

2016 VCE Drama examination report

General comments

The 2016 Drama written examination was based on the *VCE Drama Study Design 2014–2018*.

The examination was assessed out of 50 marks and comprised two sections:

- Section A – questions assessing students' skills in analysing the development and presentation of a solo performance (Unit 4, Outcomes 1 and 3) and an ensemble performance (Unit 3, Outcome 2)
- Section B – questions assessing students' skills in analysing and evaluating a production from the 2016 Drama Playlist (Unit 3, Outcome 3).

Advice for students and teachers

It is important that all students:

- have a clear understanding of non-naturalism as described in the study design
- ensure that they know the differences between play-making techniques, dramatic elements, stagecraft, expressive skills and performance skills
- have a clear understanding of ways in which the conventions of transformation of character, time, place and object can be manipulated by an actor; for example, through use of morphing, expressive skills, symbolic gesture, snap transitions, use of an action and reaction, use of a sound or word, giving and receiving, hiding and revealing, repetition of dialogue and the symbolic use of stagecraft
- understand the difference between analysing and evaluating. When analysing, students need to examine in detail to discover meaning. Evaluating involves making a judgment or critiquing something
- provide clear answers to the questions on the examination. There is no need to repeat the question in responding; however, it is important that answers are detailed and relevant to the question
- use pertinent and relevant examples
- use drama-specific language and terminology appropriately.

Specific information

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A

Question 1

The stimulus material for Question 1 contained contextual information and extracts, including images and text relating to four nursery rhymes. Students were required to use the stimulus material to develop a non-naturalistic performance on the life lessons contained in nursery rhymes. Students needed to draw on the key knowledge and skills acquired through the development and evaluation of their own solo performance work in Unit 4.

To answer this question comprehensively, students needed to plan their answers and think through the processes they used to develop both their short solo and their examination solo. They needed to think about the initial idea, how they might use a playmaking technique to develop it, the use of dramatic elements and expressive skills, transformation of character, use of props and the actor–audience relationship.

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	0	9	91	1.9

This question asked students to identify an idea that would be explored in the solo performance and explain how the idea came from the stimulus material. Ideas relating to narrative, character(s), style(s), convention(s), dramatic element(s) and stagecraft were identified by students. Responses needed to focus on how this idea would be explored in the solo performance. The idea could have been conceptual, thematic or literal, or a description of an element from the images or accompanying text. The majority of students managed this question well.

The following is an example of a possible response.

Stimulus: Little Miss Muffet image

Idea: that tension might be created through experimenting with the motivation and choice to scare someone, and the corresponding feeling of fear

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	0	1	27	72	2.7

The majority of students showed a good ability to brainstorm and to use this technique to develop ideas within the parameters of the question and using appropriate language.

Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	2	20	44	34	2.1

To obtain full marks for this question, students were required to use the information from their response to Question 1b. and describe how the role of the character would be developed through an improvisation activity such as role-play, hot-seating, trialling different ways of presenting a scene (such as using only mime or gesture), personification, or experimentation with different performance styles, conventions or dramatic elements. There needed to be a clear idea of the character's role and an understanding of how an improvisation activity could be used to develop

the character's role. The highest-scoring responses referenced the character's role by using terms such as the narrator, the protagonist or antagonist, the outsider, providing comic relief, the storyteller, alienating the audience, gaining sympathy from the audience, shocking the audience, motivation or status, etc., and displayed a sense of how the character's role would be explored during the improvisation activity.

The following is an example of a possible response.

The old woman – I will improvise a meeting with a child welfare officer. It will be a bit like a hot-seating exercise, where I come up with as many questions as possible about what I am doing to feed, clothe and manage the children, and my answers, which I will enact, give away a great deal about the comical ways the children overcome my best intentions. My motivation will be to prevent child welfare from taking the children away, but my actions will endanger my success in this.

Question 1d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	5	32	38	24	2.8

Some students found the requirements of this question difficult. It required students to analyse how an actor will create a dramatic moment on stage. Marks were not awarded for simply stating what the dramatic moment was. The highest-scoring responses clearly analysed how one dramatic element (conflict, contrast, climax, mood, rhythm, sound, space, symbol or tension) and two of the expressive skills (voice, gesture, movement or facial expression) would be used to create the dramatic moment, used drama-specific language and terminology and included pertinent examples. Low-scoring responses did not use appropriate drama-specific language and terminology, often referred to only one dramatic element and/or one expressive skill and/or provided a limited discussion that lacked detail.

The following is an example of a possible response.

Dramatic moment – Jack falls down the hill

The actor moves in a slow motion manner towards the audience, swinging his arms forward and back as he uses his voice in a deep, low tone, saying 'Noooooooooooo', as if he is rolling down the hill. The actor moves his body in a slow rhythm, exaggerating the slow-motion tumble for comic effect as he somersaults forwards, repeating the words, 'Down, down', in a staccato rhythm. This movement and word is repeated to show the momentum of the character falling down the hill, until suddenly the rhythm and action stops as the actor lies flat on his back and whispers, 'And broke his crown'.

Question 1e.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	2	4	19	27	24	17	7	3.5

This question required students to think about how the life lesson developed in Question 1b. was to be revealed or reinforced. Students needed to explain, in detail, how they would use transformation of character, the symbolic use of prop and the manipulation of the actor–audience relationship to create this transformation and emphasise the life lesson. Students are reminded that in questions where there are specific requirements they must refer to all of the points in their response.

Transformation techniques could have included: morph/meld; snap; symbolic use of gesture; use of a sound, word or action; use of action/reaction; repetition of dialogue; or exploration of the speed

of transition. Most students referred to a handheld object when describing symbolic use of a prop. Others referred to the use of a piece of fabric or an item of clothing such as a cloak or a hood.

The actor–audience relationship is the way in which an actor deliberately manipulates the audience’s emotions and moods, and responds to the action. In responding to this question students could have discussed the placement of the performer in relation to the audience, the way the actor addressed and engaged the audience, or the emotional and intellectual response to a character’s situation.

The highest-scoring responses explained how transformation, use of prop and the actor–audience relationship would be integrated in their application. These responses were clear and succinct, used drama-specific language and terminology appropriately, and included clear reference to how the transformation manipulated the actor–audience relationship, revealed or reinforced the life lesson and was the climax of the performance. Low-scoring responses often used weak or non-pertinent examples and/or did not refer to all the requirements of the question.

The following is an example of a possible response.

In the moment of climax, the actor as Little Miss Muffet is lying on the floor tangled in the pieces of elastic – symbolic of the spider’s web. She is panicking, breathing fast, struggling to free herself. The audience is holding their breath, thinking that the spider is about to strangle her to death. The elastic, although six individual strands, is connected at one end. The actor starts to hum the melodic, gentle song that is the spider’s signature tune. As she hums, her body relaxes and stops struggling, and the pieces of elastic loosen. She rolls towards the front of the stage/space and comes to stillness kneeling in baby pose, further unravelling the tangled ‘web’. As she slowly stands, the actor morphs into the spider, with slow, elegant, sustained arm and body movements; she has released the elastic and is holding it in one hand. She focuses down at the little girl and whispers, ‘I am here to assist you ... perhaps you can look at me differently and we can be friends?’ The spider reaches out one of her ‘arms’, with the elastic helping to extend forward and down towards the girl, inviting her to take the other end and join her, which the little girl tentatively does. The audience is now relaxed and relieved that the little girl is in no danger, and are inspired by the exchange, which reinforces the message – even though people/creatures may be different from you, they are not necessarily scary.

The following is an example of a possible mid-range response.

The actor playing Jack (brother) hugs the bucket upside down to his chest saying, ‘It’s Jill’s fault that we have no water.’ He gestures to the audience with a knowing shrug and raised eyebrows, then rolls his eyes and smirks. The actor then slowly lowers the bucket towards the floor, and with a slow morph, relaxing his shoulders, he changes his stance to a more open one, then with a softer voice, as Jill (sister) smiles at the audience and sings, ‘If we carry the bucket together, some water will be ours’. She then offers half the bucket to Jack with one hand, finishing with a tableau, leaving the audience to realise whose approach is the best.

Question 2

This question required students to consider how they would use the stimulus material provided in the detachable insert to develop and present a devised non-naturalistic ensemble performance. The stimulus material contained several images, a piece of text and contextual information about an ensemble group of actors who were to devise, develop and present an ensemble performance called ‘Catastrophe’.

The images, text, themes, scenario and characters provided evoked particular moods and implied styles. Most students embraced these ideas and wrote about concepts and situations that were

clearly linked to the stimulus material. Many students were able to relate to, and empathise with, the themes of the material: individual versus the community, fear of the unknown, life can take you by surprise.

Conventions from one of three specific non-naturalistic performance styles – Brecht’s Epic Theatre, Grotowski’s Poor Theatre and Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty – needed to be used in the ensemble performance. Information pertaining to the study of these non-naturalistic performance styles is on pages 11 and 12 of the *VCE Drama Study Design 2014–2018*. The study design states that ‘Non-naturalism is a broad term for all performance styles that are not dependent on the life-like representation of everyday life...’ and is based on the work of Artaud, Brecht and Grotowski. Across Units 1–4 students should study the work of these practitioners but also study a broad range of other non-naturalistic forms such as pre-naturalistic styles or non-Western styles.

Students needed to draw on the key knowledge and skills acquired through the development, presentation (Outcome 1) and evaluation stages (Outcome 2) of their ensemble performance in Unit 3. It should be noted that non-naturalistic performance styles and techniques used by drama practitioners to develop non-naturalistic performances are part of the key knowledge for Unit 3, Outcomes 1 and 2. Students, therefore, needed to have a thorough knowledge of these concepts.

As for Question 1, students needed to consider the whole question before they began responding in order to identify the relationship between the sub-parts of the question. This means that students needed to spend time thinking through the whole performance that they were developing before answering the different question parts. Students needed to choose their stimulus and then consider the performance style that would be used. They were required to use expressive skills, dramatic elements, stagecraft and transformation skills appropriate to the chosen performance style.

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	2	14	41	44	2.3

Responses to this question necessitated an explanation as to why the ensemble group of actors chose this performance style, a reference to the stimulus material and one of: chosen theme, stagecraft or intended effect on the audience.

The following are examples of possible responses.

Example 1

We chose Poor Theatre because we were inspired by the image of the three sculptural figures and the tension suggested by the spatial relationships between them. We would explore how to utilise the acting space in a variety of ways to create tension and manipulate the actor–audience relationship.

Example 2

We will use Epic Theatre because we want to project a didactic message about the impact of catastrophes. We will use props of placards to teach the audience statistics about types of natural disasters or the catastrophe of war and juxtapose them with scenes showing the impact of smaller catastrophes such as crying over spilt milk. This will cause the audience to reflect on what is really important in life.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	2	18	80	1.8

This question was well answered. The majority of students were able to identify two of the characters who would appear in this ensemble performance and describe how an aspect(s) of the stimulus material prompted the ensemble group of actors to select these characters.

The following is an example of a possible response.

Character 1 – the man who lives in the truck/Frank. The truck cabin looks like it would be somewhere to live.

Character 2 – the man who gets really angry. The red colour in this stimulus prompted me to think of anger.

Question 2c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	11	37	32	17	2.5

The opening of the ensemble performance portrays the catastrophe. The highest-scoring responses analysed how the actors would use movement and space to create this sequence. In high-scoring responses there was a clear sense that this scene portrays a catastrophe, through a sequence of fast-paced dramatic moments involving all five actors, consistent with the selected performance style.

The following is an example of a possible response.

(Theatre of Cruelty) A bomb...The menacing sound of a deep, rumbling hum will increase in volume throughout the opening sequence. The first thing the audience sees is the actors positioned at different points on the stage, on the lowest level, their bodies facing out to different parts of the audience. They are holding their hands to their ears as in stimulus image 4, their bodies and faces full of tension, their extreme despair clearly evident and it builds throughout the sequence. As the lights slowly brighten, the five individuals snap turn to see each other, in their own time. They agree, non-verbally, to head to high ground – the top rostrum. The sound is getting louder; they cannot take their hands away from their ears. In a travelling pattern that is identical in sequence but executed in personal time – three steps forward, freezing, folding towards the ground (trying to hide) then releasing to upright and leaping as far as they can – the actors make their way to the top level. The first makes it and encourages the others through focus and facial expression. They all arrive and together move to the back corner of the rostra, finally releasing their hands from their ears, frantically grabbing each other, folding into the floor, protecting each other from the imminent explosion – a frozen tableau.

Question 2d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	6	19	41	35	2.1

This was a reasonably well-answered question. There were a number of clear, detailed descriptions of how the actors would use one area of stagecraft to explore the characters' response(s) to the catastrophe and whether it united, divided or confused them.

The following is an example of a possible response.

Set – The family separate and move from the central playing area to different parts of the performance space, all adopting varying stances, leaving the daughter-in-law alone in the centre. The mother moves to the upper area and looks down on her; the father moves far left and takes out his pipe. The husband moves to the stairs with his hands outstretched to his mother and wife.

The following is an example of a possible mid-range response.

Costume – The caring woman rips off her scarf and bandages the victim. The selfish woman turns away and buttons her coat tightly, and the nervous man pulls nervously at his tie.

Question 2e.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	8	11	29	28	17	7	2.6

Many students found this question challenging. Students needed to analyse how the ensemble would create the moment of transformation of time and/or place. They also needed to demonstrate what happens before, during and after the transformation. The whole ensemble needed to be involved and the scene had to be consistent with the conventions of the chosen performance style. The highest-scoring responses analysed how the actors would create the transformation of time and/or place using focus and/or energy. These responses included clear references to how the moment of transformation was consistent with the chosen performance style, used pertinent example(s) and included appropriate use of drama-specific language and terminology. Low-scoring responses gave an inadequate explanation of how the actors would create the transformation, provided limited examples and showed a difficulty in linking the decisions made to the chosen performance style.

The following is an example of a possible response.

(Poor Theatre) The family start in the positions from the previous scene sitting on boxes as chairs, with clearly stylised frozen gestures focusing their varied attitudes towards the daughter-in-law. The transformation occurs as energy levels drop from intense and change to being happy and relaxed, with actors changing their focus to looking at each other then moving with a relaxed gait towards the daughter-in-law. The actors push the boxes into the centre of the space and the daughter-in-law stands on top as the other actors surround her, holding hands with each other as they sing *Silent Night*. Then, the characters smile at the audience and walk towards them, welcoming them to the family gathering at Christmas in the new daughter-in-law's house.

Section B

This section related to the Unit 3 analysis of a play from the 2016 Drama playlist. Students were required to select one play from the list and answer the three parts of the question that related to their chosen play. While there was a choice of plays, parts a. and b. were common questions for each play.

Play chosen	none	<i>Peddling</i>	<i>Blind</i>	<i>Bright World</i>	<i>Picnic at Hanging Rock</i>	<i>Tales of a City by the Sea</i>	<i>In Search of Owen Roe</i>
%	1	32	9	4	43	7	4

Part a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	7	34	25	33	1.9

Part b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	7	34	25	33	1.9

Part c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	5	4	10	17	18	15	15	8	5	3	4.4

Questions 1–6

Question a.

In this question students were required to explain how one actor used one performance skill to portray a character in performance.

The highest-scoring responses described, in appropriate detail, the ways one actor used one performance skill to portray a character, displaying a good understanding of the performance and using pertinent examples. Low-scoring responses listed or gave a brief or confused explanation of how one actor portrayed a character, or confused the actor with the character, only discussed the character in general terms or discussed an expressive skill instead of a performance skill. Some low-scoring responses also gave generic responses, with little reference to the actual character or performance.

Question b.

Question b. required an analysis rather than an explanation. This can be a more challenging skill; however, the question was, in general, well answered. Low-scoring responses only listed or briefly discussed one dramatic moment and/or the use of one area of stagecraft and/or how multiple actors used stagecraft. There were some responses that showed confusion about a specific area

of stagecraft and/or a specific dramatic moment and some that did not refer specifically to the performance or the area of stagecraft. High-scoring responses displayed good analytical skills and a detailed knowledge of the performance.

Question c.

While the questions in part c. were specific to the performance attended, each question asked for an evaluation of the manipulation of a dramatic element and a theatrical convention – either a performance style or a transformation of place, time or object. Students needed to use higher-order-thinking skills to answer this question successfully. Evaluation means students are required to make a judgment about or critique the performance. They could do this by discussing its effectiveness and what was successful in the performance and what was less successful. Some low-scoring responses gave a perfunctory evaluation, with little analysis of the performance, or showed a limited or confused understanding of the use of the required convention(s) and dramatic element. Other low-scoring responses displayed an understanding of the required convention(s) and dramatic element but with a limited understanding of how they were used in the performance or a discussion of only the convention or dramatic element, not the manipulation of both. The higher-scoring responses displayed a clear and succinct evaluation of how the required convention(s) and dramatic element were used in the performance, with a thorough and insightful understanding of the play, and clear and perceptive explanations.