

2023 VCE Theatre Studies written external assessment report

General comments

The Theatre Studies written examination tested students on key knowledge and skills from Units 3 and 4 of the *2019-2024 VCE Theatre Studies* study design.

To prepare for the Theatre Studies written exam, students are advised to

- revise key terminology in the study design, especially terms such as ‘theatre technologies’
- practise using the elements of theatre composition to apply selected production roles when interpreting a variety of previously unseen scripts
- revise work completed by two production roles across three stages of production, including specific exercises or activities applied at each stage of the process
- practise annotation skills when interpreting previously unseen scripts
- review specific moments from the plays seen for Unit 3 Outcome 3 and Unit 4 Outcome 3
- read and memorise dialogue and stage directions from the script studied for Unit 3 Outcome 3
- practise evaluation skills, including the use of evaluative language that responds to a play’s capacity to convey ideas with clarity, fluency, cohesion, believability, emotional engagement and/or pleasing aesthetics
- practise using theatre terminology to analyse and evaluate plays, and to express theatrical concepts and processes.

The use of sophisticated, accurate and detailed theatrical terminology was the distinguishing feature in the higher scoring responses. A key strategy in preparing for the exam might be developing a glossary of key terms and practising the use of appropriate language to explain work completed in different production roles.

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 of more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A

Question 1

In Question 1, students were provided with a script excerpt, research images and dramaturgy from Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*. Students were not expected to have previous knowledge of this play or its contexts. Students were required to select a production role and develop an interpretation of this play across three stages of production based on the information provided. This question tested knowledge and skills developed through Unit 3, Outcomes 1 and 2. The production role selected for Question 1 needed to be different from the production role selected for Question 2.

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	1	12	41	46	2.3

Students were asked to explain how aspects of dramaturgy (provided in the insert) could inform initial concepts for interpreting *Our Town*. Many students made the error of writing about another planning activity (e.g. researching) in answer to this question. Developing an ‘initial concept’ is identifiable in the study design as a ‘planning activity’, hence discussing another activity is redundant. Strong responses provided a good explanation of how a selected aspect of dramaturgy could inform an initial concept for work in a selected production role. They made appropriate and specific reference to one or more aspects of dramaturgy and used theatre terminology throughout the response. Lower scoring responses made generalised or limited reference to an initial concept, a selected production role and/or a specific aspect of dramaturgy. The most common error was providing a concept for the play with no reference to a selected production role.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	11	29	34	25	2.7

Students were asked to annotate Script excerpt 1 in three places, explaining how work in a selected production role applied the element of emphasis or contrast. The best answers provided a thorough explanation of how three specific moments in the text could inform work in a selected production role to interpret Script excerpt 1. Each annotation was clearly linked to applying the selected element, showed a sophisticated understanding of the element, and used theatre terminology throughout the response. Lower scoring responses made generalised or limited reference to a production role, three specific moments in the script, a selected element, or how work in the selected production role might be applied to interpret Script excerpt 1. These responses showed a limited understanding of annotation skill.

Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	2	17	29	31	22	2.6

Students were asked to explain how work in a selected production role could explore and/or trial an idea for creating the setting for *Our Town* (‘Grover’s Corners’) on an empty stage. The focus was on work in the development stage. The best responses provided a thorough understanding of how work in a selected production role explored the creation of setting, clearly justified their response by referring to dialogue or stage directions from the excerpt and used theatre terminology throughout the response. They also showed a thorough understanding of how one or more conventions from the performance style could inform their work. They showed excellent understanding of how one or more exercises or tasks could be used to explore or trial an idea in the production development stage. Lower scoring responses made generalised or limited reference to a production role, the creation of a setting, stage directions or lines of dialogue, a convention from the performance style, or an exercise or task used during development stage.

Question 1d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	6	14	32	30	19	2.4

Students were asked to explain how work in a selected production role could refine the idea explored and/or trialled in Question 1c. Again, the focus was the development stage and responses needed to make reference to theatre technologies. Theatre technologies could have been mechanical, electronic or digital, and might have been used to enhance an aspect of the selected production area, how it might have been used to evaluate the production area and/or communicate with the production team. Higher scoring responses showed an understanding of how one or more exercises or tasks could be used to refine an idea explored and/or trialled in Question 1c. in the production development stage. They explained how theatre technologies could be used to enhance the interpretation at the development stage and used theatre terminology throughout the response. Lower scoring responses made generalised or limited reference to work in a selected production role, the production development stage or theatre technologies.

Question 1e.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	8	7	22	39	18	6	2.7

Students were asked to analyse how a selected production role could develop a specific actor–audience relationship during the interpretation of Script excerpt 1. Students were asked to focus their response on the presentation stage and to make reference to conventions of the theatrical style. The best responses provided an excellent understanding of how the selected production role could realise the production aim during the production presentation. They showed a thorough analysis of the actor–audience relationship, with specific reference to the audience. They also showed an excellent understanding of how a convention or conventions of the style could be applied during the presentation stage, and used theatre terminology throughout the response. Weaker responses made little or no reference to application of the production role, the production aim, a theatrical convention from the style, the actor–audience relationship or the production presentation stage.

The following is a sample of a higher scoring response to Question 1. The student selected ‘designer: set’ as the production role.

a. The image of letters and paraphernalia in aspect 6 inspired my set design for ‘Our Town’ through its usage of muted, sepia tones. These colours echo feelings of memory, nostalgia and the past and I would present this in my set design through using these colours for furniture such as chairs and tables, in any projections used, to paint the floor of the stage and generally throughout the whole set design to create a nostalgic and melancholy tone.

b. [The student underlined ‘Grover’s Corners, New Hampshire’ in the excerpt.] Part of the set will be a sign at the top of the stage saying ‘Grover’s Corners’ drawing the audience’s focus to the setting of this small town, emphasising its importance in the lives of the residents. [The student underlined ‘Main Street’.] Main Street will be marked out by tape on the ground running along the middle of the stage in order to emphasise its importance in centring the town and facilitating meetings between characters. [The student underlines the word ‘cemetery’.] The ‘cemetery’ will be on a raised platform downstage right, this prominent position as well as large gravestones will emphasise its importance as a place of memory and honouring the town’s residents.

c. One of the conventions of metatheatre is allowing the audience to see the workings of a play, therefore a set idea that could be explored is utilising theatre tape to mark out the various buildings on the stage as a kind of map for the actors. For example, when the stage manager says “up here is

Main Street,” they could be pointing out an area on the stage marked by theatre tape – often used in rehearsal to establish spacing and staging, have it as a set design feature in order to fulfil the conventions of exposing the process of a play in metatheatre. In order to trial this idea, I would observe the actors in rehearsal and if they are able to use the tape markings to situate themselves and the action within different parts of the town. As well as this, I would take pictures of this map of the town in order to review its effectiveness and be able to accurately replace any tape that is scuffed or destroyed.

d. In order to refine my use of theatrical tape mentioned in Part C., I would employ the use of automatically moving trucks to create the spaces outlined by the tape. For example, when the Gibbs’ house is in a scene, an automatically moving truck with a platform would slide into the area marked out by the theatrical tape to act as a set piece of the house for the actors. This set piece would be minimal, just a simple platform, in keeping with the conventions of metatheatre. To explore this idea during the development stage, I would film the moving of the trucks with the director and review the footage to ensure the transitions are consistent and smooth. I would also work with actors in rehearsal to learn how to safely step on the trucks as well as to take notes on if the actors feel these set pieces are helping them to visualise the town of Grover’s Corners. In this way, the use of automatic moving trucks would enhance the use of theatrical tape in Part C. by enhancing the creation of a ‘map’ of Grover’s Corners on the stage without using over-the-top or extravagant set pieces.

e. To enhance the convention of breaking the fourth wall and establish an actor–audience relationship, I would utilise projections in my presentation of Script excerpt 1. In the beginning of the play, as the audience is “arriving” and the Stage Manager begins to say, “This play is called Our Town”, there will be a projection on the back wall of the stage of the street outside the theatre in 2023. This will fade as the audiences moves into the world of Grover’s Corners. In doing this, it will remind the audience of that existence as 21st-century citizens as the initial setting of 2023 morphs into the Grover’s Corners setting, hinting that the action to come will be relevant to them. As well as this, it strengthens the actor–audience relationship between the Stage Manager and the audience as it helps them effectively break the fourth wall and fosters a sense that the Stage Manager is aware, and even cares about, the lives and presence of the audience members.

Question 2

In Question 2, students were provided with a different script excerpt from Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*. Students were not expected to have previous knowledge of this play or its context. Students were required to select a production role and develop an interpretation of this scene based on the information provided. This tested their knowledge and skills developed through Unit 4, Outcomes 1 and 2. The production role selected for Question 2 needed to be different from the production role selected for Question 1.

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	4	3	16	40	24	12	3.2

Students were required to analyse how work in a selected production role could convey shifts in time and place in the script excerpt. Students needed to apply the element of motion. Higher scoring responses provided a thorough analysis of work in a production role, including how work in this role could convey changes in time and place. They provided highly specific and relevant reference to two stage directions or dialogue from the script excerpt and provided relevant reference to the element of motion as it related to the selected production role, and used theatre terminology throughout the response. Lower scoring responses

provided little or no reference to realising the selected production role, changes in time and place in the script, the element of motion or specific stage directions or dialogue from the script excerpt.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	10	5	16	41	20	9	2.9

Students were required to justify how work in a selected production role could assist in conveying the character of the Stage Manager in the script excerpt. They needed to identify the function and purpose of the character of the Stage Manager, and make reference to conventions from the theatre style. The best responses showed a thorough justification of work in a selected production role. These responses were grounded in an understanding of the function and purpose of the character, drawn from interpreting the script. They provided highly specific and relevant reference to at least one convention of the style and used theatre terminology throughout the response. Lower scoring responses provided an overly general or limited reference to work in a selected production role, the function and purpose of the Stage Manager and/or a convention of the theatre style.

The following is a sample of a high-scoring response to Question 2. The student selected 'designer: props' as the production role for Question 2.

a. *On the line "three years have gone by", actors will come onto the stage, aggressively kicking and pushing the props that were used and left over from the previous scenes and/or act(s) in the play, causing the props to fly across the stage in vigorous and darting movements, applying the element of motion. This action and aggressive movement of the props would signify that the props that symbolised events previously in the play were no longer relevant, communicating and emphasising the stated time shift. This would clear the stage, allowing audience members to understand there are new occurrences yet to take place and setting the stage for new settings and places. Furthermore, on the line "the sun's come up over a thousand times", actors will stand in a line, passing a prop of a large, brightly-yellow coloured yoga ball to one another, returning it back to the start of the line of actors and repeating the action of holding it above their heads, moving it in a synchronised, organised motion. This action further reiterates the passing of time as the prop of the yellow yoga ball symbolises the spoken "sun". By moving it with what appears to be a well-rehearsed, orderly fashion, the prop signifies a sun rising numerous times, and therefore time passing.*

b. *A convention of metatheatres is that there is always one character who plays the narrator, and who directly addresses the audience, breaking the fourth wall. In the play 'Our town', this chosen character is the Stage Manager. To successfully apply the convention, I would get the actor playing the Stage Manager to utilise a prop of a large, hand-held megaphone which they would appear to be speaking into when delivering their lines, directly engaging with the audience. The function of the Stage Manager is to narrate the play's occurrences and confront the audience for the purpose of ensuring they felt closely engaged.*

Therefore, by holding a prop megaphone, and utilising it purposefully throughout the entirety of the play, audience members can feel directly spoken to or addressed. This is because a megaphone is typically and likely to be seen by the audience as a tool used when people desire to gain people's attention and to directly address them to convey an important message. The use of a megaphone also signifies the character of the Stage Manager is distinct from other characters, as all other characters will have disguisable microphones attached to them.

Section B

This section of the examination tested students' knowledge and skills developed during Unit 3, Outcome 3, providing an evaluation and analysis of a performance from the 2024 playlist.

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	6	20	21	27	26	2.5

Students were required to analyse the use of theatre technologies in a selected play to interpret the play's script in performance. Higher scoring responses provided a thorough analysis of the use of theatre technologies to interpret the written script in performance. Theatre technologies discussed could have been mechanical, electrical or digital. The best responses provided highly specific and relevant reference to stage directions or dialogue from the selected play's script. They made highly specific and relevant references to a moment or moments from the performance and used theatre terminology throughout the response. Lower scoring responses made general or limited reference to theatre technologies, interpretation of the written script in performance, stage directions or dialogue from the script, and/or specific moments from the play.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	4	6	19	23	27	13	8	3.4

Students were required to evaluate how cohesion, rhythm or variation was used in a selected play to create a deliberate effect in a specific moment in the performance. The best responses showed a strong understanding of evaluation, and incorporated evaluative language throughout the response. They provided a thorough evaluation of how one element of theatre composition was used to create a deliberate effect in the performance. They provided highly specific and relevant evaluation of one moment from the selected play in performance. They also provided highly specific and relevant reference to stage directions or dialogue from the selected play's script and used theatre terminology throughout the response. Lower scoring responses presented an analysis or a brief description of the play with little or no evaluation. They showed a limited understanding of an element of theatre composition, a deliberate effect in the performance, a specific moment from the play, specific stage directions or dialogue from the selected play's script.

The following is a sample of a high-scoring response to Question 1. The student selected *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (play 2).

a. *The use of theatre technologies can be seen in Act 2, Scene 20, when Albus Potter and Scorpius Malfoy swim in the Great Lake. To realise the characters "swimming upwards" on a stage, harnesses were used on the actors, allowing them to move upwards mid-air, being pulled by harnesses while the actors made swimming gestures. Furthermore, to make the swimming hold the audience's disbelief, a blue scrim was used in front of the actors, when backlit revealing Albus and Scorpius, but slightly diffusing the view to obscure the harnesses the boys were attached to – making it seem as if they swam mid-air with no help, purely by the magic within the play.*

b. *When Albus and Scorpius move on moving staircases, the rhythm of the moving stairs creates a deliberate effect of depicting the tension in their love for each other. Two wooden mahogany looking staircases with ornate detailing to establish the aged setting of illustrious Hogwarts are on moving trucks, with pneumatic wheels allowing them to flow silently across the stage. This realises them "moving in almost a dance", as they sweep across the stage in a smooth pace in circular arcs, following the timing of the melancholic music. The tempo of the stair movement slows into a moment*

of suspended tension as the stairs join, allowing Albus and Scorpius to see each other, the slow pace bringing attention to the boys' yearning for each other. But as Albus looks away the "stairs move apart" suddenly, the quick pace change physicalising the tension within the relationship – an aspect of physical theatre – as the stairs flow apart in a mournful manner.

Section C

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	4	2	7	15	12	12	15	16	10	4	3	5.2

This section of the exam tested students' knowledge and skills developed during Unit 4, Outcome 3, providing an evaluation of a performance from the 2024 playlist. The play referred to in Section C needed to be different from the play referred to in Section B.

Students were asked to focus their response on the discussion of one actor and a character from a selected play. They were required to evaluate how the interrelationship between the acting, direction, design and the theatre style(s) was utilised by the chosen actor in the production. In the response they needed to make reference to the character's status. Higher scoring responses demonstrated a strong understanding of evaluation, showing a sophisticated understanding of what was and what was not effective in a production. They provided an excellent evaluation of the interrelationship between how acting, direction, design and theatre styles were utilised by the chosen actor in the production. They demonstrated a high level of understanding of the chosen character's status and often how the status changed in the performance and used theatre terminology throughout the response. Lower scoring responses provided an analysis or description of a performance with little or no sense of evaluation. They also made general or little reference to acting, directing, design and/or theatre style, work of the chosen actor or the chosen character's status. They sometimes recounted the narrative seen in performance without analysis or evaluation.

The following is a sample of a high-scoring response to Section C. The student selected 'Bernhardt/Hamlet' (play 3): chosen actor Kate Mulvaney, chosen character Sarah Bernhardt.

In Bernhardt/Hamlet, actor Kate Mulvany as Sarah Bernhardt, director Anne-Louise Sarks and set and costume designer Marg Horwell successfully applied the theatre styles of Elizabethan Theatre and feminist theatre to change Bernhardt's status. This was accomplished during the rehearsal of Bernhardt's 'to be or not to be' portrayal of Hamlet, whereby Sarks interestingly placed actors around the stage, all watching the talented acting of Mulvany as Bernhardt. More specifically, Sarks brilliantly positioned Lysette, the only other female character until this point, on the stairs into the audience, placing her as an audience member and thus, subtly conditioning them to watch in awe of Mulvany as Lysette, played by Tahlee Fereday, does. Placing Bernhardt in a position of attention and power here, a convention of feminist theatre, all actors were instructed to look to Mulvany in centre stage; who creatively applied codified gestures, a convention of Elizabethan theatre, in a stiff and overly-exaggerated manner, to accurately portray Bernhardt's status as they placed her in the centre of both power and the audience's focus in this scene. Contrastingly, during the end of the dinner party scene in Act 2, scene 4, after everyone had left, Bernhardt is confronted by Rosamond, played by Isabella Yena. Here, Horwell meticulously places a long table between Rosamond and Bernhardt, creating tension between the two. To lower Bernhardt's status, Yena impactfully maintained a straightened posture, minimal movement and a half-smile facial expression to assert her dominance within Bernhardt's dressing room, her own domain. Assisting in this notion, Mulvany incredibly applied fidgety gestures and overexaggerated head and body movements, moving in a way that surrendered her power and control by being in an almost begging and uncomfortable

posture. These exaggerated actions, a convention of Elizabethan theatre, assisted by the tension created by the placement of the table de-elevated Bernhardt's status as Rosamond seized her power and control showing a stark contrast to Bernhardt's maintenance of a celebrity status, a key theme of the play, throughout the rest of the performance, thus portraying Bernhardt effectively in different changes in status.