

2019 VCE Drama written examination report

General comments

The 2019 Drama written examination was based on the revised *VCE Drama Study Design 2019–2023*.

The examination comprised two sections:

- Section A – questions assessing students' skills in analysing and evaluating a production from the 2019 Drama Playlist (Unit 3, Outcome 3).
- Section B – questions assessing students' skills in analysing the development and presentation of an ensemble performance (Unit 3, Outcome 1) and a solo performance (Unit 4, Outcomes 1 and 3).

Advice for students and teachers

It is important that all students:

- ensure that they know the difference between play-making techniques, dramatic elements, production areas, expressive skills and performance skills
- understand how actors manipulate the convention of application of symbol to communicate ideas and themes through action, gesture, language, vocal or facial expression, object/props, costume, set pieces or heightened movement
- have a clear understanding of the techniques used by actors to transform between characters, times and places; for example, through snap transitions, morphing expressive skills, giving and taking, action and reaction, use of production areas, use of a sound/word, use of an action or gesture, use of heightened language, and repetition
- have depth of knowledge about a range of conventions and performance styles
- understand the difference between analysing and evaluating (analysing means to examine in detail to discover the meaning of something; evaluating means to make a judgment about or critique something)
- use pertinent examples
- provide clear and concise answers to the questions
- carefully label their response as being continued at the back of the answer book when using the extra space provided
- use drama-specific language and terminology appropriately.

Specific information

This report provides sample answers, or an indication of what the 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

Play chosen	Mr Burns: A Post-Electric Play	The Yellow Wallpaper	Robot Song	Scattered Lives	Pinocchio
%	23	15	34	11	18

This section related to the Unit 3 analysis of a play from the 2019 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, all three parts of the question were to be answered in relation to the same play.

Questions 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	2	11	41	46	2.3

This question asked for a description of how one production area (costume, lighting, make-up, mask, props, puppetry, set pieces, sound design, theatre technologies) was used in the performance of the selected play. Popular choices for responses were props, set pieces, puppetry, costume and sound design. Higher-scoring responses focused on a specific moment(s) within the performance that demonstrated the themes and messages of the play. These responses described how the production area was linked to the ideas explored in the play: the aftermath of an untold apocalyptic event; female mental illness in the nineteenth century; fostering and celebrating differences; the situations and conflicts that have brought migrants to Australia; and the tale of a wooden puppet who longed to be a real boy. Low-scoring responses described a dramatic element or a play-making technique instead of a production area, or gave a generic answer with little reference to the performance.

Questions 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	3	21	44	22	10	3.2

Students were required to evaluate how the actor(s) manipulated the actor-audience relationship in one particular moment in the play. Many students were able to analyse the selected plays, demonstrating some understanding of the how the actor(s) manipulated the audience's emotions, moods and responses to the action. However, the skill of evaluation continues to be challenging for students. When evaluating, students are required to make a judgment about or critique the performance. They could do this by discussing what was effective, clever or successful in the performance and/or whether something was weak, unclear or confusing. The higher-scoring responses demonstrated a clear and succinct evaluation of the placement of the actor(s) in relation to the audience, the ways in which the actor(s) addressed and engaged the audience, and the emotional and intellectual responses this elicited. Low-scoring responses briefly discussed the actor-audience relationship, demonstrating a limited understanding of the performance. Some responses provided an overview of the performance, rather than an evaluation of one particular moment.

Questions 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	3	2	9	25	21	17	12	9	4.1

Students were required to use their higher-order thinking skills to answer this question successfully. They were asked to analyse how the actor(s) used conventions to represent character and to communicate meaning in the performance. Many students found this question challenging and were unable to address the multiple aspects required. Most students were able to demonstrate a reasonable understanding of how several conventions were used in the performance and used adequate examples to support their answer. The higher-scoring responses indicated a thorough and insightful understanding of the play through their analysis of how several conventions were used to represent character and to also communicate meaning. They provided perceptive explanations supported by pertinent examples. Low-scoring responses were characterised by perfunctory or limited analysis, confused understanding of how conventions were used, or limited focus on only one convention. Other low-scoring responses neglected to discuss the representation of character or meaning in the performance. Less successful responses relied on pre-scripted answers that were not relevant to the examination question.

Section B**Question 1**

In this question students were asked to consider how they would use two pieces of stimulus material, images with accompanying text, to develop and present a devised ensemble performance. No characters, themes or scenarios were provided; students were required to respond to and explore the dramatic potential of the stimulus material in order to devise the ensemble performance. The stimulus material evoked a range of themes, moods and styles that could be explored. 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 may reflect one performance style or it may draw on conventions from a range of performance styles and be eclectic in nature. Students needed to consider how the ensemble group of actors would select conventions to engage and affect the audience in specific and intentional ways. Students were also informed that the performance may be performed in any venue or space that supports the communication of the idea(s) and/or theme(s).

Students were required to draw on the key knowledge and skills acquired through the development, presentation and evaluation stages of ensemble performance in Unit 3. Key components of Unit 3 are exploring the dramatic potential of stimulus material and examining the work of a range of drama practitioners working in selected performance styles. Students must have a thorough knowledge of these concepts.

Students needed to consider the whole question before they began responding, in order to identify the relationship between the sub-parts of the question. High-scoring responses showed that students had spent time thinking about the how the whole ensemble performance would work, before answering each sub-part of this question. They also showed careful examination of the stimulus material and the instructions in the question, before choosing an appropriate performance style(s) and relevant conventions.

Within this question students were asked to explain how they would extract dramatic potential from the stimulus material, use the play-making technique of improvisation, and apply expressive skills, dramatic elements, performance skills, conventions and production areas.

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	1	13	87	1.9

Students were asked to describe the dramatic potential of one or both of the stimulus images. The dramatic potential could be expressed as a character, theme, scenario, mood, convention or production area. Most students handled this question well and used appropriate drama terminology to describe the dramatic potential of one or both of the stimulus images. Lower-scoring responses did not describe the dramatic potential, and instead provided a description of one or both of the stimulus images.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	2	20	46	32	2.1

This question required students to explain how the actors would use the play-making technique of improvisation to explore their response to the dramatic potential described in the previous question, and to refer to one dramatic element (contrast, conflict, climax, mood, rhythm, sound, space, tension) in their response. Most students were able to discuss improvisation in general terms, although higher-scoring responses clearly identified how specific improvisational activities, such as hot-seating or role-play, would be used to explore the response to the dramatic potential. Other improvisational activities discussed 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.

Most students were able to explain how the actors would use the play-making technique of improvisation, although some overlooked the requirement to explore the response to the dramatic potential described in the previous question. The highest-scoring responses used pertinent examples and explained how the dramatic potential would be explored with clear reference to the chosen dramatic element. Low-scoring responses discussed a different play-making technique instead of improvisation, discussed multiple dramatic elements, or merely discussed the application of expressive or performance skills.

Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	3	22	43	33	2.1

This question indicated that at the end of the improvisation process, the actors would set the time and the place for the opening moment/scene(s). In the opening moment/scene(s), the actors would communicate the time and the place to the audience using an appropriate convention. The convention could not be transformation of character, time or place, nor application of symbol. Students were asked to describe how the actors would manipulate the chosen convention in the opening moment/scene(s). Most students were able to explain how one convention would be applied in the opening moment/scene(s); however, some struggled to explain how this would convey the time and the place to the audience.

Highest-scoring responses provided a good description of how the convention would be manipulated by the actors, and demonstrated how the sense of the time and the place of the opening moment/scene(s) would be conveyed to the audience. Conventions such as placards/signs, direct address, narration and stylised movement were good choices that allowed students to clearly communicate the sense of the time and the place to the audience. Lower-

scoring responses gave a narrative description of the opening moment/scene(s), with limited reference to how the actors would manipulate the convention. Some students discussed one of the conventions not included in the scope of the task. Other students discussed a dramatic element or performance skill instead of a convention. Low-scoring responses indicated that some students were challenged by the notion of how the actors would convey the time and the place to the audience.

Question 1d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	10	35	35	18	2.6

This question required students to think about how the entire ensemble group of actors would transform time and/or place at the same moment in the performance.

Students needed to analyse, in detail, how the actors would use one performance skill (focus, actor-audience relationship, timing, energy) and one production area to create a seamless process of transformation of time and/or place. Students are reminded that in questions where there are multiple specific requirements they must refer to all of the points in their response. Some transformation techniques students wrote about included morphing/melding; snapping; giving and taking; action and reaction; hiding and revealing; use of a sound, word or action; symbolic use of production areas; use of an action or gesture; use of heightened language, repetition of dialogue; freeze frames; and exploring the speed of transition, for example through use of slow motion.

Many students were able to discuss how the actors would use one performance skill and/or one production area. However, the analysis of how the actors would create the transformation was more challenging. Higher-scoring responses identified specific examples, which would be clear to the audience, of how the actors could symbolically use the space to create the transformation. Some examples included use of tableaux, actors creating sound to depict passing of time, and visual symbolism to convey a change of place.

The highest-scoring responses were clear and succinct, using appropriate drama-specific language and terminology. The analysis demonstrated how the actors would transform at the same moment, by manipulating one performance skill and one production area. Low-scoring responses merely provided narrative ideas rather than practical application of how the transformation would be created. Low-scoring responses provided limited examples, discussed a dramatic element rather than a performance skill, did not refer to all the requirements of the question, and indicated a lack of understanding that the entire ensemble group of actors was required to transform time and/or place at the same moment.

Question 1e.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	4	6	23	45	15	7	2.9

Many students found the requirements of this question difficult. The question indicated that a conflict occurs in the story and the characters react to this conflict. The actors would select another dramatic element (in addition to conflict) to manipulate in a scene that explores the characters' reactions to this conflict. After the presentation of the devised ensemble performance, the actors reflect on the audience's response to this scene. Students were asked to evaluate how the selected dramatic element engaged the audience in specific and intentional ways. In their response, they needed to describe how the actors used the dramatic element in this scene. This question required a critique of how to manipulate the audience's moods, emotions and responses,

and also how to apply one dramatic element to explore the characters' reactions to the conflict. To answer this question successfully, students needed to apply creative and critical thinking skills.

Many students overlooked the key word 'evaluate' and provided an analysis, while some others neglected to choose a dramatic element in addition to conflict. Higher-scoring responses made pertinent choices about what the conflict was; for example, an altercation between characters. This provided an opportunity for students to evaluate how the conflict between the protagonist and antagonist would be demonstrated through another dramatic element such as sound, space or tension. These students were then able to evaluate whether the intention of the scene (for example, to provide comic relief, to alienate the audience or to gain sympathy from the audience) was successful.

The highest-scoring responses indicated a strong understanding of the ways in which dramatic elements can be applied to intentionally manipulate the actor-audience relationship. Students discussed the placement of the actors in relation to the audience, the way the actors addressed and engaged the audience, and the emotional and intellectual responses to the characters' situation that would be elicited from the audience. Furthermore, they addressed how the characters' reactions to the conflict would be conveyed.

Low-scoring responses provided narrative descriptions of the scene, demonstrated limited understanding of how the actors would use dramatic elements, and did not explain how to engage the audience in specific and intentional ways. They 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 conflict, which made it difficult to assess their response.

Question 2

For Question 2, the stimulus material of five images and a piece of text, some contextual information, and two characters (the Child and the Other), were provided to create and develop a devised solo performance. The question indicated that the performance could reflect one performance style or it could draw on features from a range of performance styles and be eclectic in nature. Students needed to consider how to use conventions to engage and affect the audience in specific and intentional ways. The convention of application of symbol had to be evident throughout the solo performance, and could be applied through the actor's manipulation of expressive skills, production areas, other conventions, dramatic elements, development of their character or development of their story. Additionally, the performance would use a single clearly lit space and no changes to the lighting grid were permitted, and the actor had to be able to manipulate the production areas while they were performing.

Students were required to draw on the key knowledge and skills acquired through the development and evaluation of their own solo performance work in Unit 4, Outcomes 1 and 3. To answer this question comprehensively, students needed to plan their answers and think through the processes that are needed to develop and present a solo performance. Students were asked to explore the use of symbol, to show contrast between characters, to script a transformation of character, to refine the transformation and application of symbol, and to describe how two conventions would be manipulated in the performance.

As for Question 1, students needed to consider the whole question before they began responding. Higher-scoring responses showed that students had spent time considering the stimulus material and then choosing the performance style(s) and relevant conventions to use. Within this question students were also required to explain how they would apply the play-making techniques of brainstorming, improvisation and scripting, and use expressive skills, performance skills, the dramatic elements of contrast and climax, and conventions including application of symbol and transformation of character.

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	2	10	88	1.9

This question instructed students to select a stimulus image and use brainstorming to explore how the actor would use the selected image as a symbol throughout the devised solo performance. This question provided a framework for students to develop their ideas about the solo performance through the subsequent parts of Question 2b.–2e. Most students managed this question well, using mind-maps or visual diagrams to demonstrate how ideas drawn from the stimulus material would be used as a symbol in the devised solo performance. Lower-scoring responses merely listed or described one of the stimulus images without exploring how it would be used as a symbol.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	2	18	46	34	2.2

To obtain full marks for this question, students had to explore how, using improvisation, the actor would use one or more expressive skills to show contrast between the character of the Child and the Other. Most students were able to discuss improvisation in general terms, although higher-scoring responses clearly identified how specific improvisational activities, such as hot-seating or role-play, would be used to explore contrast between the characters. Other improvisational activities discussed included spontaneous extended improvisation; trialling different ways of presenting a scene such as using only mime or gesture; experimenting with different performance styles, conventions or dramatic elements; and exploring personification. Some students overlooked the requirement to explain how improvisation would be used, and only focused on how contrast and/or expressive skill(s) would be explored. These responses could not be awarded full marks.

The best responses used appropriate terminology when discussing the actor's use of expressive skills. For example, when exploring the use of voice, they discussed accent, pitch, diction, projection, tone, etc., and when exploring the use of movement, they discussed repetition, exaggeration, Laban's eight efforts, gait, posture, stance, etc. Pertinent examples were also used to support how the contrast between characters would be conveyed. Low-scoring responses discussed general ideas about the use of expressive skills and/or contrast between characters, or neglected to explain how improvisation would be used. Some responses demonstrated confusion of terminology and could not correctly identify an expressive skill.

Question 2c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	4	20	44	32	2.1

This was a reasonably well-answered question. The majority of students were able to apply the play-making technique of scripting to explore the first moment of transformation from the Child to the Other. Common methods of transformation included morphing expressive skills, use of a sound/word/action, and symbolic use of production areas. Other transformation techniques students wrote successfully about included snapping, action and reaction, giving and taking, and repetition of dialogue. Many students outlined how the actor would use expressive skills to transform characters. Better responses clearly explained how the transformation of character would occur and how the contrasting dynamics of the two characters would be established (either explicitly or implicitly). Unfortunately, some students mistakenly discussed the transformation from the Other to the Child so could not gain full marks for their response.

The highest-scoring responses included stage directions, dialogue and a clear method of transformation in their scripting. The intended moment of transformation and contrast between characters was clearly conveyed. They used pertinent examples that communicated aspects of the character's world to the audience. Low-scoring responses provided generic descriptions of what the scene would look like, or only discussed the contrast between characters rather than the character transformation. Some students discussed the use of lighting, overlooking the instruction at the beginning of Question 2 that the solo performance would use a single clearly lit space and that no changes to the lighting grid were permitted. These responses could not be awarded any marks for discussing the use of lighting.

Question 2d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	5	16	38	30	11	2.3

Many students found the requirements of this question difficult. It necessitated reflection on the ideas they had developed in Questions 2a.–2c. The most challenging aspect of this question was for students to explain how they would refine the application of symbol, especially for those who had not thought through the relationship between their answers for each part of Question 2, particularly the instruction that the application of symbol must be evident throughout the solo performance. The highest-scoring responses succinctly explained how the actor would differentiate between the two characters using one performance skill and the symbol they had identified in Question 2a. High-scoring responses clearly explained how contrast would be refined through the characters' energy, timing or actor-audience relationship, and hence make symbol more evident. Discussion of how to refine the use of focus was more challenging for students, particularly finding pertinent examples to explain how the contrast and application of symbol would be clearer.

Low-scoring responses provided narrative descriptions of the scene, and made fleeting or no reference to how the actor would refine the scene. Some students had multiple actors or discussed both characters in the scene, without any reference to transforming between the two characters. Other students discussed the use of a dramatic element or production area, rather than a performance skill, and could not be awarded any marks for this part of their response.

Question 2e.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	8	8	23	29	20	10	3	2.9

Many students found this question challenging and were unable to address the multiple aspects that were required. Students were instructed that one of the two characters decides to leave the 'special place', and that this would be a climactic moment in the performance. They were required to choose two conventions (other than transformation of character, time and place) to show the climactic moment, and to further explore how to communicate the meaning(s) of their chosen symbol in this scene. Most students were able to demonstrate a reasonable understanding of how two conventions would be used in the solo performance, and used adequate examples to support their answer. However, many students chose symbols that were abstract or thematic and difficult to convey, and they found it challenging to articulate how their ideas would be communicated to an audience. Some students only provided narrative descriptions of the scene, rather than describing how the actor would manipulate two conventions, apply symbol and create climax. Some students wrote about multiple actors or discussed several characters appearing in the scene at the same time, without transforming between the characters. Students are reminded that their response should clearly express that this is a solo performance. Some students again overlooked the information, at the beginning of Question 2, that the solo performance would use a single clearly lit

space and that no changes to the lighting grid were permitted. Responses could not be awarded any marks for discussion of lighting.

The highest-scoring responses revealed a thorough and insightful understanding of how the actor would manipulate both conventions to show the climactic moment of the performance. These students demonstrated a clear understanding of how to apply symbol to communicate meaning, and provided perceptive explanations supported by pertinent examples.

Low-scoring responses were characterised by perfunctory or limited analysis, referred to having multiple actors in the scene, could not articulate how the symbol would be conveyed, did not explain how two conventions would be used, provided a limited discussion that lacked detail, and made limited use of drama-specific language and terminology.