

DRAMA

Paper 0428/11
Written Examination

Key messages

The Written examination seeks, through discussion, to isolate and identify *practical* application in drama. Literary approaches should be avoided and responses which focus on narrative or character *per se* without exploring the practical application of dramatic skills and techniques cannot access the higher mark bands.

In **Section A**, candidates should pay close attention to the number of marks available for each question. Lengthy responses for a two- or three-mark question are unnecessary and will inevitably result in less time to respond to the longer-answer essay questions in **Sections B** and **C**.

In **Sections B** and **C** technical and design questions demand an approach which is both informed and able to discuss the application of technical method to the dramatic intention. Centres are advised to work on improving candidates' understanding of design elements, as associated questions continue to be challenging to many. Candidates who do not have basic understanding of any given technical or design skill should steer clear of essay questions which require knowledge of these areas.

Questions requiring simple and straightforward answers were generally done well, while the answers to more stretching questions such as those in **Sections B** and **C** often needed to contain more explanation and/or discussion relating particularly to creative, practical solutions. Explicit reference to the use of dramatic techniques is needed to achieve higher marks.

The most successful answers in **Section C** were those where candidates had explored the stimuli practically and therefore had developed an understanding of a range of design elements and performance considerations.

General comments

Many candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of the pre-release play extract and effective engagement with the devised work although the key messages above still apply in a number of cases.

There is still evidence of many candidates engaging in overly narrative responses to many of the questions which, without exception, require the discussion to focus on application of knowledge, skills and the performance process. Even the more astute responses included a detailed retelling of plot with the result that short-answer questions were given unnecessarily long answers and essay questions were diluted when concentration on application was key. There was still evidence that some candidates simply lacked an understanding of how their performance process addressed key dramatic terms and ideas.

Where factors such as a lack of resources or budget precludes complex or lavish production values Centres should not feel prevented from encouraging candidates to consider the potential of their productions or from projecting their work into an environment wherein these restraints do not apply. This is particularly relevant to design questions. It is understood that 'minimalism' may be the only practicable approach in some Centres but teachers are encouraged to provide opportunities for candidates to 'imagine' their performance beyond the bounds imposed by material restrictions. In doing so candidates will (hopefully) find themselves better able to discuss a wider range of production outcomes based on an extension beyond their actual experience.

Candidates found the question on sound design challenging; understanding of sound design remains relatively undeveloped with many candidates choosing to discuss music at the expense of other opportunities. Another area which continues to challenge is the notion of structure. Those candidates who had been taught structure as a formal concept did far better than those for whom structure equals narrative.

There is still some progress to be made in enabling candidates to engage effectively with questions which deal with technical aspects of production. Answers on set design show promise although there is perhaps a need for Centres to challenge candidates in the area where design is put into practical application. This was highlighted by the question which asked for an effective transition between two scenes, and though a number of candidates produced imaginative answers, the practicality of their suggestions was not always obvious.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Questions 1 – 5 *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge*

Question 1

Many candidates were able to engage with the question and gave good responses. There was a tendency, however, for a significant number of candidates to focus on the prop itself rather than on the moment at which it would be used effectively, and why. The 'why?' element caused the most common difficulty but overall this question was well answered by the majority.

Question 2

This question was well handled by the majority of candidates with most being able to render a fair discussion of the speech with practical suggestions of how it could be delivered. Many candidates identified a range of dramatic skills involving voice and physicality and the most capable answers linked this closely to the text.

Question 3

Nearly all candidates were able to cite two moments in the text. The second pair of marks available proved a little more challenging with some candidates perhaps not quite grasping the notion of 'impact' in terms of dramatic effect. Answers needed to distinguish clearly between the two moments and the second moment could only be credited if it was sufficiently differentiated from the first.

Question 4

Again, the vast majority of candidates responded effectively to the requirement to give two significant pieces of advice to each of the actors. The advice correctly focused on practical, skills-related approaches to characterisation in relation to specified moments in the text.

Question 5

This caused a little difficulty for a number of candidates and the responses highlight the point made above under General comments. It is possible that many candidates had not considered the practical challenge of making the transition between scenes because of the limitations imposed by their own performance environment but, notwithstanding, there needs to be some level of appreciation of how scene changes are effected when they are central to the audience's appreciation of the text and narrative. That being said, a significant number of candidates, whether from actual practical experience or as a result of considering possible approaches, managed to produce good answers. These tended to include physical elements of set and manual handling combined with imaginative audience distractions and alternative points of focus such as lighting effects, fog, projections and music as well as specific actions carried out by the characters on stage.

Questions 6 – 8 *Devised work*

Question 6

The vast majority of candidates were able to identify two key dramatic moments and most were able to say why the moments were effective. As in the case of **Question 3**, answers needed to include two sufficiently different moments otherwise only one of them could be credited.

Question 7

Candidates continue to find the concept of structure challenging, often reverting to a narrative step-by-step version of what happened or a simple re-telling of the story rather than an explanation of how elements were constructed to achieve a performance intention. A few candidates managed to refer to the overall structure of their piece in terms of its being linear or cyclical and a few were able to identify how structural elements such as 'flashbacks' were used to convey aspects of structure but overall knowledge of this area continues to be poorly evidenced.

Question 8

All candidates were able to identify some elements of costume design but fewer were able to explain in any detail how costume could be used to enhance the audience's appreciation and understanding of the performance intention. Simple descriptions of costume could only score a single mark and to score more highly it was essential for candidates to reflect on function and influence.

Section B

Questions 9 – 11 *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge*

Question 9

This proved a popular question. Candidates for the most part handled it fairly well and were able to identify a range of dramatic functions. Weaker responses tended to focus exclusively on the comedic functions, without realising that the Ghost also fulfilled a number of strategic plot-related and structural functions. The more developed responses discussed these more fundamental mechanisms with some insight. A few candidates did not entirely appreciate the significance or indeed meaning of the term 'dramatic function' and concentrated their efforts on describing the Ghost's vocal and physical attributes.

Question 10

Relatively few candidates attempted this question. Those who did were able to identify key comedic elements within the piece and recognise the opportunity for 'sight gags'. Much of the discussion centred on the Ghost's incompetence but there were one or two astute responses which, though they seemed to struggle on an inner personal level with the irreverence and rampant lack of 'political correctness' inherent in the text, nonetheless recognised that humour may be drawn in an otherwise acceptable manner from elements that are habitually frowned upon by society as a whole. They correctly understood that the key to this lies in the level of approach, wherein exaggeration and caricature enables boundaries to be pushed without offence. Further developed responses were able to identify the notion of anachronism and were rewarded for recognising the devices used by the playwright to achieve this.

Question 11

This question proved to be the most challenging to candidates. The majority demonstrated only a partial understanding of what is meant by the term 'sound design' and consequently focused on the use of mood music to create an ongoing atmosphere of festivity. Though this is perfectly acceptable it is only one aspect of the potential for sound use and overlooks the many real opportunities available to the sound designer. A few candidates recognised what was required and were able to make useful and practical recommendations involving textual elements and relating these to the use of special effects. Candidates should become conversant with this area that calls for a basic grasp of how technology is used in theatre to achieve specific sound effects and create diegetic soundscape. Centres are advised to familiarise their candidates with the three categories of sound design, namely: *Functional* (e.g. the Ghost's 'Zapper'); *Atmospheric* (i.e. the possibility of using underscoring that may include music but which may also be in the form of a soundscape), and *Incidental* where sound can be used to cover moments of transition (e.g. between scenes or to cover the gathering of the Townspeople).

Section C

Questions 12 – 14 *Devised work*

Question 12

Candidates approached this with some confidence and demonstrated a good understanding of a range of acting skills including use of space, proxemics, vocal and physical method, pacing, dynamics and characterisation.

Question 13

Many candidates were clear about their performance intention but this is not necessarily the same as the directorial concept which calls for more than simply an outline of what the audience is expected to get from the piece. Developed responses took a broader view considering the way in which the piece was shaped or crafted. This implies some understanding of structure and the way that elements of rising action or tension may be created. Those who scored highly on this question included a good response to the second part of the question which asked candidates to evaluate the success of their piece. Many candidates who did this demonstrated an ability to be critical of their own work and were able to suggest possible alternative strategies.

Question 14

This proved a popular and successful question. Some candidates clearly understood set design either as a result of practical experience or because they had considered the potential of a 'virtual' set. The purpose of the question was less about design features per se and more about how those features, when put into action, could enhance or augment the dramatic intention. This does not preclude candidates using their imagination to surmise how imagined or projected ideas might contribute to the process. Some candidates adopted this approach and typically made it clear that though their budget had not enabled them to do much by way of set in actuality, had they the means they would have taken an entirely different approach. The success of this approach is determined, however, by how effectively the design features are integrated into the practical aspects demanded by the action.

DRAMA

Paper 0428/02
Coursework

General comments

Generally speaking, the session ran very smoothly in terms of administration, although four factors hindered the moderation process in some cases, and the attention of staff at Centres is drawn to these:

- late arrival of the moderation sample in Cambridge
- DVD recordings that arrived broken or that did not play on a DVD player
- missing documentation
- arithmetical errors on the Individual Candidate Mark Sheets

Centres are reminded of the importance of the timely arrival of the moderation package in Cambridge (by **30 April** for the June examination series), and the need for the Moderator to be able to begin work without having to wait for missing documentation or a new recording to arrive.

Sample of work

A significant number of Centres did not select a moderation sample, but left this to the Moderator. It is a requirement that the Centre selects its own sample of **six** candidates and that this includes the candidate with the highest mark awarded, the candidate with the lowest mark awarded and four candidates spread evenly between these two marks. Please try to avoid sending more than one candidate in the sample on the same mark point.

Completion of mark sheets

Please note that the Individual Candidate Mark Sheets for **all** candidates (not just those in the sample) must be sent to Cambridge with the recordings. There is also a requirement to submit the Moderator's copy of the MS1 computer-generated mark sheet (or a signed printout of the marks file if marks were submitted to Cambridge electronically) as the transfer of marks needs to be checked as part of the moderation process.

The majority of Centres completed the Individual Candidate Mark Sheets thoroughly and accurately, with teachers' comments serving to draw attention to reasons why a particular mark had been awarded, and linking the performance to the assessment criteria in the syllabus. In a few instances, it was puzzling as to how the same candidate could receive a very high mark for Assessment Objective C and a low one for Assessment Objective A or B. Centres are encouraged on such occasions to offer specific comments as to why this was so. Comments in support of the candidates' work were variable. Some simply repeated the assessment criteria in the syllabus and these were of very limited use. The most useful, especially in the case of devised work, were those that commented on specific details of the performance work and pointed to aspects of the role that had been credited.

There were a significant number of candidates whose marks had to be amended as a result of incorrect arithmetical calculations. Centres are reminded that the process depends on **not** rounding up or down any of the marks for the separate assessment objectives. Marks for each of the three assessment objectives should be left as decimal fractions. Only when the total mark has been arrived at should the total mark for the candidate be rounded up or down to a whole number. Fractions of 0.5 or more should be rounded up; fractions of less than 0.5 should be rounded down.

Setting

Consideration should be given to creating the best environment for candidates to be able to perform at their very best, without the distraction of noises from outside the building, school bells or the noisy circulation of candidates moving between classes. Where candidates had an appropriate setting – and particularly where they performed to a live audience – it lifted the performance and motivated the candidates to give of their

best.

Recordings of performances

The quality of recordings was generally improved this session, mainly because the overwhelming majority of Centres presented their work in digital format on DVD. Moderators were especially grateful for the work put in by those Centres who chaptered their DVDs, which enabled performances to be identified quickly and easily.

Several recordings could not be played on a DVD player, which was a cause of considerable frustration for Moderators. In some cases the DVDs showed as 'blank' when inserted to a player and it is important that the DVDs are 'finalised' so that they will play on devices other than the one on which they were burned. In other cases the format of the files meant that they were not playable at all on a DVD player. Centres are advised to record work in PAL or NTSC format and are reminded that they should check their DVDs in a stand-alone player to ensure that they work before posting the material to Cambridge.

The overall quality of the video material was very high. There were some areas for further improvement, however. The sound quality of some recordings proved problematic, especially those that had been recorded outside where wind noise was intrusive. The camera work was not always helpful for indoor performances. In some instances the camera was on the floor in the main body of the theatre looking up to the stage, so that candidates were filmed at a very unusual angle. In other instances, the cameraman had tried to follow the action on the stage by frequently panning across the stage or zooming in and out, which made it difficult to see the performance from the perspective of a theatre audience. The reaction of a performer to other characters needs to be seen by Moderators, as well as how they react to other actors when they themselves are silent on stage.

Identification of candidates

Candidates should announce themselves to camera before each performance, stating their name and (if known at the time of the recording) candidate number and the role they are playing; this was done very well in most Centres. Some candidates used boards showing their name and candidate number as well as verbally giving this information. A few were overcome by the moment and dissolved into embarrassed giggling, which did not set an appropriate tone for the performance that was to follow. Most Centres provided a description of the candidates on the Individual Candidate Mark Sheets and many also provided photographs. Some provided neither description nor photographs, which made identification difficult.

Text-based performances

The text-based performances tended to be most candidates' strongest work. There were many moving performances and some very interesting interpretations, which showed an excellent understanding of how to move from page to stage. The strongest performances were based on an in-depth understanding of the cultural, historical and social context of the play, often reflected in a real sense of ownership in performances.

As in previous sessions, there was a very wide range of plays chosen, and these covered many different styles and periods. A representative selection is reproduced in the table at the end of this section as a resource to enable future planning for Centres. It was pleasing to see candidates being challenged and simultaneously extending their knowledge and understanding of theatre across historical periods and genres. Whilst the majority of plays were from the canon of twentieth century British and American drama, there was also a good selection of lesser-known plays from a wide variety of cultures and settings. In some cases, Centres seemed to have directed less able candidates to challenging texts from Shakespeare, Dickens or Oscar Wilde only for these candidates to struggle to perform them as they had little understanding of what they were being asked to do. The crucial factor is the extent to which the candidate can bring to life on stage a piece of text that holds a sense of dramatic fascination for them, and this is irrespective of its period, playwright or genre. Centres are particularly reminded that film screenplays are not appropriate to the requirements of this syllabus and neither are poems or novels unless they exist as professional, published stage versions.

The vast majority of the monologues were realisations of extracts from repertoire, and many of the following points about performance are based on practice seen in monologues. The best of these performances showed real depth of understanding of characterisation, and candidates had clearly made great efforts to understand what they were saying and its underlying motivation. Weaker performances generally displayed

little understanding of the character the candidate was attempting to realise, as revealed through poor diction, awkward physicality, stilted mannerisms and uncontrolled gestures.

The use of space and understanding of proxemics proved another clear differentiator of ability in performance of text-based work. Many candidates performed with an imaginary character on stage beside them or used the audience (or camera) as the protagonist; others simply laboured their way through without reference to what the character was meant to be doing. Candidates achieved higher marks when they used fluent movement for variety, emphasis and to help their dramatic pacing. Static pieces, usually with the candidate sitting behind a table, were seldom conducive to effective performance since the table inevitably acted as a barrier.

In some Centres, all candidates were allowed to use the same chair in the same place for every single monologue, even though the monologues were all from different plays. There were a number of instances – especially where the number of candidates was large – of candidates all attempting exactly the same monologue. Whilst Moderators were sympathetic to the logic and rationale underlying this, it was never likely that the same monologue would suit all candidates equally. A better strategy would be to select monologues most appropriate to each candidate's ability in a style most likely to help him/her demonstrate his/her skills. Moderators also reported occasional concerns with cross-gender casting, which is allowed by the syllabus but needs to be undertaken carefully since it provides challenges even for seasoned and skilled actors. Yet it was often the less able candidates who were given this task, which did not seem fair to them and did not give them the opportunity to be shown in the best possible light for their ability level.

Although not specifically required by the syllabus, in many group pieces there were examples of effective uses of costume and set, with candidates often taking considerable trouble to create a sense of the social, cultural and historical setting of the extract. Yet excessive props contributed little, and Moderators felt that in some cases this focus might have been developed as a means of hiding weaker performance skills. Moderators were concerned that a minority of candidates had become over focused on their props and costumes to the detriment of their characterisation.

The greatest differentiator for group text-based performances was the ability of the candidates to handle dialogue to create authentic conversational interaction. Moderators made no judgements as to the accent or stress of the spoken word, but were clear in the expectation that the dialogue should be made to sound like genuine verbal communication expressing meaning, depth and authenticity. That expectation was often fulfilled, although in a great number of instances the dialogue between characters had no more expression than the simple recitation of a text, with the result that it would have been extremely difficult for an audience to have gained much understanding of what was supposed to be happening in the play.

The table below gives a representative sample of works from which extracts were taken in June 2012. Some have appeared in lists in previous years and are included to indicate their enduring popularity; others are less well known but worthy of consideration.

Edward Albee	<i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?</i>
Aristophanes	<i>The Clouds</i>
Alan Ayckbourn	<i>A Small Family Business</i> <i>Comic Potential</i> <i>Invisible Friends</i> <i>Man of the Moment</i>
Bertolt Brecht	<i>The Good Person of Szechwan</i> <i>Mother Courage</i>
Richard Cameron	<i>The Moon's the Madonna</i>
Jim Cartwright	<i>Road</i> <i>Two</i>
Anton Chekhov	<i>A Marriage Proposal</i> <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> <i>The Seagull</i> <i>Uncle Vanya</i>
Noel Coward	<i>Blithe Spirit</i>
Martin Crimp	<i>The Misanthrope</i> <i>The Treatment</i>
Jules Feiffer	<i>Little Murders</i>
Horton Foote	<i>A Young Lady of Property</i>
Anatole France	<i>The Man Who Married A Dumb Wife</i>

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Alice Gerstenberg	<i>Fourteen</i>
John Godber	<i>Bouncers</i> <i>Shakers</i> <i>Teechers</i>
Nikolai Gogol	<i>The Government Inspector</i>
Ronald Gow	<i>Love on the Dole</i>
Tanika Gupta	<i>Inside out</i>
Lorraine Hansberry	<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>
David Hare	<i>Murmuring Judges</i>
Henrik Ibsen	<i>A Doll's House</i>
Barbara Kahn	<i>Summer in the City</i>
Charlotte Keatley	<i>My Mother Said I Never Should</i>
Wendy Kesselman	<i>My Sister in this House</i>
Hanif Kureishi	<i>Borderline</i>
Maureen Lawrence	<i>Tokens of Affection</i>
Sharman Macdonald	<i>After Juliet</i>
Patrick Marber	<i>Closer</i>
Chiori Miyagawa	<i>Yesterday's window</i>
Arthur Miller	<i>All My Sons</i> <i>The Crucible</i> <i>Death of a Salesman</i> <i>A View from the Bridge</i>
Rona Munro	<i>Bold Girls</i>
Josephina Niggli	<i>Sunday Costs Five Pesos</i>
Mary O'Malley	<i>Once a Catholic</i>
Joe Orton	<i>Ruffian on the Stair</i>
Harold Pinter	<i>The Dumb Waiter</i> <i>Betrayal</i>
Dennis Potter	<i>Blue Remembered Hills</i>
Kellie Powell	<i>Thanksgiving in the Wilderness</i>
J B Priestley	<i>An Inspector Calls</i>
Terence Rattigan	<i>The Winslow boy</i>
Willy Russell	<i>Educating Rita</i> <i>Our Day Out</i>
James Saunders	<i>The Old Man Who Liked Cats</i>
Peter Shaffer	<i>Amadeus</i> <i>Black Comedy</i> <i>Equus</i>
William Shakespeare	<i>Hamlet</i> <i>Henry V</i> <i>King Lear</i> <i>Macbeth</i> <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> <i>Twelfth Night</i>
R C Sherriff	<i>Journey's End</i>
Neil Simon	<i>Lost in Yonkers</i> <i>The Odd Couple</i> <i>Prisoner of Second Avenue</i>
Githa Sowerby	<i>Rutherford and Son</i>
Shelagh Stephenson	<i>Five Kinds of Silence</i>
Timberlake Wertenbaker	<i>Our Country's Good</i>
Mark Wheeler	<i>Too Much Punch for Judy</i>
Oscar Wilde	<i>A Woman of No Importance</i> <i>Lady Windermere's Fan</i> <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i>
Thornton Wilder	<i>The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden</i>
Emlyn Williams	<i>The Corn Is Green</i>
Tennessee Williams	<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> <i>The Glass Menagerie</i>
Paul Zindel	<i>Amulets Against the Dragon Forces</i>

Devised performances

As in previous sessions, Centres are reminded that they should indicate on the Individual Candidate Mark Sheets which of the devising options has been chosen from the list in the syllabus. Moderators reported that in the absence of this information, performances could have belonged to more than one category and had to be given the benefit of the doubt as to which was intended.

Whilst there was a sense that some Centres had encouraged their candidates to experiment and push the boundaries of their creativity, devised work was often much weaker than text-based work. The exception to this was where candidates had embraced the spirit of creating devised coursework, experimented with ideas and style and had created effective and sensitive drama, often deliberately involving styles such as physical theatre or Commedia dell'Arte. Physical theatre, in particular, was generally employed to great advantage and led to less reliance on traditional staging techniques. The influence of practitioners such as Brecht, Artaud or Boal was often evident in the best work, and helped to give both context and form to the drama.

Thematic material abounded, some of which worked well. Although there was a tendency for pieces to slide into the predictable areas of teenage issues such as drugs, unwanted pregnancies, schizophrenia, bullying, marital infidelity, cultural expectations and challenges, and madness, these issues gave rise on occasion to well-crafted, powerful work. Murder or ghost stories were popular as sources for devising original material, and the impending Olympics no doubt inspired the increase in number of sport-related pieces. Some pieces were based on real-life events such as the story of Anne Frank and the Nazis, historical characters such as Idi Amin, General Pinochet or Hitler, or well-known figures from the world of film and television such as Marilyn Monroe and Charlie Chaplin. Music was also used to good effect in some pieces with some candidates devising their own musical, complete with songs. Centres are reminded that although this can demonstrate breadth of skills, the focus of the assessment is on drama and weak singing can undermine the impact of the drama.

Moderators reported that much devised work was clichéd and at worst bordered on crass, although there were notable exceptions where the devising work was a real strength. This work was thoughtful and powerful and showed a clear understanding of genre and drama techniques. But in so many cases the devised work was poor in its genesis and application, the creation of the work weak, and its performance tepid. Such half-hearted performances frequently adopted a pseudo-naturalistic style reminiscent of a TV soap opera: predictable and not at all engaging or stimulating for an audience. In many such cases, there was little sign of the presence of an audience at all and a number of monologues appeared to have been filmed in the candidates' living rooms or even bedrooms, which inevitably resulted in filmic recordings completely unsuited to performance on stage. There were extreme examples of candidates forgetting their part and swearing to camera, which was especially unhelpful in demonstrating their skills in performance discipline.

The superficiality of the devised material frequently generated uninspiring levels of performance and the level of technique in devised work was almost invariably lower than seen in text-based performances. In many cases, there was a need for candidates to understand voice production and undertake skills work on projection and diction. Yet this was as much a product of poorly constructed dialogue and candidates often attempted to cover this deficiency through clichéd devices or poor techniques such as excessive screaming as a substitute for terror, knocking on a door with a stamped foot or excessive shouting down a mobile phone or even miming the phone with a thumb and little finger.