



A-level

# **Drama and Theatre**

7262/C Creating original drama

Report on the Examination

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## Introduction

There was a range of work this year with some very high-quality pieces that reflected students' understanding of the subject and their enthusiasm for creating their own pieces of theatre.

This year marked the change to online submissions for this component. The vast majority of centres uploaded their work without problems. The move to online submissions was requested at quite short notice and a few centres neglected to upload some documents, 'tagged' work to the wrong student or in a few cases, only uploaded parts of the Working Notebook however centres were quick to remedy problems when notified.

Much of the marking was within tolerance but moderators reported more centres out of tolerance by small margins in this series. Occasionally mistakes were made in the application of the marking grids. This applied to both the Working Notebooks and to marks for the Performance.

The majority of discrepancies in marking arose because of over-generous marking. Work that was 'good' was often rewarded with marks in the top two bands. To be marked in the top bands work has to be 'excellent' or 'exceptional'. It is understandable that teachers who know how much hard work students have put in throughout the devising process want to reward this, but it is vital that centres familiarise themselves with the national standard via Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLs).

There were a few infringements of the Specification requirements, for example a piece with two performers running over the time limit. The time limit for a group of three to six performers is thirty minutes; the time limit for a piece with two performers is ten minutes. Moderators will watch the entire performance however usually some editing of overlong performances would have better supported students' achievement.

Some students did not adhere to the word limit for the Working Notebook. Centres are reminded that words over the 3000-word limit cannot be credited. Students are required to include an accurate word count at the end of their Working Notebook.

Centres are also reminded that a non-examinee is only permitted if there is one student in the cohort (ie in order to make a group of two). A number of centres did not provide the moderator with information about the presence of a non-examinee (the most common example is where a student has left the course after the recording of the work has taken place).

## Use of support resources

The majority of centres seem familiar with the requirements of the Specification, although unfortunately a few centres showed a lack of awareness of some of the content. The Specification contains sections about exactly what content is required in the Working Notebook, the requirements of the piece, and the areas of study for chosen practitioners.

The key resource with which to acquire familiarity with the national standard was underused. The Teacher Online Standardisation portal (TOLs) has examples of real students' work, including both Working Notebooks and filmed performance work. Work from the latest series is uploaded each year, reflecting a range of practitioners and achievement.

There is also the Centre Feedback sheet, which is completed by the centre’s moderator and emailed to the centre on results day. This should be read carefully as it indicates where discrepancies between the centre’s marking and the national standard arose.

A resource that is also often underused is the centre’s NEA Adviser, who is able to advise on this component as well as component 7262/X.

## **General Approach**

The best practice for students was evident where students had clearly been taught the practitioner in their lessons and given the opportunity to explore that practitioner’s working methods, style, conventions, artistic intentions and theatrical purpose and practice. This exploration and understanding had then led the students to choose a stimulus that was consistent with their practitioner. This also meant students were in a strong position to analyse and be influenced by the relevant live theatre they had seen (either in person or digitally) in relation to their practitioner.

For example, students in one centre had clearly worked practically together to explore the methods of Gecko before choosing or creating narratives that absolutely chimed with Gecko’s practice, resulting in work that had a very high degree of compatibility with that practitioner.

The most successful Working Notebooks were clearly written throughout the process, with the first section compiled near the start of the process as the students’ choice of stimulus and aims were emerging. Successful second sections of the Working Notebook were written throughout the devising process, allowing students to give precise examples of how they had approached the creative process and what they had done collaboratively and individually to develop and refine their piece.

Less successful processes involved students trying to find a practitioner to fit their subject matter, resulting in a lack of synchronicity from the start of the process. A very few students would have benefited from guidance as to the suitability, and occasionally the tastefulness of their theme, in terms of its marriage with their practitioner, where a particular practitioner would be unlikely to produce a piece of theatre on the chosen subject.

Students continued to use a range of stimuli for their work, with the most successful reflecting specificity in their choice. Where students had chosen a particular period, narrative or event, their work tended to reflect this focus. Students choosing quite vague or wide-ranging thematic bases for their work frequently lacked theatrical effectiveness.

## **Administration and Recording of Performance Work**

### **Good practice:**

- Most centres submitted their marks and uploaded their work on time.
- The majority of centres completed the paperwork efficiently and uploaded accompanying paperwork alongside students’ Working Notebooks and media files.
- Many centres used their general Centre area to upload their Centre Declaration Sheet.

- Centres where students had left the course since the filming took place clearly identified these individuals through a covering letter (on headed notepaper) and tagged this to their general Centre area.
- Many centres completed the Mark Sheets for their students with detailed commentary on their written and performance work.
- Many centres annotated the Working Notebook in detail and with comments that were relevant to the mark scheme. For example, teachers highlighted evidence of ‘creative engagement with the stimulus’ or where students gave ‘precise details’. This type of commentary enabled moderators to see how marks have been awarded by the centre.
- Programme Notes were provided, separating students clearly into their performance groups and showing photographs of the students in costume and make-up. Good Programme Notes included student numbers, the part(s) students played and their chosen practitioner. In larger centres, Programme Notes are particularly valuable for moderators, and it was appreciated when these were created with suitable care and attention.
- Centres tagged Programme Notes and media files to each individual student, meaning these could be accessed by the moderator in a straightforward manner.
- Students introduced themselves clearly and confidently to camera, detailing their student number, practitioner, role in the piece plus any useful identifying information, such as a change of costume during the piece.
- Students choosing design skills showed their design in a filmed sequence (without any commentary) that allowed the moderator to see the full design in detail from all relevant angles.
- Performances were filmed from one camera in a fixed position throughout the performance, which covered the whole of the performing area or if students were not using end-on staging they were fully visible in the recording at all times.
- Recordings were clear both visually and aurally, allowing the moderator to check that the marks awarded were accurate.

**Less successful practice:**

- Centres had omitted to upload one or more of the following:
  - o the Centre Declaration sheet
  - o Programme Notes
  - o Candidate Record Forms with signatures, including Statements of Dramatic Intent
- Students’ Mark sheets contained very brief comments to justify the mark given, or contained comments that had no relation to the mark scheme. Some Mark sheets referred moderators to a general summative comment at the end of the Working Notebook sections which was rarely helpful.

- Working Notebooks were not annotated. It is a requirement that centres annotate the Working Notebooks, this can be done by hand if scanning in the written work, or electronically. Annotations of the Working Notebook should be seen as the teachers’ opportunity to point out where students have succeeded in meeting the demands of the task.
- Programme Notes did not identify which students were in which piece.
- Programme Notes used photographs of the students that did not show them in costume for the piece. In some cases, old photographs of the students were used, making it very difficult for moderators to identify students.
- Students did not identify themselves to camera.
- For a number of centres, the camera did not remain in one fixed position when students were performing end-on, and camerawork included panning, zooming in for regular close-ups etc. This is not permitted, and often results in some students’ work being missed. Where the piece uses promenade or traverse, centres are advised to contact their NEA Adviser for advice on how to record this work effectively.
- In a few centres, the camera angle or position did not allow for the entire performance area to be visible, meaning some of the students’ work was unseen by the moderator.
- Groups did not adhere to the time limits for pieces, as mentioned in the introduction to this report. Failure to observe these time limits does no service to the students, who often end up self-penalising.

### **Statements of Dramatic Intentions**

The fulfilment of the student’s dramatic Intentions is assessed in the fourth section of the Performance mark. Therefore, the Statement of those intentions is an opportunity for the student to express what they hope their audience will experience when viewing their work.

The best practice saw Statements that were individualised and clear in their intentions for the audience, with specific reference to the effects the student wanted to create and the way in which they would apply and develop their skills to achieve this.

Good statements made reference to the chosen practitioner’s aims and methods and how these would be seen in their work.

Less successful Statements were brief and very generalised or used the same wording the student had used in their Working Notebook. The aims of the Working Notebook should be written at the start of the devising process, but the Statement of Dramatic Intent should be written right at the end of the process, once the finished piece is ready to perform and students have a clear idea of what effects they are trying to achieve for their audience.

## Working Notebooks

The vast majority of centres ensured that Working Notebooks were split into two sections, with a separate word count for each. Centres are reminded that the word count includes all words in the Working Notebook, including quotations from sources and annotations on diagrams or photographs.

On the whole centres seemed to be familiar with what is required to be included in each section of the Working Notebook, however there were a minority of centres that had not ensured students were aware of what is listed as the requirements for each section in the Specification.

There were a number of instances where students penalised themselves by including Section 1 information in Section 2 or vice versa. This was particularly in evidence where students had included in depth discussion of live theatre that had influenced them in Section 2 or discussed the process of developing the final piece in Section 1. Information cannot be credited in the wrong section. This tended to result in discrepancies between the centre's marking and the moderated marks.

The incorporation of annotated images was generally done with more focus than in the last series. However, some Working Notebooks included images that were not annotated. If images are used, they should be annotated to demonstrate why they have been included. There is no need for students to include images, and frequently these did not enhance the written work.

Where students selected the format of their Working Notebook as 'Written accompanied by annotated photographs and/or annotated sketches/drawings and/or annotated cue-sheets', they sometimes failed to understand that the 3000-word limit is still in place and includes the annotations on images.

## Working Notebook Section 1

### **Good practice:**

- Students began their writing with a **rationale** for the work that was clear and reflected the student's choice of practitioner alongside their own enthusiasm for the subject, content or story chosen.
- Students discussed the influences on their work, covering all the areas listed in the requirements: **research, their chosen practitioner and live theatre productions.**
- Sections on **research** linked what students had found out to how this material was used in the piece. For example, students choosing practitioners who use verbatim material showed an ethically minded approach to the conduct of their interviews. Students using a novel as their stimulus had researched its background, period, context and author's intent.
- Research on the chosen **practitioner** showed awareness of their fundamental approach. For example, some students using Brecht as their practitioner started from the premise of his left-wing approach to socio-economic issues, and showed awareness of how their own choice of stimulus was in keeping with this. Successful students choosing Artaud as their practitioner were fully aware of his rejection of spoken language or logical narrative forms and explained how they were going to respond to this.

- The **live theatre** seen was relevant in some way to the chosen practitioner. Students had clearly engaged with a number of relevant productions digitally and/or through live theatre visits. References to **live theatre** included details about which elements of the pieces seen were influential on their own work.
- References to **stylistic and contextual factors** was clear and relevant eg to the time period of the piece. This was an area that had improved in this series, with students showing greater awareness of the impact of context and style on their theatrical choices.
- **Aims and intentions** of both the individual and the piece were distinct and were in sympathy with the aims of the chosen practitioner. When stating their own and the group's aims, students avoided generalisation but were specific about their own role and their part in the whole piece.

### **Less successful practice:**

- There was little **rationale** offered for the choice of stimulus or little personal engagement shown as the stimulus had sometimes been picked for the student by a teacher. Centres are reminded that students are required to choose their own stimulus.
- Sections required by the Specification were omitted, for example no reference was made to research, or no reference to the chosen practitioner
- **Live theatre** was reduced to YouTube clips of some of the practitioner's work or the trailers for productions. In referring to plays by the practitioner (for example using Mike Leigh and his play *Abigail's Party* as a relevant piece of live theatre), students did not always make it clear whether or not they had actually seen the play.
- There was an over-reliance on film and television influences on the piece, neglecting the theatricality of the devised work. Film and television can be useful as part of a research process, but as stylistic inspirations they were less helpful to students.
- Occasional reference was made to other **practitioners** discarded during the process. This does not attract credit. Some students also wasted words describing stimuli that were not used.
- The range of the practitioner's methods and working practice was neglected. Some practitioners were reduced to a handful of 'techniques'. Examples of this were referring only to direct address for Brecht, or to a few physical building blocks for Frantic Assembly. This approach showed a lack of understanding of the practitioner as it neglected the practitioner's fundamental aims when making theatre.
- Some students neglected their own **aims** or their group's aims for the piece.

## **Working Notebook Section 2**

### **Good practice:**

- Successful Working Notebooks started this section with an explanation of how they actually built their piece, from some ideas to the final product. This explanation followed closely that of their

chosen practitioner. An example was adopting Kneehigh’s **approach** of starting with ‘play’, experimenting with items, music, and narrative to build and select elements of the piece.

- Examples of the **development** of the piece showed how elements of the work changed ie were **experimented with, developed, and refined** throughout the process. Students gave specific and precise examples of what was changed and why.
- Students’ decision making with reference to their **own individual theatrical skill** also showed how their work changed and developed throughout the process and was closely influenced by the chosen practitioner’s approach to that skill. An example was discussing how students had experimented with Brecht’s ideas of fixing the ‘not...but...’ in performance and acting in a ‘spirit of criticism’.
- The **final ideas** for the performance were clear and showed a sophisticated level of connection between theory and practice.
- The **comparison of the outcome** of the piece with the initial aims took account of both individual and group aims and referred to specific moments within the piece.

#### **Less successful practice:**

- The **approach** taken to devising the work was neglected, meaning it was not clear how the piece came to be created.
- Examples of **development** occasionally focused on very simple aspects such as audibility in performance or the smoothness with which props were used. These points lacked a sophisticated approach befitting the demands of A-Level and in some cases were not in keeping with the chosen practitioner.
- Attention to a student’s own **theatrical skill** consisted of a detailed description of a section of the performance, without any indication of how this had been arrived at throughout the process. This attracts little credit.

#### **Performances**

This year it was pleasing to see a higher number of different practitioners used, with the most popular practitioners broadening out to cover a number of different styles.

Many students continue to use Kneehigh, Frantic Assembly and The Paper Birds. Strong work was also seen that used Gecko as well as Mike Leigh, DV8, Berkoff and Complicité.

A large number of students continue to choose Brecht as their practitioner, and this year there were again clear examples of students who cited as their influence touring companies who purport to use his influence in their own work. This often resulted in some lack of understanding of Brecht’s own approach, taking a limited view of some of his ‘techniques’. The best resource for all practitioners is their own work, as written and produced by them, and this is as true for Brecht as any other practitioner.

However, there were examples of work using Brecht that took a genuine left-wing socio-political standpoint, where students had applied their creativity to make the familiar ‘strange’ and create work reminiscent of Brecht’s plays.

For all practitioners, the most successful work was easily identifiable as that practitioner’s style. Less successful work adopted a ‘cherry-picking approach’ to a practitioner, showing just a few traits of that company or individual’s approach and resulting in less theatrically effective work.

It is important to note that many pieces of work would have benefited from editing, even when they were under the maximum time limit. Students often found it difficult to sustain their originality, skills, and engagement with their audience for the duration of longer pieces of theatre. Teachers are permitted to advise students on the pace and effectiveness of their work and are encouraged to do so. There were examples of very successful work with six performers that lasted twenty minutes.

Examples of successful themes included a piece set during the 1980s AIDs crisis, a piece using the early methods of Complicité that reflected the food poverty crisis as a clown show, a DV8 piece based on interviews with a range of workers in the NHS, a Frantic Assembly piece relating a sailing disaster during a Fastnet race, a Shared Experience piece based on ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ and a piece inspired by The Paper Birds reflecting the students’ peer group’s concerns about the environmental crisis.

## **Specialisms**

### **Performance**

Most students chose to be assessed as performers and a range of success was achieved with Moderators reporting a generally higher level of achievement this year. There were many examples of excellent or exceptional work. There were also examples where students had not achieved the necessary vocal and physical precision, and this was often the result of lack of thought in the original selection of the practitioner.

### **Directing**

There were few of this skill seen but those that were seen were often effective. In the Working Notebooks there was generally secure evidence of intention and of specific instruction given to the actors, which was then evident in the performances. There was detail given of rehearsal processes and application of research. Some students supplied supporting documentation, for example prompt copies, rehearsal schedules and director’s notes and, where this was integrated, this was effective.

### **Lighting and Sound Design**

There were a few examples seen, and some demonstrated a very good technical understanding in the Working Notebooks. More successful Working Notebooks were able to balance the demands of the devising process, working closely with the rest of the group and their own process as a designer. Less successful work lacked consideration of how to integrate the technical effects into the meaning being created in performance. In some instances, students only discussed their own process without making any reference to the over-all development of the piece. Supporting evidence in terms of cue sheets and lighting plots could have helped support some students’ marks.

### **Set design**

There were a few very imaginative set designs that clearly contributed to the overall success of the piece. Students had investigated a practitioner's work thoroughly and aspects of his/her aims were clearly evident. The Working Notebooks showed good practical understanding and awareness of challenges in terms of skills, time constraints and budgets. The sets were an integral part of the performances and made a strong contribution to the performances and the creation of meaning.

### **Costume design**

There were only a few costume designs seen and these showed some understanding of the designer's role. Weaker answers had not fully considered the costume in use and both fit and consonance with the piece as a whole were unclear. Costume designers need to focus on one costume explicitly in the Working Notebook. This does not preclude providing other costumes, but the selected design should evidence their best work and should be presented to camera before the performance. There should be no commentary given at this point.

### **Puppet Design**

Although several students used puppets in their performances, no puppet designers were seen. Some centres included the use of puppets in the work, but this was frequently imprecise.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.