

2011 Theatre Studies GA 2: Performance examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

As noted in previous Assessment Reports, the Theatre Studies performance examination includes monologues from plays that have been used in previous years as well monologues from plays not previously used. This can help teachers become familiar with the plays and characters and allows them to familiarise themselves with plays that are often less known or new. In selecting passages, the panel will choose both complete and constructed monologues. There is continuing support for cutting and pasting passages to construct the monologues, allowing students to address the challenge of shifts in time, person and place that this requires.

Since 2010, the VCAA has set a single prescribed version of each monologue for this examination. This is the only version of the monologue that is examinable. It is the teachers' responsibility to ensure that the monologues studied by their students are the officially sanctioned versions. In 2011 the majority of students presented the prescribed version; however, with the character of 'Gillian' a small number of students mistakenly performed only the first section of the monologue.

It was evident that most students had followed the guidelines of the monologue performance examination. The monologue task is based on creative, expressive and imaginative theatrical choices. It is not a task that demands the reconstruction of the real world in its entirety. Students should make judicious choices regarding the use of stagecraft, such as set items and properties, to enhance their performance. The student being assessed is solely responsible for bringing all stagecraft items in and out of the assessment room without assistance and this should occur within the allotted time. Students should be aware that venues are hired spaces and that there will be one table and two chairs supplied in each examination room. However, 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 there are particular requirements, students should bring their own furniture. The assessors' table(s) is for assessment purposes. Students are not to place objects on the assessors' table(s) or use it in any way as part of their performance.

It should be noted that students are allocated a room in which to perform. Students should plan their performance so it is adaptable to a range of spaces. Teachers should be aware that it is not appropriate to ask for a room change on behalf of their students on the day of the examination. Any such requests, should they be necessary, should be made to the VCAA prior to the examination. Requests made on the day of the examination are rarely granted.

Some students did not seem to be aware that weapons or imitation weapons are not to be used in their performance. Students will not be permitted to perform with weapons or imitation weapons. The use of breaking glass, stage blood, other liquids or anything that may damage the carpet or furniture is often not necessary, can be hazardous and is generally not advised. Liquids are not forbidden, but there is an expectation that the use of liquids will be limited, highly controlled and very well rehearsed. The use of liquids must not disrupt schedules due to the need for clean-up. If in any doubt whatsoever, liquids should be avoided.

Each assessment room has a single power point outlet for the use of electrical equipment, such as audio devices. It is the responsibility of the student to plan the use of such equipment beforehand, 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 commencing the performance and, if applicable, to be familiar with the remote control devices for the equipment. Students may bring a laptop, iPad or other such computer device into the examination to use in the performance. However, the student should explain how the device will be used in their Statement of Intention.

Recontextualisation of the monologue, that is, changing details such as the original time and/or setting to another appropriate context, is permissible for this task. However, some students are making recontextualisation choices that do not enhance the intended meaning of the monologue and this can adversely affect their performance. Any recontextualisation of the monologue should take into account the scene in which the monologue is embedded and the greater world of the play.

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.

Weaker performances were generally 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 for the examination 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, in most cases a lack of memorisation of lines and contextual choices were the primary contributing factors. As well as memorising the lines of the script and enacting the text, to achieve full marks for criterion 1, 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. It is expected that students will deliver all of the lines of the monologue at the time of the assessment. Pre-recording and replaying parts of the monologue on an audio device is 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. It was evident that some students paid scant attention to the use and application of theatrical style(s) (criterion 4) and were unaware, or not fully aware, of the implied time, place and persons within the monologue and associated scene (criterion 2). The combination of 'focus' and 'space' in criterion 7 appears to cause confusion for some students. Focus relates to the ability of a performer to portray and maintain a characterisation, plus the ability to focus an audience on aspects of a performance. One way of focusing the audience's attention is to manipulate 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, some students made poor stagecraft decisions and/or applied little stagecraft and this adversely affected their performance. It is expected that all students will use some stagecraft other than acting, direction and dramaturgy in their performance, including one or more of costume, make-up, props, set, sound and multimedia.

It was noted that an increasing number of students had added stage business and action before the delivery of the spoken lines of their monologue, or continued with action and business after they had concluded the verbal delivery of the prescribed text. Such choices are to be encouraged, as this can assist students in establishing and maintaining a context. However, it should be noted by teachers and students that it is not within the conventions of this task to add any lines of dialogue to the performance. Nor should lines be deleted from the prescribed text or substituted with other lines. All monologues must be performed within the seven-minute time limit.

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The 2011 Monologues

Number	Monologue Chosen	% of students
1	Ellie	5
2	Mangan	4
3	Prologue-Chorus	9
4	Sentry	5
5	Liz	7
6	Ketch	4
7	Estelle	15
8	Richard	7
9	Queen Margaret	5
10	Claire Zahanassian	7
11	Mayor	4
12	Gillian	15
13	Doug	13

Play: *Heartbreak House*

Monologue: Ellie

OR

Monologue: Mangan

Stronger performances tended to capture the period of the text most effectively through the use of well-chosen set/prop/costume items. There was a sophisticated understanding and portrayal of the subtext of the dialogue, including the social mores and the social/cultural/historical significance of the text. Higher-level performances tended to capture and recreate the Shavian style most effectively.

In lower-level performances there was little understanding or execution of the Shavian style of performance. Inappropriate costume or prop choices were made and/or there was a general lack of understanding of the themes, and in some instances key plot elements, of the play.

Play: *Antigone (Anouilh)*

Monologue: Prologue-Chorus

Higher-level performances were characterised by a clearly evident understanding of the play and the playwright's intentions. Overall, in such performances there was a strong directorial vision, which encompassed the acting and the use of other stagecraft in the performance. There was also a strong evocation of the function of the character in the play.

Lower-level performances tended to lack a solid understanding of the meaning of the lines and/or the inherent rhythm within them. Such performances were also characterised by inappropriate contextual choices which displayed little understanding of the world of the play beyond the lines of the monologue.

Play: *Antigone (Sophocles)*

Monologue: Sentry

Stronger performances were often characterised by an imaginative recontextualisation of the text that conveyed a strong and sophisticated understanding of the whole play. At the higher level, there was a most effective use of stagecraft which enhanced the overall interpretation.

Weaker performances displayed a lack of understanding of the dramatic tension inherent within the text. The pace or rhythm of the text was poorly executed. Overall there was little attempt to capture the world of the play beyond the superficial and there was a simplistic application of some of the stylistic elements of the Greek theatre.

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Play: *Our Country's Good*

Monologue: Liz

OR

Monologue: Ketch

In the performance of Liz and Ketch, higher-level work was characterised by a strong command of the language of the text and/or of the time and setting of the play. The meaning of, and behind, the lines was strongly conveyed through the use of accent and an effective recreation of the storytelling nature of the piece. There was also a strong sense of to whom the lines were being delivered and the associated intention behind them.

Lower-level performances tended to display a poor understanding and grasp of the language of the play, especially in the performance of Liz. Often such performances were based on inappropriate or ineffective recontextualisation choices. There was often a poor sense of the function and placement of the monologue within the plotline and story of the play.

Play: *In Camera (Huis Clos)*

Monologue: Estelle

Stronger performances effectively captured the world of the play and the character's place and function within it. Estelle's past was clearly understood and this was often conveyed through the imaginative use of stagecraft such as costume, sound and props. Such performances were also characterised by highly effective blocking and a strong actor-audience relationship.

Weaker performances tended to lack a sense of/depiction of the other characters present. There appeared to be little understanding of the wider world of the play beyond that of the monologue/scene. While in many instances the delivery of the lines was proficient, such performances lacked a sophisticated understanding of Estelle's character traits and associated contextual background.

Play: *Richard III*

Monologue: Richard

OR

Monologue: Queen Margaret

Higher-level performances conveyed a mastery of the Shakespearean language and a highly sophisticated understanding of the social/cultural/historical contexts of the play. While some of the stronger performances were presented in a traditional manner, others were set in another appropriate time and/or place to great effect. Especially in the case of Richard, there was highly effective use of gesture and movement in the performances.

Lower-level performances tended to display a lack of understanding of the function of the monologue within the play, the character's motivation and/or the subtext of what was being conveyed about the character. Such performances tended to be characterised by inappropriate stagecraft and/or inappropriate directorial/dramaturgical choices that displayed a lack of the understanding of the social/cultural/historical contexts of the play.

Play: *The Visit*

Monologue: Claire

OR

Monologue: Mayor

In the depictions of Claire and Mayor, stronger performances were often characterised by highly effective costume, set, prop and make-up choices (especially Claire's make-up). Higher-level performances captured the black humour in the play as well as the pathos of the lines. Symbolic and imaginative stagecraft was also used to convey the world of the play, especially the town and its inhabitants.

Lower-level performances often displayed a lack of sophisticated understanding of the plotline and themes of the play. The character was depicted as being too young and/or without key characteristics such as Claire's disability. Such performances tended to deliver the lines proficiently but without evoking a strong sense of the world of the play.

Play: *Dags*

Monologue: Gillian

Higher-level performances effectively captured the performance style of the text and conveyed both its comedic elements and pathos. Comic and dramatic timing was used to very good effect and a strong actor-audience relationship was developed. Such performances were often also characterised by highly imaginative staging choices which conveyed a sophisticated knowledge of the wider world of the play.

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Some students chose to only deliver the first section of the monologue, finishing on or around the line 'We always have the telly on at dinnertime, so it's not so obvious no one's talking'. This was deemed to be a poor choice because some of the monologue's contextual, thematic and plot elements were underdeveloped. Weaker performances were also characterised by a lack of understanding of the time setting of the play and other key contextual elements. Such performances tended to lack the sense of black humour and irony in the play.

Play: *Cosi*

Monologue: Doug

Stronger performances conveyed a sense of the period, the setting and the character interrelationships most effectively. Such performances appropriately created a sense of threat and menace, which showed a very good understanding of the character and the play overall. Comic and dramatic timing were used to very good effect as was the use of imaginative stage business to depict the character's habits and obsessive nature. There was a very strong use of implied person.

Lower-level performances were often characterised by an over-simplified interpretation of the lines. The lines were often delivered too quickly and/or with little understanding of the subtext. The portrayal of the character lacked subtlety or believability.