

2020 VCE Drama solo performance examination report

General comments

In 2020 the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority produced an examination based on the *VCE Drama Adjusted Study Design for 2020 only*.

In 2020 the Drama solo performance examination comprised 10 prescribed structures. Students could choose from female (four), male (three) or neutral (two) characters. For one structure students could select from either a male or female or both. Students created and developed a solo performance in response to one of these prescribed structures.

High-scoring students prepared work that was clearly well rehearsed, with purposeful movements and scripted dialogue that allowed assessors to understand the narrative.

Many students presented very good scripts – possibly as a consequence of being at home focusing on scripting and editing (Criterion 4), but a number of works were too wordy. Students should note that this is an acting task where the focus is on ‘doing’ rather than ‘telling’. Some students tended to blend dot points together in their narrative, which made them unclear and at times affected compliance (Criterion 1).

Students handled the eclectic style well and demonstrated an understanding of the ‘aspects’ of different styles (Criterion 5). A number of students listed three different performance styles that they used as part of the eclectic style; this was not necessary for the assessment.

Students choosing conventions and dramatic elements from the provided list generally performed well. However, some students struggled to meaningfully integrate satire, fact and dramatic metaphor in their work. Other students did not choose the convention or dramatic elements most suited to their performance. For example, a student may have chosen song for *Mary Poppins* when caricature would have been significantly better (Criteria 6 and 7).

Many performances lacked enough stillness and silence to allow for a strong actor–audience relationship. Often students finished with plenty of time to spare (Criterion 9).

Students are reminded that during the examination, assessors are hearing their work for the first time, so each word counts, and dialogue needs to be clearly articulated (Criterion 8). Similarly, if a student chooses to use a soundscape, they are advised to do a sound check to ensure that their voice can be heard over the soundscape. Students may need to set the volume lower in the examination room to ensure they can be heard when speaking, as each venue is new to them and the acoustics are untested for them (Criterion 10).

Specific information

The characters

Harlequin (Arlechino) and/or Columbine (Columbina)

High-scoring performances demonstrated a good understanding of the characters of *commedia dell'arte*. They were highly physical and presented simple narratives that were easy to follow. The characters were readily distinguishable with strong expressive skills, movement, gestures and characterisation.

Low-scoring performances lacked strong physicality. These did not fully develop the narrative present in the structure and failed to strongly differentiate between the characters. The chosen character was not overtly 'cheeky', 'distracted' or 'mischievous', and the policeman was not 'bumbling'.

Frida Kahlo

High-scoring performances understood and created a world of surrealism. They were able to incorporate the surrealism and imagery of Frida into the telling of the story. Some excellent physical theatre and clever manipulation of props, in particular in showing the accident and hospital work, showed that the students had thoroughly researched of the subject. They created a strong sense of Rivera, the politics and Frida's lovers (for example, Trotsky).

Low-scoring performances simply retold parts of Frida's life and failed to give a sense of the surrealism and the angst of her life.

The Drifter

This was the second-most popular structure.

High-scoring performances understood the style of the spaghetti western and manipulated timing to enhance comedic elements. They presented simple narratives that allowed them to focus on characterisation. This work used the stimulus music to punctuate moments of tension. There was a good mixture of satirical and serious approaches to the structure. Many works referenced the film *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* or other spaghetti westerns in addition to the music.

Low-scoring performances offered dull or highly confusing narratives. They made no distinction between spaghetti westerns and other types of western films. They tended not to acknowledge or weave in the stimulus, and dot point 3 (DP3) seemed more related to the Australian Outback than the American Wild West (Criterion 2).

The Eco-Warrior

High-scoring performances made it clear that they were on the steps of Parliament House *and* engaging in a piece of performance art. They were able to demonstrate that they were making a strong political statement about an issue they cared about. The best work integrated the performance art throughout the piece. Banksy was a popular choice for DP3.

Low-scoring performances showed poor understanding of what performance art required and missed the setting completely. Some characters simply stood and yelled at a non-specified audience.

Ida Wood

Pathos was the obvious choice of convention, and the majority of students were able to show Ida's apparent squalor without depicting it gratuitously. All were sympathetic to her plight.

High-scoring performances showed detailed research into Ida Wood's life (Criterion 3) and presented complex representations of her pleading to stay. The works used space and contrast to create scenes inside and outside the Herald Square Hotel. Students made great use of production areas such as costumes, props and sets to successfully transform time, place and character.

Low-scoring performances found it difficult to create the contrasts between life inside the room and the outside world. They were overly focused on the manager trying to evict Ida from the hotel as if this alone were the key point of their story and chose a poor parallel for DP3. They did not deal with her age or state of mind in any depth.

The Stage Parent

This was the most popular structure.

High-scoring performances offered clear narratives that were often comedic. They used a range of musical theatre conventions and demonstrated a high level of understanding of the style. They also used songs, characters, lines or stories from the film *Gypsy* to develop a clear central Stage Parent character.

Low-scoring performances presented two-dimensional characters and relied only on song for their interpretation of the musical theatre style. Some students spent too long in the restaurant set up and as a result strayed into storytelling.

John Lennon

High-scoring performances used the Beatles' lyrics to drive the narrative. More sophisticated performances demonstrated an understanding of the power the Beatles had on culture and how their split affected society on a higher level. They also explored a variety of possible reasons why the band split.

Low-scoring performances were limited in their research and overly focused on telling and dialogue. They showed poor prop and costume choices. There was not a clear sense that the scene was set in the 1970s; DP2 did not mention the other members of the band and DP3's parallel to another great partnership was mentioned or shown briefly without actually creating the parallel.

Irena Sendler

This was the least popular structure.

High-scoring performances kept the narrative simple and were able to transform time and place easily with strong characterisations and dialogue. Many students showed an understanding of Epic Theatre by using its conventions to enhance political and societal commentary.

Low-scoring performances did not make Irena the central character and some seemed to have misunderstood her (she did not 'implore the desperate humanitarian'). They did not play her age appropriately and gave no sense of the real person. Some did not locate or explore the opening sentences clearly. Many solo performances were script heavy and described the events rather than showing them to the audience.

The Boxer

High-scoring performances integrated biomechanics into all aspects of their solo performances, with a clear sense of the études. They often held freeze frames, which heightened tension, displayed focus and created

a strong actor–audience relationship. They used high levels of physicality and rhythm to punctuate moments and structure their work. They showed an awareness of the stimulus and approached the First Nations peoples respectfully and mindfully.

Low-scoring performances used props, such as boxing gloves, once and then discarded them. They did not understand the intricacies of Jimmy Sharman's life and struggled to deliver a narrative. Many also presented DP3 as a standalone scene with little reference to the rest of the performance. Some performances seemed more focused on ideas of boxing or were not framed within the context of Australia.

Mary Poppins

High-scoring performances showed an understanding of Mary's efficient personality and took inspiration from the original film. They were able to clearly demonstrate how they were going to implement change to improve the lives of the family.

Low-scoring performances were slow to move into the crux of the performance and struggled to understand how to fit Mary into a different family. They also chose odd families that did not necessarily suit the component of 'restoring order'.