

GENERAL COMMENTS

In 2014, students generally demonstrated a good understanding of and skill in devising and presenting non-naturalistic solo performances.

In 2014 the revised *VCE Drama Study Design* was implemented, along with revised specifications for the performance examination as published on the VCAA website. Most aspects of the 2014–18 examination structure are unchanged from the previous examination. The criteria for this examination continue the direction established for the previous examination but include some changes, particularly relating to the use of the conventions of non-naturalism, timing, use of expressive skills and use of performance skills. In 2014, information about the prescribed performance style was included on the examination paper for each structure. This material (in the boxed section) is advisory. Most students seem to have used this information in devising their solo performance, particularly in making choices about use of movement, stagecraft such as costume or props, and/or their approach to creating and maintaining actor–audience relationships. Students who used a different approach to the performance style or who were aiming to emphasise one or more of the points provided on the examination paper generally referred to their choices in their Statement of Intention.

Work at the highest level showed little reliance on a character(s) describing action; students established a dramatic moment and moved on. There was no unnecessary repetition. Work at the highest level also effectively used stillness and silence to control or regulate the pace of the performance; for example, create and manipulate dramatic tension.

High-scoring students demonstrated extensive research and sophisticated editing to allow appropriate consideration of each of the three dot points in performance. While there is no requirement to evenly divide performance time across the three dot points, it is important to remember that all dot points need to be addressed adequately.

The selection of a prop, especially when chosen for the purposes of demonstrating skill in the transformation of object, needs to take into account not only for its symbolic value but also the ease with which the prop/object can be used in a variety of contexts and by a variety of characters.

When constructing the solo performance, teachers and students need to remember that the named character in the prescribed structure must clearly be the central character of the performance and must occupy more of the performance time than any other character. Some students spent too much time on secondary characters, sometimes using one of the secondary characters to introduce the prescribed character, but taking over two minutes to do so. No secondary character should have primary focus.

Another challenge is to find a way of presenting the information referred to in the stem of the performance focus. Criterion 1 makes it clear that the performance stem must be evident in the performance. Too often, there was little or no reference to the stem of the performance focus and therefore important information needed to meet the requirements of Criterion 1 was missed, such as background to the character, information about where and when the performance was taking place, who else was there with the character, as well as possible emotional insights into the character.

Assessors look for references to the prescribed stimulus and how it is used in the development of the character. These references must be evident throughout the performance. In 2014, some students demonstrated evidence of only one part of the prescribed stimulus even though two parts were specified in some instances. This had a direct impact on the score students could be awarded for Criterion 2.

Assessors also look for evidence that students have incorporated additional ‘aspects of ...’, when this is prescribed in a particular structure, to complement the performance style. This offers students an opportunity to work to their strengths. It is not wise to choose ‘aspects of musical theatre’ if you cannot sing and dance, or ‘aspects of comedy’ if others don’t respond to the humour in your performance.

When considering the actor–audience relationship, it is acceptable for students not to use the assessors as the audience. However, it is a poor choice to direct their focus at walls, particularly side walls, as vocal and facial expressions may be lost to the assessors.

Where possible, students should avoid simply wearing ‘theatre blacks’ as a costume as this directly impacts upon Criterion 10.

Finally, carefully planned and executed use of space is vital. Too often, students demonstrated an uncontrolled use of space, which directly impacted on Criteria 7, 8 and 9.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

The characters

The Aspiring 'Artist'

High-scoring performances demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of art in general and the place and purpose of Cabaret Voltaire in art history in particular. Work at this level presented highly effective choices in applying the dramatic element of symbol. Clever use of stagecraft was also a key characteristic of work at this level. A range of art was referenced through thoughtful application of costume and make-up, allowing ease of transformation of both character and place.

Low-scoring performances merely repeated words directly from the performance focus stem. Work at this level showed minimal understanding of the prescribed performance style and failed to demonstrate any of the passion essential to the central character. A lack of research was also evident in both the response to dot points one and three as well as the mispronunciation of Patrick McCaughey's name.

Professor Lucifer Gorgonzola Butts, AK

High-scoring performances were exemplified by a distinct physicality where body and space were controlled with dexterity. Work at this level was adept at expressing a lighter approach to the second and third dot points, allowing the comic quality of Butts to be maintained. Sophisticated transformation of prop was effectively employed. Suspenders and elastic material were popular and versatile.

Low-scoring performances struggled with physical theatre. Work at this level had no sense of the home-shopping television channel. Students also performed largely as a talking head, failing to re-create Butts's style of invention. Timing was critical here, and work at this level demonstrated poor skills in Criterion 7.

The Socialite

High-scoring performances incorporated witty adaptations of songs from the musical theatre genre and included sophisticated observations of our society. Work at this level bravely explored the ugliness of caricature but also moved beyond the superficiality of the housewife life, showing real compassion for the ladies who could not lunch. Skilful manipulation and control of the dramatic element of climax was a defining feature of high-scoring work.

Low-scoring performances contained a predominance of drunk women at lunch, often yelling and falling over. Work at this level lacked research, which directly impacted on Criteria 2 and 3. It also demonstrated a lack of sophistication in the choice of the woman required by dot point three. Many students focused on celebrity, which was generally a poor choice.

The Worker

High-scoring performances demonstrated sophisticated choices and skill in the use of symbol and stagecraft to clearly reference the stimulus and to explore the aspects of German expressionism within the performance style. Work at this level clearly showed both lifestyles and the links between them and students confidently manipulated stillness and silence to enhance dramatic tension. Performances at this level were highly effective in their use of recorded soundtracks.

Low-scoring performances made little or no reference to the stimulus, which directly impacted on Criterion 2. Work at this level tended to lack coherence and showed little distinction between the lifestyles of the two worlds. It also contained little or no research and lacked dramatic tension. Often students performed as a talking head rather than acting in the moment.

Percy Jackson

High-scoring performances skilfully manipulated and controlled physical expression, particularly the required convention of exaggerated movement. Work at this level cleverly resolved dot point two, some linking the 'monsters' to politicians in Australia and some to wider, global events. The thoughtful and well-choreographed exploration of conflict, both internal and external, was a highlight of the best performances.

Low-scoring performances relied too heavily on talking through the narrative, often without any sense of plot progression. Stagecraft, generally, was poor. Poor costume choices included everyday street clothes that were not enhanced by adding an item that might symbolise something more appropriate for a demigod. And the selected prop was often a clumsily used stick.

Midge Macpherson

High-scoring performances clearly established a mood that was powerful in its evocation of the era, and highly effective in its use of pathos, without descending into soap opera. Students found ways to creatively demonstrate use of fact as well as other epic theatre conventions. Work at this level presented a sophisticated montage of dramatic images. It also paid particular attention to the thoughtful choice and skilful manipulation of stagecraft, especially costume.

Low-scoring performances often reproduced too much material directly from the novel. This resulted in a largely naturalistic performance style and often indicated a lack of research and directly impacted upon Criteria 3 and 4. Work at this level was often characterised by an absence of the passionate rallying, and focused only on the horrors of war.

The Cyclist

High-scoring performances contained a range of excellent vignettes and strong caricatures, using exaggerated movement, voice and facial expressions to cleverly satirise institutions and individuals. Rhythm was demonstrated through choices in movement, breath and scripting. Work at this level skilfully manipulated well-chosen props to assist in transformation of place, character and time. Material was both clever and funny.

Low-scoring performances had no sense of the character being in 'gridlock' or even on the road. They made little or no reference to the second part of the stimulus and, at times, contained bizarre and sometimes inappropriate sexual references. Work at this level demonstrated a clumsy use of props and an overuse of lycra.

Vivian Vance

High-scoring performances demonstrated wonderful comic timing and great physical dexterity. Work at this level cleverly shifted between the younger and the older Vivian, using contrast well, with sharp transformations of character and well-chosen individual mannerisms. Work here also established a strong sense of pathos in the story of being 'in the shadow'.

Low-scoring performances focused more on Lucille Ball than Vivian Vance. Work at this level lacked sophistication and comedic timing, and failed to understand the impact that Vivian and Lucy had on comedy at the time or to connect this impact with future changes, as required by dot point three.

The Late-night Movie Host

High-scoring performances successfully captured a sense of the absurd, satirising both the film industry and the central character's place within it. Students presented a seamless montage of dramatic images, demonstrating comprehensive research and well-chosen iconic moments from B-grade movies. Excellent use of stagecraft was also a key feature.

Low-scoring performances lacked research and had little or no sense of the central character or performance focus stem. There were some inappropriate costume choices and lots of screaming. In the presentation of movie 'clips' to address dot point three, there was little or no understanding shown of how the horror movie genre has changed over time.

Lady Eboshi

High-scoring performances demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the visual poetry of kabuki and showed effective use and control of stylised movement, 'mie', song and heightened language. Work at this level created beautiful pathos through the skilful use of stillness and silence. Students made excellent choices from the stimulus and seamlessly interwove those examples throughout the performance as well as conveying a strong environmental message.

Low-scoring performances spent far too much time exploring dot point two, lacked coherence and struggled to establish other implied characters. The requirement to include aspects of kabuki within the performance style proved challenging for some students. Work at this level lacked focus and seemed, at times, to present gratuitous judo and/or karate.