



## GENERAL COMMENTS

As teachers and students are becoming more experienced with the guidelines of the monologue performance examination, they are increasingly making better and more-informed choices. The number of students making ill-considered use of furniture and props has diminished considerably. In recent years students have been advised to consider all items as enhancements to the performance rather than as wholly essential to the playing. In the vast majority of cases, these guidelines are being followed.

Of concern is that some students continue to create a performance which is almost entirely dependent on stagecraft, rather than using stagecraft to enhance the performance. In many cases, prop items, furniture and costume are the end-result of considerable research, interpretive choice and directional decision-making. In a few instances, they are almost the sole evidence of consideration which is otherwise almost entirely missing from the actual acting performance. That is, rather than enhancing a well-considered performance, a costume (for example) appears to have had more time spent on it than the rehearsal of the performance.

Similarly, students should ensure that enhancements such as sounds, sound effects, musical backgrounds, data projections such as PowerPoints or films, or any of the sundry other stagecraft effects that can be included are just that – additions or enhancements to a strong performance. The enhancements cannot replace the performance or substitute for it. The criteria are very clear in what they require and the majority of criteria relate to the performance only.

As with all effects and technical enhancements, students and teachers should be aware of the possibility of failure. Ideally, the performance should continue uninterrupted if the technology fails. Some students were impressive in their ability to overcome obstacles related to the intended theatrical enhancements. However, there were still some identified cases where performances which lacked their intended effects appeared very sparse indeed. The fault in this case was not the effects or the failure of the technology. The fault was in having created a monologue which, rather than having the depth and detail to stand alone, was too dependent on the effects to do the work for the student. Effects and stagecraft will never replace interpretation, they can only enhance the interpretive decisions.

Some students ignored or were not aware of the limitations placed on weapons and hazardous materials, as stipulated in the guidelines. Students should be aware that assessors, just as any audience, use their imagination and do not need to see actual objects. Imagination is an integral aspect of the Theatre Studies monologue performance task. The use of breaking glass, stage blood, other liquids or anything that may damage carpet 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. If in any doubt whatsoever, liquids should be avoided.

Some students planned to stand or jump on furniture or, in some instances, to throw furniture. Students should be aware that venues are hired spaces. When in doubt, or if there are particular requirements, students should bring their own furniture. In some instances, the furniture is not designed to be stood upon and in no circumstances should the furniture or the floor be damaged.

Breaking mirrors or glass, while highly dramatic, is often considered a poor substitute for a carefully constructed theatrical moment. Too often, breakages and spillages are the sign of poorly considered and conceived ideas – more indicative of poor planning, desperation and melodramatics than complexity and depth. Students and teachers should carefully read the instructions at the front of the examination paper for information regarding what may and may not be taken into the examination. If concerned about the specifics of a venue, teachers might consider arranging a visit to a known venue to check stairs, door size, floor covering, lighting and such.

Teachers should note that it is not appropriate to ask for a room change if the student is using furniture that is too heavy or there are too many individual pieces. Such choices are generally considered to be poor stagecraft choices. The monologue task is based on creative, expressive and imaginative theatrical choices. It is not a task which demands the reconstruction of the real-world in its entirety.

### Areas of Strength and Weakness

Students are assessed on an eight-point scale (0–7) for each of the eight criteria. There is no specific criterion to assess whether the monologue succeeds as a piece of theatre or whether the student is ‘talented’. Such considerations are beyond the scope of the criteria. It is possible to receive an exemplary grade for a performance that is far from



theatrically perfect. Theatrical perfection presupposes that there is a right or best response to a monologue, which is a fallacy.

Stronger performances were generally characterised by:

- a thorough knowledge of the text – its meaning(s), possibilities and implications
- a thorough understanding of the scene and the world of the play as a whole (the context)
- clear knowledge of the intended period and the application of a style and appropriate conventions to create this period
- mastery of the language, in whatever idiom, style, accent or structure that was required or suggested by the chosen interpretation
- willingness to interpret the monologue in an original, interesting and appropriate manner
- a strong and clear awareness of implied time, place and person(s)
- an awareness of the levels of meaning, or subtexts, that underpinned the text and the contexts within which the monologue existed
- an awareness of the actor/audience relationship and an ability to use this understanding
- an understanding of, and an ability to manipulate, the focus of attention of the audience and the performer
- an awareness of the physicality of the character and the theatrical use of space
- direct and indirect evidence of extensive research, rehearsal and preparation
- practised and detailed use of costumes and props, and settings where appropriate
- an ability to address and use the limitations of monologue conventions to maximum effect
- a strong sense of belief
- an understanding of, and an ability to manipulate, theatrical tension and timing
- an ability to engage the assessors through the metaphorical transformation of time, place and situation.

Weaker performances were generally characterised by:

- an incomplete, limited or poor knowledge of the text – its meaning(s), possibilities and implications
- a poor perception of the world of the character within the greater context of the play as a whole
- an inability to offer a clear and specific interpretation, grounded in an appropriate style and convention
- an inability to master the rhythms and nuances of the language
- little direct or indirect evidence of research or preparation
- concentration on text and literal meaning, with minimal reference to subtext, context or the intended meaning of the playwright
- concentration on the verbal rather than the physical
- concentration on the immediate, the here and now, rather than the before, after and beyond
- wasted time and effort in the construction of peripheral or irrelevant details of aspects of props, setting, costume, hair or make-up
- a lack of awareness of implied time, place or person(s)
- a lack of awareness of the audience, the actor/audience interrelationship or the manipulation of the performance space in consideration of the audience
- a poor understanding of, and inability to manipulate, the focus of attention of the audience and the performer
- an inability to come to terms with or transcend the limitations of monologue conventions
- a poor understanding of, and inability to manipulate, theatrical tension and timing
- an inability to engage the assessors through the transformation of time or place.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

This was the first year of the revised *Theatre Studies VCE Study Design*, and hence there were new criteria. The biggest change to the assessment procedures revolved around criterion 1. In 2007 the criterion was applied primarily to the learning and presentation of lines, regardless of whether further choices had been made. That is, to receive full marks for criterion 1, students merely had to memorise and present more than 6/7ths of the text and prescribed actions. Few further considerations were made in relation to criterion 1, as other criteria picked up any further deficiencies in the interpretation. Students who received fewer than seven marks in criterion 1 had all other criteria limited to the mark received in criterion 1.

Pleasingly, over 90% of students fulfilled the demands of this criterion in 2007 and received the maximum score. Teachers and students should be aware that in 2008 this criterion may be tightened slightly so that it encompasses other minimal requirements. As well as reciting the text, students will be required to make an interpretation, choose a costume and present the piece within a context. It is important to note that, in this first criterion, there will be no consideration



given to the quality of these choices. The criterion deals only with whether any choice has been made whatsoever. It would be unusual, though not unknown, for a piece to be presented without interpretation, costume or context.

Another possible source of confusion in this first year was the combination of 'focus' and 'space' into one criterion. Teachers and students should note that the term 'focus' is used differently here to the way it is generally used in the Drama solo performance assessment. In the Theatre Studies monologue performance, focus is used as a general term which relates to the ability of a performer to focus the attention of the audience. This might include focusing attention on the performer, primarily through the actor-audience relationship, implied persons and/or aspects of the setting. In Drama, 'focus' relates more to the internal landscape of the performer. In Theatre Studies, 'focus' is more closely associated with external aspects of the performance such as space. This explains why 'focus' and 'space' are included in one criterion.

## The Monologues

Monologue Chosen	% of students
Defoe	8
Phillipa	13
Jason	4
Medea	9
Beatrice	5
Benedick	4
Meryl	14
Aunty Avaricia	8
Torvald	5
Nora	10
Tom	14
Dottie	4

Nearly half of the monologues attracted approximately the expected number of students. The less popular choices were Jason, Beatrice, Benedick and Dottie. The most popular choices were Meryl, Tom and Phillipa, which, between them, attracted 41% of students. In other words, 25% of the monologues attracted 41% of students or roughly twice that expected of an even distribution.

Phillipa attracted similarly large numbers the last time it was set as a monologue. The unpopularity of Beatrice and Benedick may be explained by the nature of the monologues, which had been put together by 'cutting and pasting' from the dialogue. They both provided difficult challenges and contained a number of leaps of understanding. Although they were comic texts, it was difficult for students to capture the complexity of the characters, the situation and the changes which occurred through the passages.

There is no necessity for a Theatre Studies monologue to approach seven minutes, as is the case in the Drama performance examination. Some of the prescribed monologues this year were quite brief. In most cases, this gave students a good opportunity to add business or action. The effective inclusion of business and action are areas for consideration for future professional development for teachers. Some monologues lend themselves to action; however, some of the shorter monologues were limited as to how they might be extended and explored. Lady Macbeth, for instance, was basically dialogue and therefore there was little scope for reflection. In contrast, Hamlet, although short, is a reflective piece that allowed much more scope for exploration and theatrical business.

Teachers were supportive of the fact that some of the monologues from previous years were re-used, particularly as they were familiar with the plays and the task. There was definite support for the fact that monologues should be repeated. There was also support for cutting and pasting passages – allowing students to approach the challenge of shifts that might appear from the cutting and pasting. This also increases the challenge of scene analysis.

### Defoe

Defoe provided a good range of challenges and results. Most students chose to recontextualise the monologue from the original, which is in keeping with nature of the text. Defoe is an elusive character and some students struggled with the challenge of identifying a clear human being. The best work offered a sense that this was the opening of the play. The



poorer efforts recited a poem without any sense of a world. Poorer work also tended to miss the possibilities to physicalise the piece. Doing so contributed to the sense of place and character.

### **Phillipa**

As with the last time it was set, Phillipa offered good scope for interpretation. It provided a strong challenge for high calibre students, and students found it exciting to aim high. A number of males attempted the monologue, usually with success. The concept of the hands and birds provided the key symbols of the piece and they offered significant possibilities for interpretation, physicality and the inclusion of imagery. As with Defoe, stronger work honoured the opening of the play, especially in relation to the rhythms of the language, the mood and the divisions between text and song.

Poorer work showed no connection to the back story, the broader world of the piece. Here, there was often poor use and understanding of the language. Weaker students were ill-advised to tackle this piece. The language, concepts and imagery were highly sophisticated and often too complex for such students.

### **Jason**

Few students chose this monologue. The last time it was set, this monologue was popular and generally well-performed. This year, there were some strong interpretations that incorporated variations on Greek gestures and a significant amount of recontextualising. Poorer work tended not to capture the arrogance of the character or the sense of Jason as an actual person. Some students simply did not understand the language and therefore missed the subject matter of the piece. In general, a non-naturalistic or recontextualised approach tended to create stronger work than melodramatic soap opera.

### **Medea**

The best work captured the passion and the range of the character. Again, interpretations were assisted by non-naturalism. Inventive and imaginative students used and referenced Greek theatre conventions and devices such as chorus and mask. Some students found it hard to capture the correct balance of emotions between love, rage and the many other levels of the piece. For instance, playing rage throughout was a poor choice. The use of dolls to represent the children was generally not a good choice as it limited the potential for the audience to feel empathy for the children and to freely imagine their predicament.

### **Beatrice**

This was not a popular piece and many students found it difficult. The amorous game-playing was a sophisticated challenge which young people found difficult. Students struggled with the subtleties of the language and the meanings. The piece was derived from dialogue which contained a number of changes of meaning and mood. It was difficult to simply recite the piece with a homogenous and consistent sense of underlying emotion. Some students struggled with these changes. On top of the challenges of identifying and identifying with the character, many students found it difficult to identify the humour of the character and piece.

### **Benedick**

Again, as with Beatrice, this was not a popular choice. A number of recontextualisations were attempted by students to throw a greater light onto the meaning of the piece. Some of these considerably helped students create a stronger context and sense of character. As with Beatrice, the passage was complex and derived from dialogue rather than being an actual written monologue. There were three specific phases of the subject matter of the speech. This created a difficult task and many students struggled to identify and move from phase to phase. As with Beatrice, the comedy was difficult to capture. In approaching the challenges of creating an interesting and potentially comic character, many students missed the opportunities for physicalisation and gesture.

### **Meryl**

This was one of the most popular choices. Surprisingly, some students did not quite understand that it was meant to be a comedy or at least that there was strong potential for comedy, especially physical comedy. The better work tended to be very physical. Tension and timing were important. Even within such a manic piece, many students found considerable variation. The piece was accessible for weaker students whilst providing strong challenges for better students. It provided strong scope for recontextualising. Students should remember to treat props properly, such as where a doll may represent a baby. The best choices tended to make use of transforming objects, such as blankets.

### **Aunt Avaricia**

This piece separated students who had not prepared well from the better-prepared students. Poorer students simply did not understand the concept of the Panto Dame. Girls had some difficulty with the piece, which required them to be a girl



playing a man playing a woman. Any concept of a performer past their prime, perhaps turned to the bottle and with some level of cynicism for performing and performers seemed to work adequately.

### **Torvald**

This was a very popular piece, which was surprising as Ibsen has not been often set. Most students were drawn to naturalism as the style of presentation. The emotional range seemed to be more accessible for many students than, for example, Jason. There were some very tortured approaches which overlooked Torvald's sense of control. Many students used silence and stillness very effectively. In the piece, it was essential to situate and relate to Nora. The sense of her presence throughout the piece was vitally important.

### **Nora**

As with Torvald, this piece was very popular. There were some very emotional approaches which lacked the control and the sense that she had been oppressed and suppressed her whole life. The best work provided a sense that she was breaking out after a period of oppression. If she was simply putting on her coat and leaving, the sense of her journey and the importance of this moment was somewhat diminished. Hiring costumes can be a problem. Students should spend time to work in their costume. Most importantly, if they have hired a costume, they should finish it off with suitable accoutrements such as appropriate shoes.

### **Tom**

This piece was very popular with boys and girls. The best work was truly spine-tingling. Most students seemed to understand the requirements of the piece, even if they had difficulty achieving their intentions. The demand was for a broad range of emotions. Many students entered into an imaginative and complex universe. Many offered strong transitions between control and lack of control. Weaker students just seemed to be searching for an excuse to yell. Costume made an important statement for some students – especially with Tom morphing into another character through the use of costume.

### **Aunt Dottie**

In direct contrast to Tom, very few students chose to perform this piece. It was difficult for students to come to terms with who Aunt Dottie was and what she represented. On the one hand, she seemed so normal and everyday. On the other, she could represent almost anything imagined by the student. In the actual play, she comes across as something of an enigma. It was difficult to capture the enigmatic qualities while still creating an interesting and memorable character.