2017 VCE Drama solo performance examination report

General comments

In 2017, the Drama Solo performance examination comprised 10 prescribed structures. Students were required to play the characters as specified on the examination. Students could choose from female (two), male (two) or neutral (four) characters. For two structures students could select either a female or a male character. Students were asked to choose one character and research, create and ultimately perform their response to the structure.

This examination is an acting task where students must create a non-naturalistic performance. The focus should be on showing rather than telling, and looking for creative solutions to complete the task. Many students tended to narrate a storyline using far too much talking and this had an impact on Criterion 4. Some students relied too much on a naturalistic performance style, while others needed to spend more time editing and refining as their overuse of some non-naturalistic conventions resulted in a confused and confusing presentation.

Students who considered the theatricality of their solo performance with a costume that reflected the era or a symbolic aspect of the character tended to gain higher scores. Students need to make creative choices about all aspects of the performance and the choice to wear street clothes or drama blacks hinders the communication of character and story. Students are encouraged to rehearse in their costume prior to the performance to help with ease of transformations.

Choices of objects and soundscapes either helped or hindered performances. An object that can be given symbolic significance and is relevant to the character and/or era worked best. Students who added their object towards the end of their creative process used the object clumsily, and it was not an integrated part of their storytelling. For some students, a recorded soundtrack supported the creation of mood and timing and enhanced their work. For others, a possible lack of rehearsal with the soundscape meant that movement and sound did not align and affected their use of timing, focus and concentration when things did not match (Criteria 7, 9 and 10).

Students' skill in use of transformations tended to be varied. High-scoring work was characterised by (or featured) use of a variety of transformation devices during the performance. Students with high-scoring work looked for opportunities to further the story through the use of well-timed transformations. Students should explore different ways of transforming characters rather than the need to physically change places or costume. Students should avoid rapid transformations to simply have a conversation between two characters; other ways should be explored to impart this information.

Many students did not reach compliance (Criterion 1). This meant that they did not complete all aspects of the prescribed structure and did not achieve full marks for Criterion 1. Most commonly, students who were not compliant left out a dot point or an aspect of the opening sentences, which also had an impact on Criterion 2.

This year the examination stated that 'the performance style, convention and dramatic element listed must be integral to, and embedded in, the performance'. The use of the performance style,

convention or dramatic element once does not constitute compliance (Criterion 1) and also impacts on other criteria.

Students supported the presentation of their examination by using their Statement of Intention to bring attention to particular performance elements and address how they approached each dot point. It is important not to simply rewrite the structure. The Statement of Intention should not exceed 100 words.

Specific information

The characters

The Fortune Hunter

This was the most popular structure.

High-scoring performances were highly physical, with seamless transitions that connected and integrated the dot points in an imaginative way, with a sense of energy and using a range of dynamics to show variety in timing. These performances were well researched, with a variance in characters.

Low-scoring performances demonstrated a lack of research (Criterion 3) and this often led to a lack of clarity in the performance, especially in dot point 3 and the 'dingy bar in Caracas'.

Lady Lucy Duff Gordon

This was the second most popular structure.

High-scoring performances demonstrated a clear understanding of Lady Lucy's age, mixed pathos with comedy and showed clear research of her life. Many of these performances took Lady Lucy seriously and developed the caricature elsewhere, thus developing marked contrast and highlighting the poignancy of the Lady Lucy character.

Low-scoring work tended to play Lady Lucy as a young woman, did not explore the concept of a 'Gown of Emotion' and used inappropriate stagecraft (Criterion 10), especially costume. There was a distinct lack of research evident in these performances, with a number of students showing Lady Lucy rowing herself away from the Titanic.

Ron Weasley or Hermione Granger

High-scoring performances demonstrated strong transformations, especially between characters. There was a clear sense of the world of the characters in language, mood and storytelling. These performances used flashbacks and sound (Criterion 6) very well. Exaggerated movement (Criterion 5) related well to the theme of wizardry, which was often linked to the use of a cloak or cloth.

Low-scoring performances tended to retell the films of the Harry Potter series, with a confusing narrative and unclear transformations. There was too much talking and a poor use of editing (Criterion 3).

Jonas

High-scoring performances demonstrated a thoughtful approach to dot point 3 and clever editing. The world of the novel was recreated imaginatively, particularly a sense of it being dystopian or futuristic. Some students used soundscapes to show transformations effectively (Criteria 5 and 10) and others created metaphors to support their work.

Low-scoring performances had little reference to the stimulus (perhaps referencing the film rather than the novel). These also tended to be naturalistic (Criterion 4) and struggled to show rather than tell.

Mr John Kemble or Mrs Sarah Siddons

High-scoring performances demonstrated a clear understanding of comedy of manners. These performances tended to have witty scripts (often using the language of the playwrights of the era) and great comic timing. Contrast was clearly shown, and the convention of heightened use of movement and language were combined flawlessly.

Low-scoring performances had a tokenistic use of rhythm (Criterion 6) and showed a lack of research. There was no sense of the time period or of the hysteria surrounding the discovery.

The Storyteller

High-scoring performances featured well-chosen movements from the events at Wave Hill and exploited the dramatic potential of each. Conventions such as tableau, movement and song were used to great effect. Pathos was created through the character's delivery rather than the character feeling sorry for themself. These performances demonstrated an understanding of the complexity of the issue explored by this character. Stillness and silence were well controlled, and very thoughtful choices of symbol were evident in these performances.

Low-scoring performances were too naturalistic, with too much talking or the student trying to cover large amounts of historical information. These performances were also exemplified by poor transformations and little use of symbol.

Mr Sneelock

High-scoring performances clearly referenced Dr. Seuss in style, creating a version of Mr Sneelock who was fearless. This work clearly used aspects of circus and circus skills in varying forms, such as being very physical or the ringmaster. These were clever, well timed and rehearsed with the soundscape or soundtrack when used. These performances used space dramatically (Criterion 6) and demonstrated a high level of energy that was controlled.

Low-scoring performances did not clearly portray Mr Sneelock or his older age. These performances tended to give more focus to other characters and did not reference enough key moments or research. Some of these performances focused on the interview aspect of the performance rather than the dot points.

The Pilgrim

This was one of the least popular structures (equal to structure 9).

High-scoring performances demonstrated magic realism, clever parody, an understanding of themes, character powers and contrasting with a range of cleverly integrated examples of pilgrimages. They captured the world of the stimulus and clarity of a through line.

Low-scoring performances generally struggled to make the Pilgrim the central character and struggled to bring the comedy of the stimulus to life. They also struggled with both magic realism and the fatal flaw (Criterion 5).

Elisabeth Hauptmann

This was one of the least popular structures (equal to structure 8).

High-scoring performances integrated Epic Theatre seamlessly and were able to use song throughout as commentary. There was a strong sense of research, especially in the areas of German politics and the rights of women.

Low-scoring performances used placards and signs gratuitously rather than as an integral part of the commentary. This work showed a lack of research and rehearsal, little understanding of Epic Theatre (Criterion 4) and at times portrayed Hauptmann as a jilted lover rather than as a strong woman who demands acknowledgment for her work.

The Show Dog

High-scoring performances were very humorous in their selection of examples from the stimulus, and the character was clearly a dog from the film. They were able to use stylised human movements to personify the dog character (Criterion 4). There was evidence of strong research beyond the obvious and transformations were clear.

Low-scoring performances did not embrace physical theatre. It was unclear which dog was the main focus; there was poor use of space and some inappropriate choices for dot point 2. These performances tended to have an over-reliance on stagecraft, with some poor choices of stagecraft.