



GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2012 Drama solo performance examination contained ten prescribed structures that provided students with a broad range of characters and a wide selection of stimuli. Feedback from teachers indicated that students were highly engaged by and interested in exploring more than one character and therefore had difficulty making their final choice. It is recommended that teachers and students plan preparation of the solo carefully; for example, using a timeline that allocates appropriate time to exploring options before beginning the development of the solo.

Strong work was characterised by

- attention paid to the importance of every word in the structure, including the information presented in the performance focus stem
- dramatic action far outweighing talking
- evidence of extensive research
- sophisticated understanding of dramatic concepts, which include performance styles, theatrical conventions and dramatic elements
- the prescribed character occupying the majority of the performance time
- creative choices in the use of stagecraft.

Weaker work was characterised by

- a naturalistic performance style
- extensive use of a wordy narrative
- inappropriate or minimal use of stagecraft
- cursory attention paid to the detail in the structures and little or no reference to the stem in the performance focus
- evidence of a lack of research
- little or no reference to the stimulus material.

Overall, students demonstrated greater thought and effort in their selection and use of stagecraft than in previous years. This is particularly important with respect to costume and its appropriateness for the character and the time in which that character lives. For some students, however, there seemed to be an apparent unwillingness to step away from everyday dress, deportment, grooming or accessorising when preparing the appearance and demeanour of the character(s) being portrayed. An audience's belief in a character can be easily broken by a student's oversight with regard to simple things like nail polish that should have been removed, piercings that should have been covered and a modern hairstyle on a character from a different era.

Teachers and students need to note that 'theatre blacks', on their own, are not a good option. They work as a blank canvas only. Students can effect efficient costume change with the selective use of additional costume items that enhance dramatic meaning through their symbolic value. This can also be useful in assisting character transformation.

The choice and use of props was better this year, especially with regard to the selection of appropriate objects and their transformation. Students, generally, worked with objects that sat comfortably within the world of the character and were easily manipulated throughout the performance, without that manipulation inhibiting dramatic timing and tension.

Better work was characterised by the selective use of comprehensive detail and careful editing.

A critical aspect of the prescribed structure that was overlooked by some students was finding a way to reference information presented in the stem of the performance focus as well as the information required in the three dot points. Every word in the structure is important and must not be overlooked or ignored. The performance stem must be evident in the performance.



SPECIFIC INFORMATION

The characters

Maisie Dobbs

High-scoring performances demonstrated an immersion into the era when almost everything in life was different from the present day: demeanour, politeness, dress, gait, gender roles, managing relationships, affection and love (as distinct from sexual attraction). Work at this level used stylised movement, language and sound effectively to enhance mood.

Low-scoring performances failed to demonstrate the formality of early 20th century life, choosing a more 'Modesty Blaise' type of character leading the cavalry. Work at this level also missed the innocence of the relationship between nurse and doctor in times of war, often presenting a more Hollywood style of overplaying the loss. Students struggled to show the status and excitedness of Lady Rowan.

The 'Techno Teen'

High-scoring performances differentiated between regular use of communication technology and reliance almost to the point of obsession on social networking technology. Work at this level acknowledged the very real benefits of communication technology but also explored the 'dark side' and presented a sophisticated understanding of 'parable' and use of dramatic metaphor.

Low-scoring performances were superficial in their exploration of the benefits of communication technology and relied heavily on the use of cliché, spending too much time exploring the 'dark side'. Work at this level glossed over the detail in the performance focus, failing to establish the audience, and ignored the requirement in dot point 3 to create a 'parable'.

The Newspaper Mogul

High-scoring performances demonstrated a good understanding of Hearst's drive to create America's greatest newspaper empire and his determination to brook no opposition. Students skilfully used expressive skills to show Hearst's anger and passion rather than simply describing this with words. Work at this level clearly understood the intrusiveness of 'yellow journalism' and the link between it and the 'cult of celebrity' in the 2000s.

Low-scoring performances played Hearst as an honest man being persecuted, and focused too much time on Orson Welles. Work at this level contained a predominance of yelling at lawyers and a lack of research.

Pinocchio

High-scoring performances demonstrated considerable understanding of, as well as skill in the use of, the traditions of commedia dell'arte. Students developed clever and practical costumes and props and went beyond the obvious in their creation of a 'new fairytale' in dot point 3. Performances were clearly based on the text stipulated in the stimulus and made highly effective use of language.

Low-scoring performances were based on popular adaptations of the Pinocchio story, not the required story in the stimulus, and presented uncontrolled energy as a substitute for the conventions of commedia. Work at this level contained no sense of climax and relied heavily on a stereotypical high-pitched, squeaky voice for Pinocchio.

The Imposter

High-scoring performances demonstrated an understanding of the Imposter as a conman, a charmer, a likeable fellow who was not really bad, just a little bit dishonest. Work at this level made excellent use of contrast and presented sophisticated transformation of characters. It also presented clear differentiation between Abagnale's work with his security company and his work for the FBI.

Low-scoring performances relied too heavily on *Catch Me If You Can*, simply repeating episodes from the film without attempting to relate these episodes to the broader requirements in the performance focus. There was no sense of caricature and no climax. Work at this level showed poor or little transformation of place.

The Tourist

High-scoring performances clearly referenced the stimulus image in the choice of costume. Students were careful to meet all requirements of the performance focus and, while exploring comedic choices throughout their work, effectively



used caricature to highlight the idiosyncrasies of real people with real personalities. The choice and presentation of the 'environmental issue' were true to the nature of the character.

Low-scoring performances often showed little or no reference to the stimulus image. This resulted in characters who seemed either out of place or out of time. There was often a sense of the 'party trick' about the material and little attention to the detail of the performance focus. Work at this level was often weighed down by a clumsy use of props that, in turn, affected comic timing. There was also reliance on the use of bawdy humour.

The Hotel Guest

High-scoring performances were typified by evidence of extensive research beyond the film stimulus. Students presented thoughtful and sensitive portrayals of characters on both sides of the conflict and were able to capture a sense of inevitability with their use of rhythm throughout the performance. Work at this level also contained a real sense of Rwanda.

Low-scoring performances merely reproduced episodes from the film and were unclear about the background of their chosen character and often unclear about the audience. Fear and despair were expressed through shouting and screaming, when judicious use of stillness and silence, the prescribed theatrical convention, would have been a more appropriate choice.

Eleanor of Aquitaine

High-scoring performances contained extensive research and presented Eleanor as an elderly, world-weary woman, proud of her achievements but tired of the intrigues and betrayals that go with power and power struggles. She was a woman painfully aware of her mortality. Work at this level also demonstrated excellent choices in the use of stagecraft and the use of the conventions of Elizabethan theatre.

Low-scoring performances failed to understand Eleanor as a Queen and a mother of kings, often presenting her as an abandoned wife in the modern sense of the word, and having her incarceration similar to that of a prison in the 21st century. Work at this level often made inappropriate costume choices.

The Spirit of Colonisation

High-scoring performances were highly physical and skilled in the use of symbol and pathos. Students presented a spirit who played a range of roles, and made excellent choices in their use of stagecraft, particularly with props. Work at this level presented thoughtful, intelligent and, at times, somewhat subversive responses to dot point 3.

Low-scoring performances were generally unable to find a way of responding to dot point 3, and showed little understanding of the multi-layered nature of the stimulus. Work at this level lacked cohesion and structure, which resulted in a confusing and sometimes muddled development.

Karma

High-scoring performances were highly physical and dynamic, and the energy was carefully controlled. Students presented sophisticated use of freeze-frames and effective use of both external and internal conflict. Work at this level clearly addressed both Karma's and her brother's use of powers and sensitively recreated the early years in Vietnam. Students made excellent stagecraft choices, particularly with costume.

Low-scoring performances overplayed the martial arts aspect of the world of the character, often resulting in a loud, full-on physical exercise that showed little reference to the brothers and no sense of regret in Karma herself.