2021 VCE Theatre Studies monologue external assessment report

General comments

In 2021, the Theatre Studies monologue examination comprised 10 monologue choices covering a range of scripts, theatre styles, forms, contexts, themes and cultural origins. Students chose one monologue from the prescribed list. Some monologues were reproduced in their entirety (as they appeared in the original script), while others were formed by cutting and pasting passages from one or more parts of the script to form the monologue, thus allowing students to address the challenge of shifts in time, persons, places and character development that this requires.

Students who chose the acting and directing option were required to demonstrate their knowledge and skills working in both of these production roles. Students who chose the designing option were to design for a solo actor performing the monologue in a 5 m × 5 m space under the examination conditions by applying any two of costume, set, properties, sound, lighting or make-up.

Students should be aware that the rooms used for the examination are not necessarily dedicated theatre performance spaces and that their dimensions, acoustics, floor coverings and lighting conditions may vary. Students should plan for their interpretation to be flexible enough for a variety of room sizes, acoustics, lighting conditions and floor coverings, including carpet. In 2021, students were required to present their monologue interpretation in a 5 m × 5 m space, which was delineated in the examination room. Students were permitted to set up lighting, sound and other materials outside the 5 m × 5 m area, but lighting, sound and audiovisual equipment had to be operated from within the designated space. Students should be aware that some venues have standard-sized doors/doorways (some venues have a single, not double, doorway) and that items to be used for the examination need to fit through this opening (height and width). Students should note that they have a maximum of two minutes to set up their materials before commencing the examination and that they will be instructed when to commence setting up. Students are to bring their materials into and out of the examination room unassisted.

In their monologue interpretation students are required to address audience culture and to consider the intended audience for their interpretation. The assessors are the audience for the interpretation. In this context, the assessors are fulfilling the role of those for whom the interpretation is intended. Actor/director students may choose to perform to the assessors as audience or to an imagined audience or both.

All electrical equipment was required to be tested and tagged, including extension cords. Students were permitted to bring a data projector, laptop, an MP3 player, a mobile phone, a tablet or other such portable electronic device into the examination room. Recording functions on any electronic devices/equipment had to be disabled during the examination. Where a laptop was used, the student was required to direct the screen of the device towards the assessors and students were not permitted to access the internet during the examination. A mobile phone or other smart device such as a tablet was permitted in the examination room if it was to be used as a prop or as an audio-video playback device. The messaging and wi-fi functions of the device had to be disabled before the student entered the room.

In 2021 for the first time, for each of their production roles, students were asked to specify on the pro forma a particular element of theatre composition (i.e. any one of cohesion, motion, rhythm, emphasis, contrast or variation) they had applied. In high-scoring responses the elements of theatre composition were highly evident throughout the interpretation. In some of the lower-scoring responses, while the elements of theatre composition were stated, there was little evidence of the application of these in the monologue interpretation.

For students choosing the acting and directing option:

* They should ensure that, as well as acting, they demonstrate their application of directing to interpret the monologue; both are assessed.
* It is a requirement of the examination that students convey a theatre style(s) and that it is consistently applied throughout their performance.
* Students will not be prompted. If a student forgets their lines, they should pick up the monologue where they can and continue with their performance.
* While it is not obligatory, most students accompany their acting interpretation with materials and technology such as costume(s), props, set, lighting and sound.

For students choosing the designing option:

* According to the examination specifications, students are to design for an actor (one actor only) performing the monologue (but not for the wider scene or the whole play) to an intended audience within a single clearly lit space, and within the designated performance space of 5 m × 5 m (i.e. the designer should present their interpretation within the 5 m × 5 m space and should design for an actor as if performing the monologue with the same-sized space). It is important that designers work within these parameters.
* In the examination specifications document, there are specific instructions regarding what designers should include in their interpretation. Students are advised to adhere to these requirements.
* Designers should be mindful that any symbolic intentions conveyed in their design should be clearly evident to, and would be understood by, the intended audience watching the performance.
* The designs should complement the work of an actor performing the monologue but should not overly direct or dictate the actor’s movements or character interpretation.

Specific 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.

Stage 1 – Interpretation

Most students followed the examination specifications with regard to the interpretation stage of the examination. A common error for acting and directing was memorisation of lines. Common errors for designing included designs that were impractical for an acting interpretation of the monologue or that would overshadow the application of acting and directing.

In preparing for Stage 1, students should ensure that their interpretation contains all the required aspects as contained in the specifications for this examination and that all of the criteria for the examination are addressed.

Stage 2 – Oral interpretation statement

The examination concluded with students delivering an oral interpretation statement. It was the student’s responsibility, without instruction by the assessors, to move from the interpretation (Stage 1) to the oral interpretation statement (Stage 2), and the transition time was part of the time permitted for Stages 1 and 2 combined. Some students took a short break after Stage 1 to prepare themselves for Stage 2. This break was permissible but was included as part of the eight minutes of total time for the delivery of parts one and two of the examination.

Students were permitted to read from notes written on, or attached to, the interpretation statement pro forma, which was part of the examination and which they were allowed to bring into the examination room. Students should be mindful that assessors base their assessment on what is orally delivered, not what is written on the pro forma and that they are hearing what is being said for the first time; it is important for students not to rush the delivery of their oral interpretation statement. Following the oral presentation, a single hard copy of the interpretation statement was handed to the assessors. Some students memorised their oral interpretation statement, which was permissible.

The 2021 monologues

The popularity of each monologue is indicated in the table below.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Character number | Monologue chosen | Total % of students |
| 1 | Emilia | 17.23 |
| 2 | Lettice | 16.07 |
| 3 | Double | 12.67 |
| 4 | Polly | 11.43 |
| 5 | Iff | 9.46 |
| 6 | Cyrano | 8.61 |
| 7 | Malvolio | 7.84 |
| 8 | Por Por | 5.91 |
| 9 | Ballad Singer | 5.79 |
| 10 | Doctor | 4.98 |

In 2021, 83.85% of students selected the acting and directing option and 16.15% selected the designing option.

Response to assessment criteria

1. Fulfilment of the requirements of the selected production role

High-scoring responses met all of the requirements for the examination, as outlined in the examination specifications (VCAA, February 2021).

Lower scores for acting and directing were often due to the student not delivering all of the required dialogue and/or their contextual choices. Lower scores for designing were often due to the student quoting fewer than two times from the script of the monologue, designing for an acting space larger than the required 5 m × 5 m, or designing for the whole play rather than specifically for the monologue.

2. Skill in undertaking and applying dramaturgy

High-scoring responses demonstrated and discussed the application of dramaturgical research both within the play script and beyond it, including such aspects as contexts of the prescribed monologue, the specified scene and the wider playscript, plot, structure, language of the script, character(s), themes, images and ideas, theatre style(s), intended meanings, theatrical possibilities, influences on the playwright(s), and previous productions of the play.

Lower-scoring responses confined the dramaturgical research to within the play script and/or did not demonstrate how the research had informed the interpretation of the monologue.

3. Skill in working in the selected production role

High-scoring responses provided clear evidence that the student had responded to the monologue, applying a high level of skill corresponding to the selected production role(s) – either acting and directing, or two of the following design areas: costume, make-up, props, set, lighting or sound.

Lower-scoring responses demonstrated a lack of understanding of and/or skill in the requirements of working in one or both of the selected production roles as outlined in the examination specifications (VCAA, February 2021).

4. Skill in conveying the interrelationships between the prescribed monologue, the specified scene and the world of the play

High-scoring responses demonstrated a thorough understanding of the interrelationships between the prescribed monologue, the specified scene in which it was embedded and the wider script from which it was derived. There was clear evidence of how this understanding informed the interpretation of the monologue.

Lower-scoring responses were characterised by a limited understanding of the interrelationships between the monologue, scene and wider play script. This was often manifested in poor conceptual choices and/or a limited understanding of the prescribed character and their development through the play.

5. Skill in the development of a creative and imaginative concept for interpreting the prescribed monologue

High-scoring responses were characterised by a highly informed concept for the monologue interpretation that was creative and imaginative while taking into account other aspects such the playwright’s intentions, the plot of the play, its themes and characters, and the intended effects on the audience.

Lower-scoring concepts were less refined/sophisticated in nature and/or provided little to no evidence that the interpretation was informed by, and took into consideration, aspects such as the contexts of the prescribed monologue, the specified scene and the wider playscript, plot, structure, language of the script, character(s), themes, images and ideas, theatre style(s), intended meanings, theatrical possibilities, influences on the playwright(s) and application of dramaturgy. Some lower-scoring responses demonstrated a limited understanding of the play overall.

6. Skill in conveying the contexts of the prescribed monologue

High-scoring responses clearly conveyed the contexts of the monologue through application of the selected production roles. Some students chose to change the original context(s) (i.e. to recontextualise). In doing so it was evident that the changed context was appropriately informed by the student’s understanding of the monologue, the specified scene in which it was embedded, the wider play script, and dramaturgy.

Lower-scoring responses conveyed the context(s) of the monologue in a superficial way and/or changed the original context in a way that was not appropriate for the content of the monologue and/or for the scene and the wider play.

7. Skill in applying theatre style(s)

Acting and directing students performed in the theatre style(s) and designing students designed for a performance as if performed in the chosen theatre style(s).

High-scoring responses clearly conveyed the student’s knowledge of the theatre style(s) of the original script or of the theatre style(s) they chose to apply instead. A range of conventions and characteristics of the theatre style(s) was evident throughout the interpretation of the monologue.

In lower-scoring responses the theatre style(s) was barely discernible within the interpretation or was superficially applied.

8. Skill in the use of elements of theatre composition

In high-scoring responses there was direct correlation between the element(s) of theatre composition the student stated on the interpretation statement pro forma and their use of this/these in their interpretation. High-scoring responses also demonstrated a high level of understanding of how the application of element(s) of theatre composition can contribute to work in the selected production role(s).

Lower-scoring responses were characterised by an inappropriate choice of the element(s) of theatre composition applied to the interpretation and/or little evidence of their application. In some instances, the choice and application of one or more elements of theatre composition for each production role was at odds with the concept the student had determined for the interpretation.

9. Skill in demonstrating the interrelationship between the interpretation and the audience

High-scoring responses were characterised by a high level of understanding and appreciation of the effect the student’s interpretation could have on an intended audience. Some students stipulated the audience they envisaged for their interpretation (e.g. that Por Por from A Ghost in My Suitcase was being interpreted by the student for a school-aged audience).

Lower-scoring interpretations of the monologue were presented with little to no understanding or acknowledgement of an audience that would view the student’s work in the selected production role(s) and/or how aspects of the interpretation could enhance the experience of an intended audience.

10. Ability to demonstrate, orally justify and explain interpretative decisions

In high-scoring responses there was a consistent correlation and interrelationship between the oral interpretation statement and the interpretation the student had presented. High-scoring responses demonstrated, explained and justified the decisions the student had made when working in their production roles.

Lower-scoring responses were characterised by a general discussion about the monologue and the play from which it was derived and/or superficial information about the play and its context(s). A justification of why interpretative decisions were made was missing from some lower-scoring responses.