

2017 VCE Theatre Studies written examination report

General comments

The 2017 Theatre Studies written examination assessed students on the knowledge and skills developed throughout Units 3 and 4. The highest-scoring students demonstrated:

- thorough knowledge of the playscript for the prescribed play in Unit 3
- excellent understanding of how acting and other stagecraft were applied in the prescribed play in Units 3 and 4
- a sound working knowledge of at least two areas of stagecraft from the prescribed list
- a sophisticated understanding of how theatrical styles, context and language inform the application of stagecraft
- an ability to apply stagecraft through the different stages of production, including understanding the difference between each stage.

In preparing for the examination, students are strongly urged to ignore irrelevant information from secondary sources. Students are strongly encouraged to develop their own analysis and evaluation of a performance and to use material from forums and education notes circumspectly. The texts for study in Unit 3 are the prescribed playscript and the play in the performance. Given the deep confusion evident in some student responses (for example, where students directly quoted what a director or designer said in a forum), students are advised to spend time developing their personal capacity to write about theatre rather than memorising quotes, etc. that are essentially other people's views about a particular interpretation or production.

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

Play chosen	none	<i>Twelfth Night</i>	<i>Faith Healer</i>	<i>The 7 Stages of Grieving</i>	<i>Away</i>	<i>Shrine</i>	<i>The Yellow Wave</i>
%	3	9	21	5	53	7	3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	4	2	6	17	16	14	12	11	9	5	4	5.1

Higher-scoring responses focused their analyses on the theatrical style(s) of the play and how this informed acting and other stagecraft. Their analyses of acting explained what individual actors did or what an ensemble of actors did during a specific moment in the play.

Many low-scoring responses did not focus on the idea of theatrical styles – rather, students tended to convey everything that they knew about a play without directly relating this to how theatrical styles informed the application of acting and other stagecraft. Some low-scoring responses either did not mention acting or wrote about acting in a generalised way.

Higher-scoring responses also tended to include commentary about how the audience made meaning from the performance while some lower-scoring responses focused on how theatre companies went about preparing for the performance. Other low-scoring responses did not address the given question, instead providing information supplied by theatre companies through education notes and forums. For example, students were not required to convey where costumes and props were bought or what inspired a director or designer to make particular decisions – the production team’s process was not relevant to a response and in many cases this confused student analyses.

High-scoring responses showed a sound understanding of theatrical styles and associated conventions.

Some students who wrote about the theatrical style of Realism diverted their response into a discussion about context, which may have been tangentially relevant but required a more specific focus to relate to the question. Students are urged to refine the way they write about a Realist style, if this is indeed the intention of the playscript and the production team, so that their focus is on the elements of the style rather than issues such as context or themes. Information on how to better prepare to write about style can be found in the suggested resources list on the Theatre Studies index page on the VCAA website.

Lower-scoring responses to Question 1 generally showed a limited understanding of theatrical style. Many inaccurately identified theatrical styles in Unit 3 performances. For example, *Away* was not performed as a piece of Epic Theatre, though some students noticed aspects of Epic Theatre in the eclectic style adopted by the director and the creative production team. Lower-scoring responses discussed style as a series of unrelated conventions, ascribing each to disparate styles that bore no relevance to the purpose or function of the prescribed plays. A specific example of this misunderstanding can be seen in some responses discussing the ubiquitous convention of direct-audience address. While ‘breaking the fourth wall’ may be a convention of Epic Theatre, it is also a convention of styles as diverse as Greek Theatre, Elizabethan Theatre, Vaudeville and Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed. Higher-scoring responses located the convention of direct address as an aspect of a relevant style, and presented their case cogently and comprehensively.

In analysing or evaluating the theatrical style of plays in Unit 3 or Unit 4, students are urged to ascertain the style through explorations of a range of factors, including the perceived intention of the playwright and production team, the context of the production and original playscript, and the overarching style of the performance.

Higher-scoring responses demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of a relevant style shaping the application of acting and other stagecraft, and identified how this was used to convey a message or elicit a specific audience response. These answers provided a logical and highly focused analysis. They showed how theatrical style is more than a random collection of theatrical devices – rather, it is the cumulative shape of a piece of theatre, driven by an intention to convey a specific message or create a particular audience response. The conventions or aspects of style employed were often best understood in student responses as the most effective way of eliciting a desired actor–audience relationship.

Lower-scoring responses to Question 1 provided an unsophisticated understanding of style, presenting aspects or conventions of a style without a sense of the intention of the playwright or production team.

Consider, for example, The Australian Shakespeare Company's production of *Twelfth Night*. In the production, an actor broke the fourth wall to improvise a contemporary joke about Donald Trump. A simplistic reading of this moment might assert that this was in the style of Epic Theatre, given the political nature of the reference; however, breaking the fourth wall, improvising and making references that are culturally specific to the audience are also conventions of Commedia Dell'Arte – and given the era within which the playscript was written, and other conventions evident in the performance such as mistaken identify, use of stock characters and use of slapstick and physical comedy, a more sophisticated response might draw on these different threads to create the more convincing argument that acting and other stagecraft was applied in the style of Commedia Dell'Arte. This argument would be especially compelling, given that the intended effect of *Twelfth Night* was to create a communal, chaotic, convivial, comedic atmosphere (an intention of Commedia), as opposed to alienating the audience in order to get them to focus on the political message of the story (an intention of Epic Theatre). Brecht's Epic Theatre is more than the sum of its parts. Brecht used particular ways of creating theatre to manipulate the thoughts and feelings of an audience because it was the best way that he could find to explore those political realities at the core of his work. In short, breaking the fourth wall to make a political joke does not make *Twelfth Night* Epic Theatre.

There is no definitive list of theatrical styles and no right or wrong ways of discussing style. The examination assesses students on a living art form – and artists can (and should) stretch the boundaries of style, dispense with rules of style, create a collision of styles or invent their own styles. Within this slippery conceptual landscape, some lower-scoring responses tended to cling to more clearly defined conventions of genre, without demonstrating a logical understanding of the spirit of the style or the overall message of the play, missing the figurative forest for the trees.

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

Twelfth Night

In ASC's interpretation of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, acting, costume and make-up were informed by the theatrical style of Elizabethan theatre, specifically Shakespearian comedy, with the farcical elements of physical comedy, mistaken identify and slapstick style movement. Exhibited in the script excerpt, the character Viola (played by Elizabeth Brennan) disguises herself as a "man", Cesario. Informed by the farcical element of "mistaken" identity, Brennan used acting by utilising a gentle, high-pitched voice and a high centre of gravity in her interpretation of the feminine Viola. While "present[ing] as a gentleman", Brennan used a lower-pitched voice and violent gestures to convey her masculine façade of Cesario. Brennan's make-up of silver paint outlined in black on the right side of her face, as well as a deep red lip, mirrors

the famous lightning bolt make-up of David Bowie. As Bowie was known for his gender fluidity, Brennan's make-up emphasises the theatrical style of a Shakespearean comedy due to the emphasis on "mistaken" gender. Moreover, the farcical nature of this theatrical style was conveyed through Sir Andrew Aguecheek's (played by Anthony Rive) grand gestures (flailing arms in the air), humourous facial expression (wide eyes and open mouth) and comedic gait (fact-paced running) as he jumped into a tank of water. The physical comedy and slapstick style movements were complemented by farcical costumes such as Aguecheek's bright green suit and Sir Toby Belch's crazy untamed, platinum blonde wig, enhancing the playfulness of a Shakespearean comedy. Furthermore, ASC emphasised the revelrous nature of the theatrical style by adapting the playscript to include modern elements through costume. By dressing the fools in typical Australian 'tradie' construction vests and hats when they drunkenly walked through the audience, ASC linked the farcical theatrical style to the looseness of Australian culture. Additionally, ASC also included elements of Commedia Dell'arte by informing the acting by animal characteristics. For example, Elizabeth Brennan realised the character of Viola by using "bird-like" movement and leading with her head when she walked, implementing characteristics of a bird.

Section B

Play chosen	none	Noises Off	The Merchant of Venice	The Way Out	Pike St	The Real and Imagined History of the Elephant Man
%	1	62	7	5	14	11

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	2	4	29	40	24	2.8

Higher-scoring responses conveyed a particularly strong understanding of how an actor made the audience think or feel a particular way about character in one moment and how these ideas or feelings were advanced or changed in the same or in a different moment in the play. These responses provided a comprehensive description of the specific moment using theatre-specific terminology.

Lower-scoring responses conveyed how the actor–audience relationship was established but did not refer to how it was maintained. Some lower-scoring responses confused the distinction between actor and character. For example, some lower-scoring responses to *Noises Off* were not able to clearly articulate the difference between actor and character when describing the plot device of a play-within-a-play.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	3	2	13	30	35	11	6	3.5

Despite the focus of this question being an evaluation, many students responded in an analytical mode, rather than in an evaluative one. An evaluation must do more than identify what was realised on stage and how stagecraft was applied to convey meaning. Students are urged to better prepare their evaluation of the listed plays for the examination, as specified in the study design. An inadequate level of evaluation relied upon generalised judgments about the performance and

included no specific rationale. A satisfactory level of evaluation included an identification of what was effective or ineffective, with a justification for why this worked or did not work as an interpretation of the playscript. A thorough level of evaluation included sophisticated evaluative terminology throughout, a strong justification for why an interpretation worked or did not work and used stagecraft-specific terminology. The assessor did not have to agree with the evaluation but the student had to justify their opinion about the interpretation presented during the Unit 4 playlist production.

Students were asked to evaluate by providing a value judgment. Higher-scoring responses provided perceptive comments about aspects such as the clarity, cohesion, fluidity, subtlety, poise, control or aesthetic beauty of the actor's expressive skills. These responses clearly described various qualities of nominated expressive skills in the evaluation.

Lower-scoring evaluations made one or two references to the word 'effectively' but did little more than this. They analysed, but with little to no sense of evaluation. Some lower-scoring responses were unable to identify two of the five expressive skills outlined in the study design.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response to 1. *Noises Off*, with the chosen actor Emily Goddard.

The moment Emily Goddard emerges from the wings as Poppy, the flustered stage manager, she establishes a strong, sympathetic actor audience relationship as she stands trembling, on the verge of tears, wrapped in a mess of chords and cables as the bossy, pompous director, Lloyd (also her love interest) aggressively barks orders at her 'get off the ... stage'. Her shaky, weak, deer-like portrayal of Poppy establishes a very strong actor audience relationship as the audience feels sorry for the pathetic character. This actor audience relationship is maintained when Lloyd puts his arm around Brooke, another cast member, to which Poppy says through a choking sob 'I think I am going to be sick,' further enticing sympathy from the audience

The following is another example of a high-scoring response to 1. *Noises Off*, with the chosen actor Emily Goddard.

Emily Goddard's use of movement creatively demonstrated her flustered nature of her character at the beginning of the play but evolves to demonstrate the importance of stepping out of comfort zones to receive what one truly deserves. Dynamically using an asymmetrical gait as she is weighed down by her oversized prompt copy allows Goddard to successfully convey Poppy's constant undercurrent of fear and anxiety. This is hereby coupled with her use of a high-pitched, timid voice which emphasises Poppy's determination to ensure the production is a success, by ensuring "doors and sardines" are in perfect condition for the cast of "Noting One". Moreover, as Goddard reluctantly stumbles up the stairs and clutches the prompt copy to her chest to act as Brooke's understudy, she successfully represents Poppy's fear to act beyond the stage. This evolves innovatively, as Goddard skips in a childlike manner across the stage and caresses the flowers from Tim like a baby and constantly smelling them. Moreover, as she gains the confidence to vocalise loudly to Lloyd that she is "having a baby", no longer mumbling or stuttering, as she did previously, Goddard demonstrates Poppy's growth. At the end of Act 2, as Goddard willingly ascends the stairs to the upper tier of the set and passionately embraces Tim (James Saunders), she innovatively demonstrates that Poppy, by putting herself out of her comfort zone, has finally achieved what she wants and deserves recognition and love.

Section C

Question 3a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	0	1	19	35	44	3.2

Students were required to discuss the application of one or two areas of stagecraft to interpret the playscript *Frankenstein*, including the following three aspects:

- creating a frightening mood
- aspects of an eclectic theatrical style, specified in the insert
- features of a stimulus image (relevant to the eclectic theatrical style).

Higher-scoring responses used a specific aspect of one or more images to elaborate on an aspect of style and demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of how a particular feeling for the audience (that is, 'a frightening mood') might be created through application of their selected area(s) of stagecraft. These responses used theatrical terminology to describe the nature and function of stagecraft. They also showed an understanding of the relationship between style and application of stagecraft.

Lower-scoring responses missed one or more of these aspects or did little more than repeat what was provided to them in the question and supplied information.

Question 3b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	2	21	37	38	3.1

Students were required to respond to a script excerpt, discussing the application of one or two areas of stagecraft in the planning stage with specific reference to:

- one of the playwright's listed intentions
- a planning activity.

Higher-scoring responses described in detail a planning activity such as researching, drafting initial ideas, brainstorming or meeting with other production team members. The highest-scoring responses used stagecraft-specific terminology to explain their concept for conveying the specified intention in the interpretation of the script excerpt.

Lower-scoring responses tended to discuss a concept with no reference to one of the listed intentions or a planning activity. Some lower-scoring responses referred to an activity that was impractical.

Question 3c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	4	23	36	34	3

Higher-scoring responses used theatrical terminology to explain a process of investigating a key aspect of the concept described in Question 3b. These sophisticated responses explained an aspect that might need to be explored, such as the timing, clarity, use of space, design alternatives or safety of stagecraft to stage a concept. They also described a clear, practical and achievable way of testing this aspect. These responses showed an excellent understanding of how their selected area of stagecraft might be applied through a sophisticated use of theatrical terminology

and a clear rationale for why a particular planning activity would be relevant to exploring a particular concept.

Lower-scoring responses expanded on a concept for interpreting the script excerpt with little to no sense of a trialling activity. Some lower-scoring responses referred to an activity that was not relevant to the development stage, such as dress rehearsal, or provided a somewhat generic description of process, which was not integral to the play or concept being explored.

Question 3d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	6	9	35	50	2.3

Higher-scoring responses referred to a relevant reflection process (for example, filming, journaling, discussion in a meeting or bringing in a trial audience), as well as specifying the focus for reflection (for example, in order to see if the application of stagecraft conveyed that the audience was experiencing the birth through the Creature's perspective or creating a close actor–audience relationship).

Lower-scoring responses tended to describe which aspect of the trial they might reflect on, without explaining how they might conduct this reflection, or described a reflection process without explaining which aspect might be the subject of the reflection.

Question 3e.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	1	16	31	27	22	3.4

Students were required to explain how one or two areas of stagecraft could be applied during the presentation stage to create the specific actor–audience relationship of sympathising with the Creature. Students were required to make specific mention of:

- a stimulus image
- the actor–audience relationship.

Higher-scoring responses showed a strong understanding of the selected stagecraft through sophisticated use of theatrical terminology and a detailed description of how and when stagecraft could be applied. Higher-order responses used the stimulus as a way of anchoring the application of stagecraft in the eclectic style.

Lower-scoring responses omitted one or more of the required aspects. Some lower-scoring responses showed a limited understanding of how their area of stagecraft might realistically be applied in a particular moment. Some presented a strong literary justification for how an audience might be made to feel sympathy, though lacked clarity about the application of stagecraft.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response. Note that the student successfully expressed their ideas through the use of dot points and subheadings.

4. Design: Lighting and 6. Design: set

a. Lighting:

- *The use of intense, bright floodlights focused towards the audience (image 1) could be used to convey a frightening mood*
- *Strobe lights throughout the performance could also be used throughout the performance in order to incorporate a “stylised movement” element, and “unnatural*

qualities of movement”, borrowed from theatre of cruelty to create an eclectic theatre style

Set:

- *The set design could be based on the idea of the audience being surrounded by the action, around them, above and below, as seen in image 4.*
- *The unpredictability of this set design and actors appearing above the audience would create audience involvement, “surrounded by the performance” as in the eclectic theatre style*

b. Lighting:

- *Research could be undertaken into what one would see if they were being “born” for the first time, in order to convey the playwright’s intention of showing that the audience experiences ‘birth’ from the creature’s point of view (for scene 1). This may include exploring whether warm or cool toned light should be used for the “flash of white light”*
- *The playwright’s intentions of showing the creature as “childlike discovering a new world” could be initially researched through finding out what angle of light would make the Creature appear small and vulnerable, (and create the least shadow), especially during his struggle in scene 2*

Set:

- *A preliminary discussion activity with the director could occur to talk about whether the Creature may be able to first be seen in an area of the stage surrounded by the audience, on a level lower than them, performed in the round.*
- *This would show the “childlike nature of the Creature”*

c. Lighting:

- *During the development stage, trialling of lights could occur. The effect of different angles on the Creature’s appearance in order to make him appear small, vulnerable and childlike could be explored, such as focusing a harsh cool-toned profile spot as a downlight on the Creature.*
- *This trialling of angles of light could occur in consultation with the director and costume designer to make sure that it is consistent with their intentions and vision for the production*
- *Following the trial of lighting angles to show vulnerability, changes may be made to the colour, intensity of spread of light, such as if the use of the initial “cool-toned profile spot” interfered with the appearance of the Creature’s costume. The hue of the light could then be changed to warm, and further trialled during this development stage*
- *Reflection of the development stage could be achieved through the use of documentation, specifically in a folio. Photos of the effects of different angles of light could be taken, placed side-by-side in a folio, and compared to see what would be the most effective.*
- *Furthermore, any later trialling, such as if the hue of light was changed due to costume, could be photographed too, and reasons for changes and reflections on the effectiveness of the change could be noted too in order to show further development*

d. Lighting:

- *In the final scene of the production, in order to invoke a sense of sympathy in the audience, the position, intensity and hue of lighting could change*
- *The use of harsh bright light (as seen in image 1) could transition to the whole stage being dimly floodlit, with a dull warm wash of light*
- *This change in the intensity and hue of lighting could create a sense of sympathy, as the stage takes on a less intense, more compassionate mood, as seen by the sepia-toned dull colours of image 3, greatly contrasting to image 1.*
- *This use of light could be used even further as the whole wash of light could be dimmed gradually during the moment in script excerpt 2, with light ultimately just being focused on the Creature and his Master*
- *This use of transition of light and focus could initially draw the audience's attention on their mood and position towards the Creature changes, establishing actor-audience relationship. The focusing of light gradually specifically onto the Creature would further maintain the actor-audience relationship as lighting conveys that he should ultimately be shown sympathy*

Set:

- *The placement of audience in the set could be used to show sympathy as the creature could be seen in a vulnerable position, trapped and surrounded by the audience due to the round set design*
- *The audience's position in relation to the Creature, focused at all times on him would immediately establish and maintain a sense of actor-audience relationship*

Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	4	25	32	23	13	3.1

Higher-scoring responses showed a detailed understanding of stagecraft through citing various qualities or features of the area of stagecraft and using theatrical terminology. They also provided sophisticated links between the language of the monologue, the themes of loneliness and/or isolation and the application of stagecraft.

Lower-scoring responses made little or no mention of how they would explore the themes of isolation and/or loneliness through the application of stagecraft or they listed how stagecraft would be applied but did not clearly explain how these choices were informed by specific verbal language (that is, dialogue) or non-verbal language (that is, stage directions) in the script. In some responses there was confusion between direction and acting or other areas of stagecraft.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response. A description of the student's script annotations is provided in parentheses.

Acting

[The student highlighted the stage direction of '(Pause)' in the script excerpt.]

I could use a vocal gesture of a sigh, take a deep breath, relax tension in my body to neutral and use the non-verbal language of lowering my head to exhibit the Creature's feelings of isolation and loneliness

[The student highlighted two uses of the word 'we'll' in the script excerpt.]

To connote the Creature's excitement and the prospect of a fellow creature to stop him feeling lonely, I could smile brightly, open my eyes widely and emphasise the 'we'll' every time it is repeated – this could demonstrate the importance of companionship.

[The student highlighted the phrase 'All I ask is the possibility of love' from the script excerpt.]

Non verbal language – I could drop my arms by my side and lower my head to emphasise despair of loneliness. Verbal language – speak with low-pitch, slow pace and emphasises word 'possibility' to portray his sadness and need for hope that he will not remain isolated.

Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	6	4	22	37	22	9	2.9

Students were required to show how application of stagecraft during the monologue could be informed by information provided by the student from other parts of the playscript. Higher-scoring responses demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of how stagecraft would be applied in the monologue to foreshadow a murder that would occur much later in the play. These students demonstrated a strong sense of how their selected area of stagecraft could be used to convey meaning through sound use of theatre terminology and a detailed description of various qualities of their selected area of stagecraft in a specific moment. For many, this included paraphrasing or quoting briefly from the monologue provided.

Lower-scoring responses misunderstood the question and provided an explanation of how stagecraft would be applied at another stage of the playscript (for example, during the murder). These students ignored the explicit instruction to 'Use Script excerpt 3 to answer **parts a. and b.**'. Some lower-scoring responses referred to an area of stagecraft not listed, referred to a different area of stagecraft from the one specified in Question 4a., or did not make mention of the monologue.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response. Throughout the monologue, the actor will increase their pace of speech, volume of pitch and become gradually more breathy and less controlled; this depicts his growing anger and exasperation, thus foreshadowing that the Creature may seek vengeance. In addition, his state of tension could grow from neutral to passionate connoting that the Creature will later need a release of tension that satisfies his anger and sadness. During the monologue the actor will also perform the gesture of punching a fist into their hand – a tick that is repeated as he becomes stressed and angry and Frankenstein's refusal. As he increases the pace and urgency of the gesture (at the beginning a sudden, light LABAN flick, towards the end a heavy, sudden LABAN punch) his growing tension, aggression and anger is depicted, further foreshadowing that he may be drawn to vengeance to satiate his anger and upset, murderous urges later on.