

2018 VCE Theatre Studies examination report

General comments

The 2018 Theatre Studies written examination assessed students on the knowledge and skills developed throughout Units 3 and 4 in the final year of the *VCE Theatre Studies Study Design 2014–2018*. Students who scored highly demonstrated a strong understanding of:

- the purpose and function of at least two areas of stagecraft
- ways in which key concepts such as context, theatrical styles, intended meaning and language of the playscript inform the application of stagecraft in theatrical interpretations
- activities associated with each of the three stages of production
- the Unit 3 prescribed playscript
- the Units 3 and 4 prescribed plays in performance
- how to evaluate a play in performance
- how to develop theatrical possibilities from a previously unseen playscript
- the use of theatrical terminology to describe application of stagecraft.

Responses showed that students found evaluation of plays in performance the most challenging aspect of the 2018 written examination. Students are urged to hone their evaluation skills in preparation for the examination by:

- reviewing the difference between analysis and evaluation
- focusing on specific illustrative moments in the prescribed Units 3 and 4 plays
- identifying what was successful and what was not successful in the performances
- justifying why these were or were not successful creative choices, with an emphasis on how this impacts the audiences' readings of the play
- building an extensive repertoire of evaluative terminology to illustrate the range of ways that we might critically relate to theatre
- developing a capacity to write about theatre in their own words.

Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

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 statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A

| Play chosen | None | <i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time</i> | <i>Picnic at Hanging Rock</i> | <i>Ellida</i> | <i>Carmilla</i> | <i>Which Way Home</i> |
|-------------|------|--|-------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| % | 2 | 37 | 35 | 10 | 5 | 10 |

Question 1a.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
|-------|---|---|----|----|----|----|---------|
| % | 6 | 4 | 30 | 31 | 19 | 11 | 2.9 |

High-scoring responses focused both on specific moments in the performance and specific aspects of the written playscript. In the 2018 examination students were not provided with script excerpts from the prescribed playscripts, but they were required to have specific knowledge of the written playscript. The highest-scoring responses showed a good understanding of the written playscript by providing:

- direct quotes of dialogue or stage directions memorised from the playscript
- scene numbers or titles that appeared in the written playscript.

Low-scoring responses provided a vague or general reference to the play that may have been gleaned from watching the performance rather than reading the text. To better prepare for the examination, students are encouraged to generate a quote bank of pertinent examples from the playscript, particularly moments where an interpretive choice may have been made that is similar to or different from the play in performance.

High-scoring responses showed a strong understanding of the play's context. Context might be understood as the world of the play and can be simple or highly complex. For example, a basic knowledge of the context of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* might have included rudimentary aspects of the world of the play, such as that it was set at the turn of the century or it was set in a boarding school. A more sophisticated understanding of this play's context might have focused on more abstract aspects of context, such as the conflict between post-colonial white Australia juxtaposed against the untameable mystery of the Australian bush.

High-scoring responses anchored their analysis in how acting conveys context. These responses showed an excellent understanding of acting, such as detailed and specific mention of how expressive skills were applied in a particular moment. More sophisticated responses engaged with more abstract aspects, such as how restrictive movement qualities may have conveyed a claustrophobic or restrictive cultural context.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

4. Carmilla

In the playscript, 'Carmilla', adapted by Adam Yee from J Sheridan Le Fanu's novella of the same title, the context is stated to be "late eighteenth century, Styria" in the playwright's notes at the beginning of the playscript. This is seen as Laura states that they live in Styria in the first scene, as well as stating they "inhabit a schloss", implying that there is an eighteenth century, upper class context. The contexts were shown in La Mama's performance of 'Carmilla' primarily through the use of voice of the actors. All of the actors utilised a European accent to establish that the performance was set in a European context, which was particularly notable as the accents were foreign to an Australian audience. They also over articulated words and spoke with a slow pace to emphasise the upper-class status of the characters, as evident during

Carmilla's introduction, as the actress used clear articulation to show Carmilla's upper-class background. The actors also moved slowly and regally to show their wealth, as well as the eighteenth century context as people often moved slowly and carefully due to their heavy, layered clothes.

Question 1b.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
|-------|---|---|----|----|----|----|---------|
| % | 6 | 3 | 29 | 29 | 21 | 12 | 3 |

High-scoring responses demonstrated an excellent understanding of a relevant theatrical style implied in the playscript or performance of the Unit 3 prescribed play. Other features of a high-scoring response included:

- detailed knowledge of the written playscript, evidenced by direct quotes
- detailed knowledge of how stagecraft other than acting was applied in the performance
- knowledge of aspects of a relevant theatrical style

Some low-scoring responses made inappropriate choices of theatrical styles. Students are urged to carefully consider the overarching intention and style of the piece of theatre to establish an appropriate style. For example, direct address is an aspect of Epic Theatre, but not every play involving direct address is a piece of Epic Theatre, especially if that production is not predominantly didactic.

Some low-scoring responses focused on acting, which was not relevant to the question's focus. Most students responding to *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* identified the theatrical style as Physical Theatre, though many of these responses could not identify how stagecraft other than acting was informed by this style.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

2. Picnic at Hanging Rock

The theatrical style of Theatre of Cruelty became prominent in the performance of Picnic at Hanging Rock through the stagecraft area of Costume, allowing the written playscript by Tom Wright to come to life. In the written playscript the character of Irma comes to 'say goodbye' when the other girls start to attack her 'ripping' her clothing. Zoë Atkinson, the costume designer matched this cruelty placed on Irma by using the costume design, a period dress with what appears to be a crinoline, inhibiting the actresses movement and making her look more entrapped, in comparison to the wild nature of the other girls, who are able to move exaggeratedly in their fragmented school uniforms. This complements the assault on the audiences senses as the shrill screams made by the actress Nikki Shiels evokes the audience to want to help her as the gown inhibits her ability to fight off the other girls. This costume design complements the notion that societal expectations are fragile when faced with the power of nature. This enhances the moment when Irma states 'What good is spelling and algebra in Australia'

Section B

| Play chosen | none | Julius Caesar | Madame Butterfly | Motor-mouth Loves Suck-face | Jurassica | A Doll's House, Part 2 | Lovesong |
|-------------|------|---------------|------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|------------------------|----------|
| % | 2 | 17 | 2 | 23 | 7 | 39 | 10 |

Question 2

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
|-------|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|---|---|----|---------|
| % | 4 | 1 | 3 | 11 | 10 | 15 | 18 | 18 | 9 | 6 | 5 | 5.7 |

High-scoring responses provided detailed evaluation of how one actor's application of two or more expressive skills presented the character's motivation and impacted on the actor–audience relationship. These responses tended to:

- provide specific examples from the play in performance to illustrate how an actor applied their expressive skills to realise their character's motivation
- showed an understanding of how the actor both established an actor–audience relationship in one moment and maintained, or changed, it in a different moment.

Some low-scoring responses did not establish a clear understanding of how expressive skills were applied. Some only provided examples of one expressive skill. It seemed most challenging for students to explain the difference between the expressive skills of gesture and movement. The highest-scoring of these responses explained gesture as being about a particular shape made with a part or the whole of an actor's body (e.g. positioning of their head, arms, legs, hands, holding a stance or posture) to convey an idea to another character (e.g. nodding to another character to convey agreement) or to realise a particular characteristic (e.g. cocking their head to one side to realise the inner state of a character's confusion), whereas movement was best explained as how the actor's body, or part of their body, travelled through the space (e.g. their gait, speed, weight, floor patterns created, rhythm).

High-scoring responses were produced by students who had honed their capacity to evaluate why a piece of theatre moved them or broadened their perspective on the world. These responses were sophisticated in their understanding of how acting and other areas of stagecraft impact on what the audience feels and thinks. They were insightful about what worked and what did not work in the performance.

Low-scoring responses provided analyses with no sense of evaluation. These responses tended to explain why a piece of theatre made us think or feel a particular way but did not engage with how well this was done.

To improve their capacity to evaluate in the examination, students are encouraged to:

- attend a broad range of theatrical experiences
- keep a journal of initial thoughts and feelings associated with attending a performance
- be brave about holding onto their own opinion about what was or was not effective, which may be informed – but never invalidated by – the interpretations made by others, including information provided in education notes or forums provided by a theatre company
- be equipped with language and skills to justify and validate their own feelings about the play
- engage in group discussions and debates about what may or may not be effective in a performance (it is good if everyone in the class has a slightly different perspective).

Evaluation requires an in-depth explanation of why particular choices were or were not effective. Higher-scoring evaluations understood that theatre impacts audiences in a variety of ways: emotionally, intellectually, empathetically, aesthetically, rhythmically, etc. These evaluations had a more sophisticated grasp of evaluative language. To better prepare for the examination, students are urged to build a word bank of evaluative terminology. For example, rather than simply being 'effective', consider whether or not an aspect of the performance was:

- subtle – as opposed to broad or overstated

- fluent – as opposed to jarring or disjointed
- engaging – as opposed to distancing or distracting
- well-controlled – as opposed to careless or underworked
- well-paced – as opposed to ponderous or poorly timed
- lyrical – as opposed to prosaic or lacklustre
- evocative – as opposed to gratuitous or superfluous
- high-end – as opposed to poorly rendered or under-developed
- believable – as opposed to presentational or laboured
- well-researched – as opposed to anachronistic or decontextualised
- dynamic – as opposed to tedious or flat.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

5. A Doll's House Part two

Marta Dusseldorp powerfully realised the character of Nora Helmer, in Melbourne Theatre Company's A Doll's House Part Two, effectively conveying both her extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. Nora's extrinsic motivation is to obtain a divorce from her husband Torvald, a motivation which is seen prominently in the moment where she attempts to coerce Ann-Marie to assist her in the process. At this moment in performance, Dusseldorp was blocked in close spatial proximity to the actor playing Ann-Marie and guided her with gentle, sweeping gestures into a chair. Once the actor playing Ann-Marie was seated, Dusseldorp crouched down with a feeble, vulnerable physicality and fulfilled the delicate gesture of placing her head in Ann-Marie's lap. Dusseldorp's voice was whiny, like a child's, and effectively conveyed to the audience that such is her desire to acquire a divorce, that she will coerce those around her to do so. In this moment, Dusseldorp utilised the performance skill of focus to establish an actor-audience relationship, applying herself to this moment in a way that utilises her whole physicality to be present in the moment, which is a contrast from Nora's fast paced movements in the rest of the play. This actor-audience relationship was powerfully maintained in performance through the continuation of such focus + performances which effectively drew the audience in and allowed Dusseldorp to maintain their attention like when observing the dramatic flux of her key characteristics. An example of this maintained actor audience relationship, to create pathos for the character, could be seen at the end of the play, when Nora sits with Torvald in a moment of silence. There, her intrinsic motivation of facing her husband after fifteen years is revealed. At this moment Dusseldorp and Greg Stone were blocked to sit sharing centre stage, with their knees tucked like children up to their chests. Dusseldorp's physicality was open, and balanced, with a strong gait. Her eyes and facial expression were serene as she looked out to the audience maintaining her relationship with them, though not seeing them, because of the presence of the fourth wall. This moment was incredibly effective at conveying to the audience the peace that Nora feels at fulfilling her motivation. This moment of tranquillity could be felt strongly by the audience demonstrating Dusseldorp's success at maintaining the actor-audience relationship through pathos.

Section C

Question 3a.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
|-------|---|----|----|----|---------|
| % | 2 | 12 | 25 | 60 | 2.5 |

High-scoring responses showed a good understanding of context and how one or more areas of stagecraft could be applied to convey context. Some examples of context included:

- the setting of the murder mystery in the 1920s
- the social context of upper-class English society

- the metatheatrical context of the incompetent Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society attempting to stage the play.

Low-scoring responses showed a limited understanding of context or did not provide specifics about how one or more areas of stagecraft could be applied to convey context.

Question 3b.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
|-------|---|---|----|----|----|---------|
| % | 2 | 2 | 34 | 35 | 28 | 2.9 |

High-scoring responses referred to specific aspects of the two theatrical styles listed in the examination and demonstrated how aspects of these two styles could inform the application of one or more areas of stagecraft. These responses also:

- demonstrated how their application of stagecraft was informed by a specific aspect of the language from the script excerpt, providing a quote or paraphrasing from the script excerpt
- explained how they could use a specific activity from the planning stage to apply stagecraft
- drew ideas for the application of stagecraft from specific aspects or one or more of the stimulus images.

Low-scoring responses did not include one or more aspects of the question in their response.

Some students had difficulty identifying a relevant planning activity, such as researching, planning or sketching initial concepts.

Question 3c.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
|-------|---|---|----|----|----|----|---------|
| % | 4 | 1 | 27 | 27 | 25 | 16 | 3.2 |

High-scoring responses identified two distinctive development activities that could be used to explore or trial a specific aspect of an idea or ideas described in Question 3b. These responses also:

- showed an excellent understanding of how their selected area or areas of stagecraft work during the development stage to explore or trial ideas
- used high level theatrical terminology to describe the process of developing their stagecraft
- explained a specific process to reflect on an aspect of their trial and exploration

The highest-scoring responses identified a specific purpose or effect of their selected stagecraft that could be evaluated during the development process. For example, students might have reflected on whether their application of stagecraft:

- works cohesively with other areas of stagecraft
- conveys an intended meaning
- evokes an intended audience response.

Low-scoring responses tended not to identify two clear processes or activities that could be used to develop the idea for their selected area of stagecraft. Many of these responses were also not specific about how reflection on the trials could occur.

Question 3d.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
|-------|---|----|----|----|---------|
| % | 4 | 12 | 32 | 51 | 2.3 |

High-scoring responses demonstrated a strong understanding of how bump in, technical rehearsal or dress rehearsal works within the presentation stage. These responses also drew from a specific aspect of script excerpt 2, such as quoting or paraphrasing from the stage directions provided.

Low-scoring responses focused on another aspect of the presentation stage, such as performance to an audience, or did not specifically deal with an aspect of script excerpt 2.

Question 3e.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
|-------|---|---|----|----|----|----|---------|
| % | 8 | 4 | 32 | 27 | 21 | 10 | 2.8 |

High-scoring responses demonstrated an excellent understanding of how the application of stagecraft might impact the actor–audience relationship. The highest-scoring responses showed an understanding of the actor–audience relationship in terms of how application of stagecraft during the presentation stage could affect:

- how the audience felt (e.g. shock, humour, confusion)
- what the audience thought (e.g. that nothing else could go wrong)
- the audience's relationship to a character (e.g. creating empathy with a character's feelings of embarrassment).

The highest-scoring responses also showed an understanding of the two theatrical styles implied in the written playscript. These responses showed the conflict between the two styles; the mood of mystery and controlled sophistication implied in murder mystery theatrical styles was often disrupted by the embarrassment and unexpected mistakes implied in the style of comedy. These responses also made direct quotes from script excerpt 2 and described specific aspects of the stimulus images provided.

Low-scoring responses did not include one or more aspects of the question or showed a limited understanding of the selected area(s) of stagecraft during the presentation stage.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response for all parts of Question 3.

3a. During the production planning of 'The Play That Goes Wrong' actors would have begun researching the murder mystery theatrical style to create suspense in the context of 'The Murder at Harversham Manor'. By watching online videos as well as reading the script, the actors would be able to begin to create a vision for their potential characters, with exaggerated movements and heightened emotions. Set designers would also need to begin researching the sophisticated looking set pieces utilised to create a suspenseful murder mystery. Also begin sketching and drawing plans for potential extravagant set pieces, as would be shown in 'The Murder at Harversham Manor'. However due to their incompetence, these features may not have occurred leading to a failed production.

3b. During the production planning both murder mystery and comedy would inform acting and set design. Upon first entering the stage, Jonathan trips and falls, so when initially reading the script, the actor could annotate that spot to ensure he incorporates highly physical movements and an overexaggerated reaction to create the theatrical style of comedy as shown in stimulus Image 4. When conceptualising plans for set, the designers could create a mind-map activity regarding the extravagant appearance of the British ornate set pieces, as shown in Stimulus Image 1 to inform the murder mystery theatrical style. However, also have plans to allow them to be structured so they can easily be broken during every performance, as set pieces do in comedy style.

3c. During the production development stage, actors could participate in warm-up activities, and hot-seat games to explore and trial the heightened physical acting style. By working with the director and blocking each scene, as well as keeping an annotated script to refer to, the actor would be able to evaluate their specific use of erratic movements, paired with stillness and

silence and refine it to become more of a parody, as comedy requires. The set designers could begin constructing and buying the set pieces and would work and liaise with costume and lighting designers to create an overall aesthetic of wealth and well-ordered settings as the murder mystery style entails. Also by trialling the set pieces under the stage lights, the set designers could be able to create the evidently malfunctioning appearance of the sophisticated set pieces, thus joining the two theatrical styles and exaggerating the comedic appearance of 'The Play that Goes Wrong'.

3d. During the dress rehearsal stage of presentation, actors, in their respective extravagant costumes, would rehearse and refine their use of physical theatre to heighten the comedic appearance of the play when in full costumes. The actors movements may be somewhat restricted and so it would be important to rehearse those dramatic, overexaggerated movements in script excerpt 2. This would ensure the audience finds humour in Dennis knocking over the door, or Robert colliding dramatically with the fireplace.

3e. In Script Excerpt 2, the actors use of heightened over exaggerated movements, specifically when Dennis first enters, destroying the door would initially establish actor-audience relationships. With their stilted, almost robotic movements, as shown in stimulus Image 4, along with their exaggerated hair and make-up, as shown in stimulus image 5, the actors could ensure the audience remains captivated by the story and actively participating in the comedic appearance. The actors could also face and stare at the audience, while occasionally approaching them with their erratic movements, informed by the comedic theatrical style, and maintaining actor-audience relationship, as they are physically engaging them. As shown in Script Excerpt 2, the set pieces continually fall and are damaged. So set designers would merge the two relevant theatrical styles of murder mystery in the sophisticated, expensive looking furniture with its breakability and humorous malfunctions, as shown in stimulus image 6 to simultaneously create suspense in the audience and then comedy at the character's breaking each set piece.

Question 4a.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
|-------|----|---|----|----|----|----|------------|
| % | 11 | 5 | 17 | 34 | 22 | 11 | 2.9 |

High-scoring responses demonstrated a strong understanding of how stagecraft could be applied during the performance of the monologue to show that a listed set of circumstances had previously occurred. These responses made specific reference to language in the playscript by providing direct quotes from script excerpt 3. These responses tended to show an excellent understanding of how stagecraft conveys meaning, using stagecraft-specific language.

Low-scoring responses sometimes referred to a mistake not on the list provided or showed a limited understanding of their selected area of stagecraft. Some of these low-scoring responses tended to recount narrative rather than articulate how stagecraft could be applied. Some of these responses referred to an area of stagecraft not on the list provided, such as lighting.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

6. Design: sound

Sound could be applied through the use of Foley recording of 'Trevor's voice offstage' and sfx to hint to the mistakes that have previously occurred.

For example, the sound of drilling and people working on a set, could be created by layering Foley recording of multiple people discussing how to drill and fix the set with the sound of drills and hammers sourced from Youtube. Once layered, the track could be played after Chris says 'this evening's performance' and continued at a low level to remind audiences of the set being collapsed.

Moreover, Trevor's voice could be recorded and have a distorted effect placed on it in 'Audacity' so it sounds like it is coming through a radio, hence, reinforcing the idea with the dialogue of 'it's going quite badly' to reiterate the mistakes made.

Question 4b.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
|-------|----|---|----|----|----|---|---------|
| % | 19 | 7 | 34 | 18 | 15 | 9 | 2.3 |

High-scoring responses demonstrated an excellent understanding of how stagecraft could be applied during the performance of a monologue to convey a character's motivation. As specified in this question, students were required to refer to three or more aspects of language from script excerpt 3. The high-scoring responses provided a quote to show when an area of stagecraft might be manipulated or to explain the inspiration for applying stagecraft in a particular way.

Low-scoring responses tended to refer to fewer than three aspects of language. Some referred to an area of stagecraft not on the list, or to a different area of stagecraft to that mentioned in Question 4a.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Acting

In an attempt to appear in control, firstly when I 'emerge' on to the stage, I can use long, confident strides, open body language and posture, and a bright and happy facial expression by smiling and appearing put together despite the chaos that has previously ensued. The non-verbal language provides a 'mask' for how I am actually feeling regarding the situation. When I say 'good evening', to show my nervousness, I can begin with a high pitched squeaky vocal tonality, but I can then cough and attempt to assert my sense of control by returning to using the voice I used at the beginning of the play – moderate pitch, open vowel sounds, falling inflection and rounded, controlled tonality. When Trevor can be heard over the radio for the second time, my line 'before we resume the production' can be said at a loud and booming volume, as if I am trying to cover the chaos of the situation by simply talking over it to regain control. I could project my voice to the very back of the theatre, use a slightly higher pitch as well as a raising inflection to attempt to hide Trevor's voice on the radio.