

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

DRAMA

J316

For first teaching in 2016

J316/03 Summer 2019 series

Version 1

Contents

Introduction	3
Administration	4
Concept pro-formas	5
What did candidates do well?	5
What did candidates find a challenge?.....	6
Texts.....	7
Performance – Acting	8
What did candidates find a challenge?.....	9
Performance - Design	9
General.....	10



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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Administration

Most centres met the deadline of seven days for sending the examiner the required documentation. The items required are as follows:

- The concept pro-forma for each candidate as a hard copy. Electronic versions are not acceptable. The pro-forma must be signed by the candidate with the centre confirming that the work is that of the individual candidate alone.
- The running order of showcase performances. This must have candidate names and candidate numbers and be organised in order of performances.
- Details of the centre such as location, availability of parking, and any ID required.
- The time the centre wishes the examination to start.
- Although the specification refers to photographs being sent in advance; this is not necessarily very helpful, and most examiners prefer photos of the candidates in costume to be available on the day.

It is essential that the seven-day deadline is met to ensure parity for candidates and to give examiners sufficient time to mark the concept pro-formas and to prepare their paperwork for the marking of the performances.

Arrangements for the examiner were generally very good. Most centres were able to provide a good-sized desk and a lamp, and ensured their audience was not overlooking the examiner. It is important that the examiner have privacy while watching the performance so that s/he can write notes and complete assessment forms, and an examiner may ask a centre to move part of the audience if it is felt they are too close. Examiners will remain at their desk during the examination, but a room should be made available for their use if they need a break during the day and for lunchtime when they may write up notes.

It is a requirement that the centre provide an audience for performances. The specification gives details of the nature of audiences permitted. The majority of centres had audiences that were made up of the actual examination class, taking it in turns to perform and to watch their peers. Some centres also had other classes watching from younger years or future GCSE students. A growing number of centres had invited candidates' parents and friends to watch. Peer audiences were very well-behaved and supportive, as were the invited audiences. One examiner said, 'The audience raised the game for the candidates by providing a real atmosphere of performance rather than an atmosphere of audition.'

An increasing number of centres asked for a twilight or evening performance to ensure a quiet environment, and to enable parents and relatives to attend. A small number also asked for a Saturday examination. These are permissible, and most examiners are very happy to examine later in the day or at a weekend. If a twilight, evening or weekend examination is requested, centres should make it clear when they complete and submit their Visit Arrangement Form (VAF) forms. The new format of the VAF forms used this year for the first time was very successful.

It is for the centre to decide how they wish the two showcase performances to be organised, although examiners are happy to give advice should it be required. A wide variety of ways of doing this were experienced again this year. Some centres kept groupings the same for the two performances; others had candidates within the same group perform a duologue or monologue for their second performance; others had a complete mixture of groupings. Several centres chose to have a group perform and then follow it by a series of monologues and duologues. There is no particular or preferred method required by the specification. However, the two extracts must have a break between each of them in the candidates' showcase, even if the two extracts run consecutively.

A requirement of the specification is for the performances to be filmed and then chaptered and placed on a DVD or memory stick. These should then be sent to the examiner as soon as possible. Most centres were able to do this within two or three days. The recording should be in a format that allows it to be

played on a computer or DVD player and should be chaptered. Candidates must introduce themselves before each extract.

It is important that the camera is located so that it captures all of the area in which candidates are performing, while avoiding also filming the head and shoulders of the examiner. Almost all centres were able to use a performance space that was quiet and without interruption.

Concept pro-formas

This section of the examination requires candidates to have good knowledge of the whole of the play, not just the extracts that they have used for their showcase. Candidates need to:

- know and understand the original intention of the playwright
- research the context of when the text was written
- identify the challenges the text provides for a performer and/or designer and how they might be met
- decide on their own intention and how they want an audience to respond
- plan how to develop their role using drama techniques learnt during the course
- have examples of how they have prepared.

Examiners reported, almost without exception, how good preparation for the concept pro-forma informed and supported their showcase performances.

What did candidates do well?

Examiners reported many candidates wrote in good detail, the most successful addressing the elements asked for by each question. It isn't necessary to write in great length, and it is possible to provide sufficient information to attain top marks within the word guide provided for each question. Many candidates displayed genuine enthusiasm for their text and their chosen extracts, reflecting a good choice of text.

The best candidates were able to provide information about the origins of the play in their answers to Q1, explaining why the playwright had written it, and setting the text in the social and/or political context of that time. In many cases candidates' research had uncovered previous performances and were able to compare the original to subsequent interpretations, and then compare it to their own intentions. Well-focused answers kept to the brief. For example, Question 1 is asking about the challenges and refers to structures. The best candidates were able to reference the whole play and avoid just describing the plot. The key word is *demands* and while there will be challenges linked with character, the most successful candidates avoided going into great detail about their role and avoided discussing general issues about the plot.

In Q2 the focus is on artistic vision, and the most successful answers were able to link candidates' own vision for their extracts with the original intention and how they had interpreted it. Where there had been subsequent productions of the play, research had enabled some candidates to discuss their own interpretation in the context of how others had interpreted the text. Another aspect some successful candidates used was to apply knowledge of practitioners to inform how they wanted to present their extracts. Some discussion of design and how it might support their vision was evident in well-rounded answers.

The question answered most successfully was Q3. Most candidates understood their role, and that they needed to carry out preparation if their performance was to be successful. Some linked this with the demands of their vision so didn't consider their preparation in isolation. Actors needed to consider the drama techniques they had used and how that linked with the demands of their own role. Higher achieving candidates avoided the trap of writing about all of the roles instead of focusing on their own. There is a good opportunity here to link the demands of the text (explained in Q1), their vision (described in Q2) and how they need to develop their role for the demands to be met and their vision achieved.

Weaker answers didn't do any of this and instead gave a narrative describing the play and the different characters within it. Another element that helped contribute to the achievement of high marks was explanation of how the role itself developed from first beginnings, how perhaps peers had commented on the success of their character interpretation, and how they changed their presentation of role to overcome challenges – a recognition of when something wasn't working, and attempts to modify their character. Most higher achieving candidates were clear about the demands of their own role and the relationships with other characters, and such candidates provided some good comments on specific vocal and movement ideas, semiotics and emotional expression.

Answers to Q4 were usually very clear on the kind of audience reaction that they wanted and might get. This question is underpinned by the previous three and the most successful answers managed to blend in the intentions, challenges and vision with their own character interpretation into an intended and expected audience response. Cross referencing rather than repeating information given in the other three answers is the key to a sound answer to Q4.

Those answers where good marks were not achieved often gave a description of what happens in the play for Q1 and Q2, a vague commentary on what all the character were for Q3, and a bland comment on audience reaction without any consideration of what the candidate might have written in the earlier answers. The most successful candidates were those who stuck rigidly to the elements of each question and avoided repetition.

It is important to note that the space provided for the answers is considered sufficient for an answer that could achieve full marks, and although there is no penalty for exceeding the suggested length, some of those candidates who did have long responses took the risk of being self-penalising through generalisations and repetition.

Most candidates word-processed their answers. When doing so the minimum font size to be used is 12.

What did candidates find a challenge?

The temptation to describe the plot was too much for some candidates, and many examiners reported how candidates went into great detail describing the plot, ignoring completely the prompts within the question. Even among better answers there was little consideration of structure and this is an area that is clearly important when selecting their extracts, so there is likely to have been some consideration of it in their practical work.

Although the majority identified the playwright and when the play was written, many did not go on to explain succinctly the social and/or political context. Nor were there many who referred to subsequent productions where there may have been interpretations that could have influenced the candidates' own thinking.

Some candidates did not seem to understand what was meant by *vision* in Q2 and ended up repeating much of what had been written as an answer for Q1.

As a guide, Q1 is about the whole play, relevant context and challenges it presents and noting the way the two extracts fit into that whole. There need be no mention of roles played or group/individual intention here. Better, that there is some consideration of previous presentations of the play that may inform what they are going to do. Q2 then expands on what they are going to do with the extracts and why – the artistic intention. Here the discussion is likely to be about how all the characters are to be played rather than discussing the individual's approach. Q3 is then about the role(s) they are playing, how they worked on them, indicating understanding of what happens to that character and their relations with others both before and after the extract that makes this selected section significant for that role. Q4 is then about the anticipated reception of their work and how they plan to manipulate that as performers/designers.

To maximise the marks available in Q1 candidates must refer specifically to both extracts. The best answers articulated clearly different demands pertinent to each of their chosen extracts.

Design candidates sometimes struggled to interpret the question to make it relevant to design. While it is important in Q1 to provide the same information as candidates offering acting as their skill, the later questions need to be focused on design while still being specific as described above.

One examiner wrote:

The best concept pro-formas showed considerable understanding in defining, justifying and evaluating the choices made and perception in the outcomes, which linked clearly to the reasons and decisions made.

In conclusion, the advice given last year is still valid:

- address each question as precisely as possible
- avoid repetition
- provide specific examples
- reference both extracts, not just one of them
- demonstrate different challenges in each of the two extracts.

Texts

The range of texts was wider this year with not quite so much reliance on standard favourites such as *Girls Like That* and *DNA*. Many centres also decided to vary the texts within their own centre with different groups following different texts rather than the whole group performing the same extracts.

The OCR Text Management Service must give permission for the texts that centres want to do. Centres should be aware however, that although they may approve a text, this does not give permission to perform any part of it. Several examiners saw some examples where the extracts chosen were full of expletives or dealt with incidents of violence, abuse or suicide. The starting point for this is that it is not appropriate; other examiners saw very sensitively chosen extracts that had just the occasional expletive, where candidates had been able to bring out the full power of the text. Centres must read and abide by page 48 in the specification to make sure that appropriate extracts are chosen. This page states clearly what candidates' performances may not contain. Most candidates and centres took an imaginative approach to the texts, and there was some creative and imaginative risk-taking.

Some texts where examiners commented were very successful included:

Pool No Water – excellent and engaging physical theatre piece.

Tissue – good use of physicality and strong focused performances

Things I know to be true – Andrew Bovell – Not quite Frantic Assembly but lent itself for good strong creative moments.

Pieces performed in site specific places around the centre. They commented that this was a really imaginative way to present the work.

Classical performances of several Greek Tragedies and Shakespeare by candidates who thoroughly understood the texts.

Metamorphosis by Steven Berkoff – hugely varied and expressionistic physical theatre piece.

Henry V – there was an especially interesting St. Crispin's day soliloquy, done as an accurate Winston Churchill characterisation.

Performance – Acting

There were very few pieces that were too short or too long. Long pieces tend to be self-penalising, and pieces that are too short do not give sufficient time for the candidate to demonstrate a range of skills. In a very small number of cases a candidate did not perform a full showcase, appearing in just one extract. This means no mark can be given for the performance assessment objectives, although the concept pro-forma, if completed, will still attract marks.

It is important to remember that each extract must only be performed by candidates who are going to be marked and that non-examined candidates are not permitted except for urgent, last-minute reasons of illness. Non-assessed performers are usually only allowed in instances where there are not enough students to meet the group size requirements (if a student leaves the course for example, or a last minute illness means an absence, and a stand in is needed).

What did candidates do well?

Candidates were generally well-rehearsed and demonstrated good performance memory. It was evident to examiners that many candidates had worked hard on their characterisation. Projection was good with very few examples of inaudible dialogue. Although there is no extra credit for set and costume, many candidates had thought about these elements, and by using them effectively they enhanced their performances by the use of appropriate settings and costume.

It is the demonstration of skills that attracts marks, and so the most successful candidates ensured they had extracts and characters where they were able to show a contrast in role and to demonstrate a range of skills, rather than more of the same in their second extract with a focus on just one or two drama techniques.

Those candidates who had really thought about genre were able to translate their ideas as expressed in their concept pro-forma into their performances. The use of physical theatre, rather than a bolt-on aspect that looked uncomfortable for performer and audience, was integrated into transmitting meaning by being integrated in a seamless way into the performance.

Transitions are very important, and many candidates had learnt to avoid blackouts and lengthy pauses with nothing happening, and to find imaginative ways of moving from one scene to another.

Those candidates who had understood fully the whole text, and not just their extract, and explored their chosen extracts in detail in their concept pro-forma, were usually the ones who were able to translate their ideas effectively in performance.

What did candidates find a challenge?

Candidates who had not fully absorbed the whole text and who didn't really understand how their extract fitted in to the whole text, often struggled to communicate meaning. This was very often reflected in a weak concept pro-forma where insufficient thought had gone into what it was that was at the core of the text, and how their extract contributed to that.

Selecting extracts where each one was really a repeat of the other was a strong challenge to some candidates and didn't allow them to use a range of drama skills. In this scenario, in their second extract the candidate just continues in the same role without any difference in characterisation, and it is difficult for them to show a range of skills.

Blocking a scene so that movement and positioning were helping rather than obstructing communication was also a challenge for some. Delivering lines with barriers such as table and chairs between performer and audience for lengthy periods of time was not helpful for effective communication.

Some candidates found controlling their physicality a challenge. Performing in an exam can be a nervous experience, but rocking from foot to foot, or shuffling aimlessly around the stage are not things that will help a performance to go well.

Maintaining characterisation is important, and sometimes candidates were not able to keep to their role consistently, forgetting that they must remain in role even when not speaking. Fidgeting or looking disinterestedly at other parts of the performance space does not help to maintain an effective theatrical experience.

Performance - Design

There are still relatively few candidates who take up this option, although numbers are greater than the previous series. Candidates fall into two categories: those who just do not want to act and almost see design as an easy option; and those who are very committed to the aspect on which they are focusing. The first category is never going to achieve good marks unless candidates become committed to the skill they have chosen. The second category have several challenges that must be overcome to achieve success.

Before anything else, the candidate must recognise that when selecting a design option, it must be the equivalent of the acting option. There is considerable demand in, for example, learning lines, blocking, choosing and applying a style, and spending considerable time rehearsing. The design element chosen must be of similar demand. Choosing to light an extract with very simplistic lighting changes cannot be said to be the equivalent of an acting role. In the same way, choosing to do costume and make-up when the play is about school children so that the only costume is school uniform that is easily sourced is unlikely to place much demand in terms of research, design, sourcing and realising and so cannot be said to be equal in demand and will not attract marks because it is not possible to show a range of skills in that area of design.

The specification is very clear about the supporting material and it should be shown to the examiner on the day of the practical examination. The information can be found on page 29 of the specification.

Candidates who did well when offering design ensured the two extracts provided sufficient challenge and variety; provided evidence of their journey from the intention of the group for the piece through to the realisation of their design; made sure that at least the essentials as described in the specification were provided for the examiner to see; and made sure the start of their design journey was reflected properly within their concept pro-forma.

General

The list of the plays that follows gives an indication of the range of texts performed in this series. It is not exhaustive, and is just a representative sample

Name of text	Playwright
<i>Blackout</i>	<i>Davey Anderson</i>
<i>Playhouse Creatures</i>	<i>April de Angelis</i>
<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	<i>Samuel Beckett</i>
<i>Metamorphosis</i>	<i>Steven Berkoff</i>
<i>Greek</i>	<i>Steven Berkoff</i>
<i>Things I Know To Be True</i>	<i>Andrew Bovell</i>
<i>Boy in the Striped Pyjamas</i>	<i>John Boyne</i>
<i>The Caucasian Chalk Circle</i>	<i>Bertolt Brecht</i>
<i>Two</i>	<i>Jim Cartwright</i>
<i>Road</i>	<i>Jim Cartwright</i>
<i>Little Voice</i>	<i>Jim Cartwright</i>
<i>Kiss Me Like You Mean It</i>	<i>Chris Chibnall</i>
<i>Top Girls</i>	<i>Caryl Churchill</i>
<i>The Insect Play</i>	<i>The Brothers Copek</i>
<i>Private Lives</i>	<i>Noel Coward</i>
<i>Daisy Pulls it Off</i>	<i>Denise Deegan</i>
<i>Circles</i>	<i>Rachel De-Lahay</i>
<i>A Taste of Honey</i>	<i>Shelagh Delaney</i>
<i>Gut Girls</i>	<i>Sarah Daniels</i>
<i>Mudlarks</i>	<i>Vickie Donaghue</i>
<i>Grimm Tales</i>	<i>Carol Anne Duffy/Tim Supple</i>
<i>Mind Games</i>	<i>Paul Elliott</i>
<i>Neville's Island</i>	<i>Tim Firth</i>
<i>Dancing at Lughnasa</i>	<i>Brian Friel</i>
<i>Parliament Square</i>	<i>Jim Fritz</i>
<i>Bouncers</i>	<i>John Godber</i>
<i>Shakers</i>	<i>John Godber</i>
<i>Government Inspector</i>	<i>Nikolai Gogol</i>
<i>The Magdalen Whitewash</i>	<i>Valerie Goodwin</i>
<i>Fathers for Justice</i>	<i>David Hughes</i>
<i>Chalk Farm</i>	<i>Keiran Hurley</i>
<i>The Woman Who Cooked Her Husband</i>	<i>Debbie Isitt</i>
<i>4.48 Psychosis</i>	<i>Sarah Kane</i>
<i>My Mother Said I Never Should</i>	<i>Charlotte Keatley</i>

Name of text	Playwright
DNA	Dennis Kelly
Believers	Bryony Lavery
Two Marias	Bryony Lavery
Beautiful Breakdown	Bryony Lavery
Blood Wedding	Frederico Lorca
Yerma	Frederico Lorca
People Places and Things	Duncan MacMillen
The Wasp	Morgan Lloyd Malcolm
The Woman in Black	Stephen Mallatratt/Susan Hill
Child's Play	Don Mancini
Beauty Queen of Leenane	Martin McDonagh
Someone Who'll Watch Over Me	Frank McGuinness
Welcome Home	Tony Merchant
The Crucible	Arthur Miller
Alice in Wonderland	Adrian Mitchell
100	Kass Morgan
The Secret Garden	Marsha Norman/Lucy Simon
Mugged	Andrew Payne
Agnes of God	John Pelman
Girls Like That	Evan Placey
Blue Remembered Hills	Dennis Potter
An Inspector Calls	JB Priestley
Art	Yasmina Reza
Equus	Peter Shaffer
Macbeth	Shakespeare
Midsummer's Night Dream	Shakespeare
Othello	Shakespeare
The Tempest	William Shakespeare
Pink Mist	Owen Sheers
Journey's End	R C Sherriff
Brighton Beach Memoirs	Neil Simon
Antigone	Sophocles
Tusk	Polly Stenham
That Face	Polly Stenham
The Curious Incident of the Dog.....	Simon Stephens
Five Kinds of Silence	Shelagh Stevenson
The Long Road	Shelagh Stevenson
Real Inspector Hound	Tom Stoppard

Name of text	Playwright
<i>Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead</i>	<i>Tom Stoppard</i>
<i>Blue Stockings</i>	<i>Jessica Swale</i>
<i>The Roses of Eyam</i>	<i>Don Taylor</i>
<i>Bronte</i>	<i>Polly Teale</i>
<i>Chatroom</i>	<i>Enda Walsh</i>
<i>The Twits</i>	<i>Enda Walsh</i>
<i>I Love You Mum, I Promise I Won't Die</i>	<i>Mark Wheeller</i>
<i>Hard to Swallow</i>	<i>Mark Wheeller</i>
<i>Too Much Punch for Judy</i>	<i>Mark Wheeller</i>
<i>Lord of the Flies</i>	<i>Williams/Golding</i>
<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i>	<i>Tennessee Williams</i>
<i>Be My Baby</i>	<i>Amanda Whittington</i>
<i>The Magdalen Whitewash</i>	<i>Valerie Goodwin</i>

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