

# 2019 VCE Theatre Studies examination report

## General comments

To best prepare for the written examination, students are urged to:

- read the script for the prescribed play from the Unit 3 Playlist and memorise appropriate quotes (dialogue or stage direction)
- review specific moments from the Unit 3 and Unit 4 plays in performance and practise writing about them in detail
- review the nature and function of production roles within the three stages of the production process
- develop a strong working knowledge of tasks and exercises relevant to the three stages of production in two different production roles
- practise applying production roles, elements of theatre composition, theatre styles and context to interpret previously unseen scripts
- develop a terminology bank of language to describe the nature and function of production roles
- develop a bank of evaluative terminology
- review the difference between acting and directing.

## 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

### Question 1a.

| Marks | 0 | 1  | 2  | 3  | Average |
|-------|---|----|----|----|---------|
| %     | 1 | 18 | 31 | 51 | 2.3     |

This question tested students' ability to:

- find the dramatic potential in previously unseen material
- apply dramaturgy
- show how work within a selected production role could convey context.

High-scoring responses focused on the specific context of the terrible war between two brothers. Students gave examples of how work within their production role could convey ideas about the aftermath of conflict, such as design features that showed the devastation of the city, or acting choices that represented the battle-weary appearance of the Thebans. High-scoring responses also provided specific detail from one or more of the research images or ideas from the dramaturgy. For example, references to the orange hues from research image 3, design features of the gasmasks depicted in research image 4, or the gestures adopted by the dancers in research image 1. These aspects were carefully integrated into the response and informed how context could have been conveyed.

Low-scoring responses spoke in general terms about the context without directly referencing the war between the two brothers. For example, they may have identified that the play was a contemporary retelling of Antigone's story without making any reference to war. Low-scoring responses tended to refer to an aspect of the dramaturgy provided without explaining how this would inform the application of work by the production role. They also made little reference to work within a selected production role.

### Question 1b.

| Marks | 0 | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | Average |
|-------|---|----|----|----|----|---------|
| %     | 1 | 13 | 27 | 33 | 26 | 2.7     |

This question tested students' ability to:

- find the dramatic potential in a previously unseen script
- apply conventions of a theatrical style
- show how work within a selected production role could be informed by an element of theatre composition.

High-scoring responses were able to show how specific dialogue or stage directions and a convention from Greek Theatre could inform work within a selected production role. They showed a strong understanding of how the element of cohesion could inform the initial concept. The best responses provided a clear and detailed description of how work in their production role could interpret a specific moment.

Low-scoring responses did not make specific mention of the script excerpt, made limited reference to a convention from Greek Theatre or made little reference to the element of cohesion. They showed little understanding of how work within their production role could interpret a script.

### Question 1c.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | Average |
|-------|---|---|----|----|----|----|---------|
| %     | 2 | 3 | 22 | 33 | 26 | 14 | 3.2     |

This question tested students' ability to:

- work within a production role to achieve a production aim
- explore and trial work during the production development stage
- collaborate within a production team.

High-scoring responses demonstrated an excellent understanding of how work within their selected production role could realise one or more of the selected production aims. They showed how an idea could be trialled or explored, identifying both what they were trying to explore and how they would go about it. For example, exploring how actors might have used costume design to convey that it was a new morning, symbolising a new beginning for Thebes after a terrible war. Or trialling what colours and fabrics best conveyed this concept by listing the various colours or fabric types

they could try during the development stage and the ways they could assess their effectiveness in meeting the production aim. High-scoring responses also discussed how collaboration might occur within a production team; for example, how actors could rehearse with the costumes or how the director might meet with the costume designer to evaluate the extent to which the costumes matched the director's vision for the production.

Low-scoring responses tended to describe how production work could convey a production aim but without articulating the process of exploration that occurs during development. Some described what they were intending to trial without explaining how they would go about doing it. Other low-scoring responses failed to explain collaboration with another production role, and some didn't refer to a production aim from the list.

#### Question 1d.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | Average |
|-------|---|---|----|----|----|----|---------|
| %     | 4 | 6 | 49 | 15 | 16 | 11 | 2.7     |

This question tested students' ability to:

- work within a production role during bump-in, technical rehearsal and/or dress rehearsal to refine an interpretation
- apply the theatre composition element of contrast
- apply theatre technologies to evaluate work during the presentation stage.

High-scoring responses referred to specific aspects of the presentation stage prior to performances, such as dress rehearsals where minor adjustments could be made to the work, or technical rehearsals where timing of lighting, sound and set movement may be adjusted. They focused on the element of contrast, providing detailed descriptions of aspects of the production that were juxtaposed to highlight difference. For example, the drunken revelry of the chorus prior to Creon's entrance juxtaposed against the solemnity and reverent mood after Creon enters. These high-scoring responses considered how theatre technologies might be used in the evaluation process. For example, using smart phones or video cameras to film a dress rehearsal in order to reflect on the impact of the contrast, or setting up an intranet discussion platform to allow different production roles to discuss adjustments needed to enhance the desired effect on the audience.

Low-scoring responses made reference to how theatre technologies could enhance production work, but without evaluating their effects. For example, using a remote control device to activate the movement of a set piece might enhance the sense of contrast in that moment, but it does not necessarily allow the production role to consider how well contrast is conveyed in that moment. Some low-scoring responses showed a limited understanding of how contrast might be achieved through work in their production role.

#### Question 1e.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2  | 3  | Average |
|-------|---|---|----|----|---------|
| %     | 2 | 5 | 37 | 55 | 2.5     |

This question tested students' awareness of safe and ethical work practices during the production presentation stage.

High-scoring responses identified potential risks relevant to their production role during the presentation stage and how to minimise or avoid them. For example, the safety risk associated with Creon entering the stage at an elevated height might be minimised through the addition of safety rails and stress testing of the set. Or the risk to the environment of creating landfill might be minimised by ensuring that during bump-out set pieces are sorted for recycling or storage for future production.

Low-scoring responses described the safety or ethical practices in very general terms or didn't refer specifically to the production of *The Burial at Thebes*.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response for all parts of Question 1. The selected production role was 'set designer'.

*1a. During the planning stage, I would firstly read the script and annotate it. Next I would refer to research image 3 in order to further research ancient Greek architecture, as seen in the column and furniture in image 3. This would enable me to use elements of classical Greek architecture in my set, and render it as war torn, which is cohesive with the context of the play as it begins after a war. Furthermore, I would refer to image 4 in order to research colour palettes in monochromatic tones to enable a sombre tone and link to the war, mourning and exile as well as new leadership that is present.*

*1b. For the initial concept of the Chorus' speech in the planning stage I would create layers on the stage in a whitecard model, placing the chorus on a floor-level thrust in the centre of the audience. This would act as a means for the actors to directly address the audience and involve the audience immersively as part of the community, representing the views of the community. This also provides cohesion of status versus the new leader and the chorus as they are grouped together at floor level whereas Creon would be on a higher level. This could connect to the aspect of script 1 where the chorus speaks 'drum the earth from early until late' as it represents the cohesive unity of the chorus at the heart of the community, which is enabled by the levels of the set.*

*1c. Drawing on the aspect of being 'stripped of their armour' in Script excerpt 1, I would experiment with different materials for the floor such as dirt and carpet which would act as a gestural floor space, conveying mourning of losses in the raw earth, where bodies go, as well as a notion of rejuvenation of a new beginning and glory, which also stem from the earth. I would also draw on the element of the chorus in the script excerpt as well as 'death' and the brothers' doom being 'sealed'. This could derive through a drop of sand through a large pipe or sieve in order to portray ashes and community loss during moments in which the chorus speaks. I would experiment with the amount of sand necessary to create a thin, majestic illusion and take videos to document my trials. I would also work collaboratively with the lighting designer to ensure a par can could adequately shine through the sand in order to connect to the Gods and worship element prevalent in the lives of the citizens.*

*1d. During bump in I would ensure that the sand drop is adequately timed to end as Creon enters in order to contrast status and time. Additionally, I would ensure the stage levels (heights) of the raise and the thrust are of adequate height so that the new leader Creon acquires a defined space to show the high stakes of the new leader and status that Creon now must maintain. I would use a video camera to record the sand drops and time them, as well as weigh out how much sand is necessary for each drop in order to create a consistent, accurate drop. I would also document any changes in a journal such as height of drop, weight of drop and amount of sand. I would then upload this into a shared online platform so that all cast and crew can access it and understand what they are working with. This would also allow me to reflect and better my work through regular evaluation.*

*1e. During the presentation stage I would ensure that all actors are comfortable with the levels of the stage as well as ensure that the sand does not land on any actors or audience. To ensure this runs smoothly in the presentation stage, I would ensure that during dress rehearsal and preview performances that people aren't sitting in areas that may be hit by sand that that actors have adequate visibility of where they are on stage and are not hit by any sand.*

#### Question 2a.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | Average    |
|-------|---|---|----|----|----|----|------------|
| %     | 3 | 3 | 19 | 36 | 27 | 13 | <b>3.2</b> |

This question tested students' ability to:

- find the dramatic potential in a previously unseen script
- work within a production role to convey a character's objective and motivation.

High-scoring responses made reference to dialogue or stage directions from two different places in the script excerpt. They explained clearly how these specific aspects could inform work within a production role, and how both the objective and motivation could be conveyed through production work. For example, an actor might have used a loud voice, with firm tone, staccato rhythm and low pitch to convey Creon's objective of establishing strength, while at the same time gesturing for Chorus members to clear rubble from the steps, conveying Creon's motivation to restore order. They also used specific theatrical terminology to describe in detail how work within their production role could convey meaning.

Low-scoring responses referred to less than two aspects of language from the script excerpt. Some responses conflated objective and motivation, providing a general discussion of how either objective or motivation might be conveyed but without specific details. Some low-scoring response made little reference to how work within a production role could convey meaning.

### Question 2b.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | Average |
|-------|---|---|----|----|----|----|---------|
| %     | 9 | 6 | 20 | 30 | 23 | 13 | 2.9     |

This question tested students' ability to:

- find the dramatic potential in a previously unseen script
- work within a production role to achieve a production aim
- show how an interpretation of a monologue might convey ideas about the wider script.

High-scoring responses linked two examples of dialogue or stage direction that might inform production work. They provided specific detail about how work within a production role could foreshadow the tragedy of Antigone's death, which occurs much later in the play. For example, they explained how lighting of Creon might change at specific moments in the monologue to emphasise the impending tragedy which occurs because of Creon's implacable approach during this speech. Others explained how acting or directorial choices for the Chorus responding to Creon's speech could convey the idea that something bad will happen because of what Creon is saying, or how costume design choices for Antigone's character could highlight her rebellious nature.

Low-scoring responses made limited reference to the language of the script or did not explain how their production work could signpost the impending tragedy. They might have referred to a reasonable idea but needed to provide more specific description of work within their production role and use theatrical terminology to explain the nature and function of production work.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response for all parts of Question 2. The selected production role was 'actor'.

*2a. In order to convey Creon's objective to establish strength as a the new ruler of Thebes I would have a strong rigid posture, shoulders back, puffed out chest, raised chin and large demonstrative gestures. This would demonstrate Creon's perceived and new level of superiority as he has risen to power as the new leader of Thebes. On the lines 'Nobody is to treat him otherwise' I would adopt a demanding and domineering tone, a low register and a booming voice in order to illustrate Creon's autocratic nature as a leader and his desire to restore order through obedience towards his commands. Moreover, on the lines 'a carcass for the dogs and birds to feed on' I would have a slight smile and sinister look on my face and say the line using an impassioned and enlightened tone. This would convey Creon's relishing in the condemnation and exile he has inflicted on Polyneices even after death, and how Creon seeks to restore order*

*by punishing those who have been ‘a traitor’. Thus, demonstrating Creon basking in his newfound power.*

*2b. In order to foreshadow the play’s tragedy, I would have the chorus who are still on stage and within the pit slowly start to embody death physically in order to symbolise and foreshadow the death that is yet to come. I would do this by the chorus’ eyes rolling back, our heads drooping, our legs buckling, our mouths opening in disgust and outrage but no words coming out in order to show them trying to prevent the death to follow but being unable. Thus, as Creon’s monologue progresses and specifically on lines such as ‘the obscenity he was’ and ‘he is forbidden any ceremonial’ more and more of the chorus would begin to physically react. We would slowly begin to drop and reach forward with our arms as if trying to reach for some assistance to prevent the tragedy to come. Thus, this stylised physicality and non verbal language could convey how Creon’s actions and words foreshadow the death to follow, as I embody death through the chorus.*

## Section B

| Play selected | Romeo and Juliet | Cosi | The Violent Outburst that Drew Me to You | Cloudstreet |
|---------------|------------------|------|--|-------------|
| %             | 7                | 49   | 16                                       | 27          |

### Question 1a.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6 | Average |
|-------|---|---|----|----|----|----|---|---------|
| %     | 3 | 4 | 32 | 21 | 20 | 12 | 8 | 3.2     |

This question tested students’ ability to:

- explain decisions by theatre practitioners to interpret a written script from the Unit 3 Playlist
- analyse how an element of theatre composition was used in a Unit 3 playlisted performance
- analyse work by production roles other than directors and actors.

High-scoring responses showed an excellent understanding of the written script by providing quotes from the dialogue or stage directions in the script of the selected play. They also described what occurred on stage at specific times during the performance and clearly explained how work within two production roles applied a chosen element of theatre composition to create a deliberate effect on the audience. For example, how sound design manipulated pace, timing and tempo to impact the rhythm of a performance and create a moment of tension for the audience.

Low-scoring responses often lacked any direct reference to the script. Students are required to have a strong working knowledge of the written script for the playlisted performance that they saw during Unit 3. This means that students should have read the script and practised discussing how this script was interpreted in the performance by theatre practitioners. Students are urged to memorise specific examples of dialogue or stage directions to demonstrate their working knowledge of the written script.

Low-scoring responses could have used more theatrical terminology to describe work within a production role during a specific moment. For example, in discussing the application of lighting, they might refer to the colour, direction, intensity, source, focus and timing of lighting to create a strong evocation of a particular moment in the performance, thus providing a description that shows a strong working knowledge of the nature and function of this production work.

Some responses did not score well because they mistakenly made reference to the role of actors.

The following is an example of a high scoring response. The response relates to Part One of *Cloudstreet* by Nick Enright and Justin Monjo (Theatre company: Malthouse Theatre in association

with Black Swan State Theatre Company). The selected element of theatre composition was 'motion'.

*The movement of the walls upon the introduction of the 'tumbledown house' is a significant moment of Malthouse's production 'Cloudstreet'. As the walls of the house slowly creep onto the stage, following the stage direction 'The Pickles Arrive at Cloudstreet', they give the deliberate impression of the house breathing. This is achieved through the creaking and groaning sound design, which emulates the personified movement of the house and through the movement of the set by which the 4 walls invade the space. This moment of the production serves to both introduce the character of the Cloudstreet house, and give the distinct impression of the invasion of land, a theme which is highlighted by Matthew Lutton's direction. This invasion of land is particularly pertinent to the indigenous 'ghosts' who, like the whole of Australia, haunt the land. This impression of the house breathing also relates to the 'ghosts' who 'swirl around' the middle room, and 'whisper' into Fish's ear. The motion of the set walls, and the implied motion of the creaking audio, both signal the house's lifelike characteristics and foreshadow the presence of the ghosts who live inside.*

### Question 1b.

| Marks | 0 | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | Average |
|-------|---|----|----|----|----|---------|
| %     | 7 | 19 | 34 | 24 | 15 | 2.2     |

This question tested students' ability to explain decisions by one or more actors to interpret the Unit 3 playlisted written script during the play's performance.

High-scoring responses provided specific references to language from the script, such as quoting dialogue, stage direction or act and scene numbers. They showed an excellent understanding of the role of the actor by referring to acting skills and describing these in detail. For example, some discussed how an actor used their mouth, cheeks, forehead, eyes and jaw to create a specific facial expression. Others made reference to some specific aspect of the interpretation that was realised, for example, a particular character trait that was conveyed through acting choices.

Low-scoring responses made little or no reference to the written script. Some made limited reference to the role of the actor.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response. The response relates to Part One of *Cloudstreet* by Nick Enright and Justin Monjo (Theatre company: Malthouse Theatre in association with Black Swan State Theatre Company).

*One actor, Ian Michael, was an indigenous actor, a part of the Noongar people. In the written script amendments were made to place the context of the Stolen Generation to the front of the play in the prologue. The storyteller describes 'the widow' who turns 'Number One Cloudstreet' into a missionary for the young native girls to correct their behaviour and help their 'sorry race'. In performance, Ian Michael stands alone on the big empty stage and speaks directly out to the audience. The specific moment sets the tone of the play and connects us to the struggles of others in which the story intrudes on. As Michael stands extremely still and is an indigenous man himself it allows for the audience to have a deeper connection with the character and the context. The performance uses language of the Western Australian indigenous people spoken by Michael to enhance their story as he says 'Ngarla koort mirling Ngarla boodjar' which translates to Our hearts want our country, I want to go home. This evokes a sense of sadness and presents the pain of these girls who lived in the house.*

## Section C

| Play selected | Shakespeare in Love | Much Ado about Nothing | Come from Away | One the Bear | Tchekov at the House of Special Purpose |
|---------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------|--------------|---|
| %             | 24                  | 11                     | 50             | 12           | 2                                       |

### Question 1.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
|-------|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|---|---|----|---------|
| %     | 3 | 2 | 7 | 21 | 18 | 14 | 12 | 11 | 7 | 3 | 2  | 4.7     |

This question tested students' ability to:

- evaluate work by an actor in the Unit 4 playlisted performance
- evaluate how two acting skills were used to convey meaning
- evaluate the interrelationship between acting, direction and design.

High-scoring responses used evaluative language consistently throughout their evaluation. They thoroughly explained what was effective about the acting skills, direction and design and why it was effective, and also made insightful comments about why some aspects of the performance were not as effective. They considered 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 de-contextualised
- dynamic – as opposed to tedious or flat.

High-scoring responses evaluated the interrelationship between acting, directing and design, citing how it was applied during one specific moment in the performance to achieve a particular production aim. They also showed an understanding of the differences between acting and directing, with some students referring to direction in terms of:

- blocking choices, or
- the unifying vision for a performance that provided overarching connection between aspects of the performance.

Acting was best described in terms of acting skills such as how:

- tone, pitch, rhythm and volume of voice were applied
- speed, weight and direction of movement were applied
- the shape of different body parts was applied to create gesture
- the shape of different parts of the face was applied to create a facial expression
- timing and gesture were applied to create stillness and silence.

High-scoring responses made specific reference to an intended meaning in the performance such as:

- realisation of character traits
- conveying aspects of a narrative, including creation of tension and climax



- creation of mood
- impact on the actor-audience relationship.

Low-scoring responses provided limited evaluation. They used little or no evaluative language (e.g. seamlessly, jarringly, subtly, beautifully, concisely, emotionally, sophisticated, intelligent, prosaic etc.) and/or provided little justification for why an aspect of the performance was/was not effective. Some low-scoring responses made reference to acting, with little or no reference to directing.

The following is an example of a high scoring response. The response relates to *Come from Away* by Irene Sankoff and David Heine (Theatre company: Newtheatricals).

*One of the intended meanings of 'Come from Away' is to display the hardship, repercussions and racism felt by Muslims after 9/11. To realise this, Ash Roussety (swing) employed various acting skills, in conjunction with Toni-Leslie James' costume design. To effectively make apparent his shift from 'newfoundlander' to Ali, Roussety used a thick Arabic accent, also heightened by the addition of a 'taqiyah' (traditional Muslim hat), ensuring that audience members understood this transition between characters. In the specific moment of his direct audience address prior to the song '38 planes reprise,' Roussety successfully conveyed this intended meaning. He employed a soft, ashamed tone, which through a crescendo in dynamic became more of a faint growl as he became more angry and embarrassed. He used little movement, enhanced by the relationship between acting and directing, as the director's blocking of remaining still just off downstage centre effectively forced the audience's focus on what he was saying, demanding their sympathy for the situation. Although the rise in vocal dynamic successfully showed the character's pain, a slight lack of diction caused some words to be lost in the heat of the moment, therefore meaning that his outburst of emotion came at the expense of some words. However, this wasn't too much of an issue, as his use of gesture revealed further his situation, especially on the word 'aurat', which is the Muslim tradition that was broken during the strip search scene. On this line, he clenched his fist slightly, contrasting his prior stillness, as although it was a small movement, it was still effective in showing Ali's inner emotions, furthered by the slight biting of his cheek as though he was about to cry. This depiction, enhanced by directing and design, therefore achieved the successful communication of the intended meaning, as its raw portrayal of grief and shame incurred audience sympathy, establishing a new actor-audience relationship based on understanding and empathy.*