
GCSE

DRAMA

8261/W Understanding drama
Report on the Examination

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Summary of overall performance of the current series

The vast majority of centres have worked hard to prepare students for the demands of this exam. Examiners reported seeing many insightful and engaging scripts that conveyed a genuine love of Drama and an intelligent understanding of how actors and designers can use their skills to convey meaning and engage audiences.

This year there were more balanced scripts, with fewer examples where students had done significantly better in one of the sections. The vast majority of students attempted all questions on the paper. It is evident that centres have focused on the amount of time students should spend on answering each of the questions. It was not unusual to see students note down the amount of time they should spend on each answer on their scripts. This meant that most students tailored the length of their answers to reflect the number of available marks.

There was a significant number of students who began their response by answering Section C before moving on to Section B and a smaller number who began Section B with the 20 mark question.

The popular trend continued for completing the whole paper in reverse which impacted the performance of some students. Beginning with the lower value questions allows most students to engage more effectively with the extract and formulate ideas for the larger value questions. There were also a significant number of students who jumped between sections and did all questions out of order. This often led to some confusion about the unique demands of each question. There were also examples of students crossing out pages of answers, writing half an answer and then returning to it later which tended to lead to repetition and a lack of coherence in their responses.

Centres need to ensure students have fully explored the set text by reading the play and not relying on watching recordings of previous productions, which students often made irrelevant reference to. At times this led to insecure knowledge of the characters and their journeys through the play and occasionally students lacking understanding of the plot. There were also a number of examples where the student misunderstood where the extract came from within the play as a whole.

The majority of students wrote about *Blood Brothers*, although *The Crucible* and *Noughts and Crosses* remained popular. The popularity of other text in order was *Things I Know to be True*, *Around the World in 80 Days*, *A Taste of Honey* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

There continued to be a preference for studying digital/streamed performances in Section C. Watching recorded performances did not appear to dampen students' enthusiasm and examiners reported reading deeply personal responses that beautifully captured how performers and designers had inspired the student. There was a trend where entire cohorts of students had been prepared to write about the same few moments from a performance. This often meant that students were not wholly engaging with the specific demands and focus of Section C questions.

A summary of students' performance in Section A

This section tests students' knowledge and understanding of theatre terminology, roles and responsibilities, stage positioning and configurations through four multiple choice questions. Most students attempted to answer all the questions in this section and did so with accuracy. Although, due to the approach taken by some students to attempt all questions in reverse order, some ran out of time and did not complete these questions. This is a pity as Section A is intended to be the most accessible section.

The question that was most frequently incorrectly answered was Q.4 which related to the audience's experience when watching a promenade production.

Many students wrote out their answers, some in full sentences. This is unnecessary – a simple 'letter response' (A, B, C, D) is all that is required, and this will help students save time.

A summary of students' performance in Section B Question .1

This four-mark question tests students' knowledge and understanding of the play's original context, from the perspective of a designer. Examiners noted that the most effective responses were concise, with a clear focus on precise descriptions of design. Whilst concise, successful answers were crucially packed with detail that reflected the context of the play and the extract.

Centres are reminded that the question asks students to 'describe' and does not ask students to 'explain,'. Less successful answers gave a limited or vague description of a design and the rest of the answer was a lengthy justification of their choices.

Some students provided opening paragraphs which summarised the play's socio-economic or historical context. This approach was most often seen in answers on *Blood Brothers* and *The Crucible*. These introductory paragraphs appeared to have been pre-learnt and so were unconnected to the specific extract. Including these overviews did not always support the student's response.

If students are writing about narrative context for the extract, they must connect it to their specific designs.

Some students only provided a labelled diagram of their design. Centres are reminded that whilst diagrams can be included, students must provide a description of their ideas written in full sentences.

In the case of a few of the plays, students' ideas contradicted information provided in the text about location, season or elements of design that are pivotal to the action.

5.1

Many successful answers were seen that acknowledged the Puritan context and Hale's status through descriptions filled with appropriate ideas. Effective answers referenced authentic materials, colours and items such as buckled shoes and breeches.

Some students struggled when finding ways to show Hale is a minister, incorrectly suggesting he would wear a large crucifix or a dog collar. Others based their design ideas on the misconception that Hale would use his clothing to show off his considerable wealth.

Many of the most successful answers acknowledged, through the condition of his costume, that Hale had travelled to the Proctor's farm. However, some wrongly suggested he would be wrapped up in a warm thick cloak to protect against the harsh Salem winter when the scene is set in spring.

6.1

Successful answers reflected that Mickey had been playing outside and often described the use of make-up to dirty his knees and face. They also described his clothes as being oversized or too small to demonstrate the family's poverty.

Many answers were influenced by stereotypical and damaging assumptions about what it means to be working class. In many answers, assertions were made about Mrs Johnstone being neglectful and all working-class people being dirty and smelly. Some only focused on the condition of clothing as being dirty and ripped and did not give information about individual items.

The most successful designs reflected the context of a 60s working-class community in Liverpool through the choice of appropriate fashions and materials.

7.1

Many students' answers were filled with appropriate ideas that reflected the men's fashions of late 19th century London. Students described bowler hats, checked trousers and pocket watches, as well as items that conveyed Passepartout's role as a Victorian servant such as white gloves.

Other students included details that hinted at his flamboyant character or his French heritage.

Less successful answers incorrectly assumed that his clothing would be dirty, or ripped due to his lowly status in comparison to Fogg.

8.1

Effective responses used their set design to reflect the importance of the garden and outdoor living in Australian culture. They also recognised the efforts Bob put into tending the garden, describing well-cut lawns and pruned bushes.

Many students had used the description of the set at the front of the text as an inspiration, although to achieve a top band mark it was not enough to simply copy down this list. Successful answers described several key aspects of the set in detail.

Lots of answers focused on the roses, some exclusively wrote about them, providing extensive explanations of their symbolic importance. These answers rarely met the demands of the question. Many students also described them as withering or just blooming, contradicting the stage direction at the start of the scene.

Several students in their attempt to create a sense of Australian heat provided uncreditable descriptions of the use of lighting.

9.1

The most successful answers provided design ideas that acknowledged the narrative context of the extract and the fact that Ryan is returning home after the bombing. Many describing items of clothing that would disguise his identity or show his allegiance to the Liberation Militia. Effective designs also reflected his status as a Nought in an unjust and prejudiced society. Some did this through symbols or colour and others took a more naturalistic approach, both could be highly effective.

Many students referenced the term contemporary dystopian without appearing to have an understanding of what it means. Other less successful answers were based on stereotypical assumptions about what it means to be working class and focused solely on how dirty, ill-fitting and stained Ryan's clothes would be.

10.1

Not enough answers were seen to draw comprehensive conclusions about students' performance in this question although some very impressive answers were seen which referred to Roman-inspired architecture, intricate tapestries hanging on the wall and decorative arches.

Successful answers suggested specific and detailed design ideas that reflected both the socio-historical context of the play and the narrative context of the extract. One student wrote about the rumpled sheets on the bed showing that Romeo had just left. Another referenced being able to see the balcony beyond the bedchamber, which acted as a constant reminder to Juliet of her love.

11.1

Most students answering this question ignored the information provided both in the dialogue just before the extract begins and the stage directions at the start of the scene. Students who had not considered this information did not refer to the 'long white housecoat'. Many designs also did not acknowledge Jo's late stages of pregnancy in their design.

The most successful answers included descriptions of the housecoat that looks like 'a badly tailored shroud' that stretches over her 'enormous bump' and then added another series of details that reflected the context that referred to make up, haircut and footwear.

A summary of students' performance in Section B Question .2

This eight mark question tests students' knowledge and understanding of how to create effects through the employment of performance skills when delivering a specified line of dialogue.

Successful responses saw students consider composite parts of the line separately, normally breaking it into two or three phrases, rather than writing about the line as a whole.

Many students appeared to have been taught to begin their answer with an introductory sentence where the whole line of dialogue is written; this is unnecessary and time consuming. Although it was often useful when students began with a brief overview of the effects they hoped to achieve linked to the specific context of the line.

Some students wrote about their vocal and physical skills separately, and this is a valid approach. However, examiners noted that the most successful responses were often when students described the combined effect of both sets of skills, which enabled them to write in a more concise and focused way. Some students began each sentence by identifying whether the skill they were writing about was vocal or physical ie 'A physical skill that I would use...'. This form of signposting is unnecessary and adds little to the answer.

Many students were able to skilfully bring their ideas to life using an impressive range of dramatic terminology and adjectives, so the examiner could see the stage action. Some responses lacked precision and no detailed description was given, students simply described characters walking or saying lines without any additional information being provided.

It was clear that some students did not understand the wide range of terms they were taught. The most misused terms were gait, pitch and tone. The phrases 'loud pitch' and 'high tone' were used regularly. Gait was often used to describe characters who were sat or still.

Sometimes vivid descriptions were provided, but the ideas suggested would not have created the identified effect/s. In some cases, very detailed and appropriate performance ideas were offered with no reference being made to the effects the student intended to create.

5.2

Many responses were hampered by misconceptions about Hale's character. Students regularly described him as aggressive and sarcastic and desperate to assert his authority over Proctor.

Successful answers acknowledged his desire to be fair, his drive to find the truth, and his intentions to form his own opinion of those mentioned in court. They also acknowledged the difficulties he has accepting Proctor's excuses and the validity of his claim that he could effectively pray in his home.

6.2

Most answers focused on creating a sense of the loving relationship between the characters and Mrs Johnstone's maternal concern. Others focused on her irritation with her son's whining and her weariness as she has heard this all before. Both effects were appropriate.

Some sophisticated answers reflected an understanding that, whilst she is a loving mother, she is also very busy and lacks the time to comfort him. Many effectively described her returning to her domestic chores near the end of the line. Others wrote about her still being flustered after believing Mickey was the rent man.

Some students suggested that this line should be delivered to show the anger that Mrs Johnstone feels about Mickey disobeying her orders. This confusion was often seen when the student had answered 6.3 first and they began answering 6.2 wrongly believing she already knew where Mickey had been playing.

7.2

Many responses effectively captured Passepartout's annoyance and concern in response to his mistake. In the most successful answers, this was placed in the context of the newness of his appointment and his desire to impress Fogg.

Some described an overly comedic or farcical delivery which had the character running wildly backwards and forwards across the stage. This showed a misunderstanding of style, character and the context of the line.

8.2

Successful answers were informed by a clear understanding of the close bond that Rosie and Bob share. They described a variety of skills that would communicate the combination of shock, concern and grief he was feeling in that moment.

Less successful answers focused on the idea that Bob was angry with Rosie and subsequently acted in an overly aggressive manner towards her. These answers showed a misunderstanding of his approach to parenting and his character.

9.2

This question was generally answered successfully with students acknowledging Ryan's defensiveness, but also his desperation to make Meggie understand his decision to be involved in the attack. Effective answers also referred to his awareness that his sons are in the room.

Less appropriate responses were focused on creating the effect of his guilt and regret about the deaths he was responsible for. This showed a lack of understanding of his character and the rage he feels, much of which is fuelled by the loss of Lynette.

10.2

The few responses written seen were generally detailed and appropriate and showed an understanding of Lady Capulet's character and her relationship with her daughter. They recognised her coldness and her lack of empathy.

A few students mistook her line as words of comfort, motivated by a genuine concern for Juliet's wellbeing.

11.2

There were some sensitive and mature responses to this question, which acknowledged the complexity of Jo's emotions at that moment. These answers recognised that Geof's domesticity provides Jo with a much needed sense of security after her chaotic childhood.

Other appropriate answers focused on the genuine affection Jo feels for Geof and the joy she feels having him around and teasing him.

Less successful answers focused on the idea that Jo was simply excited to eat, without recognising the importance of the stability Geof brings to her life.

A summary of students' performance in Section B Question .3

This twelve mark question tests students' knowledge and understanding of the use of performance space and interaction. Answers need to be focused on showing something specific to the audience, as defined by the question.

Centres are reminded that interaction should include verbal skills. Many responses just focused on physical and in some cases just on the use of stage space. There was an increase in the number of responses which focused solely on where each character was on the stage and where they moved to. The use of terms such as stage left and stage right can be very useful in Question .3 answers, but simply referring to where a character is standing is unlikely to be able to convey an effect or an idea. Students should be encouraged to think about a range of ways that characters can use stage space and interact with each other including the use of eye contact, response to the delivery of specific lines and touch, or the lack of it.

The term proxemics featured frequently in answers, but it was often misused. Many students talked about increasing proximity as characters moved towards each other. Some described characters decreasing proximity, but without describing how they moved towards each other.

The most effective responses focused on three or four key lines from throughout the shaded extract. They then took the examiner through the journey of the shaded extract making frequent references to the focus of the question

Less successful responses involved a generalised description of how the character might be performed throughout the whole of the shaded extract without reference to specific moments or lines.

5.3

This question elicited some excellent answers, the most successful of which acknowledged the character's conflicting motivations and beliefs which fuelled the tension between them. They then described and explained a series of subtle interactions that reflected both the tension and the naturalistic style of the play.

Less successful answers were often based upon misconceptions about the level of hatred and aggression the characters feel towards each other. Many described Hale as being physically aggressive and shouting in Proctor's face. This demonstrated a lack of understanding of Hale's character and of acceptable behaviour of Christian men in Puritan times.

Many excellent answers demonstrated an awareness of the opportunities that the set presents to the actor. Meaningful references were made to the use of the table as a barrier between the men and chairs to create levels to show tension.

6.3

Most answers were focused on showing Mrs Johnstone's feelings. The most successful answers referenced a range of appropriate emotions including shock, worry, fear and anger. Several highly effective answers described an initial expression of rage that culminated in her being rough with Mickey, which was later followed by regret and shame. However, some had her being overly violent and described her attempts to intimidate her son, which showed a lack of understanding of her character and their relationship.

Many students effectively placed her fear in the context of the threats Mrs Lyons had made. However, they wrongly suggested that Mrs Johnstone was still recovering from this interaction and did not recognise that nearly eight years had passed.

Lots of students focused on the stage direction (*She grabs him*), however, they provided no detail about how this moment could be performed. Students cannot be credited for simply repeating what is in the text.

7.3

Most answers were very focused on the idea of showing Passepartout's surprise. Effective responses worked logically through the shaded extract, focusing on key lines and moments and how their delivery could convey disbelief and shock as the news sinks in.

As with 7.2 answers, some suggested overly farcical ideas that were not appropriate for the character or the extract. These ideas included Passepartout running around wildly throwing clothes in the air as he prepares to pack. Answers that focused on farcical action often lost focus on the brief as these ideas were linked to the creation of comedy rather than showing surprise.

8.3

There were some very thoughtful and sensitive answers seen in response to this question, which acknowledged the depth of Bob's concern, motivated by his love for his youngest child. Great insight was shown by some students as they suggested performance ideas that linked his objections to Rosie's travel plans to his hidden pain as he thinks about life without her.

Successful answers took the examiner on the journey of emotions Bob goes through as he processes the thought of Rosie moving away. Some of the most effective answers focused on his attempt to hide his sadness at losing her when he denies crying. Students were able to suggest appropriate ideas using touch, eye contact and proxemics to convey his concerns.

As with 8.2, less successful answers showed a misunderstanding of Bob's character conveying his concern through controlling and overly aggressive interactions with his daughter.

9.3

This question was generally answered well with most students focusing clearly on finding appropriate ways to communicate Ryan's defensiveness. Some described Ryan as overly aggressive towards Meggie and suggested that he was trying to frighten or intimidate her into accepting his justification.

A lot of students spent a considerable amount of time directing Meggie. Whilst the student can and should acknowledge the other actor/s on stage, an extensive description of how they perform lines will not be credited.

Some students did not understand the strength of Ryan's beliefs and suggested that he was filled with doubt and guilt, this interpretation showed a lack of understanding of the character and made it difficult for students to stay focused on the brief.

10.3

Most of the answers seen suggested ideas that effectively showed Lady Capulet's anger. Physical distance and aggressive interactions were often appropriately referenced, as was the use of levels as she was described as towering over her daughter as she lay on the floor.

A handful of students did not fully acknowledge the focus of the question and described Lady Capulet tenderly attempting to comfort her daughter. This showed a lack of understanding of her character and meant the answer was not relevant to the brief.

11.3

Most of the responses seen focused on showing Jo's relationship with Geof. Partly because of the focus on the relationship, more students focused unnecessarily on describing the other actor's performance.

Many answers focused on the hand holding from Jo's two requests, to the hand holding itself and then the pulling away. This meant that the opening and closing lines of the shaded extract were rarely considered. It also meant that some students only focused on this and ignored other opportunities to use interaction and stage space to show their relationship. In some cases, this meant only a narrow range of skills were referenced.

Some students were confused about the nature of their relationship and described Jo as being overtly sexual, others wrongly suggested that Geof was the father of the baby.

A summary of students' performance in Section B Question .4

These twenty mark questions test students' knowledge and understanding of how performance skills might be used to interpret the character in the extract and the play as a whole.

The most effective responses offered precise and detailed performance ideas for the extract and then compared these with significant moment/s from the play as a whole. There were many different, but valid approaches taken to answering these questions. Some students paired descriptions of the delivery of a line from the extract with a description of a key line from somewhere else in the play. Others wrote about the extract and then turned their attention to the play as a whole. Some wrote about key moments, including the extract in chronological order. Although this allowed the student to chart the journey of the character throughout the play effectively, this often meant not enough attention was given to the extract and in a few cases the extract was not referenced at all.

Other less successful responses only focused on the printed extract and make no reference to the play as a whole or made generalised assertions about the use of performance skills, without referencing specific moments.

Regardless of approach, what is key to success in this question is well-chosen moments that allow the student to describe ideas specifically calculated to interpret the character. Many of the Q.4 seen lacked a clear sense of interpretation or contained inappropriate or insecure interpretations.

5.4

Some excellent answers were seen in response to *The Crucible* and students wrote insightfully about Proctor's character arc. The most effective answers recognised that his defensiveness in the extract was fuelled by guilt. Many provided performance ideas relating to the argument Hale has interrupted, whilst others chose to describe the interaction with Abigail in Act One. Both of these approaches, if appropriate ideas were described in precise detail, very successfully provided an insight into what motivates Proctor in the extract and the play as a whole.

Some common misconceptions were seen in many students' answers, which focused on the idea of Proctor's perceived aggression towards Hale in the extract. This idea was then further developed with examples of when he shouts at other characters in the play, such as in Act Three, without acknowledging why he is so angry at that moment.

Many students chose to write about the final moments of the play but often did not recognise the strength of character it takes for Proctor to rip up his confession. Some students used this as an example of how weak he has become and how he is a broken man, with no understanding that this is a moral victory.

6.4

Most students attempting this question demonstrated a secure and appropriate interpretation of Mickey. Many demonstrated an insightful understanding of his journey through the play and how he is shaped by socio-economic factors. Students spent far too long giving details about Russell's intentions and providing an overview of the wider issues being explored in the play, such as access to education. This approach of exploring what Mickey represents thematically often prevented students from conveying a comprehensive interpretation.

Some students only focused on ways they might convey his youth, with a number suggesting they might perform on their knees to make themselves shorter. These students also tended to only focus on moments when Mickey was a child and this made some answers narrow.

Some of the more effective answers compared ideas for the extract with examples from later scenes most frequently the pill scene and the final scene.

7.4

This question was generally answered successfully with most students providing an appropriate interpretation of Fogg. Many insightful answers recognised that the extract comes from the start of the play and they used their answer to illustrate how he is changed by his adventure. Some referenced later moments with Mrs Aouda and described how his feelings towards her soften him.

A few answers simply focused exclusively on the idea of presenting him as a typical English gentleman, with extensive descriptions of the use of an RP accent. These answers failed to acknowledge any complexity of the character.

8.4

Most students answering this question recognised the significance of the extract in Rosie's journey towards independence from her family. A number of answers skilfully contrasted ideas for the extract with performance ideas for Rosie's opening monologue. This allowed them to discuss how important her family were and the growth she experiences during the play.

Other insightful answers focused on her relationship with her siblings and linked this to the idea that everything that she 'knows to be true' is disproven as she watches her family unravel.

A few students interpreted Rosie as unfeeling towards Bob in the extract and described her desperation to get away from her family. This showed a lack of understanding of how torn she is about leaving them and everything she knows

9.4

Some very thoughtful and insightful answers were seen in response to this question. The most successful responses charted how Meggie is shaped by the tragedies she witnesses as her family falls apart. Some wrote very sensitively about the impact of Lynette's death and also focused on the kindness she shows Sephy at the funeral. In the best answers, there was a real sense of the depth of understanding of the complexity of her character.

Many used performance ideas for the extract to explore her feelings about the use of violence in the Nought's struggle against oppression. Others also insightfully discussed the scene in terms of her role as wife and mother and her desire to protect her sons.

There were some students who had a very insecure knowledge of the character and so only focused on the extract and based their whole interpretation on her violence towards Ryan. They made assumptions about her being domineering, aggressive and controlling, without acknowledging the fear that drives her to lash out at her husband or that she is not violent in the rest of the play.

10.4

Few responses to this answer were seen, but the most successful focused on the complexity of Juliet's character. There were some insightful responses that recognised her courage, intelligence and decisiveness. Weaker answers tended only to focus on her love for Romeo and spent a lot of time exploring the nature of their relationship rather than providing a clear interpretation of her character.

Some students did not recognise that she was not weeping over Tybalt's death, this showed a lack of understanding of the significance of the extract.

11.4

Many answers in response to this question felt confused, partly because students did not seem to fully understand the nature of the relationship between Geof and Jo. Many clearly did not understand Geof's motivations for wanting to be part of Jo and the baby's life.

The most effective answers provided a range of performance ideas for several moments which highlighted his commitment to Jo, his kindness and patience, and the meaning Jo brings to his life.

There were a few answers that suggested inappropriate ways in which Geof's sexual identity might be explored. These ideas were often based on outdated and offensive stereotypes.

A summary of students' performance in Section B Question .5

There was a small increase in the number of students choosing to answer Question .5, although not enough responses were seen to draw conclusions about the performance of students when writing about specific texts. Set remained the most popular design skill to write about followed by costume and lighting, very few sound and puppet design answers were seen.

Many answers only focused on the extract, with no ideas provided for the play as a whole. Most answers lacked focus on the idea of using design 'to support the action'. Students need to be providing examples of how the design might be used at specific moments in both the extract and the play as a whole.

When writing about set the most effective answers acknowledged the genre and style and the requirements for transitions between locations. Some students also wrote in a very skilled way about the epic presentational style of *Noughts and Crosses* and considered this when explaining how they would represent the McGregor's home and then transform it into multiple other locations. Those writing about set design for *Blood Brothers* often described the use of composite set, with other items such as Mrs Johnstone's kitchen in Act Two, being trucked on. In a number of these answers the composite set was described, but no reference was made to how it would be used in the extract or the play as a whole.

There were several highly appropriate costume designs offered, particularly for *The Crucible*, where students were able to draw upon their extensive knowledge of appropriate fabrics and key terminology, demonstrating an understanding of the context of the extract and the play as a whole. A large number of responses seen only described one costume. Centres are reminded that it is a requirement that at least two of the characters' costumes in the extract are described.

Lighting answers often lacked an understanding of how lights can be employed to convey ideas or create mood and atmosphere. Most only focused on the use of colour to reflect the characters'

feelings, with no consideration of the style of the play. There was also rarely any reference to specific design skills such as the use of intensity, positioning, angles, focus or type of light used.

A summary of students' performance in Section C

This section of the paper tests students' knowledge and understanding of the work of theatre makers in a live performance setting.

There are three questions in this section; one question is focused on the evaluation and analysis of performers, and two questions focus on the work of a designer. Students only have to answer one question in this section. As in the previous series, the most popular choice remained Question 12, which focuses on performers. There was, however, an increase in students being prepared to write about design and there were some highly insightful and critical responses seen, particularly focusing on costume and set design.

The vast majority of students wrote about productions that were available on DVD or streaming sites. The most popular digital productions were: Billy Elliot: The Musical, Things I Know To Be True, Peter Pan, Jane Eyre, Treasure Island, A Small Island, Yerma, Frankenstein and Medea. In most cases, watching recorded performances did not impact the level of enjoyment and appreciation communicated in responses. Some very thoughtful and sensitive answers were seen that truly captured the joy of watching theatre and conveyed a sense of genuine engagement with work seen.

Some students struggled to introduce the production if they had watched a recorded performance. At times this led to confused and lengthy introductions where they gave details both of when the production was originally staged and when they saw the production. Several answers were seen, where the title of the production was not given and it was unclear what production had been seen.

In some answers, there was a sense that the whole production had not been watched and that students had only watched brief clips. This meant they were unable to recognise or communicate the significance of the moment in the production as a whole. To ensure students are able to craft answers that meet the demands of the question, they should not focus on a narrow range of brief moments of stage action nor only focus on one actor or one aspect of design. Centres must ensure students are prepared to 'discuss a variety of aspects' of a production, as per the specification.

Popular live productions included Woman in Black, A Monster Calls, Six, Everybody's Talking About Jamie, Noises Off, An Inspector Calls and A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time. Whether live or recorded, excellent answers captured moments from the production seen and brought it to life through vivid detail and description and then went on to analyse its impact in relation to the focus of the question, before offering an evaluative comment to define its relative success.

Many answers lacked this balance and it was not unusual to see students achieving excellent A03 marks, but limited or reasonable A04 marks. Success in this section relies on students ability to make the moments they have studied within a production relevant to the specific focus of the question. Pre-learning descriptions and in some cases evaluative statements is likely to be self-limiting.

There was an increase in the number of students who began with their Section C answer and then stopped to complete Section A and B before returning again to C. Students would often talk about one or two moments, then stop and then write about additional moments at the end of the paper. However, it was noted that when the student returned to Section C they had often lost focus on the specific requirements of the question and the response felt disjointed.

12

This question tests students' knowledge and understanding of how meaning is created in performance. This series the specific focus was on how two or more performers used their performance skills to show a relationship, a valid question within the parameters of the specification. The most effective responses focused on a series of 'moments' and brought them to life for the examiner through the use of vivid descriptions and accurate use of drama terminology.

Examiners noted the diverse range of interesting and innovative approaches when answering this question. Some students described how the use of physical theatre established and explored the relationships between the Price family in *Things I Know to Be True*. Others wrote about the non-naturalistic techniques used in *A Monster Calls* to highlight Conor's conflicted feelings about letting his mother go. Some also thought carefully about how the term 'relationship' might be interpreted in relation to the specific production seen. Some students wrote very effectively about more abstract relationships such as the relationship between younger and older versions of a character.

The majority of students wrote about the use of more naturalistic performance skills being used to show familial or romantic relationships. Some students chose to write about a single different actor in each moment, whereas others focused on the interaction between multiple actors, both approaches were equally successful.

Some students chose to focus on a series of key moments throughout the production to chart how a relationship had developed. Whilst the question did not require a focus on change this proved to be a very successful approach, providing a framework for meaningful evaluation and analysis.

There were a considerable number of students whose answers did not refer to the idea of showing a relationship. These answers most often focused on the communication of character. This was often seen when students focused on the birth of the monster in *Frankenstein*. Many provided analysis of how the actor's use of physicality conveyed a sense that he was like a vulnerable new born baby. However, others wrote very successfully about this moment making it relevant to the focus of the question by linking the communication of vulnerability to the Monster's dependence on his creator. Many also extended their focus slightly and described the moment that Frankenstein first sees his creation lying helpless on the floor.

Many other students focused on the creation of an audience response. This was most often seen when students were writing about productions such as *The Woman in Black*. Often students appeared to only be able to analyse and evaluate the moments discussed in terms of the tense atmosphere created or the fear the audience felt. Other students were able to write skilfully about this production in terms of how the relationship was shown. There were many highly insightful answers which compared the stilted relationship between the actor and Kipps in the opening scene, with the closer relationship they develop as they begin to rehearse.

Some students wrote about productions that only featured one actor. In many of these cases, students still made clear attempts to focus on how relationships were shown, often through the use of multi-rolling. To make sure students could access all available marks in this scenario, the mark scheme was amended and shared with examiners before they started marking. Analysis of the performance data of these students concluded their performance on question 12 was broadly in line with their performance on the rest of the paper, as well as in line with the performance across all learners with entries for GCSE Drama.

Centres are reminded that students should see at least one production that meets all of the recommendations as outlined in the specification.

A considerable number of students also chose to write about a single actor throughout a production. In some cases, they even wrote about them interacting with other actors, but without providing any details about the other actor's use of skills. This suggested a limited knowledge of the moment which was restricted to the single actor's performance. Examiners felt that in the majority of these responses, students were writing pre-learnt descriptions and felt unable to add additional detail about the performance of the other actor. This is another example of how limiting pre-learning material focusing on a single aspect of a production can be when it comes to successfully meeting the demands of the questions.

Other students wrote predominantly about one actor, with some brief descriptions of other actors' skills. This was a perfectly valid approach and was most often seen when there was an outstanding central performance of a protagonist such as in *Yerma* and *Medea*.

13

This thirty-two mark question tests students' knowledge and understanding of how meaning is created in performance, with a specific focus on how sound design could be used to create different moods. This question was answered by the fewest students. The most effective responses often focused on the non-naturalistic use of sound in *The Woman In Black* and *The Curious Incident of The Dog in The Night-Time*. In the latter, some very insightful answers focused on how sound was used to create moods by reflecting the emotions of Christopher. There were some particularly vivid and appropriate descriptions of the use of sound during the train station scene as Christopher becomes overwhelmed and a tense and uncomfortable mood is created.

Several students chose to write about musicals and exclusively focused on the use of song and music. This could have been a valid approach, but very limited detail was provided about how the sound of the song/music was created. Descriptions were often limited to statements such as 'the song was sad' or 'the music was slow'. This was then often followed with a lengthy evaluation of the mood created, but it was unclear how the sound created this mood.

Successful answers demonstrated an understanding that the work of a theatrical designer was being evaluated and analysed and focused on describing a range of design skills. Many students did not demonstrate a knowledge of how designers might create either diegetic or non-diegetic sounds.

14

This thirty-two mark question tests students' knowledge and understanding of how meaning is created in performance, with a specific focus on how costume or set designers communicated key themes. Due to the optionality built into the question, this proved to be the more popular design question. A few students misread the question and wrote about both design elements. Students should be reminded that even when a choice is offered answers should only ever focus on one design skill.

Examiners reported that the most successful costume responses were informed by students' working and practical understanding of costume design. Some students wrote in detail about a variety of aspects of design including length, fit, condition, colours, construction and choice of fabrics. They were then able to thoughtfully analyse and evaluate how specific design decisions

helped to communicate key themes. Some highly effective answers were seen based on *Six*, where the individual costumes of each of the queens were described in turn. These designs were then evaluated and analysed in terms of communication of the wider themes of female oppression and silence throughout history.

Set was a slightly more popular option than costume and *An Inspector Calls* was the most frequently discussed production. Some students wrote very effectively about the use of set in this production to highlight the key themes of inequality, the class divide and social responsibility. They were able to thoughtfully analyse the use of space, perspective and specific aspects of the set such as the positioning of the house on stilts. Many of the answers featured descriptions of the house collapsing, although most students were unable to describe how the designer had created this effect.

Some answers focused almost exclusively on the use of set by the actors. In these answers, the descriptions focused on the actors' performance skills rather than design skills. This approach was most commonly seen in answers focusing on *Lovesong*. As with costume, the most effective set answers described a range of design skills rather than just focusing on the overall aesthetic created.

Less successful answers for both costume and set often only focused on a single aspect of a design such as the colour. Other less effective responses focused on design to communicate something other than key themes. Many students appeared to have an insecure knowledge of the production they were writing about and so were unable to identify key themes.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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