginative set designs that clearly contributed to the overall success of the piece. Students had investigated a practitioner's work thoroughly and aspects of his/her aims were clearly evident. The working notebooks showed good practical understanding and awareness of challenges in terms of skills, time constraints and budgets. The sets were an integral part of the performances and made a strong contribution to the performances and the creation of meaning. Weaker designers appeared to have worked in isolation from the performers, and in these cases there was restricted evidence of the impact of the set on performance and of the set in use.

### **Costume design**

There were only a few costume designs seen and these showed some understanding of the designer's role. Weaker work had not fully considered the costume in use and both fit and consonance with the piece as a whole were unclear. 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 and should be presented to camera before the performance. There should be no commentary given at this point.



## **Puppet Design**

Although several students used puppets in their performances, no puppet designers were seen.

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

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