



## GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2008 end of year written examination for Theatre Studies was based on the reaccredited *VCE Theatre Studies Study Design* (2007–2011). It was consistent with the format of the sample examination which was produced by the VCAA during 2007. The paper covered five areas of study from the study design; all Unit 3–4 Outcomes except for Unit 4, Area of Study 1 (which is assessed in the Monologue performance examination) were assessed.

- In general, students who understood the underlying concepts of the *VCE Theatre Studies Study Design* handled the examination well.
- Most students answered all questions on the paper. It was evident from the script books that many students chose to answer the questions in a different order to the sequence on the examination. Many of these students started by answering Question 4, which was worth the most marks on the paper. This was deemed to be a judicious decision.
- It was noted that some students were not guided by the number of marks per question in regard to the length and depth of their response. This was particularly apparent in Question 3, which required short answers, yet some students wrote lengthy and overly detailed responses.
- Students were given the option to support any of their written answers with hand-drawn illustrations, and some took advantage of this option. Some questions required students to provide illustrations and it was apparent that most students seemed to have no problem doing so. Some questions required students to annotate their hand-drawn illustrations, and this requirement was generally complied with.
- A total of 50 marks was available for the paper.

### Areas of strength and weakness

High-scoring papers demonstrated:

- sophisticated understanding and use of subject specific language, terminology and expressions
- a high level of skill in analysing and evaluating
- a sound working knowledge of how one or more of the following areas of stagecraft can be applied through the stages of production (production planning, production development, production season, production evaluation): acting, direction, dramaturgy, stage management, set, costume, lighting, properties, make-up, sound, multimedia and promotion (including publicity)
- a high level of skill in developing images and/or ideas from playscripts using acting and/or other areas of stagecraft
- a sound knowledge of the ways in which theatrical style(s) can inform the intended meaning of a playscript
- a high level of understanding of the ways in which playscripts and contexts pertaining to them can be presented to an audience
- a high level of skill in applying practical and theoretical knowledge from the course to ‘stimulus material’ in the examination (*VCE Theatre Studies Study Design*, page 31).

Lower scoring papers demonstrated:

- little or no use of subject specific language, terminology and expressions
- limited knowledge of areas of stagecraft, the stages of production, theatre style(s) and/or theatrical contexts
- limited application of practical and theoretical knowledge from the course
- little or no understanding of the difference between an analysis and an evaluation
- limited use of the marks allocated for each question as a guide for the depth of response required
- little or no understanding of how to annotate diagrams/illustrations.

### Advice for students

- Questions may be answered in any order.
- In the examination, students should be guided by the number of marks allocated to each question when determining the length and/or detail of their response. This is particularly so if the question implies that a short answer is required; students should consider what is deemed an appropriate length of response for short answer questions. Note that the 2009 examination will be presented in question and answer booklet format. Students should use the question requirements, number of marks and number of lines as a guide to the amount of detail required.



- Students should take note of the particular type of response required in each question, as indicated by words such as ‘describe’, ‘evaluate’, ‘explain’, ‘discuss’, ‘compare’, ‘analyse’, ‘identify’, and respond accordingly. It appeared that some students did not understand the difference between an analysis and an evaluation, i.e. that when writing an evaluation some evaluative comments are required in the response, to accompany the analytical ones.
- Students need to understand what is required when annotating diagrams/illustrations. When required to annotate diagrams/illustrations some students only labelled them. Annotations should add explanatory comments to the diagrams/illustrations.
- Students should develop a vocabulary based on theatrical language, terminology and expressions as pertains to the course.

The 2008 examination paper did not stipulate that a particular form of written response was required. Students chose to write in essay form, point form, report form or any combination thereof. All were considered acceptable, as long as the student addressed the focus of the question and the response was appropriate to the type required; for example, an evaluation or a description. Where an explanation or analysis was required, most students chose to write their answer in a format other than in dot points. The examination contained a detachable insert that contained ‘stimulus materials’ pertaining to Question 4. When responding to this question students were required to draw on the stimulus materials and the ‘contextual background’ information that was also provided.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

**Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.**

For Question 1 an excerpt from a playscript was reproduced with accompanying questions. It was clearly noted on the examination paper that no prior knowledge of the plays, their contextual background or the stimulus material was required when answering Questions 1 and 4.

### Question 1

Students were asked to draw on key knowledge and key skills pertaining to Unit 4, Area of Study 2 and interpret a scene by applying stagecraft. The stimulus material for this question was a piece of playscript from the play, *Blithe Spirit* by Noel Coward. Two interrelated questions were asked in relation to the playscript. Students were informed that they could apply any theatrical style(s) to their interpretation of the scene and that they could change the original context to another appropriate context. The examination paper informed students that they were not required to have prior knowledge of the playscript or its contexts.

### Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	1	2	5	18	27	25	21	4.3

Students were asked to discuss how the application of one or more of acting and/or costume and/or direction and/or make-up and/or sound could be applied to emphasise the humour within the scene.

A high-level response was characterised by:

- an imaginative discussion of how one or more of acting, costume, direction, make-up and/or sound could be applied to emphasise the humour within the scene
- inclusion of pertinent example(s) from the script and/or other aspects of the contextual background, such as dialogue and/or stage directions from the scene, other aspects of the contextual background such as the synopsis, the style of the play, the setting of the play, the themes, the characters, the specified staging requirements
- appropriate use of theatrical language, terminology and expressions.

Following is an example of a high-level response.

*Acting and direction could be used to emphasise the humour within the scene. This could be done by the use of voice, movement and facial expressions. Whenever Charles speaks to Elvira, he would direct it to her physically, perhaps turning to his left to speak to her. If Ruth were positioned on his right, she could turn away for a moment so she does not see his physical movement and only hears his comments, making it obvious she thinks they are directed at her, making the comedy derived from misunderstanding. The actor playing Ruth could use her facial expressions to show a look of horror/outrage at her husband's behaviour. Her voice when saying lines such as 'what don't you blame her for?' would be high-pitched, and she could stand glaring at him, placing her hands on her hips to show her disapproval. The misunderstanding and Ruth's reactions to what*

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*Charles says will provide a comedic performance. The direction (such as the actors' physical positions) would also aid the element of misunderstanding and emphasise the humour. Ruth and Elvira could be directed to simultaneously move around Charles while speaking to him, perhaps circling his chair, so that his discomfort could provide humour as well. His discomfort and their anger would be exaggerated to play up the comedic aspect.*

An acceptable-level response was characterised by:

- a satisfactory discussion of how one or more of acting, costume, direction, make-up and/or sound could be applied to emphasise the humour within the scene
- inclusion of appropriate example(s) from the script and/or other aspects of the contextual background
- use of theatrical language, terminology and expressions.

A low-level response was characterised by:

- a limited discussion of how one or more of acting, costume, direction, make-up and/or sound could be applied to emphasise the humour within the scene
- the explanation discussed the script and/or contextual background but with little or oblique reference to how stagecraft would emphasise the humour
- the response used little or no theatrical language, terminology and expressions.

## Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	6	4	15	23	26	15	12	3.5

Students were asked to explain two ways in which their application of stagecraft in part a. was informed by the 'contextual background', as provided on the examination.

A high-level response was characterised by:

- an insightful and creative explanation of two ways in which the application of stagecraft from the areas of acting, costume, direction, make-up and/or sound was informed by the contextual background provided
- the scene was linked to one or more of the area(s) of stagecraft in an imaginative and sophisticated manner
- the explanation was enhanced by appropriate use of theatrical language, terminology and expressions.

Following is an example of a high-level response.

*The themes informed the application of acting. Jealousy in particular features throughout the scene, with the actor portraying Elvira sharing her jealousy at her husband's new wife and providing humour with her nasty comments regarding Ruth (also satirising the social rules of marriage). The direction of Ruth and Elvira circling Charles' chair was derived from the jealousy theme – turning their movement into a mock duel over their husband. The social rules of marriage as depicted in the play motivates the actors' jealousy and the women's reactions to each other, as they both feel they have a claim over Charles.*

*The theatrical style informs the manner of the acting. Being a comedy of manners encourages the actors to enhance their use of humour, making the satirical aspects very obvious in order to enhance their use of humour, in order to get laughs from the audience. The actors satirise their own characters to achieve this by mocking their shallowness and materialism, using exaggerated voice and movement to 'send up' their characters.*

An acceptable-level response was characterised by:

- a satisfactory explanation of two ways in which the application of one or more of the stagecraft areas was informed by the contextual background provided
- an explanation which linked the scene and one or more of the stated area(s) of stagecraft
- an explanation which was enhanced by the use of theatrical language, terminology and expressions.

A low-level response was characterised by:

- a very limited explanation/description of two ways in which the application of one or more of the stagecraft areas was informed by the contextual background provided
- an explanation which made few or oblique links between the scene and one or more of the stated area(s) of stagecraft
- a response which used little or no theatrical language, terminology and expressions.

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## Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	4	1	4	10	15	15	16	15	11	10	5.5

This question pertained to the 2008 VCE Theatre Studies playlist for Unit 3. Students were asked to select one of the listed questions, each of which pertained specifically to one of the plays on the 2008 Unit 3 prescribed playlist. In accordance with Unit 3, Area of Study 3, all students were expected to have attended one of the plays from the 2008 Unit 3 prescribed playlist and have read the corresponding written playscript. Students were expected to refer to both the play in performance and the written playscript in their response.

A high-level response was characterised by:

- an insightful response which demonstrated a high level of understanding of the play in production and the written playscript from which it was derived
- inclusion of highly pertinent references to the written playscript and play in performance
- use of appropriate theatrical language, terminology, expressions and/or concepts.

Following is an example of a high-level response.

*Tartuffe* adapted by Louise Fox from the original by Molière

*Analyse ways in which the historical and/or social and/or cultural contexts of the written playscript were interpreted in performance to an audience.*

*Historical: The original playscript of Tartuffe is a 17<sup>th</sup> century neo-classic comedy written Molière. His original intention of the production was to satirise the pious and hypocritical (people) of the time but it is believed that this was a veil and he was really satirising the church. In Louise Fox's adaptation, she realised that because Australia is a largely secular society it would be more relevant for her to satirise society's pre-occupation with materialism and hedonism. However, hypocrisy of the church is still a relevant theme with the reference to 'prosperity theology', Hillsong Church, and the hypocrisy of a Buddhist character guilty of gluttony. Throughout the play there are references to Molière's time such as the French style railings on the balcony of the mansion and the bell above the gates. This emphasises contemporary society's pre-occupation with Molière's time and also reinforces its relevance as a modern playscript.*

*Social/cultural: The choice was to set the play in Melbourne, whilst still maintaining how the original intentions were shown in many ways. Whilst the original was set in the family drawing room, the modern Melbourne equivalent of that is around the pool in a garden. This is because, respectively both these places are where family members and friends gather to socialise. The pool also helped bring the play into 21<sup>st</sup> century Melbourne, as gathering around bodies of water to socialise is a 'very Australian' pastime. The pool also highlighted the wealth and decadence of the family, who in the current drought, were still at liberty to have a pool. This decadent lifestyle was also shown through the way the family were able to lounge around the pool in their pristine white bathing suits without getting them dirty because they had a maid and a pool cleaner. The inclusion of the Choirboys' song 'Run to Paradise' helped emphasise the 'Australian' context and modernise the play. The character of Damis (Luke Ryan) who went outside of his literally 'gated' community only to come back sporting blue Bonds underwear was a contemporary reference used to highlight what a 'normal' Australian teenage boy looks like. Continual references to their private schools helped establish them as upper class.*

An acceptable-level of response was characterised by:

- a satisfactory response that demonstrated a sound understanding of the play in production and the written playscript from which it was derived
- inclusion of appropriate examples from the written playscript and/or play in performance
- use of theatrical language, terminology, expressions and/or concepts.

A low-level response was characterised by:

- a limited response that demonstrated a scant understanding of the play in production with little reference to the written playscript from which it was derived
- limited use of examples from the written playscript and/or the student only referred to the play in performance
- little or no use of theatrical language, terminology, expressions.

## Question 3

### Question 3a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	2	10	87	1.9

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## Question 3b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	3	7	33	56	2.4

## Question 3c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	3	6	35	56	2.5

## Question 3d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	7	21	37	34	2

This question pertained to the 2008 VCE Theatre Studies playlist for Unit 4. Students were asked to answer each of the four parts to the question, making reference to one of the plays from the 2008 prescribed playlist for Unit 4. In 2008, the four parts of the question encompassed identifying characteristics of a character, analysing the motivation(s) of a character, comparing how two actors used the acting space and an evaluation of how one actor established and maintained an actor-audience relationship.

A high-level response was characterised by:

- a high level of understanding of the play and its contexts
- inclusion of highly pertinent examples from the play pertaining to acting and/or the characters
- use of appropriate theatrical language, terminology, expressions and/or concepts.

Following is an example of a high-level response.

*Wicked – The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz*

*Two characteristics of the character of Elphaba were, firstly her green skin, this highlighted her difference and isolation within society. A second characteristic present in the character of Elphaba was her deep intelligent and strong voice. This helped create an image of an intellectual within Oz but also helped solidify her as a moral voice within the performance.*

*The motivation of the character of Elphaba was to fight against injustice. This motivation born of her initial motivation, to fight against the injustice of her birth, i.e. her green (skin) and her unfair social isolation developed to encompass a fight against injustice in all its forms. She fights against the injustice of the treatment of animals in Oz, and also the injustice behind the phony nature of the Wizard. This motivation is born of Elphaba's own isolation and rejection, understanding what it is to be treated or faced with an injustice.*

*Elphaba did not move around the acting space a great deal. This highlighted her awkwardness within society. Later within the play as she embraces her power and difference she moves more freely and comfortably within the space. This is epitomised in the Act I finale 'defying gravity' where she almost fills the entire stage when she flies. The character of Glinda on the other hand, comfortable within society as a popular girl, flits around dizzily all over the stage. This contrasts with Elphaba who is uncomfortable in society. Glinda is happy and accepted so uses the performance space freely. At the end of the play when Glinda is left alone as the good witch she still fills the acting space yet, within her bubble, it appears in contrast to the freedom of Elphaba. She is trapped in Oz and within her role in society.*

*Elphaba created an actor-audience relationship by employing the theatrical convention of song. By stopping the mostly linear time-line of the production, turning to face the audience (without breaking the 4th wall as the audience is never acknowledged) sings about her inner most fears, hopes, ambitions, motivations and feelings. Through this insight, given through a convention typical of musical theatre, the audience feels empathetic to the plights of Elphaba eventually siding with her and by the end of the production, that she can survive and live 'happily ever after'. This actor-audience relationship is successfully created and maintained throughout as the audience feel a real connection with the character and her plight.*

An acceptable-level response was characterised by:

- a satisfactory level of understanding of the play and its contexts
- inclusion of appropriate examples from the play pertaining to acting and/or the characters
- use of theatrical language, terminology, expressions and/or concepts.

A low-level response was characterised by:

- a low level of understanding of the play and its contexts
- inclusion of scant examples from the play pertaining to acting and/or the characters

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- little or no use of theatrical language, terminology, expressions and/or concepts.

## Question 4

### Question 4i.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	4	4	14	20	25	17	16	3.8

### Question 4ii.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	5	3	13	23	25	17	15	3.7

### Question 4iii.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	8	8	17	21	21	14	12	3.3

Question 4 was based on Unit 3, Outcomes 1 and 2 and required students to draw on their knowledge and skills of how to apply stagecraft to interpret a playscript and analyse the application of stagecraft. This question was worth the most marks on the 2008 examination paper. Students were required to draw on two or more of the stimulus materials and the 'contextual background' provided when responding to the question. The selected play was *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* by Bertolt Brecht. The examination paper informed students that they were not required to have prior knowledge of the playscript, its contexts or the stimulus materials.

Students were required to select **one** of the stagecraft areas listed and respond to the required tasks. Each of the 12 stagecraft areas in the course was listed, with three tasks required for each. Each task was worth a maximum of six marks.

A high-level of response was characterised by:

- a very high level of understanding and application of the chosen area of stagecraft
- a highly insightful understanding of the theatrical possibilities of the chosen area of stagecraft in relation to the question and how it could be applied
- a relevant and perceptive demonstration of the relationship and influences between the context of the play and the stimulus material, and the way in which this informed the selected area of stagecraft
- highly pertinent examples were provided
- appropriate use of theatrical language, terminology and expressions.

Following is an example of a high-level response. Although knowledge of style is evident, other aspects of the response are strong enough to meet the requirements for a high-level response.

#### Acting

- Choose **one** character from the play and describe two key characteristics
- Describe **three** strategies you could use to develop the character
- Explain **two** ways you might interpret this character

#### ACTING

*'Arturo Ui': As a 'local gangster', and thus a member of a criminal gang, characteristics of stereotypical antagonists would be evident. Indeed, Brecht used archetypes in order to make his plays didactic. Consequently, in terms of movement, Arturo would walk confidently and steadfast in order to portray his self assured nature as a man who has the power to 'order Ignatius Dulfeet's murder'. Furthermore, Arturo Ui would always have a coin in his pocket and flick it in times of misdemeanours, in order to enhance his status as a thug. Indeed, a group of gangsters would personally surround Arturo Ui in order to show how corrupt and powerful he is in 1930s Chicago. Indeed, 'anyone who opposes Ui, including his own assistant, Ernesto Roma is killed', and thus, in order to portray his belligerence, Ui would spit at all those inferior to him such as the vegetable traders and shipyard workers. In front of respected businessmen and newspaper journalists, however, Ui would be polite and charismatic. Thus, his characteristics would vacillate between those that pertain to gangster activity (flipping the coin, being surrounded by henchmen and spitting on the lower classes) and those that pertain to his illusory peaceful appearance, such as dispensing charity in the eyes of businessmen and the media.*

*Three strategies to develop character.*



1. *Using the Laban system, I would develop my character of Ui using techniques such as 'slashing' and 'pushing', in order to manipulate the actions of the antagonist. Indeed, Ui's character relates to the themes of 'the rise and destructive power of dictators' and thus 'slashing' and 'pushing' would be appropriate techniques to use in order to imbue Ui with a sense of anger, corruption, authority.*
2. *Using Stanislavski's method of acting, including the use of the 'magic if' and 'super objective' would help imbue the character of Ui with a sense of purpose. For example, 'Ui announces plans to take over the vegetable trade across the country'. In reference to Brecht's didactic style of theatre in which he wanted the audience to reflect on social mores and political events, using Stanislavski's techniques would enable Ui to have an objective in his quest for absolute power.*
3. *Looking to other Bertolt Brecht playscripts for inspiration and stimuli would enable the character of Ui to be based on similar archetypes found in Brechtian plays. Indeed, the theatrical style of Epic Theatre was used throughout Brecht's work, and thus, stimuli could be found in other playscripts.*

**INTERPRETATION:**

1. *Interpret Ui as a thug who is out to kill those who usurp his power. This could be achieved through breaking into song in moments when he is about to kill newspaper journalists in order to alienate the audience and remind them that they are watching a piece of didactic theatre. The use of comedic elements such as this would enhance the belligerence of Ui, as a dictator who will kill any person in his way. Furthermore, use of multimedia showing images of Hitler would help the audience realise parallels between the belligerence of Ui and belligerence of an archetypal dictator.*
2. *Another interpretation would be to portray Ui as a character who has been influenced by the henchmen and is really just a pawn for their domination. Indeed, at the end of the performance when Ui 'announces his plans to take over the vegetable trade' he could use conventions such as soliloquies that his plans will benefit not only him, but the entire community of Chicago. Indeed, this could be achieved through the use of banners, signs and stagecraft element such as costume which state 'victim' in order to show Ui as a more vulnerable character.*

An acceptable-level of response was characterised by:

- a satisfactory level of understanding and application of the chosen area of stagecraft
- an appropriate level of understanding of the theatrical possibilities of the chosen area of stagecraft in relation to the question and how it could be applied in the context provided
- a demonstration of the relationship and influences between the contextual background of the play and the stimulus material, and the way in which this informed the selected area of stagecraft
- appropriate examples were provided
- use of theatrical language, terminology and expressions.

A low-level of response was characterised by:

- a very limited understanding and application of the chosen area of stagecraft
- little or no understanding of the theatrical possibilities of the chosen area of stagecraft
- little to no relationship between the play and/or stimulus material and/or context was shown, with generally a superficial response
- little to no use of theatrical language, terminology and expressions.