



2010 Theatre Studies GA 2: Performance examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The Theatre Studies performance examination requires students to present a monologue from the list published in the *VCAA Bulletin VCE VCAL and VET*. The monologue task challenges students to develop an interpretation of the monologue based on creative, expressive and imaginative theatrical choices. The 2010 examination was the first in which there was a single prescribed version of each monologue. Overwhelmingly, students presented the prescribed version and most students followed the guidelines of the monologue performance examination.

The task does not require the student to reconstruct the real world of the play entirely. Students should think carefully about how their use of stagecraft, such as set items and properties, will enhance their performance. The student is responsible for bringing all stagecraft items in and out of the assessment room unassisted and within the allotted time.

Recontextualising the monologue, for example by changing the original time and/or setting to another appropriate context, is permissible for this task. However, some students made recontextualisation choices that did not enhance the intended meaning of the monologue. Students should be aware that this can adversely affect their performance.

Students should be aware that venues are hired spaces and that they will be allocated a room in which to perform. They should plan their performance so it is adaptable to a range of spaces. Students should expect to perform in the room they are allocated to and need to understand that often it is not possible for students to swap the room in which they are assessed. Students are advised of the venue of their assessment well in advance of the examination date and are able to find out about the characteristics of the performance space; for example, floor surface (carpeted or uncarpeted). It is not appropriate to ask for a room change because the student is using heavy furniture or if they have too many individual pieces.

One table and two chairs will be supplied in each examination room. The furniture supplied is not designed to be stood upon and in no circumstances should the furniture or the floor be damaged. When in doubt, or if they have particular requirements, students should bring their own furniture. The assessors' table(s) is for assessment purposes only. Students are not to place objects on the assessors' table(s) or use the table(s) in any way as part of their performance.

While it appears that most students are following the performance examination guidelines, some students were not aware that they were not permitted to perform with real or imitation weapons. 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 students are in any doubt whatsoever, they should avoid using any liquids.

Each assessment room has a power point for the use of electrical equipment, such as audio devices. However, it is responsibility of the student to plan how they will use such equipment including considering whether to bring batteries and/or an extension cord, depending on where in the room the power point is situated. It is also advisable for students to check the sound level of audio equipment before starting their performance and, where applicable, to be familiar with the remote control devices for the equipment.

Areas of strength and weakness

Stronger performances were generally characterised by:

- a thorough knowledge of the monologue, associated scene and the play as a whole
- a high level of direct or indirect research and preparation
- a strong and consistent directorial vision
- a strong correlation between the interpretation of the monologue and its contexts, including those within the scene and the greater play
- a high level of understanding of subtext and the intended meanings of the playwright
- consistent and creative application of theatrical style(s)
- mastery of the language as appropriate to the monologue and the greater world of the play
- a clear awareness of implied time, place and person(s)
- accomplished performance skills including the use of verbal and nonverbal expressive skills
- well chosen and effectively applied stagecraft other than acting, dramaturgy and direction
- highly evident and effective use of focus and space



- an understanding of, and an ability to manipulate, theatrical tension and timing.

Generally, weaker performances were characterised by:

- an incomplete, limited or poor knowledge of the monologue
- a poor perception of the world of the character within the context of the scene and the play as a whole
- little direct or indirect evidence of research or preparation
- little evidence of a consolidated directorial vision
- poor or inappropriate contextual choices
- concentration on text and literal meaning, with minimal reference to subtext, context or the intended meanings of the playwright
- limited use and application of theatrical style(s)
- poor understanding and/or application of the language the monologue
- limited physicalisation of the character
- peripheral or irrelevant application of props, set items, costume, or make-up
- a lack of awareness of implied time, place or person(s)
- limited manipulation of the performance space
- a poor understanding of, and inability to, manipulate the focus of the audience and the performer
- a poor understanding of, and inability to, manipulate theatrical tension and timing.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

The first criterion is quantitative rather than qualitative. That is, it asks whether the student met the requirements of the task, rather than considering how well the monologue was performed. Where students did not meet the requirements of criterion 1, it seemed that they had not memorised their lines and/or had not made appropriate contextual choices. To achieve full marks for criterion 1, as well as memorising the lines of the script and enacting the text, students were required to make directorial choices, select and apply a theatrical style(s), choose and apply stagecraft other than acting and create an appropriate context for the performance. Students were expected to deliver all of the lines of the monologue at the time of the assessment. The pre-recording and re-playing of lines was not deemed to be a performance.

Students should note that all of the assessment criteria have equal weighting and they should ensure that their performance meets each criterion. Some students paid scant attention to the use and application of theatrical style(s) (criterion 4) and were unaware of, or not fully aware of, the implied time, place and persons within the monologue and associated scene (criterion 2). The monologue, the associated scene and the greater world of the play should inform contextual choices as conveyed in the performance. The combination of 'focus' and 'space' in criterion 7 seemed to cause confusion for some students. Focus relates to the ability of a performer to portray and maintain a characterisation, as well as the ability to focus an audience on aspects of a performance. One way of focusing the audience's attention is by manipulating the performance space. Some students presented their monologue with very little evidence of the application of stagecraft other than acting, dramaturgy and direction (criterion 6). While the choice of stagecraft such as costumes, make-up, set items and props should be judicious, it seemed that some students made poor stagecraft decisions and/or applied little stagecraft and this adversely affected their performance.

The Monologues

| Number | Monologue Chosen | % of students |
|--------|---------------------|---------------|
| 1 | King Berenger | 8 |
| 2 | Queen Marguerite | 10 |
| 3 | Volpone | 2 |
| 4 | Lady Would-Be | 3 |
| 5 | Horace Vandergelder | 8 |
| 6 | Mrs. Levi | 13 |
| 7 | Antony | 3 |
| 8 | Cleopatra | 9 |
| 9 | Jolyon | 8 |
| 10 | Angela | 15 |
| 11 | Herald | 11 |
| 12 | Death | 10 |



Many students tended to add stage business and action before the delivery of the spoken lines of their monologue. An appropriate choice made by students was to continue with action and business after they had concluded the verbal delivery of the prescribed text. Such choices are to be encouraged as they can assist students to establish and maintain a context. However, teachers and students should note that it is not within the conventions of this task to add or delete lines of dialogue to the performance.

Along with new choices, monologues from previous years will be reused. This may mean that students are more familiar with the plays and characters. There is support for cutting and pasting passages, allowing students to address the challenge of shifts in time, persons and places that this requires. It is the teachers' responsibility to ensure that the monologues studied by their students are the officially sanctioned versions. The text of the prescribed monologues is available upon request from the VCAA.

Play: *Exit the King*

Monologue: King Berenger or Queen Marguerite

Stronger performances tended to capture both the pathos and the humour of the monologue and its textual irony. Higher-level performances were also characterised by an excellent application of make-up, costume, set and prop items. They were also characterised by a strong awareness and sophisticated application of theatre of the absurd. Higher-level performances tended to create a strong sense of the other characters present on stage.

Lower-level performances tended to be characterised by an apparent attempt at the absurdist style without a clear understanding of it or the inherent meaning of the text. They tended to lack an understanding of the relationship between the King and his subjects and between the King and Queen. Often students did not convey the motivations and objectives of the characters clearly.

Play: *Volpone*

Monologue: Volpone or Lady Would-Be

While these were among the least popular of the characters, the higher-level performances were characterised by a strong understanding and realisation of the humour in the text and a sophisticated knowledge of its content. A notable number of the higher-level performances effectively recontextualised the piece and/or applied props, set items and costumes very imaginatively.

Lower-level performances lacked humour and/or lacked a strong stylistic vision. The characterisation was one-dimensional and/or appeared to be based on a simplistic understanding of the script. At the lower level, some key words and phrases were mispronounced, which displayed a lack of research and/or understanding of the text.

Play: *The Matchmaker*

Monologue: Horace Vandergelder or Mrs Levi

Stronger performances tended to convey the appropriate age of the character most effectively; lower-level performances tended to portray Vandergelder as too old or Mrs Levi as too young. Higher-level performances effectively captured the wit inherent in the text as well the pathos and dramatic irony. Costume, make-up, set and props were imaginatively applied in the higher-level performances.

In lower-level performances, the characters lacked depth and/or were too much like a caricature; the level of characterisation rarely went beyond the use of an accent. There was little sense of implied person or place, the status of the character and her or his place in the world of the play.

Play: *Antony and Cleopatra*

Monologue: Antony or Cleopatra

Reversing the trend of the past few years, in 2010 a Shakespearean play was one of the more popular choices, especially the character of Cleopatra. With either the character of Antony or Cleopatra, higher-level performances were characterised by highly imaginative contextual choices and associated application of stagecraft. While some of the stronger performances tended to be presented in a traditional manner, others were set in another appropriate time and/or place to great effect. Higher-level performances were also notable for showing mastery of Shakespearean language and a sophisticated understanding of the content of the monologue and its place in the greater world of the play.

Lower-level performances tended to display a lack of understanding of which other characters were on stage at the time of the monologue and/or what was at stake for the character at this moment in the play. Such performances tended to be characterised by inappropriate stagecraft and/or inappropriate directorial or dramaturgical choices.

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Play: *Rockabye*

Monologue: Jolyon

This monologue was a popular choice. Higher-level performances managed to convey the various aspects of the character as encapsulated in the monologue: the humour in the script, Jolyon's relationship with Jules and the charisma of the character and his social and cultural background. Stronger performances conveyed more than what the character might be saying on the surface.

Lower-level performances displayed little understanding of Jolyon's relationship with Jules and/or portrayed the character in an unsubtle manner. In such performances, there were often many props on stage, which did little to enhance the meaning of the text and/or were not used or referred to in the performance.

Play: *Secret Bridesmaid's Business*

Monologue: Angela

This piece was the most popular monologue choice in 2010 with 15 per cent of students choosing to perform it for the examination. Overwhelmingly, students presented the monologue according to its context within the play – that is, Angela in her hotel room the evening before the wedding. In the higher-level performances, there was an excellent variety of pace and understanding of the internal monologue of the character, including her motivation and objectives. There was also a clear understanding of the age of the character and the subtext of the lines. Stronger performances conveyed the humour inherent in the lines as well as moments of self-deprecation and the character's feelings of betrayal and guilt.

In the weaker performances, there tended to be an overreliance on stage business and use of props at the expense of depth of characterisation. In many of the lower-level performances, the lines were rushed or were delivered with little apparent understanding of their significance in the greater storyline of the play.

Play: *Marat/Sade*

Monologue: Herald

Many students recontextualised the Herald monologue in imaginative ways. Higher-scoring performances created a strong evocation of place and implied persons. Props were well chosen to suggest the world of the play. The performance indicated a high level of understanding of the play-within-a-play technique and its reference in the context of the play. Higher-scoring performances were also often characterised by a sophisticated use of Theatre of Cruelty.

Lower-scoring performances tended to overlay the mental illness of the patients. The use of Theatre of Cruelty was crude and often limited to shock tactics. These performances also tended to demonstrate a rudimentary understanding of the play script including the world of the play.

Play: *Everyman*

Monologue: Death

Many students recontextualised this piece, often to good effect. Higher-scoring performances demonstrated an understanding of, and skill in, the delivery of the language including the rhythm and poetry of the lines. These performances were characterised by high-level contextual choices such as the personality and physical appearance of the character, often shown in imaginative or inventive ways.

Lower-scoring performances tended to convey little understanding of the deeper meaning of the play script including the interrelationships between Death, God and Everyman. Delivery of the language of the text was poorly executed. There tended to be an over-reliance on props and costume items and less on characterisation.