2024 VCE Drama written external assessment report

General comments

The 2024 VCE Drama written examination tested students on skills and knowledge from Units 3 and 4 of the [VCE Drama Study Design From 2019](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/assessment/vce-assessment/past-examinations/Pages/Drama.aspx). It consisted of three main questions in two sections.

Section A focused on the plays seen for Unit 3, Outcome 3 and included three components. Students who performed well in this section addressed all aspects of each task, were confident using drama terminology and were able to clearly provide examples from the chosen play to analyse and evaluate.

Section B included two questions, each with five tasks to complete, which took students through the process of devising an ensemble performance and a solo performance. The ability to respond to all components of each task using sophisticated, accurate and detailed drama terminology was the distinguishing feature of high-scoring responses. High-scoring responses included choices of performance styles and conventions across the sequence of questions appropriate to the ideas they were exploring. These responses demonstrated understanding of the logical progression the examination was taking through the devising process for both ensemble and solo performances, and explained how the actor(s) would work in devising and performing the imagined work.

Common errors related to students not understanding the terminology and applying the wrong skill or element as a result. Students often described rather than analysed, and therefore didn’t properly explore the intended effect that an actor was trying to create. In Section A, the most important area for improvement is for students to know how to evaluate, i.e. to apply a range of evaluative terms throughout the response rather than tacking them on at the end. In Section B, students need to ensure they don’t get so involved in describing the narrative of the imagined performance that they forget to address the specifics of the question.

A useful strategy for students preparing for future examinations would be to develop a glossary of key terms and practise the use of appropriate terminology to explain how an actor applies expressive and performance skills in a variety of styles and applies a range of production areas.

In preparation for the examination, students could:

* revise all key terminology, particularly the differences between performance skills and dramatic elements
* review specific moments from the play seen for Unit 3, Outcome 3
* learn the names of actors and creatives in the playlisted play they have studied
* practise evaluation skills, including the use of evaluative language that conveys an actor’s ability to apply expressive skills and performance skills to communicate mood, contrast, tension, rhythm and conflict
* practise describing the processes of devising an ensemble or a solo as opposed to performing to an audience
* revise main performance styles and conventions
* revise how play-making techniques are applied across the development process
* consider using different-coloured highlighters to identify the different requirements within each question, both during practice and during the examination itself.

Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual 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

This question tested students’ knowledge and skills developed during Unit 3, Outcome 3, providing an opportunity to evaluate and analyse an actor’s performance. Students were required to select one play from the 2024 VCE Drama playlist to write about.

Students generally wrote with confidence about the plays they saw. The Trojan War and The Roof Caving In were very popular choices, with Garage Girls and World Problems also featuring in many responses. a/lone’s season was quite late in the semester and this was probably why very few students wrote on it.

A common error was students appearing to confuse the actor with the character.

Question 1a.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
| % | 3 | 6 | 38 | 54 | 2.4 |

Students were required to explain how an actor manipulated one production area to create meaning in one moment in the play.

High-scoring responses made clear how the production area selected was being manipulated or interacted with in the performance, and what the moment was. High-scoring responses referencing lighting or sound design as the production area explained how the actor responded to, or performed with, this production area to create meaning. These responses clearly showed how the actor’s application of this production area communicated an idea within the moment of the play. Lower-scoring responses were less specific about the meaning created or the moment being discussed.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Jonathan Price, in the battle scene between Hector and Achilles, manipulated the production area of sound design. The sound design, of which played cartoonish sound effects of punches and gun shots, was manipulated by Price as he moved in unison with it. This created a chaotic, comedic actor–audience relationship.

Question 1b.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
| % | 4 | 3 | 18 | 35 | 28 | 13 | 3.2 |

Students were required to analyse how one actor applied one expressive skill and one performance skill to represent a character in a specific moment of climax.

Students’ ability to identify how the actor’s skills contributed or responded to the climactic moment was the chief point of distinction between high-scoring and low-scoring responses.

High-scoring responses:

* clearly described a climactic moment and how its creation was aided by the use of one expressive skill and one performance skill
* used drama-specific terminology and referred to choices that built towards a climactic moment, such as heightening tension or creating mood.

Lower-scoring responses:

* tended to be too general in their analysis of the skills, for example, referring only to ‘voice’ without referencing qualities of voice such as pitch, pace, volume, rhythm or timing
* were often too general in the discussion of the performance skills of energy and focus.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Susie Berry, who played Achilles in one moment of the show used the performance skill of timing, and gesture to represent Achilles powerful advantage over Hector within the fight scene. Susie Berry extended her right arm, making a twisting clasping action with her hand, which represents her mind controlling ability to crush Hector’s bones. This is demonstrated by the sound track playing crushing bones sounds in timing with Berry’s gesture to communicate that Achilles is the powerful one capable of causing the damage to Hector. Berry is demonstrating Achilles power by approaching Hector and miming pulling out a sword. The gesture of lifting the sword and revealing it to the audience (symbolically), while Hector is positioned on his knees below her examples the moment of climax; the death of Hector. In addition to this gesture, Berry aims to pull out the sword in sync with the sword sliding sound and stabbing sounds, creating timing to illustrate the scene to the audience, demonstrating the rise of tension. Indeed, it is at this climax, which both timing and gesture are used to convey the intensity of the battle, making the battle engaging and exciting for the audience to watch and feel immersed in.

Question 1c.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Average |
| % | 3 | 2 | 6 | 30 | 24 | 18 | 11 | 5 | 4.0 |

Students were required to evaluate how one actor created and maintained an actor–audience relationship, referencing two specific moments in the performance.

Most students identified clear moments to reference and were able to describe or explain how actors created those moments. The idea of two moments was generally well understood, even if the second moment was part of the same scene. Students who only described the moments without analysis did not score highly. Students who completed the analysis well but didn’t include an evaluation also could not be scored in the high range.

High-scoring responses:

* embedded drama terminology and referred to the actor’s use of expressive or performance skills, dramatic elements, production areas or conventions as evidence to support their answers
* used a variety of evaluative language and embedded this language throughout
* were articulate about the moments in the play they were discussing and how the actor impacted the audience each time.

Lower-scoring responses:

* demonstrated confusion about the nature of an actor–audience relationship, focusing on the idea of personal relationships rather than the requirements of actor–audience relationship as a performance skill (this confusion particularly appeared in responses about The Trojan War)
* analysed but did not evaluate
* only identified one moment.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Carly Sheppard successfully created actor–audience relationship in “World Problems”, assisted with the use of a consumable prop strawberry. In the dramatic moment of ‘the opening’, Sheppard stood centre stage, facing square to the audience as the unnamed character of ‘the performer’. Sheppard then commendably began swaying her arms to convey a child-like figure, as she nonchalantly nibbled on a strawberry before disposing of it’s leafy top. This established the actor–audience relationship, as she evoked a nostalgic and carefree mood, purposefully creating a connection with the audience. Sheppard then manipulated this relationship in the later dramatic moment of ‘the recluse’. In this moment, Sheppard sat within the set vortex, cradling herself, before slowly sitting to face the audience. She then skillfully began to consume a strawberry in it’s entirety, allowing it’s juices to drip down her arm. This successfully manipulated the audience’s mood, as they were forced to have a visceral reaction to the vulgarity of this dramatic moment. The uneasy mood that was created here juxtaposed that of the previous moment, forcing the audience to become detached from the performance. In turn, this allowed them to consider the meaning of this vulgarity, as Sheppards consumption of the only organic matter on stage (other than herself) provided commentary on the hapless consumption of earth’s natural resources. Overall, Sheppard effectively established and manipulated actor–audience relationship in “World Problems”, allowing the audience to truly consider the commentary made.

Section B

Question 1

In this question, students were asked to imagine themselves devising an ensemble performance with a group of actors, similar in scope to their experience in Unit 3, Outcome 1. They were given four colour photographs as stimulus material to imagine a play exploring the idea of ‘achievement’. Students were required to select a performance style to work with across the ensemble-devising process.

The five tasks in this question followed a logical progression through the devising process, inviting students to envisage how they would develop three specific moments in this performance. The process was explained through information provided in boxes accompanying the specific task required. High-scoring responses clearly demonstrated the student had read and was responding to the information provided. Lower-scoring responses tended to focus on the narrative of the student’s initial idea at the expense of the specifics of each task.

Question 1a.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 0.2 | 8 | 91 | 1.9 |

Students were required to write down one idea they took from any or all of the four stimulus images, and explain how the dramatic potential of this idea was inspired by the stimulus material. Students who identified an idea but did not relate it directly to one or more of the images could not be awarded full marks.

Question 1b.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 1 | 7 | 43 | 42 | 6 | 2.5 |

Students were required to explain how the acting ensemble would explore application of symbol through one production area when developing the dramatic potential of the idea identified in the previous task. The instructions for this task stated that it related to the process of developing a moment in the play, not a performance of that moment. Addressing all aspects of this task and ensuring it reflected a development activity was the main challenge of this task.

The majority of students were able to discuss how they explored the application of symbolism using a production area while maintaining the thematic link with the original idea from Question 1a.

High-scoring responses:

* included choices that were appropriate to their identified performance style
* made it clear that this was a part of the exploration of the application of symbol, rather than a moment in performance, by referring to specific play-making techniques and processes
* included a clear moment to discuss, helping to link their performance style with the intended dramatic potential from Question 1a.

Lower-scoring responses:

* didn’t explain how application of symbol would be made clear (saying it is a symbol without explaining how is not adequate)
* did not explain how the scene was being developed, only stating that it was being developed
* got caught up in a narrative and lost the sense of a moment.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

The group of actors will explore application of symbol through the use of a trophy prop to develop the idea of teamwork. The trophy symbolically represents victory, but no character can touch the prop, unless they are connected to every other character physically, or synchronised through song or dance. The group will experiment different ways characters can touch the prop and achieve victory, such as a human pyramid of choreographed dance to present cooperation in the performance.

Question 1c.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
| % | 3 | 23 | 48 | 27 | 2.0 |

Students were required to describe how the acting ensemble would use improvisation to explore one convention of the chosen performance style in the development of the second moment. The focus of this task was using improvisation to explore a convention as part of the play-making process.

High-scoring responses clearly articulated how improvisation would be used to explore a convention, and what moment would be developed. The convention was appropriate to the performance style, useful for the selected moment and could be explored in improvisation.

Lower-scoring responses did not make it clear how a moment would be improvised, or described a moment in performance rather than its development. In some cases, conventions were not consistent with the selected performance style. Using one of the four prescribed conventions (transformation of time, place, character or application of symbol) generally did not benefit students as much as using conventions specific to their choice of performance style.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Convention: Actors body as primary expression

The ensemble will improvise by moving around the space as one person yells out a challenge such as “climbing a mountain” and all actors group together creating the mountain with their bodys. This will help explore the different journeys people can take to victory through the actors bodys. This will establish a moment when the actors are in the middle of the journey.

Question 1d.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
| % | 3 | 3 | 18 | 39 | 28 | 9 | 3.1 |

Students were required to analyse how their acting ensemble would create a third moment of their performance to explore the theme of achievement. In doing this, they needed to show how the actors would manipulate their use of space and apply another dramatic element as well as a different convention from the one used previously. The information supplied for this task did not stipulate a developmental task.

High-scoring responses:

* made creative, considered and appropriate choices about how to further develop the idea of achievement
* analysed in detail what the effect of their choices would be on the audience
* demonstrated understanding that manipulation implies an intention to create meaning or a specific effect
* included clear but concise descriptions of the third moment
* included detailed analysis of the manipulation of application of space, dramatic element or convention.

Lower-scoring responses:

* did not make the moment clear
* described the moment without linking the student’s ideas back to the idea of achievement
* gave a narrative description of a scene that may or may not have linked back to the scenes and ideas explored earlier in the examination
* used the same convention as the previous question
* selected a convention not appropriate to the chosen performance style
* included little or no analysis of the manipulation of application of space and/or another dramatic element or convention.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Convention: Mask

To show that the loss of an achievement is okay, the third moment in which the team loses will manipulate space, tension, and mask. When the loss occurs, the team splits up, with each actor moving to opposite corners of the performance space, each wearing a mask. Tension is built from the prolonged silence, where no one moves, or talks, they just stare at each other, communicating disconnect and disappointment. The tension is increased as one actor slowly walks to the centre of the stage, dropping their mask and opening their arms wide, but the other actors remain still for a prolonged moment, increasing the tension further. However, the tension is dissolved when a second actor drops their mask and rushes over to hug the first, followed by the rest. This is an immense moment of relief for the audience, with the dropping of the masks symbolising vulnerability, and the eventual hug communicating that failure from achievements is okay, and support and effort is what really matter.

Question 1e.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 5 | 8 | 27 | 41 | 19 | 2.6 |

Students were required to analyse how sound would be applied in different ways to refine one of the moments they had already written about, to enhance its impact upon the audience. The focus of this task was delineating between sound as a dramatic element and sound design as a production area.

The majority of students demonstrated that they knew the difference between sound as a dramatic element and a production area. Far fewer students described how sound was used to refine the moment.

High-scoring responses:

* included clear choices about how the use of sound and sound design would change or enhance the student’s previous choices, and linked this to the impact on the audience
* provided clear examples of the dramatic element of sound versus sound design, and included practical ways both could be utilised within the moment
* made succinct links with their chosen performance style that had song conventions, such as musical theatre or epic theatre.

Lower-scoring responses:

* did not link their examples of sound and sound design to the play-making technique of refining, or describe how they were being implemented to improve the moment
* appeared to confuse sound as a dramatic element and sound design as a production area
* were more descriptive than analytic.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

The actors will use the production area of sound to further assault the senses and the dramatic element to enhance the impact of rythum. The production area will have an increasing ringing which will become irritating loud, provoking an uncertainty and fear within the audience. Additionally, the dramatic element of sound can be used as the gestures can hit their bodies, making a slapping sound as they snap with the rythum, enhancing that established pace.

Question 2

In this question, students were asked to imagine themselves devising a solo performance exploring the relationship between two characters. They were given four colour photographs as stimulus material. The five tasks in this question followed a logical progression through the devising process, inviting students to envisage how they would develop the characters and how the actor would transform between them. The process was further supported through information provided in boxes accompanying each of the five specific tasks. Students were required to apply aspects of another performance style, different to that applied in Question 1, to enhance an eclectic style to work with across the solo devising process.

Students were told that the performance would be performed in a single, clearly lit space. This information was provided to help students reference their experience in Unit 4, Outcome 2.

High-scoring responses made it clear that the student had read and was responding to this information. They also labelled the two characters and identified their relationship. Lower-scoring responses tended to focus on explaining the narrative of the student’s initial idea at the expense of the specifics of each task.

Question 2a.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 0.4 | 8 | 91 | 1.9 |

Students were required to explain how the stimulus material inspired the idea of the relationship between the two characters.

To receive full marks, students needed to make a specific reference to some aspect of the stimulus material in relation to the characters’ relationship.

Question 2b.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
| % | 1 | 11 | 50 | 37 | 2.3 |

Students were required to describe how the actor would develop one character by manipulating expressive skills using improvisation. Again, this was a task that asked the student to consider the process of developing a character and how improvisation is used in this process.

High-scoring responses:

* described specific improvisational activities and how they would be used to develop a character using expressive skills, which were clearly linked to one of the characters identified earlier
* explained how the actor manipulated expressive skills in trialling a character.

Lower-scoring responses:

* described how they would create a character through their expressive skills, but not how they would use improvisation
* described two characters.

Question 2c.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 2 | 9 | 49 | 30 | 10 | 2.4 |

Students were required to complete either a brainstorm or a script to show how they would develop the opening moment of the solo performance, consistent with their chosen performance style. This opening moment needed to include how the actor would use the space and reference the relationship between the two characters outlined in Question 2a. In the information box, students were given some simple parameters to establish the task. The challenge in this task was to ensure that all aspects of the task were clearly addressed.

A similar number of students chose each option (brainstorming or scripting).

High-scoring responses:

* included choices that were appropriate for the student’s selected performance style
* clearly articulated how the relationship between the characters would be explored
* discussed space in appropriate and creative ways that had clear and intentional impacts on the audience
* conveyed a clear sense of this being an opening scene to engage an audience
* included very good use of terminology
* brainstorming: included plenty of ideas explored using a clear and logical mind map layout
* scripting: used the conventions of scripting, including stage directions and dialogue.

Lower-scoring responses:

* tended to not complete all aspects of the task (in particular, appeared to forget that it was the opening scene)
* did not include a sense of the relationship between the characters
* wrote about brainstorming or scripting rather than doing them
* included limited use of terminology.

Question 2d.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
| % | 4 | 3 | 18 | 34 | 27 | 14 | 3.2 |

Students were required to analyse how the actor would use a specific moment of transformation to explore the relationship identified at the start of Question 2. The focus of the task was the specifics of the transformation process: naming it, identifying how three or more expressive skills would be used to show the transformation from one character to the next, and describing how the actor would use one or more of the listed production areas in the process. The boxed information explicitly stated that the actor would show a distinct contrast between the two characters.

High-scoring responses:

* included detailed analysis of a clear moment of transformation of character, which used at least three expressive skills and one production area, describing how the actor would present both characters and transform between them, and how their choices would affect the audience
* often had a clear layout with Character 1’s expressive skills followed by the transformation technique and then Character 2’s expressive skills; the use of the production area was woven into the response
* included clear contrast between the actor’s use of expressive skills for each character
* applied sophisticated use of drama terminology, particularly the naming of transformation techniques
* included a succinct but clear description of the relationship between the characters, linked to the transformation.

Lower-scoring responses:

* described how expressive skills would be applied but not why or how the skill would explore the relationship between the two characters
* provided fewer than three expressive skills
* included inaccurate use of terminology
* used a production area other than one of those listed (for example, lighting).

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

To transform between Laura and Bill, the actor will use a snap transition, and manipulate costume, voice, facial expression and gesture to show the character’s fan/celebrity relationship. When first portraying Laura, the actor uses a slow, elegant and refined voice, giving the impression that Laura is well read and thoughtful with her language. The slightly squinted eyes and slow, regal hand gestures give Laura a sense of seductivity, and she wears the costume of a feathered boa off her shoulders, which works to present Laura as a glamorous star. At the word “Click!”, the actor instantly transforms into Bill. Bill’s voice is much quicker than Laura’s, and also fluctuates in tone slightly. This works to show Bill as eager and somewhat frantic. The actor gives Bill a wide-eyed expression of awe, and uses quick gestures to symbolise the click of a camera. The Boa also transforms, and loops around The Actor’s neck like a camera strap. The juxtaposition of Laura’s precise and slow disposition and Bill’s energetic and quick portrayal creates contrast between the two, and further establishes the fan/celebrity dynamic.

Question 2e.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mark | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
| % | 11 | 23 | 43 | 23 | 1.8 |

Students were required to describe how the actor would create a moment when the relationship between the two characters changed, using one convention from their chosen performance style and one performance skill (but not actor–audience relationship). The information box informed students they could not use transformation of character, time and place, or application of symbol.

High-scoring responses:

* clearly outlined what had changed in the relationship
* included convention choices that linked cleverly to the performance style chosen
* clearly articulated what the moment looked, sounded or felt like for the audience
* articulated how the actor applied the performance skill clearly and accurately.

Lower-scoring responses:

* chose a convention that was not appropriate to the chosen performance style
* did not make it clear how/when/why the relationship changed
* were too general in their description of how the actor used focus or energy
* were engaged in the character’s narrative journey and forgot to address the specifics of the task.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

As the adult woman, the actor will use direct address as an Epic Theatre convention, and focus. Previously, the relationship has been negative, with a lack of trust from the little girl. In this moment, the actor will turn to the audience, breaking the fourth wall for the first time. Directly addressing the audience, the actor speaks neutrally about the positive side of growing up. Focusing on the audience members for the entire monologue, the actor creates a sense of tranquillity, implying something has changed for the better.