

2017 VCE Drama examination report

General comments

The 2017 Drama written examination was based on the *VCE Drama Study Design 2014–2018*.

The examination was assessed out of 50 marks and comprised two sections:

- Section A – questions assessing students' skills in analysing the development and presentation of a solo performance (Unit 4, Areas of Study 1 and 3) and an ensemble performance (Unit 3, Area of Study 2)
- Section B – questions assessing students' skills in analysing and evaluating a production from the 2017 Drama Playlist (Unit 3, Area of Study 3).

It is important that all students:

- have a clear understanding of non-naturalism as described in the study design
- have a clear understanding of ways in which the conventions of transformation of character, time, place and object can be manipulated by an actor, for example, through morphing expressive skills, snap transitions, symbolic gesture, use of action and reaction, use of a sound or word, giving and receiving, hiding and revealing, repetition of dialogue, and the symbolic use of stagecraft, etc.
- ensure that they know the difference between play-making techniques, dramatic elements, stagecraft, expressive skills and performance skills
- understand the difference between analysing and evaluating. When analysing, students need to examine in detail to discover the meaning of something. When evaluating, students need to make a judgment about or critique something
- provide clear and concise answers to the questions on the examination
- when using the extra space provided at the end of the examination book, students should carefully label their response as being continued at the back of the book
- use pertinent examples
- use drama-specific language and terminology appropriately.

Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A

Question 1

For Question 1, a series of images, a list of themes and some contextual information were provided as stimulus material to develop and present a character who wears a mask for a non-

naturalistic solo performance. Students needed to draw on the key knowledge and skills acquired through the development and evaluation of their own solo performance work in Unit 4, Areas of Study 1 and 3. To answer this question comprehensively, students needed to plan their answers and think through the processes they used to develop both their short solo performance and their solo examination. They needed to think about choosing a theme and performance style, exploring the context for the solo performance, a reason why the main character wears a mask, how they might use the play-making technique of improvising, the use of expressive skills, dramatic elements and performance skills, transformation of character, use of stagecraft and the actor–audience relationship.

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	2	12	87	1.9

This question asked students to use the stimulus material for Question 1, then apply the play-making technique of brainstorming to explore and identify the context (place, time, situation) for the solo performance. The majority of students managed this question well, showing a good ability to brainstorm to develop ideas for the context for the solo performance. Students who used the two examples provided on the examination were not awarded any marks.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	0	6	94	2

In this question, students were required to identify the reason why the main character wears a mask. Most students explained the character's motivation for putting on the mask as a representation of identity or disguise. Some students referenced how this was linked to the main character's role in the solo performance, using terms such as: the narrator, the protagonist or antagonist, the outsider, providing comic relief, the storyteller, alienating the audience, gaining sympathy from the audience, shocking the audience, etc.

Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	12	40	30	16	2.5

To obtain full marks for this question, students needed to describe how a specific improvisational activity could be used to develop characters, the use of expressive skills (voice, gesture, movement or facial expression) and explore the chosen theme. Most students were able to discuss improvisation in general terms, although higher-scoring responses identified how a specific activity, such as hot-seating or role-play, would be used. Other improvisational activities discussed by students included trialling different ways of presenting a scene (such as using only mime or gesture), personification, and experimentation with different performance styles, conventions or dramatic elements. High-scoring responses made a link (either explicitly or implicitly) between the activity and the chosen theme and performance style.

Question 1d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	9	35	37	18	2.6

Some students found the requirements of this question difficult. Students had to analyse how the actor would create the moment of transformation of character using mask and contrast and/or timing. During this moment of transformation, the secondary character's motivation for unmasking the main character also had to help the audience understand the chosen theme of the performance. Some transformation techniques students wrote about included: morphing/melding; snapping; symbolic use of gesture; use of a sound, word or action; use of action and reaction; giving and taking; symbolic use of stagecraft; hiding and revealing; repetition of dialogue; or exploration of the speed of transition, for example, slow motion or reverse. The highest-scoring responses clearly analysed how the actor would use mask and contrast and/or timing to create the moment of transformation, explored how the secondary character's motivation for unmasking the main character would help the audience to understand the chosen theme, used drama-specific language and terminology and included pertinent examples. Low-scoring responses often referred to having two actors in the scene, did not refer to the theme or use of mask, could not articulate the secondary character's motivation for unmasking the main character, and/or provided a limited discussion that lacked detail.

Question 1e.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	2	4	21	35	20	13	5	3.3

This question required students to think about how the chosen theme would be revealed or reinforced. Students needed to explain, in detail, how the actor would manipulate their energy and use one or more areas of stagecraft (props, costume, sound production, make-up) to create a change in mood when the secondary character, who wants to 'unmask' the main character, appears. Students are reminded that in questions where there are specific requirements they must refer to all of the points in their response. The highest-scoring responses clearly explained how the actor would manipulate energy and one or more areas of (the listed) stagecraft to convey the change in mood, referred to the chosen theme and used pertinent examples. These responses were clear and succinct, used drama-specific language and terminology appropriately, and included clear reference to the chosen performance style. Low-scoring responses often used weak or non-pertinent examples and/or did not refer to all the requirements of the question. Some students mistakenly explained the dramatic element of sound, instead of the stagecraft area of sound production, and could not be awarded any marks for this part of their response.

Question 2

This question required students to consider how they would use the stimulus material provided in the detachable insert to develop and present a devised non-naturalistic ensemble performance. The stimulus material contained a large image of a map and contextual information about an ensemble group of three to five actors who were to devise, develop and present an ensemble performance called 'The Community'. The images, text, scenario and characters provided evoked particular moods and implied styles. Most students embraced these ideas and wrote about concepts and situations that were clearly linked to the stimulus material. Students were instructed that the performance was to be based on the conventions of any non-naturalistic performance style, provided that the chosen performance style was different from the chosen performance style

for Question 1. Students needed to draw on the key knowledge and skills acquired through the development, presentation (Area of Study 1) and evaluation stages (Area of Study 2) of their ensemble performance in Unit 3. Non-naturalistic performance styles and techniques used by drama practitioners to develop non-naturalistic performances are part of the key knowledge for Unit 3, Areas of Study 1 and 2, and therefore students must have a thorough knowledge of these concepts.

As for Question 1, students needed to consider the whole question before they began responding in order to identify the relationship between the sub-parts of the question. Students needed to spend time thinking through the whole performance that they were developing before answering the different question parts. Students should have considered the stimulus material and then choose the performance style and relevant conventions that would be used. They were required to utilise expressive skills, dramatic elements and stagecraft and manipulate the actor–audience relationship as appropriate to the chosen performance style.

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	6	29	37	27	2.9

Students were instructed that at the opening of the performance, the group of characters would be engaged in a morning activity. Students needed to describe how the ensemble group of actors would use a play-making technique, sound and four black boxes to develop this morning activity. The highest-scoring responses succinctly explained how the actors would use a play-making technique, such as improvisation or rehearsing, to explore the use of sound (vocal and/or body percussion, etc.) and the four black boxes (as either set pieces or props) to create this scene. Pertinent examples supported how the morning activity would be clearly conveyed to the audience. Low-scoring responses discussed more than one play-making technique, sound production instead of sound created live by the actor and/or neglected to explain how the four black boxes would be used.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Chosen performance style – Epic Theatre

Location – petrol station

Through use of the play-making technique improvisation, the ensemble group will experiment ways of transforming their black box into a car/automobile. Along with the physicalization of the vehicle will come the sounds, trialling use of vocal sounds to resemble that of a car/automobile.

The response above included three diagrams with annotations; one of a person sitting on a box (car seat) miming holding a steering wheel; the next of a person straddling the box leaning forward as if on a motorbike; the third of a person pushing the box around the performance space to create movement. Sounds resembling cars will help fill the performance space; broomm, zoom, screech, bromomom.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	5	21	30	24	16	3.2

This question required students to consider how they would create the next moment in the performance – a disruption to the morning activity and the characters' reactions to it. Responses to this question necessitated an analysis of how the ensemble group of actors would use two conventions of the chosen performance style and the actor–audience relationship to create this

scene. High-scoring responses indicated a clear understanding of the actor–audience relationship, as appropriate to the chosen performance style, through the variety of ways in which an actor may deliberately manipulate the audience’s emotions and moods, and response to the action. Students discussed the placement of the actor(s) in relation to the audience, the way the actor(s) addressed and engaged the audience, and/or the emotional and intellectual response to a character’s situation. The highest-scoring responses used pertinent examples, provided an analysis of how two conventions from the chosen performance style would be used, with reference to the actor–audience relationship, and explained how the actors would show the disruption and the characters’ reactions to it. These responses were clear and succinct and used drama-specific language and terminology appropriately. Low-scoring responses referred to the same performance style that had been chosen for Question 1, often used weak or non-pertinent examples and/or did not refer to all of the requirements of the question.

Some students did not identify the chosen performance style.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Identify the disruption – *As the characters begin filling their cars with petrol, blood begins to come from the dispenser!*

Identify two conventions – *1. Direct address 2. Tableau*

The actors 1 by 1 form a freeze frame of the petrol station fill up. Once each actor is in position the scene will begin to play and characters will begin to notice the blood coming from the petrol machines. A tableau again takes hold – the characters are in shock, exaggerated facial expressions and gestures. A single actor portraying the petrol station worker walks downstage out of the freeze frame, and addresses the audience, “The townsfolk were shocked to discover that someone had been contaminating the petrol supply with human blood.” Breaking the fourth wall, creating an intimate actor-audience relationship with this character who will act as the narrator, whilst the other actors in the tableau remain distant.

Question 2c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	8	30	30	21	9	2.9

Many students found this question challenging. Students were required to explain how the ensemble group of actors would create the moment of transformation of place by manipulating tension (either dramatic or comedic) and rhythm (a regular pattern of sounds, words or actions, the pace, etc.). To do this, they needed to demonstrate what happened in the scene before, during and after the transformation, and the scene had to be consistent with the chosen performance style. The highest-scoring responses clearly explained how the actors would create the transformation of place through techniques such as tableaux, morphing, slow motion, split stage, symbolic use of stagecraft, tension and rhythm. These responses were consistent with the chosen performance style, used pertinent example(s) and included appropriate use of drama-specific language and terminology. Low-scoring responses provided an inadequate explanation of how the actors would create the transformation, usually discussing the actors walking to the new location or beginning the scene at the new location, provided limited examples and showed difficulty in linking the decisions made to the chosen performance style.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Second location – *Town hall*

When the scene plays, the actors will move from their freeze frame of shock and begin banging their black box props on the floor creating a synched rhythm. As each character begins talking and speculating about why there is blood in the petrol machines, the banging of the box rhythm

becomes out of harmony and tension builds. The scene becomes chaotic and frenzied until an actor yells, "Quiet!" and in sync the actors create one final slam of the boxes. From there the characters push the boxes together to form seats in front of a lecturn and the actors become a group listening to the mayor, "Murmur, murmur." The actor who yelled becomes the mayor addressing the townsfolk about the crisis at the town hall, repeating "Quiet! Quiet!" then saying, "Everyone, as town mayor I will get to the bottom of what is happening to our petrol supply."

Question 2d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	7	24	40	29	1.9

This was a reasonably well-answered question. The majority of students were able to explain how the ensemble group of actors would manipulate their use of expressive skills to show the climactic moment of the performance. The highest-scoring responses used pertinent examples and the explanation of the scene was consistent with the chosen performance style. Low-scoring responses gave a narrative description of the final scene with limited or no reference to the use of expressive skills or the chosen performance style and/or did not explain what the climax was.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Performance style – Commedia dell’arte

Location – Town Hall

Disruption – An unexpected package arrives

The actors who all have taken on the stock characters of the style and were working in the hotel have finally arrived at the town hall. They are all excited about the giant box that appears and are running around the box, jumping and laughing. One character (Arlecchino) decides that the Mayor (Pantalone) must open the box. They all stand around the box in a big circle and start to take slow, big steps towards the box in unison – with eyes wide open and using their arms to clap, counting down from 10 in Italian. As they move closer to the box, the steps and the claps and the counting get quicker. When they reach the box, they freeze and take a deep breath. The Mayor opens the box and they all fall back in surprise as a confetti bomb goes off and they laugh.

Section B

This section related to the Unit 3 analysis of a play from the 2017 Drama playlist. Students were required to select one play from the list and answer the three parts of the question that related to their chosen play. While there was a choice of plays, part c. was a common question for each play.

Play chosen	none	<i>As Told By The Boys Who Fed Me Apples</i>	<i>Coranderrk</i>	<i>The Lost WW1 Diary</i>	<i>Parasites</i>	<i>Melbourne Talam</i>
%	0	26	6	14	15	38

Part a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	3	18	41	38	2.2

Part b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	2	12	42	43	2.3

Part c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	5	3	8	15	17	18	16	10	5	3	4.6

Questions 1–5**Question a.**

While the questions in part a. were specific to the performance attended, each question asked for a discussion of how one actor used either an expressive skill (voice or movement) or performance skill (focus or timing) to portray one character in the performance. High-scoring responses focused on specific qualities when discussing the actor's use of voice, such as accent, pitch and diction; use of movement, such as gait, stance and posture; use of focus, the actor's ability to sustain the role and create implied characters; use of timing, to create comedic or dramatic moments, pacing of dialogue, transforming characters and creating changes in mood. Low-scoring responses relied on pre-scripted answers that did not pertain to the examination question. The highest-scoring responses discussed, in appropriate detail, the ways one actor used the specified expressive or performance skill to portray one character, using pertinent examples and displaying a good understanding of the performance. Low-scoring responses listed or gave a brief or confused explanation of how one actor portrayed one character, or confused the actor with the character, only discussed the character in general terms, or discussed multiple actors and/or characters. Some low-scoring responses also gave generic responses, with little reference to the actual character or performance.

Question b.

As for the questions in part a., although the questions in part b. were specific to the performance attended, each question asked for an explanation of how an area of stagecraft (lighting, props, sound production, set design) was used to enhance the performance. In general, this question was well answered. High-scoring responses displayed a good understanding of how the area of stagecraft was used to depict mood, convey themes and denote changes in time and/or place. They provided pertinent examples and used drama-specific language and terminology appropriately. Low-scoring responses listed or briefly discussed the use of one area of stagecraft, demonstrating a limited understanding of the performance. There were some responses that showed confusion about the area of stagecraft, in particular, discussing the use of props instead of set design.

Question c.

Question c. required analysis and evaluation of the manipulation of one dramatic element and one convention in the performance. This is a more challenging skill and students needed to use higher order-thinking skills to answer this question successfully. When evaluating, students are required to make a judgment about or critique the performance. They could do this by discussing its effectiveness and what was successful in the performance and what was less successful. The higher-scoring responses displayed a clear and succinct analysis and evaluation of how one dramatic element and one convention were manipulated in the performance, demonstrated a thorough and insightful understanding of the play and provided perceptive explanations supported

by pertinent examples. Low-scoring responses were characterised by perfunctory evaluation with little analysis and confused understanding of how one dramatic element and one convention were manipulated in the performance. Other low-scoring responses provided a discussion of only the dramatic element or the convention, not the manipulation of both.