

2015 VCE Theatre Studies stagecraft examination report

General comments

In 2015, the Theatre Studies Stagecraft examination comprised 13 monologue choices covering a range of theatrical styles, genres and cultural origins. There were six female character monologue choices, five male character monologue choices and two neutral (male or female) character monologue choices. Students chose one monologue from the prescribed list. In 2015, some monologues were reproduced in their entirety, while others were formed by cutting and pasting passages to form the monologues, thus allowing students to address the challenge of shifts in time, persons and places that this requires. Students could choose to interpret their chosen monologue using either Acting and Direction **or** Design (any two of costume, set, properties, sound, make-up).

The VCAA sets a single prescribed version of each monologue for this examination. This is the only version of the monologue that is examinable. Upon request, a PDF of the complete set of prescribed monologues can be sent to schools. Details of how to make this request are on the examination paper. Additionally, the examination paper gives instructions as to which lines are to be included and omitted from the interpretation of the prescribed monologue. The interpretation of deleted passages is not examinable.

The stagecraft examination requires students to think creatively, expressively, imaginatively and theatrically. There are specific requirements for interpreting the monologue whether the student chooses to use Acting and Direction **or** Design. The specifications are different for each. Students are advised to become familiar with and adhere to these specifications. Students should also follow the 'Guidelines for students and teachers', as printed on the examination paper, and note that the content of the guidelines may change from year to year.

Re-contextualisation of the monologue (that is, changing details such as the original time and/or setting to another context) is permissible for this task. However, any re-contextualisation of the monologue should take into account the scene in which the monologue is embedded and the greater world of the play.

Students should be aware that the rooms used for stagecraft examinations are not necessarily theatrical performance spaces and that their dimensions may vary. The student being assessed is solely responsible for bringing all items in and out of the examination room without assistance, and this should occur within the allotted time. Students should note that their total time in the examination room must not exceed 12 minutes. For these reasons, it is advised that students make judicious decisions about the materials/items they bring into, and set up in, the room. It is recommended that students take no more than 2 minutes to set up before commencing Stage 1 of their examination. Failure to do so may result in the student not having sufficient time to complete all three stages of the examination. Students should be aware that venues are hired spaces and, therefore, the furniture supplied is not to be stood upon. Under no circumstances should the furniture or the floor be damaged. The examination room contains two chairs for the student to use (no table is supplied), should they wish to do so. When in doubt, or if there are particular requirements, students should bring their own furniture. The assessors' table(s) is for assessment purposes only. Students are not to place objects on the assessors' table(s) or use the table(s) in

any way during their examination. It should be noted that students are allocated an examination room. Students and teachers are not permitted to request a change of room. Students should plan for their interpretation to be flexible enough for a variety of room sizes, lighting conditions and floor coverings.

The examination paper contains information regarding objects and substances that students are not permitted to use. The use of breaking glass, stage blood, other liquids or anything that may damage the flooring/floor covering or furniture is often not necessary, can be hazardous and is generally not advised. Liquids are not forbidden, but there is a high expectation that the use of liquids will be limited, highly controlled and very well rehearsed. Students must not use any objects or substances that may cause injury to themselves or others.

Each examination room has a single power point for the use of electrical equipment, such as audio devices. However, it is the responsibility of the student to plan for the use of such equipment beforehand, including considering whether to bring batteries and/or an extension cord. Students are also advised to check the sound level of audio equipment and, if applicable, to be familiar with the remote control devices for the equipment. All equipment should be tested and tagged, including extension cords. Students may bring a laptop, MP3 player, tablet or other such portable electronic device into the examination room. Recording functions on audio equipment must be disabled during the examination. Where a laptop is used, the student should direct the screen of the device towards the assessors.

Areas of strength and weakness (for both Acting and Direction, and Design options)

High-scoring responses were generally characterised by:

- thorough knowledge of the monologue, the associated scene and the whole playscript
- a high level of direct research (for example, researching the play or playwright) or indirect research (for example, researching associated times, settings, themes or ideas)
- a strong and consistent directorial/design vision for the interpretation
- a strong correlation between the interpretation of the monologue and its context(s), including those within the scene and the greater play
- a high level of understanding of subtext and the intended meaning of the playwright
- a strong understanding and application of theatrical style(s)
- clearly evident application of directorial/design decisions
- high-level use of theatrical terminology and expressions
- a strong level of awareness of the relationship between stagecraft (including acting) and audience.

Specific information

Students should note that all of the assessment criteria have equal weighting, and so they should ensure their interpretation meets the requirements of each criterion.

The first assessment criterion is quantitative rather than qualitative – it assesses whether the student met the requirements of the task, rather than considering how well the monologue was interpreted. To achieve full marks for criterion 1, students must adhere to the requirements of the stagecraft area (Acting and Direction or Design), as outlined in the VCE Theatre Studies stagecraft examination specifications. Where students did not meet the requirements of criterion 1, it appeared that, in most cases, memorisation of lines (for Acting and Direction) and not making direct reference to specific lines from the monologue (for Design) were the primary contributing factors.

The examination is divided into three stages – stage 1: Framing Statement, stage 2: interpretation and stage 3: question(s). In 2015, it appeared that most students were prepared for these three stages; however, a small number of students seemed less prepared for stage 3. The duration of

the response to the first two stages was 7 minutes. Students were asked one question following their interpretation of the monologue. Students had 2 minutes to answer the question from the point at which they began their response. In future examinations, more than one question may be asked.

Stage 1: Framing Statement

The examination began with students delivering an oral Framing Statement. They were permitted to read from notes written on or attached to the Framing Statement form, which was part of the examination paper and which they were allowed to bring into the examination room. Following the oral presentation, a hard copy of the Framing Statement was handed to the assessors before the question(s) stage. Some students brought multiple copies of the Framing Statement into the examination; however, only one copy is required.

Students should be mindful that assessors base their assessment on what is **said**, not what is written on the form. It is not a requirement that students memorise the content of the Framing Statement; however, this is an option. Some students wrote lengthy Framing Statements, which they struggled to deliver within 2 minutes. It is advisable not to rush the delivery of the oral Framing Statement.

Transition between Framing Statement and Interpretation

Students should start their interpretation as soon as possible after completing the Framing Statement. Students should note that it is their responsibility to move from the Framing Statement (stage 1) to the interpretation (stage 2), and that the transition time is part of the 7 minutes permitted for stages 1 and 2 combined.

Stage 2: Interpretation

Most students followed the examination specifications with regard to the interpretation stage of the examination. In 2015 there were two new requirements in regard to stage 2. These were that Acting and Direction students would **not** be prompted and that Design students could label (with up to seven one-word labels) their designs but were not permitted to annotate their designs. Students handled these new requirements well.

In preparing for stage 2, students should note the following:

- Design
 - According to the specifications, students are to design for ‘a single clearly lit, relatively small space where no changes to the lighting grid are permitted’. Students should take note of this parameter and any further advice that may appear on the examination paper with regard to the space. Students may make reference to how their design could look under theatrical lighting; however, lighting is not an area of stagecraft for this examination.
 - Design students must be aware that the primary focus for the design is the prescribed monologue rather than the play as a whole. Reference to the greater world of the play is permitted as long as it adds meaning to the design for the monologue component, which is the central focus of the interpretation.
 - Where a prescribed monologue comprises two (or more) passages from different sections of a playscript, students should clearly address **both** passages in their design (for example, the ‘Ruth’ monologue in 2015).
 - Students are **not** permitted to read from notes of any kind during the interpretation (stage 2). On the 2015 examination paper, it stated that ‘in the interpretation stage ... reading from notes ... is **not** permitted’. In the examination specifications, it is stated that ‘Speaker’s notes, other than those on the Framing Statement template, are not permitted’.

- The designs and materials the student brings into the examination room need to be well chosen. Students should consider what each design item adds to the overall design concept or vision. Students are advised to avoid unnecessary repetition or duplication of design items and to be mindful that they have a limited time in which to set up in the room for their examination.
- Students must be aware that annotations are **not** permitted on designs as per the specifications for this examination.
- Acting and Direction
 - It should be noted that it is not within the conventions of this task to add any lines of dialogue to the performance, nor should lines be deleted from the prescribed text as specified on the examination paper or substituted with other lines.
 - Overwhelmingly, students wore a costume and used props for their interpretation. Some also used a well-chosen set item(s), wore make-up and/or used sound effects/music. The application of costume, make-up, sound, properties and set items was viewed with regard to how it related to the student's use of acting and direction. However, given that the main focus of the assessment is on acting and direction, students should make judicious choices as to the use of other stagecraft and consider its use in light of how it enhances the realisation of their acting and directorial vision.
 - In regard to the use of props and set items, students should be mindful that they have a limited time in which to set up in the room for their examination.
 - Some students tended to concentrate more on their acting performance and less on their direction of the monologue. Students should note that their application of direction is being assessed as well as their acting, with each component having equal weighting.
 - It should be noted that students will **not** be prompted during the interpretation (stage 2).

Stage 3: Question(s)

It should be noted that the examination specifications state that one or more question(s) will be asked. In 2015, each student was asked one question selected by the assessor(s) from a set of four. They were required to answer the question verbally. The questions were not published, but were consistent with advice given in the specifications.

Students should note the following:

- They may ask for the question(s) to be repeated by the assessor(s) should this be necessary.
- They have up to 2 minutes to answer the question verbally from the point at which they begin to answer.
- They should avoid repeating information previously given; for example, anything stated in the Framing Statement.
- The examination specifications document contains examples of the types of questions that could be used in the question(s) stage of the examination.

The 2015 monologues

The popularity of each monologue is indicated in the table below.

Number	Monologue chosen	Acting and Direction (% of students)	Design (% of students)	Total (% of students)
1	Witch	16.0	27.9	17.8
2	Miss Shepherd	9.0	11.6	9.4
3	Anna Andreyevna	6.3	7.5	6.5
4	Nellie	10.7	6.1	10.0
5	Ruth	8.7	7.5	8.5
6	Imogen	6.2	2.0	5.5
7	Peachum	3.6	4.8	3.8
8	Tiga	5.8	4.8	5.6
9	Morgan	2.3	0.7	2.1
10	Mark Antony	6.0	5.4	5.9
11	David O Selznick	10.7	6.1	10.0
12	Narrator/Ceiling/Wall/Floor	11.8	10.9	11.7
13	Chorus	2.8	4.8	3.1

Characteristics of high-scoring responses

Acting and Direction

High-level Acting and Direction interpretations were characterised by:

- Stage 1: Framing Statement
 - delivery of a Framing Statement that clearly established the main acting and directorial choices made, the contexts of the interpretation, evidence of research, and knowledge of the monologue, scene and wider playscript
- Stage 2: Interpretation
 - re-contextualisation, if applied, was appropriate to the monologue, the scene and the wider playscript
 - effective mastering of the language of the monologue
 - an interpretation that conveyed a strong understanding of the intended meaning and context(s) of the play
 - evidence of high-level research
 - effective understanding and use of the theatrical style(s) of the prescribed monologue, scene and play
 - well-conceived and well-executed interpretative choices
 - highly effective use of the actor–audience relationship
 - strong, cohesive and clearly evident directorial vision
 - evidence of high-level directorial choices and the execution of them
 - a strong sense of the character’s(s’) role and function in the monologue and the wider play
 - a clear awareness of implied time, place and person(s)
 - the ability to convey implied person and implied place very effectively
 - accomplished performance skills, including the use of expressive skills, verbal and non-verbal language
 - well-chosen and effectively applied other stagecraft to enhance the acting and direction
 - highly evident and effective use of focus and space
 - an understanding of, and an ability to manipulate, theatrical tension and timing

- highly effective pace and rhythm of delivery
- Stage 3: Question(s)
 - highly effective use of theatrical terminology and expressions
 - high level of consistency with the content and intentions of stages 1 and 2.

Design

High-level Design interpretations were characterised by:

- Stage 1: Framing Statement
 - delivery of a Framing Statement that clearly established the main design choices made (for any two of costume, set, properties, sound, make-up), the context of the interpretation, evidence of research and knowledge of the monologue, scene and wider playscript
- Stage 2: Interpretation
 - appropriate re-contextualisation of the scene and the wider playscript, if applied
 - effective use of well-chosen direct quotations from the prescribed monologue
 - a strong understanding of the intended meaning and context(s) of the play
 - evidence of high-level research
 - effective use of and/or reference to the theatrical style(s) of the prescribed monologue, scene and play
 - well-conceived and well-executed design choices
 - a high level of understanding of the interrelationship between designer, actor and audience
 - strong and cohesive design vision
 - a strong sense of the function of the monologue in relation to the wider play
 - accomplished design skills
 - evidence of an awareness of the acting of the monologue in regard to the design
 - evidence of high-level design choices and the execution of them
 - high-level design presentation skills
 - the interpretation was linked specifically to the monologue rather than the play more generally
- Stage 3: Question(s)
 - highly effective use of theatrical terminology and expressions
 - high level of consistency with the content and intentions of stages 1 and 2.