2021 VCE Drama solo performance external assessment report

General comments

In 2021, the Drama solo performance examination comprised 10 prescribed structures. Students could choose from any of these structures with three of the structures having additional choices (Structure 6 – one of the characters from the Thunderbirds television series, Structure 7 – any statue in Victoria, Structure 8 – one of four princesses).

There was some highly refined scripted work and depth of research evident in performances this year. Conversely, there were many performances that relied too heavily on the spoken word. Students are reminded that it is better to do rather than tell for this examination – action rather than narration. Sustained use of realism/naturalism is contrary to the use of the eclectic performance styles required for this examination.

Students chose one convention and one dramatic element from the list provided to support their work. In the higher scoring work, students had clearly experimented with, rehearsed and refined their chosen convention and dramatic element to enhance the mood and meaning of their performance. In lower scoring work, the convention and dramatic element was not embedded in the performance – it was only referred to sparingly, or not evident (Criteria 6 and 7).

Production areas tended to be used well by students to enhance their performances, with thoughtful choices of set pieces or props. Some set pieces were very large and were difficult to navigate through the door – students should assume that the door to the examination room is of a standard size. The majority of students made a clear costume choice. Many students used audio devices to enhance their performance through the use of appropriate atmospheric sound effects and/or music and the majority were successful. The placement of the audio speaker is important. Placing it between the performer and the assessors detracted from the performers on occasion and at times the audio device was too loud (Criterion 10). Appropriate placement and sound checks are a must.

High-scoring work used the performance space well, considered specific performance styles to drive the piece and had a range of transformations. Low-scoring work appeared to be improvised and did not include the opening sentences or all of the dot points (DPs), thus not reaching compliance (Criterion 1).

Students are reminded that although the Statement of Intention is not assessed, this can be a valuable tool to guide the assessors towards specific aspects of the performance. Some students wrote far more than the 100 words allotted – assessors simply do not have time to read more than a one-page statement. Alternatively, just rewriting the performance structure is of no use at all. An exemplary Statement of Intention is included later in this report. It is written in dot points and covers what the assessors may miss or need to know rather than repeating the performance focus or filling in every section.

Specific information

Note: 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 characters

The K-pop Idol

High-scoring performances explored the social issues behind K-pop and what it meant to the individual. There was a clever interweaving of the three DPs while ensuring each was evident, and a thorough understanding of what it meant to be a K-pop idol. Students clearly had fun with the stimulus.

Lower scoring performances tended to blur all three DPs together, showed limited research and a lack of understanding of what K-pop is. It was unclear what country they were in and the character was chosen for the music rather than the research.

Queen Cleopatra of Egypt

High-scoring work was thoroughly researched, edited and refined (Criterion 4). Students differentiated between DPs 1 and 2 and there was a clever application of symbol. There was some excellent manipulation of Greek theatre, particularly use of space and chorus.

Lower scoring performances tended to focus on what they looked like rather than acting the character of Cleopatra. These performances tended to rely heavily on script and spoken text, talking rather than action. There was a simplistic use of the conventions of Greek theatre and a poor choice for the femme fatale.

Narcissus

This was the second-most popular structure.

High-scoring performances demonstrated an interweaving of the student’s research together with Greek theatre (Criterion 2). There was a contrast in ideas and character and creative ways to convey how Narcissus learned something from the people on earth. Pathos and heightened use of language were popular choices for the convention for this character.

Lower scoring performances defined narcissism in limited terms – usually only as self-love. There was a lack of research and overly simplistic choices for the DPs. It was difficult to distinguish between various characters, and greater application of expressive skills – voice, movement, gesture, facial expression – was required. (Criterion 8)

The Film Director

High-scoring performances showed the difference between the past and the present effectively and contrasted the real story with the exaggerated retelling. The film director was often satirised through caricature, a popular choice for the convention. This work often used sound production for waves, sea and the boat and had poignant moments of stillness and silence.

Low-scoring performances were confused by this structure and did not do what the DPs asked. There was a lack of research (Criterion 3) demonstrated by a confusion between the novel Lord of the Flies and the stimulus material or by the wrong age of the survivors. Often DP 2 was not addressed.

Ida B Wells

This was the least popular structure.

High-scoring work was culturally sensitive, emotional and had a strong sense of the actor–audience relationship (Criterion 9). Colour was used symbolically (black and white), song was used in an evocative way to show pathos and cleverly integrated production areas to create strong epic theatre conventions to add to the performance style.

Lower scoring work did not touch on the bigger issues that could have been explored in this structure as suggested by the stimulus and resources.

The International Rescue Team Member

High-scoring work had a strong sense of physical theatre often with puppet-like movements embedded throughout. There was a clear plot line, excellent use of space and students were able to play multiple characters seamlessly, using mannerisms, accents and movement (Criterion 8).

Lower scoring performances were hard to follow, with complex stories and lack of reference to the stimulus material. These students tended to explain the rescues (talking) instead of acting them out (doing). Often DP 2 was missing, as was evidence of physical theatre and its conventions.

The Statue

High-scoring performances demonstrated clever ways to bring in the elements of epic theatre (Criterion 5). There was often a deep personal connection to the message the students were conveying with clear evidence of research. Poetry and heightened used of language were often included to enhance the performance.

Lower scoring performances did not distinguish between the DPs, leading to a lack of clarity, and further research was required to inform the performance. There was often reliance on narration and telling rather than action and doing, and the performance style of epic theatre was not well utilised.

The Princess

This was the most popular structure.

High-scoring performances had funny, clever scripting, incorporating heightened language (often verse) to generate satire. Costuming was clever with modern takes on ‘traditional’ princess costumes. These performances pushed an agenda and satirised gender stereotypes. Instead of just changing a few details of fairy tales, students rewrote stories with a strong understanding of the flaws.

Lower scoring performances often just showed Disney or Shrek without going any further, and with little evidence of the outdated message (DP 1). There was little reference to or focus on the other real-life women in DP 3 and lack of contrast between dark and light moments.

The Performer

High-scoring performances communicated their message through song and dance – using musical theatre as a vehicle for commentary. There were sophisticated choices approaching the idea of gender and a great exploration of someone really struggling with their place in the world. Stillness and silence, a combination of comedy and pathos, and effective use of movement enhanced this work.

Lower scoring performances blended DPs 1 and 2 and chose poorly for DP 3. Some performances referenced the film rather than the stimulus material. There was, at times, confusion between gender and sexuality.

The Concierge

High-scoring performances developed a strong sense of who the concierge was and their function in the hotel. There was clever and appropriate use of props to help tell the story (e.g. trays, trolley, suitcase) (Criterion 10). Rhythm and pace were used well with high energy, frantic concierges contrasted with the other characters. Comedy was often used to excellent effect.

Lower scoring performances featured less sophisticated choices to show the magic of the hotel and the concierge character did not convey a sense of care about saving the hotel or of the stress felt in relation to the conflict with the developers. Energy was lacking and props were inappropriate, clunky and underused.

Exemplary Statement of Intention

The Princess

Cinderella

Convention selected: Satire

Dramatic Element selected: Conflict

Performance Focus

DP1

“You don’t need a Fairy Godmother to come save you”

Live your dreams rather than a fairy tale

Class units: teach princesses to be independent agencies

DP2

Cinderella encourages The Prince to follow his homosexual heart

Princesses learn to be empowered women

DP3

Samantha Kerr – Soccer star, originally played AFL Footy but gender forced her to change codes

Audrey Hepburn – Defied beauty standards of her time & paved the way for Princess Diana’s charity ‘calling’

Performance style (Eclectic)

Dramatic metaphors – used as centrepieces of storytelling

Brechtian use of ‘signs’ give a didactic context to messages and solo setting

Convention (including how symbol is used)

Symbol:

Audrey Hepburn tableau: Spirit of Audrey statue outside of UNICEF HQ

Pink tracksuit replaces ballgown