

2020 VCE Theatre Studies written examination report

General comments

In 2020, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority produced an examination based on the *VCE Theatre Studies Adjusted Study Design for 2020 only*.

Theatre Studies in 2020 was affected by school closures due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic – many students adapted their Unit 3 Outcome 1 production work and completed production tasks without access to rehearsal studios, and were unable to see a play in a theatre during Unit 4. Students and teachers should take great pride in the achievements evident in students' work on the 2020 VCE Theatre Studies written examination; it was clear that they had risen to the challenges, and many demonstrated satisfactory knowledge and skills from the Theatre Studies Study Design (Unit 3 and 4 – revised for 2020).

Students who scored highly tended to show:

- a strong capacity to apply two production roles through three stages of production when interpreting unseen scripts and dramaturgical material
- detailed knowledge of the written script for the playlisted Unit 3 play, and pertinent examples of the play performances studied in Unit 3 and Unit 4
- knowledge of key concepts in the study design – especially the elements of theatre composition, acting skills, character function and purpose, character traits, objective, motivation, status and directorial decisions
- a capacity to carefully read questions and construct relevant and focused responses
- evaluation skills
- strong theatrical and evaluative terminology.

In preparing for the task, teachers and students are encouraged to:

- carefully revise terminology and key concepts outlined in the study design and practise writing about how these could be applied in production – or how they were applied in the performances studied
- create a glossary of words or phrases used to describe work in production roles and through the production process
- list different exercises and tasks that are relevant to each stage of the production process, including documenting and evaluating processes
- list key quotes and stage directions from the Unit 3 playlisted plays and practise incorporating these in analyses and evaluations of the performance
- list key moments from the play performances studied and practise writing about how the elements of theatre composition and other key concepts were applied during the performances
- practise applying the production process to interpret previously unseen scripts and dramaturgical material (including stimulus images)
- engage in robust class conversations where students are encouraged to have their own opinion about performances – and are able to justify their opinions with evidence
- practise analysing questions from previous exams
- read previous assessment reports, especially the sections relevant to the skill of evaluation.

Specific information

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A – Production roles and interpretation

Question 1a.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
|-------|---|---|----|----|---------|
| % | 1 | 9 | 31 | 58 | 2 |

This question tested students' ability to:

- find the dramatic potential in previously unseen material
- apply dramaturgy
- show how context could inform work in a selected production role.

Students were required to discuss the same production role from Question 1a. through to Question 1e. Regardless of the production role listed by students on page 2 of the examination, the first production role mentioned in Question 1a. was considered the selected production role across Questions 1a. to 1.e. Students were not required to know more about *The 39 Steps* than information provided on the examination paper and insert.

High-scoring responses provided specific detail from the dramaturgy provided on *The 39 Steps*. Some included strong examples, such as historical information from the period in which John Buchan published the novel or when Alfred Hitchcock produced the thriller film. They drew on specific details from the research images, such as the colour and direction of light in research image 3. They discussed how work in the selected production role could be informed by this information, such as details about the cut, style and fabric of costumes informed by the historical era and detail from research images.

Lower scoring responses tended to omit details from a research image, an idea from the dramaturgy, or work in the selected production role. Some referred to a very general concept, such as 'thriller', without anchoring their response in the detailed dramaturgy provided in the insert.

Question 1b.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
|-------|---|----|----|----|----|---------|
| % | 2 | 20 | 26 | 30 | 22 | 2.5 |

This question tested students' ability to:

- apply a selected production role to interpret a script during the planning stage
- exploit comedy (a deliberate effect intended in the script)
- describe an exercise or task relevant to the planning stage.

High-scoring responses directly quoted dialogue or stage directions from script excerpt 1 to show the precise language that inspired the interpretation. These responses showed a strong understanding of one of the elements of theatre composition, such as 'emphasis', and how their production work could provide a focus for a comic moment derived from the script. High-scoring responses had strong ideas for moments of comedy – such as the unexpected arrival of the clown characters. They described a specific exercise or task

during the planning stage – such as annotating or researching. Strong theatrical terminology was used in the response.

Lower scoring responses did not make mention of a planning activity or made reference to an activity more appropriate to the development stage. Some mentioned ‘rehearsing’ or ‘trial and error’ without clearly explaining how this was an exploration of an initial concept during planning (as opposed to a developmental process). Some did not provide a specific quote from the script excerpt, apply an element of theatre composition, or focus the response in exploiting moments of comedy. Some wrote about the element of ‘contrast’ and focused too much on the contrast between suspense and comedy. Some made no reference to a production role or referred to a production role different to the one mentioned in Question 1a.

Question 1c.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
|-------|---|---|----|----|----|----|---------|
| % | 3 | 6 | 23 | 30 | 23 | 14 | 3.1 |

This question tested students’ ability to:

- apply a selected production role to interpret the script during the development stage
- exploit suspense (a deliberate effect intended in the script)
- describe an exercise or task relevant to the development stage.

High-scoring responses thoroughly explained how work in a selected production role could be applied to create a moment(s) of suspense and directly quoted dialogue or stage directions from script excerpt 1. They explained how the same element of theatrical composition mentioned in Question 1b. could be applied. They discussed an exercise or task during the development stage, such as an improvisation activity for an actor, or a construction or trialling process for a designer. Strong theatrical terminology was used in the response.

Lower scoring responses may have omitted:

- a quote
- the element of theatre composition discussed in Question 1b.
- an exercise or task used in the production development stage
- suspense.

They may not have referred to a production role or may have referred to a production role different from the one discussed in Question 1a.

Question 1d.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
|-------|---|---|----|----|----|----|---------|
| % | 3 | 5 | 25 | 33 | 23 | 12 | 3.1 |

This question tested students’ ability to:

- apply their selected production role to interpret the script during the presentation stage
- collaborate with another production role to create a deliberate effect on the audience.

High-scoring responses discussed how the selected production role could contribute to creating a deliberate effect on the audience during the production presentation. They clearly articulated this effect, which may have been a particular concept (e.g. helping the audience to understand that the clowns were late arriving at their position) or a particular feeling (e.g. making the clowns seem ridiculous and funny to the audience). They explained how they might work collaboratively with another production role. They showed a strong understanding of activities that might occur during the production presentation stage, such as an activity in

the tech rehearsal or dress rehearsal. They provided specific and relevant example(s) from script excerpt 1. They used a high level of theatrical terminology.

Lower scoring responses made no reference to an effect on the audience or referred to a very broad effect, such as 'comedy and suspense'. Some did not mention working collaboratively with another production role or the production presentation stage. Some made no reference to script excerpt 1. Some made no reference to their selected production role, or described another production role rather than how collaboration between two roles created an effect on the audience.

Question 1e.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
|-------|---|----|----|----|---------|
| % | 7 | 31 | 34 | 29 | 1.8 |

This question tested students' ability to document and evaluate work in the presentation stage.

High-scoring responses provided a good understanding of how work in the two production roles could be documented and evaluated to reflect on the deliberate effect (from Question 1d.). They discussed documentation technique(s) or process(es), such as filming or photographing. They also provided examples of evaluating, such as reflecting on a specific aspect and making small adjustments to the work. High-scoring responses made reference to the effect on the audience previously discussed.

Lower scoring responses may have omitted discussion of documenting or evaluating. A common error was generically describing a documenting and/or evaluation process without making reference to the deliberate effect discussed in Question 1d.

Question 2a.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
|-------|---|---|----|----|----|----|---------|
| % | 3 | 5 | 28 | 29 | 21 | 14 | 3.0 |

This question tested students' ability to:

- apply a selected production role and the element of contrast to interpret a specific aspect of the script
- apply theatre technologies in their selected production role.

Students were required to discuss the same production role in Question 2a. and Question 2b. They had to refer to a different production role from that discussed in Question 1. Regardless of the production role listed by students on page 9 of the exam, the first production role mentioned in Question 2a. was considered the selected production role across Question 2a. and Question 2b.

High-scoring responses showed an excellent understanding of how work in their selected production role could interpret the script. They provided two or more specific and relevant quotes. They applied their production role to create contrasting places and times mentioned in the excerpt. They discussed mechanical (e.g. ropes and pulley systems, stage revolves), electrical (e.g. fans or smoke machines) or digital (e.g. data projection, digital lighting boards) technologies and how they might be used to enhance or evaluate the work in the production role. They used sophisticated theatrical language throughout their responses.

Lower scoring responses had less than two quotes, did not make mention of theatre technologies, or were not focused on contrasting places and times. They may have not made mention of a production role or they may have discussed the same production role mentioned in Question 1.

Question 2b.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
|-------|---|---|----|----|----|----|---------|
| % | 6 | 7 | 32 | 26 | 18 | 12 | 2.8 |

This question assessed students' ability to:

- apply their selected production role to realise a character from a script
- analyse the character's function and purpose, and character traits.

High-scoring responses provided pertinent quotes from the script. They explained how work in the selected production role could realise the character. While the Radio Announcer character is a voice over, many chose to interpret the character as physically present. Others interpreted the character as a disembodied voice. They clearly explained the character's function and purpose, such as providing expositional information, narrating Hannay's journey and providing comic relief. They provided an explanation of two or more of the Radio Announcer's character traits, such as being upper-class, serious and/or being attracted to Hannay. They provided a sophisticated level of theatrical language.

Lower scoring responses sometimes made no reference to the function and purpose of the Radio Announcer. They might have mentioned fewer than two character traits. They may have not quoted dialogue or stage directions.

Section B – Theatre analysis and evaluation

Question 1

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Average |
|-------|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|---|---|----|---------|
| % | 3 | 2 | 9 | 23 | 15 | 15 | 12 | 11 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 4.7 |

This question tested students' ability to evaluate how actor(s) and one or more other production roles applied the element of variation to realise the intended meaning of the selected play's script.

High-scoring responses provided a thorough evaluation. Evaluation is more than analysis – it is about forming a value judgement. Evaluation is not an analysis with evaluative terms shoehorned in; it is not enough to analyse an aspect of the production and insert words such as 'effective' or 'cohesive'.

In preparing to evaluate, students might consider:

- What moved me, excited me, entertained me or provoked deep thinking within me?
- What alienated me, bored me, distracted me from the main intentions of the script, or seemed gratuitous?
- What is of value or relevance in the script to me and what is of value or relevance to a contemporary audience? In other words, why does this production need to be staged at this time and in this particular way?

The theatre company producing the play will not necessarily give students the answer to these questions in a forum or set of educational notes. These are questions that students must ask themselves.

For example, in Ridiculusmus' production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, was the production:

- an insightful satire of Wilde's canonical text, poking fun at the staid, conservative function of theatre in middle-class Australia – or was it puerile and gratuitous, reducing Wilde's insight and wit to sexual innuendo and caricature?
- a playful and clever recontextualisation of Wilde's social commentary on Britain's class structure – or was it a broad and tasteless swipe, sacrificing the play's tension by decontextualising the characters

from their social milieu, a disconnect further amplified by playing to an Australian audience who had limited understanding of the world of the characters or the context of Victorian England?

- a thought-provoking metatheatrical exploration of gender played to acerbically critique gender roles – or a demeaning portrayal of gender and sexuality, tone deaf to contemporary thinking about representations of women?

Students should be invited to have robust conversations about what they hold to be important or valuable about the theatrical work – and to be empowered with the capacity to succinctly state their case and to back their argument with detailed evidence from the script and performance.

Lower scoring responses did not focus the evaluation on the element of variation and tended to discuss tension, conflict, intensity, energy or the use of the space – without discussing how these were aspects of variation in the performance. Some confused the element of variation with the element of contrast. They tended to not directly quote the script. They tended to not discuss the role of the actor(s) and/or other production roles.

Section C – Performance analysis and evaluation

Question 1a.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
|-------|---|----|----|----|---------|
| % | 2 | 15 | 34 | 50 | 2.3 |

Question 1b.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
|-------|---|----|----|----|----|---------|
| % | 3 | 12 | 25 | 33 | 26 | 2.7 |

Question 1c.

| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | Average |
|-------|---|----|----|----|---------|
| % | 8 | 13 | 34 | 45 | 2.2 |

These questions tested students' ability to:

- identify a character's status and objective
- analyse how acting skills were applied by an actor to realise a character's status
- analyse how directorial decisions contributed to the realisation of a character.

In these questions, students analysed the play that they saw for Unit 4. The play must have been different from the play selected in Section B.

Common choices of filmed productions analysed in Section C included *Hamilton*; *Frankenstein*; *Jane Eyre*; *Treasure Island*; *One Man, Two Guvnors*; *Away*; and *A Servant of Two Masters*. Some studied *This is Eden* (if this was not discussed in Section B).

High-scoring responses successfully identified a selected character's objective (i.e. their goal) and motivation (i.e. what drives them to achieve the goal). They identified the character's status (i.e. social position or position of power in relation to other characters) during a very specific moment in the play's production. They described the application of acting skills (i.e. facial expressions, gestures, movement, stillness and silence, and voice), and provided several specific details about the acting skill, such as the tone, pitch, rhythm and volume of the actor's voice. They clearly identified a directorial decision, such as a blocking or casting

decision, or an overarching directorial vision. They linked this decision to one or more ideas about the character and provided specific evidence from the performance.

Lower scoring responses sometimes omitted discussing objective, motivation, status or acting skills. They may not have discussed a specific moment from the production of the play. They may not have discussed a directorial decision or linked the decision to the realisation of the character. Some lower scoring responses made a very limited choice of character, such as a character who was not human or one who was only momentarily on stage.