



A-LEVEL

DRAMA AND THEATRE

7262/X Component 3 Making Theatre
Report on the Examination

7262
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General

- This has been an unusual year and for many teachers and their students, a difficult and challenging one.
- A number of Centres found the administration of 7262/X more challenging than in previous series. Partly this was due to the modified requirements that have been implemented this year in response to the disruption caused by the Covid 19 pandemic.
- Many of the issues arising from this series were commented on in the Reports on the Examination from the 2018 and 2019 series, but there have been some issues, unique to this series in 2022, following two years without ‘normal’ examinations.
- In 7262/X, the main modifications were:
 - the introduction of the facility for students to submit ‘alternative evidence’, if their examination was affected adversely by Covid 19
 - the change to the requirement for students to workshop 3 extracts; students were allowed to focus their time and energy on the workshoping of a single extract, if they chose to, but were free to workshop and write about 2 or 3 extracts if their situation permitted and they wished to do so
 - this change also led to a modified requirement for the Reflective report, where students were able to write about one, two or three extracts that they had workshoped, with no alteration to the Reflective report demands, including the stipulated ‘suggested length’ of 2,000-2,500 words with an absolute maximum of 3,000 words
 - Our examiners were aware that some students who explored 1 or 2 extracts may have shorter work than the 2,000-2,500 suggestion and they have not been penalised if they have met the marking criteria.
- Very few students reportedly resorted to the submission of ‘alternative evidence’.
- There were several instances of reports exceeding the ‘absolute’ maximum of 3,000 words. As stipulated in the specification, words beyond the 3,000 maximum were not credited.

A reminder about the role of the NEA

- Teachers should be aware that there is support available through their AQA designated NEA adviser, for advice on the interpretation and delivery of all aspects of this 7262/X component.
- Social media platforms have offered welcome mutual support for teachers during the turbulent times of the pandemic, but some of the well-meaning advice offered by colleagues may not be as accurate as the advice offered by the AQA-trained NEA advisers whose role is to guide teachers and to avert potential rubric infringements or misinterpretations of the specification.

Administration

Responding to initial contact from the allocated examiner

- Most centres responded to examiner’s contacts promptly and there was clear and useful communication between examiner and the centre. This was extremely important this year as schools were still facing the challenges of student absence, Covid related problems and a higher than usual number of teachers with long-term illnesses.

- Unfortunately, several examiners have commented on the difficulty of establishing contact with centres, or, where Exams Officers had passed on the Examiner's details to the relevant teacher, there was frequently a delay in the teacher responding to the requests for the Schedule Outline Form with details of:
 - candidate numbers and student names
 - selected specialisms
 - extracts chosen
 - practitioners chosen.

The Play Approval Process

- The requirement for including a signed Play Approval Form with the materials sent to the examiner (to be submitted to the NEA for approval at least **six weeks** before the examination) had been overlooked by several Centres.
- The Play Approval system is one of OFQUAL's requirements of this specification and, therefore, teachers who had forgotten about them had to make later and, in some cases, retrospective submissions for approval.

Extracts to be sent to the Examiner

- Some Centres did not send their examiner copies of the extracts to be performed. Examiners should receive these no less than **four weeks** before the examination date.
- Some Centres did not indicate the beginning/end of the extracts to be performed, nor did they indicate cuts or changes that had been made to the extracts in contravention of the rubric for this component.

Submission of Paperwork to accompany the recordings of the performances

- Most centres had provided clear 'Programme Notes' with clear identification of each performance group, supported by photographs of the students in the costume and make-up that they appear in, in their performances.
- Less helpful were passport-style photographs, often taken from school records, showing the students at a younger age and with very dissimilar appearances to their late-teenage selves.
- Programme Notes should include photographs of each student, preferably arranged so that all members of each group are grouped together. Additionally, the students' candidate numbers should be included next to their photographs, plus details of the chosen play, the part they played and their chosen practitioner.
- Some Centres did not include Programme Notes which are a requirement and therefore had to be provided before assessment could take place.
- Some Centres omitted to include Candidate Record Forms, and these also had to be requested by the examiner.
- Some Centres did not include the students' 'Statements of Dramatic intentions', without which, no assessment can be made of how far students have achieved their intentions.

Recordings and USBs

- Most centres submitted work which was filmed appropriately and followed the guidelines set by AQA. Some filming did not follow these guidelines. However, the best recordings were clear both visually and aurally.
- Other Centres filmed the students' work from such a distance from the stage that it was impossible to tell one student from another by sight alone, and examiners had to follow the text to identify which student was playing which role - if the recording was audible.
- It would be a good idea for a late rehearsal to be filmed and then checked so that problems with clarity of sound and vision could be addressed/eliminated.
- Some filming was problematical, where the students were not all captured throughout the performance. This was usually, but not exclusively, caused by staging choices, for example filming in traverse or the filming of a promenade performance.
- It is advised to discuss any potential issues with filming the students' performances with the NEA adviser and take advice about how to ensure that each students' work is fully represented.
- It was helpful when students introduced themselves clearly to camera and included any useful identifying information, such as a change of costume during the piece or multi-roling.
- In most cases, design students ensured that their set, costume or puppet design was filmed in close-up, and in silence, in a sequence preceding the recording of the performance.
- Design students must **not** introduce their designs on camera or make any comments about their designs. Some Centres did not comply with this requirement.

USBs

- Most centres encrypted the USB, with the vast majority using the agreed AQA password for this subject.
- Some Centres used their own password, sometimes writing the password on the USB label, somewhat defying the whole purpose of encryption. Others used their own password but did not share it with the examiner, and others weren't password protected at all. These were administrative breaches.
- A few recordings were inaccessible for unknown reasons, but which inevitably meant a disproportionate amount of time was spent contacting the Centre, trying to access the work and/or waiting to receive a replacement USB.
- Some Centres included all the 'paperwork', including Reflective reports, on the USB - without any hard copies of the paperwork at all. This is not acceptable, as Examiners cannot be expected to print out vast quantities of material to mark and annotate.

Statements of Dramatic Intention

- Although the Statements of Dramatic Intention do not attract marks in themselves, they provide important information for the examiner and form a necessary part of the assessment of the performance. Bullet point 5 of the criteria banding scheme, (Part A), relates directly to the student's achievement of their dramatic intentions and cannot be rewarded at all if there are no intentions to measure the performance outcome against.
- Good statements made clear and specific reference to intended effects and often referenced the application of the practitioner's methodology. Less effective statements made very

generalised comments which did not offer the examiner any insight into the student's dramatic intentions.

- Some students did not offer 'Justification of theatrical choices' that appears on the SDI form. Students need to explain why and how they have interpreted the text as they have.
- It is especially important to complete this information if students have deviated from the text as it is written, perhaps in terms of location, period and/or casting decisions. For example, if a play is very clearly set in a Lancashire town and the student has chosen not to use an accent from Lancashire, they should alert the examiner to their theatrical reason for doing so.

Selection of extracts

- Students were permitted to explore and workshop 1, 2 or 3 extracts (for 2022 only).
- Examiners applied the amended mark scheme to whatever an individual or group of students presented them with.
- In the majority of Centres, students had explored 3 extracts.
- It was evident, from some of the performances seen, that not all students had been guided appropriately in their choice of extracts, or had not responded receptively to guidance given.
- Examiners reported that many students appeared not to have read the whole play from which the extract was taken, let alone identified and explored a ten-minute section from which their 'key extract' was taken, as explicitly required by the specification.
- Some students had chosen monologues from the internet/YouTube or from Monologue/audition collections, and their work sometimes revealed a complete disregard for the style/period and/or genre of the original full text.
- In some cases, interpretation of the character being performed was completely inappropriate to the play as a whole.
- Even where students were working in groups, there was evidence of a common lack of understanding of the wider play.
- Another striking feature of this pandemic-affected cohort was the frequency with which examiners encountered centres where each group had explored the same play and, in some cases, different groups or individual students presented exactly the same extract for the examined performance.
- This resulted in overly similar, if not almost identical, theatrical performances and a lack of a sense of the students' ownership of their performances.
- This was in evidence in performances where the setting of tables and chairs on stage stayed the same for all groups and in reports where students all wrote virtually the same thing.
- In some instances, Reflective reports were so similar as to suggest a form of collusion had taken place, with students 'over-sharing' their work.
- Unwise abridgements of texts were more in evidence this year.
- Students need to be reminded that the cutting out of characters not only changes the writer's intention but also changes the rhythm and dynamic of the scene and sometimes alters the meaning. For example, cutting Rosie from a family scene in 'Things I Know to be True' where she is clearly meant to be present, changes the relationships and family dynamic on stage.
- Some groups spliced together scenes from different parts of the play, which is clearly a

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- rubric infringement as this does not constitute ‘a continuous extract’ – the set task.
- Some ‘monologues’ were artificially created by simply excising one of the characters from a duologue.
 - Some students employed a ‘voice-over’ or a ‘voice from the wings’ to supply occasional lines in their ‘monologue/duologue’ – this constituted a breach of rubric, as ‘non-examinees’ are not permitted.
 - In almost every case, where students ‘tampered’ with an extract, to suit themselves, the performance criteria relating to ‘appropriateness to the play as a whole’ and ‘sensitivity to context’ resulted in the decisions the student had made being self-limiting.

Selection of Practitioner

- When it came to practitioners chosen there were some excellent choices that allowed students to explore their chosen text from a firm foundation of understanding their practitioner’s methodology.
- The most popular practitioners by far this year were Stanislavski and Katie Mitchell although Max Stafford Clark, Frantic Assembly, Artaud and Brecht were also popular.
- Far fewer students attempted a design skill in 2022 and the design practitioners were rarely chosen.
- Examiners were disappointed, as in previous series, to see how little students actually knew about Artaud’s theories or about Brecht’s actual practice.
- Instead of revealing appropriate research into their chosen practitioners, students appeared to have acquired a muddled grasp of their practitioner’s theory and practice from unspecified sources.
- It is important to stress that the areas of study for all practitioners are detailed in the specification, so it is disappointing to see weak links being made between theory and the students’ own practice, as seen in the performances and evidenced in the reports.
- Less successful pairings of text and practitioner appeared to be the result of students having first chosen a text, worked on it for a little while, and then decided at a later stage to ‘tack on’ a practitioner’s ideas. This usually resulted in a disjointed and incoherent piece.
- Evidence of the influence of the practitioner should be integral to the piece and not considered as a separate element.
- There were examples of pieces using Frantic Assembly where the intention appeared to be to use every practical idea gained from Frantic Assembly’s workshops and from their book throughout the pieces. This resulted in a barrage of ‘round-by-throughs’, ‘hymns hands’ and ‘chair duets’ obscuring the sense of the text itself.
- Students should also bear in mind that the extract that they choose is part of a larger text and that the style they adopt should also work if the whole text was to be performed that way.
- Students who chose one of Kneehigh’s own texts and then used Kneehigh as their practitioner usually excelled as the material, naturally, lends itself to Kneehigh’s approach. The same applies when Brecht is applied to one of his plays and when a Frantic Assembly text, such as *pool: no water* is performed in the style of Frantic Assembly.

The Reflective Reports

Positive aspects seen:

- Students continued to use a variety of structures for their Reflective Reports which was entirely acceptable.
- Where students had selected a single extract, they often offered a very detailed explanation of their work and of the application of their chosen practitioner.
- When writing about two or three extracts, students still managed to address all the requirements of the Reflective report, albeit in a little less detail.
- Most students gave reasons for their choices of extract(s) and practitioner(s) and showed a secure understanding of how the social, cultural and historical context of their chosen extract(s) had affected their interpretation of their piece.
- The best reports included well-illustrated examples both from the preparation/rehearsal period for the piece and the final stages of presenting the workshopped performance(s).
- Crucially, good reports showed detail of the application of the chosen practitioner to the process and the outcome of their creative work, as well as including sensible evaluation of the development of their personal skill/specialism within the interpretation of the piece.
- Good reports showed how the student had used the practitioners' methodologies to develop their own work.
- Good reports referred to specific key moments in the extract(s), including brief references to text which allowed examiners to visualise the process more clearly.
- Although there were far fewer design students than in previous years, those design reports that were seen were well illustrated, with photographs and diagrams which were integrated in the text of the report.

Less good practice

- Some students appeared to think that they had to adopt a comparative approach to the extracts (when they were exploring more than one extract) but this is a misunderstanding.
- Some students, having explored a single extract wrote very short Reflective reports (of approximately 800 words) and did not take advantage of the opportunity to write to the suggested report length of 2,000–2,500 words, with an absolute maximum of 3,000 words. However, they were not penalised for writing fewer than 2,000-2,500 words if they met the marking criteria.
- Some students did not provide a word count which is essential for this externally-marked piece of coursework.
- In weaker reports, students briefly identified the genre and style of the extract(s) and may even have noted the social, cultural and historical contexts, however this information was rarely used to explain how these aspects had informed their interpretation of the chosen play(s)/extract(s).
- Weaker reports made very generalised comments about their discoveries during the process, revealing limited understanding and application of the practices of their chosen practitioner.
- Weaker reports tended to be descriptive and narrative rather than analytical and evaluative
- Some students gave insufficient consideration to how they had developed their own skill, using the influence of their chosen practitioner.
- Some students wrote about a very narrow range of their chosen practitioner's methods, for example, choosing Frantic Assembly, but only referencing 'chair duets' or 'picking oose'.
- Some students revealed a very restricted understanding of their chosen practitioner.
- Some students did not offer an interpretation of their chosen extract or role.

Contribution to Performance

Positive aspects seen:

- Students made highly appropriate choices, pairing the chosen practitioner with an eminently suitable text
- Students gave full attention to detail in all aspects of the staging to create an authentic theatrical event.
- Students uncovered meaning in the text and offered intelligent and nuanced interpretation of the text, as written.
- Students performed the text without cuts or unjustified abridgements or unjustified interpretations.
- Students communicated complete control of their skills in performance.
- A full range of performances was seen, including some exceptional performances in Band 5. There were few very weak performances seen, with none in Band 1, and only a small minority in Band 2. It was encouraging to see so many accomplished and thoughtful performances, many achieving Band 4 and above.

Less good practice

- Students adopted a casual approach to the theatricality of the event often characterised by a disorganised approach to the performance space with visible clutter in view of the camera.
- Missing or mimed props within naturalistic performances.
- Minimal attention to detail in relation to costume and/or setting.
- Poor attention to period/context within the performances.

Skills and specialisms

- A range of skills was seen, although the majority of students opted to be assessed as performers.
- Teachers need to advise design students that their designs are assessed wholly in performance; there is no opportunity to describe or explain the design, to camera, (or to the examiner, when face-to-face examiner visits recommence) in this specification.
- To be successful, any design element should play as effective a role in the success of the performance as the direction (if there is a director) and the performance work; it should certainly facilitate the action rather than create problems for the performers.
- An understanding of the extract, its contexts, and the playwright's intentions, as well as the influence of an appropriate practitioner, should be evident in the performers', director's and/or designers' interpretation – consonance between these different elements is most important.

Performer

Positive achievements

- Extracts were unedited, or appropriately edited, and of the correct length, to enable students to demonstrate performance skills in accordance with the playwright's intention.
- The chosen practitioner was a complete match with the selected extract and actually enabled the student(s) to reveal the playwright's intentions.
- Students displayed precise vocal and physical performance skills that revealed understanding of the demands of both practitioner and text, as well as of the role selected.

- Examiners were delighted to see a good balance of monologues, duologues and group work across the cohort, this series, despite the negative impact on rehearsal-time caused by potential absences, due to Covid 19.

Less successful work

- Some extracts were much longer than the stipulated length for the group size; this often had a diminishing effect on the marks awarded if the performance was not sustained or lacked variety.
- There were also some extremely short monologues seen in this series, which did not allow the performers to demonstrate either a range of skills or to demonstrate that they could sustain one or two skills for the duration of a meaningful piece of theatre.
- Occasionally, students chose an extract and role that they had seen (possibly several times) in a streamed performance and, while this experience might have helped weaker students to understand the text, it occasionally tempted students into ‘copying’ the performance, which inhibited their own creativity.
- Gillian Anderson’s performance of Blanche from ‘*Streetcar*’, for example, was seen regularly by examiners with varying degrees of success. Sometimes, more than one student, in any one Centre, offered an attempt to copy this distinctive portrayal of Blanche Dubois. Where Stanislavski was nominated as practitioner, it was difficult to award marks for a pronouncedly replicated performance.
- While monologue books have their place in hunting down suitable extracts for a solo performer, they should be approached with care. It was evident from some of the performances of monologues chosen, perhaps, (out of context) from a monologue book, or from YouTube, that students had not taken the trouble to access the whole play.
- Monologues were often performed directly to the camera with no apparent awareness of the context of the speech or any consideration of where any other characters that appear on stage at the same time (if there were any) would be placed.
- Where the monologue chosen was a soliloquy, for example, from *Hamlet*, then this was an acceptable approach, but a monologue such as Blanche’s from ‘*Streetcar*’, as mentioned above, needed the performer to be aware that she was speaking about the tragic circumstances of her husband’s death to Mitch, and that, however lost in her memory Blanche might become, the performer must be conscious of where Mitch is on the stage in relation to her character.
- Some students made a completely inappropriate choice of practitioner, for example combining Brecht with *The Seagull*.
- In some pieces, the understanding of the practitioner was so limited that it was impossible to detect their influence in the work. This was often a feature of ‘Brechtian-inspired’ work where performers appeared on a ‘minimalist’ set, wearing ‘rehearsal blacks’ and spoke all their lines directly to the audience. Attempts at ‘multi-roling’ of a range of characters was not achieved through performance skills but by hanging different ‘placards’ around their necks, at different times during the performance, to indicate their variety of roles.

Direction

- A few students chose this option.
- Successful directors did appear to strive to achieve a clear style, informed by the chosen practitioner, and in some cases the unifying presence of a director was easy to detect, especially in some well-choreographed physical theatre pieces.
- Successful direction was frequently evidenced in obviously polished work, where the stage-picture had been considered, as well as the direction of individual performers.

- Successful directors used materials creatively; showed understanding of the potential effects of staging fundamentals, such as the use of space, scale, levels, perspective and the performers' relationship with the audience.
- Successful directors also showed an understanding of the importance of accommodating the action of the extract perfectly, including the positioning of entrances and exits and/or projection screens, if used.
- Some finely nuanced naturalistic pieces were seen where actors appeared confident in all aspects of their work and there was a clearly established rhythm and pace discernible in the performance.
- Students who had applied distinctive practitioners, such as Punchdrunk, generally fared very well, with one director using a disused pub for her site-specific direction of 'Two', where the performers were able to actually utilise the optics, beer pumps and back door of the pub to great theatrical effect. This student had also taken great care to rig stage lighting so that the performers could easily be seen.
- Weaker direction often resulted in a sense of incomplete preparation and performances appeared under-rehearsed or slightly incongruent with the text and/or practitioner chosen. There were some poorly executed attempts at the use of 'live-feed' seen in Katie Mitchell-inspired directed pieces in this series.

Lighting design

- Lighting design was attempted by the very brave and the very confident this series, in the knowledge that the design would be assessed via a recording, but some excellent work was seen.
- There were interesting designs seen for a performance of '*pool: no water*' which took the rippling light reflected from the swimming pool as a motif throughout. This student worked with bold colour washes in shades of blue, as well as with shadow and silhouette when the artist arcs into the 'pool' in a moonlit night to find – 'no water' – black-out.
- Lighting design practitioners chosen included Paule Constable and Malcolm Rippeth with other students citing the same practitioner as the actors had chosen, for example, in the case of '*pool: no water*', Frantic Assembly.
- There were some excellent examples of lighting design where the actors were working in the style of Berkoff, and his signature use of light and shadow was seen to great effect in a performance of *The Trial*.
- The majority of the students' work seen involved designers who operated the lighting themselves.
- There was a good level of understanding of how lighting could contribute to mood and atmosphere and some experienced lighting designers revealed their ability to light the stage from all angles and to support the action rather than to over-embellish and distract from it.

Sound design

- There were not enough examples of this skill reported to make any meaningful comment about sound design.

Costume design

- Relatively few costume designs were seen. Where designers considered the effect of their work as shown in performance, and from a suitable distance, these were successful.

- A few designers had not considered the impact of their costumes for audience members beyond the ‘front-row’ and their design illustrated this lack of forethought.
- Other costumes were not appropriate for the actual extract being performed. This showed a lack of sensitivity to the context of specific scenes and/or particular moments in the play.
- Good costume designs always showed sensitivity to the context of the play as well as to the character wearing the costume and the action that they are involved in during the extract.
- Successful costume designers used materials creatively and understood the need to create a ‘complete’ costume with attention paid to all costume design fundamentals, including colour, shape, fabric, ornamentation, style, fit, condition and they included headgear (if appropriate), footwear and accessories.

Set design

- A few set designs were seen, but this was a minority choice.
- Set designs that were seen ranged, in terms of ambition, from a complete ‘box-set’, for an extract from Noel Coward’s *Private Lives* to a single ‘wheeled-on’ bureau in front of which a duologue from *Hamlet* was performed.
- The student who designed the impressive setting for *Private Lives* included entrance doorways stage left and right with a set of French doors, upstage. Furnishings included full length drapes framing the French doors, two matching chaise longues, various mahogany side tables, one of which had a 1930s telephone perched on it. There was also a drinks trolley (replete with various bottles and decanters), a working gramophone, authentic-looking Persian rugs, cushions galore, suspended chandeliers and ‘walls’ adorned with pictures and mirrors. This set was used throughout the exchanges between Elyot and Amanda to great effect.
- The student who ‘designed’ for *Hamlet* chose a bureau of indeterminate period (looked old) in front of which an extract from *Hamlet* was performed. The bureau was not used by the performers (Hamlet and Ophelia) and no other ‘set-dressing’ was included.
- As with other design skills, successful designs showed understanding of the period and social context of the setting of the piece as well as the practical demands of the performance of the extract and the designers offered ways in which to support the performers.
- Most designers claimed the influence of a practitioner, but this was not always sufficiently apparent in the final design on stage.

Puppet design

No puppet design has been reported to the Lead Examiner at the time of the compilation of this report.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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