

GENERAL COMMENTS

This report addresses issues that students should consider when preparing for the Dance performance examination. The examination is described on pages 35 and 36 of the *VCE Dance Study Design 2014–2018* and in the performance examination specifications and advice on the VCAA website on the Dance study page.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Dress requirements – Technique solo

In general, students chose appropriate dance clothing when presenting this solo. This enabled an accurate assessment of a range of physical skills throughout the performance. The trend in 2014 was the use of mostly dark leotards or singlets, with tights and a skirt or shorts. Appropriate footwear was usually selected, and reflected the selection of movement vocabulary and requirements of safe dance practice. Some students chose to wear baggy T-shirts or tops that were too small. Students should be reminded that the body line should not be distorted by loose or overly tight garments as these mask the physical skill of alignment. Some students also chose to wear knee pads unnecessarily, which hampered some movements and also affected alignment. Students need to make sure that their choice of hairstyle does not interfere with the use of projection and eye line, and detract from the overall projection of performance skills. The hairstyle of most female students was generally neat, often worn in a bun or braid. If choosing a ponytail, students should ensure it is tied securely to avoid any mishaps.

Dress requirements – Composition solo

In general, students selected costumes and props that supported and enhanced the expressive intention. At times students relied too heavily on the choice of costume and make-up to communicate their expressive intention. Students are advised to select a simple costume to facilitate the communication of the intention and not rely solely on the costume or use of props. It is recommended that students rehearse in the costume prior to the examination in case any aspect of it hinders their ability to execute movement vocabulary and, if props are to be used, students should practise with the selected prop(s) several weeks prior to the examination to avoid any malfunction.

Music

While there were some excellent choices of accompaniment, some of the music selected for the technique solo did not encourage expressive variation. Some of the selections of movement vocabulary and arrangements of phrasing were restricted by music that was either particularly slow or difficult to work with in terms of variations of time and energy. Teachers should advise students to select music that features variations in dynamics and tempo changes so the manipulation of the elements develops and progresses throughout the phrases and sections.

Music selected for the composition solo was generally effective and supported the choice of expressive intention. At times there was an over-reliance on the use of lyrics in the music to communicate the intention to the audience and some students edited several pieces of music together to create different sections without paying any attention to the use of suitable transitions.

The majority of students used MP3 players successfully; however, if using a smart phone, students should ensure it is switched to 'flight' or 'airplane' mode as interruptions, such as text messaging, affect the audibility and quality of the music. In the case of some students, the music continued after the dance had finished. Students must ensure that the music is cut to the appropriate duration to avoid such a situation.

Many students selected a volume for the accompanying music that was either too soft or too loud. During the allocated 'marking through' time, it is important that students check the volume of the music in the examination room and adjust it accordingly so an appropriate sound level is maintained during the examination.

Where students choose to use a music operator during the examination, this person is required to face away from the performer to avoid distracting the performer. Once the music has commenced, the music operator should be advised not to turn the MP3 player off until the performance has been completed. If operating the music themselves, students should leave a lead-in space at the start of the music so they can run into their starting position.

Students should also be encouraged to bring a backup copy of the music (on another MP3 player or cassette) on the day of the examination to allow for any technical difficulties that may arise.

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Time limits

The time limits for both solos are detailed in the examination specifications and included in the information for students that is sent to schools in Term 3, with notice of the examination date, time and venue.

Some students seemed unaware of the time limits prescribed for each component of the practical examination and several students were just short of the minimum time requirement. Students who performed shorter works often failed to achieve very high scores as the dance was not fully developed and did not meet the assessment criteria at the highest possible level. No student went over the 5 minutes; however, when students performed longer dances it was evident that stamina started to fade and the choreography became repetitive.

Teachers should advise students to ensure the duration of their solo is appropriate to the specifications as well as the student's level of fitness.

Safe dance practice

Knowledge and understanding of safe dance practices that were developed in the 'dance technique' area of study should be applied in order to meet criteria 1 to 4 of the technique solo successfully.

Generally, students followed safe dance practices and, for the most part, tended to attempt movements within both their physical capabilities and their range.

Where students engage in risky choreography, they should implement safe dance practices. In some cases, movements such as fly rolls, arch falls and knee drops were executed with a lack of control and no attention was given to safe technique; for example, landing directly on the knee joint when performing knee drops without activating core stabiliser muscles to control the movement. Some students came very close to a potential injury. Students should attempt movements such as aerials only if they have been trained correctly and are certain they can land safely.

Teachers should recommend that students avoid potentially unsafe and uncontrolled executions of movement vocabulary, including unsupported back bends and recoveries, and the execution of inverted positions where the head, neck and shoulders are compromised. As in previous years, incorrect falling techniques were a trend. Teachers should monitor students' falling techniques to ensure quadriceps and core muscles are correctly engaged to safely control the fall. Falling onto both knees from an elevated position is a professional movement and should be avoided by students.

Other issues

On the day of the examination, students should arrive at the examination centre with sufficient time to complete administrative checks, prepare their equipment and complete an adequate warm-up. Students should also ensure they have the correct equipment and paperwork. Some students did not have the updated Statement of Expressive Intention for 2014 and this delayed the assessment process.

When in the examination room, students are advised to use their rehearsal time efficiently. They should not perform the dance 'flat out' during this time as they may not have enough stamina left to perform at their highest level during the examination.

Each solo dance needs to be presented as a single uninterrupted performance. If the student either forgets the dance or experiences a costume/prop mishap, they should continue performing as soon as possible.

The music should be set up by the student at the appropriate point and is not to be turned off unless the student clearly indicates to the assessors that they do not wish to continue.

Unit 3 – Technique solo

The technique solo is based on the key knowledge and skills specified for Outcome 2 of Unit 3, and is designed to assess students' ability to demonstrate physical skills through a range of body actions, skill in the choreographic manipulation of the elements of movement, skill in the projection of the whole body to demonstrate artistry and to communicate to the audience.

Expressive intention

The choice of expressive intention should allow students to address each of the criteria equally. Many students chose to base their expressive intention on an exploration of the assessment criteria.

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Choice of dance style

Generally, students based their choice of movement vocabulary on a 'personalised' movement selection. Where a particular style(s) was selected, students should have been aware of how suitable their choice would be in terms of fulfilling the requirements of the criteria. It is important that teachers advise students that the selection of a choreographic style should facilitate the opportunity to demonstrate a range of skills, including floor, aerial, and non-locomotor and locomotor movements. A lack of range impedes the student's ability to demonstrate the requirements of the criteria.

Criteria 1 to 4 required students to demonstrate control of physical skills within a range of safely executed body actions.

In high-scoring performances, students demonstrated personalised movement vocabulary that was safely executed. These students explored an extensive range of body actions to illustrate an intricate and detailed application of various physical skills. Their performances also demonstrated comprehensive control of these skills through complex movement choices.

In lower-scoring performances, students demonstrated less ability to execute a combination of physical skills. Generally, they struggled with control, flexibility and strength. This was apparent when they performed more complex or challenging skills such as elevations and turning sequences. Students either lost control by pushing beyond their physical limits or opted for more simplistic movement choices.

Teachers should assist students with developing control over a range of movement, including weight shifts, aerial work and control of floor work, to ensure a broad exploration of physical skills throughout the solo. This can be achieved by conducting regular dance classes that concentrate on general technique, such as alignment during turning and arm placement in elevation, as well as systematic practice of different combinations of skills. As the solo develops, regular rehearsal of the work leading up to the examination day could also assist in refining the various body actions and physical skills.

Criteria 5 to 7 required students to demonstrate skill in the varied use of each element of movement – time, space (shape) and energy – to create expression throughout the solo.

Students with high-scoring performances generally personalised the dance by manipulating time, shapes and energy in a variety of contrasting ways. These students used accents and tempo changes that allowed the choreography to develop. They made full use of curved and angular shapes in complex ways using the entire body. There was variation in the use of energy qualities, resulting in skilful arrangements of force and flow throughout a range of body actions and varied use of physical skills.

Students with lower-scoring performances struggled to manipulate all these elements or their manipulations were minimal. Some students demonstrated little knowledge of rhythmic variation and tempo changes were not considered. In this work, energy was often sustained at one level with little variation or inclusion of the different qualities.

Students should be encouraged to work with different musical styles, and to think about using the accents and tempo changes to manipulate time, shape and energy. Engaging in various improvisations will promote further understanding of these concepts.

Teachers should advise students to select appropriate music that facilitates a skilful manipulation of time, shape and energy. They should also direct students to make purposeful decisions about how to incorporate the different elements throughout the movement phrases.

Criterion 8 required students to demonstrate skill in the projection of the whole body, including transitions between the phrases and sections, and use of eye line to communicate an artistic and expressive execution of movement.

Students with high-scoring performances generally projected effectively to the audience using smooth transitions that suggested a seamless or unified composition. Every movement was given the appropriate amount of attention and was confidently projected using eye/body focus to engage the audience, establish a mood throughout the dance, and communicate the choreography artistically and with expression.

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Students with lower-scoring performances lacked the confidence to establish eye contact and project to their audience. At times they seemed underprepared and appeared focused on trying to remember their steps rather than performing the choreography. These students often forgot movements or seemed to just mark through the dance.

Students are encouraged to regularly rehearse the movement in order to develop movement memory and confidence. In addition, thinking about the emotions or expression the choreography is intending to portray will assist with the overall projection and artistry.

Teachers should allow students to perform their finished dance solo in a variety of settings prior to the examination and to rehearse regularly in a large space to develop confidence in this area.

Specific information

Each criterion was weighted equally and was marked on a 10-point scale (0–10) that assessed the extent to which the performance demonstrated the following capabilities.

Criterion 1: Control of body alignment and coordination of body parts within a range of body actions

A high-level performance demonstrated a highly skilled application of the principles of alignment to maintain control through a range of safely executed body actions. This involved maintaining appropriate muscle tone, safe and appropriate alignment of head, shoulder girdle, hip, knee and ankle joints, and complex coordination of body parts.

Criterion 2: Maintenance of stamina and control of muscular strength within a range of body actions

A high-level performance demonstrated a highly skilled application of endurance to maintain control through a range of safely executed body actions, and displayed complex sequences of movements that showed a high level of muscular strength. This involved the use of balanced positions, turns or rotations, falls and recoveries, elevated movements and landings, and very fast or very slow movements.

Criterion 3: Control in the use of transference of weight and balance within a range of body actions

A high-level performance demonstrated subtle adjustments of weight and transitions, and maintained a highly skilled awareness of alignment principles and balance when transferring weight through a range of safely executed body actions, including turns and rotations, falls and elevated movements.

Criterion 4: Control in the use of flexibility within a range of body actions

A high-level performance demonstrated a highly skilled range of motion in a range of joints and maintained consistent control of flexibility through a number of safely executed body actions, including turns or rotations, falls and elevated movements.

Criterion 5: Skill in the varied use of time

A high-level performance demonstrated highly skilled manipulation of time to create expression throughout the execution of phrases and sections of the dance. This involved the variation of duration, tempo, accent and rhythm.

Criterion 6: Skill in the varied use of space (shape)

A high-level performance demonstrated highly skilled manipulation of shape to create expression throughout the execution of phrases or sections of the dance. This involved the dancer using a range of curved and angular movements in both the upper and lower body.

Criterion 7: Skill in the varied use of energy

A high-level performance demonstrated highly skilled manipulation of the dancer's energy. This involved combining a range of movement qualities to show variations in the flow and force of the movement.

Criterion 8: Skill in projection of the whole body to demonstrate artistry and communicate to the audience

A high-level performance consistently demonstrated skill in the projection of the whole body, including transitions between the phrases and sections, and use of eye line to communicate an artistic and expressive execution of movement to the audience.

Unit 4 – Composition solo

The composition solo, based on the key knowledge and skills specified for Outcome 2 of Unit 4, is designed to assess students' ability to demonstrate solo composition skills through the expressive use of spatial organisation and the formal structure of the composition.

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The revised study design requires the composition to be structured using a clear formal structure, such as binary, narrative, ternary, etc., or as a unified composition with a clear beginning, development and resolution.

Statement of Expressive Intention

The form used for the written Statement of Expressive Intention was updated in 2014 to reflect the changes in the study design for the composition solo. On this form, students were asked to record the number of sections, the formal structure used and the main choreographic devices used to structure the dance, and provide an overview of the expressive intention throughout the different sections of the dance.

Generally, students noted down the number of sections clearly and a formal structure was indicated. Teachers should revisit work completed in Unit 3, Outcome 1 and revise students' understanding of different formal structures, including unified composition, so they can make informed choices about which structure would best facilitate their selected expressive intention.

The use of choreographic devices throughout the dance was recorded in various ways. It was advised in the performance examination specifications that students comment on the main choreographic devices used in structuring the solo. Therefore, brief descriptions were considered appropriate. Some students attached a separate page of information regarding the various ways in which choreographic devices were used to communicate their intention. This information could not be considered as it is beyond the scope of the Statement of Expressive Intention.

Students were required to include an appropriate amount of text to adequately describe their expressive intention in terms of the various sections presented. The area designated for this information is presented as a single box. This is to give students the option to include as many sections as they need to. In some cases, students did not record their intention in separate sections, making it difficult for the assessors to follow the selection and arrangement of movement to communicate the expressive intention throughout the selected formal structure. Teachers should remind students to complete this important step as the composition was assessed against the outline of the expressive intention in each section of the dance.

As in previous years, some students selected an expressive intention that did not have the scope to be developed into sections. A few had inherent problems in that at least two sections were written in a similar way, compromising the clarity and development of the choreographic idea throughout the formal structure. Overly complex expressive intentions did not help students communicate their idea(s). Simplifying the idea(s) for each section of the dance would allow the assessors to follow the progression of the work. Also, some students tackled experiences that were well beyond what could be expressed within the time limit.

Props

Students should be advised to communicate their choreographic idea through the whole body rather than by manipulating one or more props. Where props are used, they need to have an essential connection to the intention of the dance. Too many props can be an unnecessary distraction and may also increase the chance of a malfunction or a compromise the students' use of safe dance practice.

Criteria 1 to 4 required students to demonstrate skill in the varied use of spatial organisation.

Students with high-scoring performances demonstrated an expressive arrangement of spatial organisation. As the intention of each section progressed, there was a deliberate decision to vary the spatial organisation in a meaningful way that enhanced the communication of the expressive intention.

Students with lower-scoring performances did not develop manipulations of spatial organisation in a purposeful way and, often, the combinations were too simplistic and/or ignored the written Statement of Expressive Intention. If established, manipulations were often repeated throughout the progression of the solo and were not incorporated to effectively support the stated intention.

Students needed to make conscious decisions about how various elements of spatial organisation would appropriately communicate their idea(s) in the planning stages of their solo.

Teachers could facilitate this process by supporting students in developing and refining the spatial organisation of the dance through the use of work plans and improvisations. Consideration should be given to understanding how using different combinations of spatial organisation will alter the meaning of the movement vocabulary.

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Criteria 5 to 7 required students, throughout the sections of their composition, to demonstrate skill in:

- the selection of expressive movement vocabulary
- the varied arrangement of movement into related phrases and sections to create an appropriate formal structure
- the expressive manipulation of choreographic devices
- expressing the intention of the choreographer.

Students who gave high-scoring performances demonstrated that the main task underpinning the construction of the solo was to select movement vocabulary that related strongly to the stated expressive intention.

Students who gave lower-scoring performances chose either basic movement combinations that were based on a dance/drama or literal movement responses that did not reflect the ideas in the stated expressive intention or that had complex movement vocabulary that was not related in any way to the expressive intention.

Students are encouraged to choose movements that adequately progress the stated expressive intention. If using mime or gesture, students should consider how they can expand these movements to develop a more expressive and sophisticated movement vocabulary throughout the phrases/sections in order to communicate the expressive intention in a more skilful way.

Teachers could support this process by providing the opportunity for students to engage in improvisations that explore various intentions through meaningful movement choices.

Students who gave high-scoring performances presented work where the selected movement was arranged into related phrases and sections, demonstrating skilful and logical sequencing that created a coherent formal structure and communicated their stated intention. This was achieved through the use of transitions, contrasts, highlights, etc. to demonstrate a sense of clarity and unity relevant to the whole composition.

Students who gave lower-scoring performances often relied on music to create the sections without paying any attention to arranging related phrases into sections to create a clear choreographic form. At times sections were underdeveloped and not linked through the use of transitions, which affected the way the movement vocabulary was arranged.

The communication of the expressive intention should be thought about in terms of the formal structure, for example, using the model of a narrative formal structure of three or four sections with transitions in between. Teachers should advise students that the movement material set up in the initial section should be used in some way to develop further manipulation(s) of the phrasing in order to build on, contrast and/or establish a thematic relationship between each section and create a clear structure.

Students with high-scoring performances manipulated choreographic devices to structure the dance and communicate the expressive intention, thus successfully integrating, developing and linking various devices skilfully throughout the composition. Some examples of the devices used were repetition, addition of new material, fragmentation, retrograde, augmentation, etc.

Students who gave lower-scoring performances generally did not integrate or develop the choreographic devices to adequately structure the composition and communicate the expressive intention. They did not demonstrate any complexity or sophistication in their application of the devices and lacked an understanding of how these can be used to form and develop a composition solo.

The list of choreographic devices is extensive and students are encouraged to think more about how the application of different choreographic devices can be used to communicate different aspects of their expressive intention.

Teachers can facilitate an understanding of the choreographic devices through both theoretical and practical work in the classroom.

Criterion 8 assessed the use of performance processes, practices and artistry in communicating the choreographer's expressive intention.

Generally, students' performance processes were expressive and allowed an effective communication of the stated expressive intention.

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Students who gave high-scoring performances demonstrated outstanding performance processes, practices and artistry, with good use of facial and body expression to communicate the expressive intention throughout the whole dance. These students executed movement to its full capacity, established a mood relevant to the intention and performed with confidence.

Unfortunately, where these skills were not rehearsed, students had a tendency to just go through the motions and internalise their performance without really understanding how to project out to an audience.

It is important that students allocate sufficient time to rehearse their solo. They need opportunities to perform in front of an audience as often as possible to help them improve their overall performance artistry and gain the confidence to communicate their selected intention.

Specific information

Each criterion was weighted equally and was marked on a 10-point scale (0–10) that assessed the extent to which the performance communicated the choreographer’s expressive intention and demonstrated the following capabilities.

Criterion 1: Skill in the varied use of level

A high-level performance maintained control and a highly skilled manipulation of levels throughout the phrases or sections of the dance to communicate the student’s expressive intention effectively.

Criterion 2: Skill in the varied use of direction

A high-level performance maintained control and a highly skilled manipulation of direction throughout the phrases or sections of the dance to communicate the student’s expressive intention effectively. This involved manipulations of various directions, including circular, diagonal, forward, backward, sideways, upward and downward.

Criterion 3: Skill in the varied use of eye/body focus

A high-level performance maintained control and a highly skilled manipulation of focus throughout the phrases or sections of the dance to communicate the student’s expressive intention effectively. This involved variations of head, eye and body focus.

Criterion 4: Skill in the varied use of dimension

A high-level performance maintained control and a highly skilled manipulation of dimension throughout the phrases or sections of the dance to communicate the student’s expressive intention effectively. This involved manipulations of various sizes of movement shapes ranging from small to large.

Criterion 5: Skill in the selection of expressive movement vocabulary

A high-level performance demonstrated excellent skill in expressively selecting movement vocabulary throughout the stated number of sections to communicate the student’s expressive intention.

Criterion 6: Skill in the expressive arrangement of movement vocabulary to create an appropriate formal structure

A high-level performance demonstrated excellent skill in expressively arranging movement vocabulary to form a clear formal structure. This involved arranging the selected movement vocabulary into related phrases and sections in order to clearly establish the stated formal structure and communicate the student’s expressive intention.

Criterion 7: Skill in expressive manipulation of choreographic devices

A high-level performance demonstrated excellent skill in expressively integrating and developing movement vocabulary through the use of various choreographic devices to effectively structure the dance work and communicate the student’s expressive intention.

Criterion 8: Skill in the use of performance processes, practices and artistry to communicate the expressive intention to the audience

A high-level performance demonstrated excellent skill in maintaining performance processes, practices and artistry throughout the dance (for example, appropriate levels of energy, expressive projection of movement, use of facial/whole-body expression), which led to a clear communication of the student’s expressive intention.