2022 VCE Drama written external assessment report

General comments

The 2022 VCE Drama written examination included Section A, which assessed key knowledge from Unit 3 Outcome 3, and Section B, which provided unseen stimulus to assess key knowledge from Unit 3 for devising an ensemble performance and Unit 4 for devising a solo performance.

The format of the exam provided scaffolding in the preamble to each question to allow students to specify the key aspects of the questions they intend to respond to, such as stated performance styles, stimulus numbers, playmaking techniques, themes and conventions. This structure was intended to assist the student to clarify what they would be developing and writing about and also assist, where appropriate, in the marking of the response. Although this detailed format was constructed to help guide the students in each question, it was important that students read and followed the process and logic of all aspects of the question before commencing writing. Section B tasks were progressive: this structure placed focus on students knowing and applying drama-specific terminology. The examination assumes that students are generally able to apply the language from the *VCE Drama Study Design* and can also reference performance styles and their associated conventions with some confidence.

A large number of students required more space to answer questions and are reminded that they can continue writing on the page of the exam book in the space below the question lines, rather than feel they have to continue at the back. In some cases, students rewrote the question as part of their answer, which was unnecessary and consumed valuable time. Students are reminded to consider the marking scheme and prioritise their time according to the marks allocated to each question.

Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual 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

This question related to Unit 3 analysis of a play. Students were asked to respond to three questions about one play they attended from the VCE Drama Playlist in 2022.

The popular choices were *Mother Courage* and *Slap. Bang. Kiss*. Also reasonably well represented were *Midsummer* and *Jack and Millie*; however, *Driftwood* and *Owl and the Albatross*, featured less, the latter having much of the season cancelled.

There was a general lack of specific detail across responses to this question, with very few examples given and often only the characters, and not the actors, discussed. In some cases, there was confusion between the actor and the character. However, where actors were discussed, students demonstrated very good knowledge of the names of both actors and characters from the selected play. This was impressive.

Question 1a.

Mark	0	1	2	3	Average
%	1	7	31	60	2.5

The question was generally well answered. Most students were able to confidently describe how one expressive skill was used to communicate character. Almost all students were able to correctly identify an expressive skill. Responses that scored highly had a strong sense of character traits, such as the characters' emotional state, status, objective or motivation, and applied precise terminology to unpack the specifics of the chosen expressive skill. Responses that scored less well tended to lack detail, often using only one word to describe an expressive skill and not what it represented.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

To demonstrate the character of the sergeant, Kate Bayley employed a stiff gait, walking with her arms behind her back, shoulders drawn back, and head held high. This not only reflected her character's rank, but also her character's orderly, no-nonsense nature.

Question 1b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	6	3	12	32	28	19	3.3

This question asked students to analyse how actors in the performance they attended manipulated the conventions of a performance style to communicate meaning. Most students were able to identify a performance style and some appropriate conventions. The scaffolding of this question (by asking the students to list the style and two conventions first) seemed to assist all students. High marks were awarded to students whose analysis gave clear and specific examples of the conventions used and pointed to the meaning intended to be received by the audience.

Lower-scoring responses selected conventions which reflected an inadequate understanding of performance styles. For example, conventions of stock characters might be a part of melodrama, but they are not relevant to the discussion of style in *Slap. Bang. Kiss*. In some responses, how the conventions created meaning was often missed with an overreliance on plot description with no analysis.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Performance Style: Epic Theatre

Convention 1: Direct Address

Convention 2: Episodic Narrative Structure

Sarah Fitzgerald uses direct address in the march movement scene, directing her gaze toward the audience and saying, 'I'm not talking to parents or teachers, I'm talking to you right in front of me.' This acts as a didactic call to action for the youth in the audience as is typical of Epic Theatre. The disjointed narrative also foreshadows how the stories intertwine at the climax of the play and communicate the meaning that, even though it may not always seem like it, youth are always connected. Next the convention of episodic narrative was manipulated by Tsungirai Wachenuka and Fitzgerald when transitioning between their stories. They repeat 'Slap … Bang. Slap … Bang. My foot against the desk.'

And by detaching the narratives in this episodic structure, the audience themselves become detached and can review the themes the play is exploring, especially activism.

Question 1c.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	3	1	3	13	32	25	15	8	4.4

Although this was an evaluation question, the challenge for students was to show their understanding of how the selected production areas were manipulated by actors to establish and maintain the actor-audience relationship.

Some production areas, although evident in the performance, were clearly not being manipulated by the actors. Students who scored highly recognised this and either avoided production areas that were not manipulated by actors or ensured they framed their response around how the actors established and maintained the actor-audience relationship through their interaction with the production areas. Evaluative language was key here and students needed to make an evaluative judgment as to effectiveness or otherwise.

Generally, responses to this question demonstrated a good understanding of the conventions in the productions. Responses that scored highly were able to explore the actor-audience relationship unique to the convention discussed, going beyond general statements such as 'making it clear to the audience' or 'engaged the audience'. They synthesized the evaluation through the answer and used clear, pertinent examples for the performance.

Lower-scoring responses did not anchor their evaluation of production areas in how actors established and maintained the actor-audience relationship or discern the difference between establishing and maintaining. They often described the production areas, rather than how the actors manipulated or interacted with them as part of the actor-audience relationship. These answers tended to only see this relationship as either alienated or close, with little consideration for the manipulation of emotions or how the audience engaged with the character. Some students did not evaluate at all and relied instead on analysis.

Section B

In Section B there were two questions with multiple parts. Each question invited students to consider how they would use stimulus images to assist them to devise theatre. Question 1 focused on devising an ensemble performance and Question 2 focused on devising a solo performance.

Question 1

Students were invited to consider four colour stimulus images and from one of these select a detail which they felt might suggest the dramatic element of a particular mood. The mood selected would be recurring and applied throughout the question. The stimulus images were highly accessible, and students easily found details in each that encouraged their creative process.

Students applied their key knowledge from Unit 3 to select and apply the conventions of a performance style or practitioner they had studied, and to show their understanding of the processes of devising by applying play-making techniques that include manipulating the actor-audience relationship in performance. Students were encouraged to identify and state the key aspects of each part of the question prior to answering, to enable them to both follow the logic of the task and clearly state their intentions.

Students needed to have read the entire question carefully to see the way mood was integrated across all tasks. Stronger responses understood that the question required them to demonstrate an understanding of

multiple aspects of devising – the selection of a performance style, choice of convention, playmaking process and production area – and made relevant/pertinent choices, guiding the assessor clearly through the process of creating an ensemble process. Responses that scored highly understood this creative process that was inherent in this question and were able to guide the reader easily through the judicious choices they made.

Question 1a.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	0.5	7	92	1.9

Students were given four colour images and asked to explore the dramatic potential of only one of these for devising an ensemble performance. They needed to consider a detail within their chosen image and how this detail may suggest a mood to be used in the opening moment and in further moments in their devised ensemble performance.

Stimulus images 1 and 3 were chosen by the majority of the students. Most students were able to answer this question effectively. There were many different interpretations of what constituted a mood, and some students did not explicitly state the link between the image and the mood in their response, perhaps assuming the assessor would make the link. Lower-scoring responses did not provide an opening moment.

Many students wrote about two moods, especially when referring to image 1. Although this may not have been a problem for the first part of the question, consistency throughout the next three parts of the question was required, and students who oscillated between moods in later parts of the question could not get full marks. The question asked for 'a mood' (singular); however, if a response linked two differing moods to the image, the response was only assessed on the first one. If a student later swapped around the moods between the two offered in Question 1, full marks could not be awarded, particularly if the moods discussed were quite different. Another recurring issue across Question 1 was students identifying a mood as the feeling of a character, rather than the overarching feeling evoked by the intended performance.

Question 1b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	3	35	40	21	2.8

The question required students to consider the specific styles or drama practitioners they had studied in Unit 3 and specific conventions associated with them. They needed to consider how they might explore the conventions of these styles/practitioners through improvisation and how this activity would assist the ensemble to create the mood for this opening scene.

Most students were able to identify two relevant conventions and could speak of them in terms of development. However, stronger responses were able to give a clear picture of what the improvisation activity would actually entail (e.g. hot seating, space jump, emotional role play) and how the conventions would be explored through this activity. Responses that demonstrated an understanding of how improvisation as a playmaking technique could be used to generate ideas scored higher marks.

In this context, conventions that implied an audience (e.g. alienation or direct address) seemed a fraught choice as students fell into the trap of discussing how these would be presented during a performance rather than how they would be explored using improvisation. Stronger responses identified this and would speak of improvising to their peers and responding to feedback. However, weaker responses implied that the improvisation was part of the performance to their intended audience. The difference was in the student's ability to recognise the intention of the activity inherent in the question. Similarly, lower-scoring responses discussed mood in relation to what the audience would feel. While this is important, the question asked

students to consider how the actors might use convention to create that mood. Some low-scoring responses did not outline a specific improvisational exercise, but wrote generally about playmaking.

Question 1c.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	1	14	40	30	14	3.4

This task required students to focus on one of the chosen styles/practitioners and analyse the opening scene in some depth. They needed to consider how this style/practitioner and a selected production area may be manipulated in this moment to help create the stated mood and an intended actor-audience relationship.

The higher-scoring responses clearly addressed all aspects of this question, including the nuances within it, such as actors manipulating the production area, not just including a production area. There were many responses that missed one or more aspects of this task.

Higher-scoring responses were able to make a clear and logical link between the style/practitioner and the way the production area was manipulated in order to communicate the mood, analysing according to the specifications provided in the question. Stronger responses also included how the production area would need to be **manipulated**.

Lower-scoring responses didn't clearly explain why the performance style was chosen. They needed to indicate a deeper understanding of the purpose of their chosen style.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

> In the opening moment, the ensemble will crowd around a metre tall rock set-piece that has a platform on the top to stand on (inspired by Stimulus 3). The ensemble will use a dance quality to their movements to help certain ensemble members up on the platform to sing solos about feeling unstoppable. The song will have an upbeat tempo and rhythm to convey a positive, victorious mood, hence the use of Musical Theatre, which will be emphasised by dance sequences that feature fisted hands, tall posture and superhero-like movements. This will intend to lift the mood of the audience and excite them to contribute to the overall upbeat atmosphere.

Question 1d.

Mark	0	1	2	3	Average
%	4	12	43	41	2.2

Students were then required to describe another moment in the ensemble, maintaining the same selected mood. Students were to apply a convention from the practitioner/style selected in the previous question. To assist students to follow this logic they were invited to state the convention prior to the task.

This question was generally well answered, especially when students remembered to maintain the same mood. Most students made appropriate choices for conventions which allowed them to describe these being manipulated in the second moment.

Lower-scoring responses changed the mood for this second moment, or were still addressing the first moment.

Question 1e.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	4	4	26	41	25	2.8

Finally, students were required to analyse a new moment in their devised ensemble performance, one which offered a contrasting mood to the one used throughout the previous parts of the question. The analysis was to consider how a contrasting mood can be established though the use of the production area from part 1c. and the application of expressive skills.

This part of the question was generally answered well. The mood had to **contrast** the first one, and the higher-scoring responses were able to demonstrate a link between moment one, moment two and moment three. They described the impact this moment would have on the audience.

Lower-scoring responses didn't analyse the way the selected production area and the use of expressive skills were applied to create the contrasting mood. In some cases, answers were simplistic, e.g. 'happy mood, the actors will wear bright colours and skip around the stage with high-pitched voices'. These responses had the required components but lacked the depth of analysis of how this these choices would convey the contrasting mood. Low-scoring responses failed to cover all components thoroughly, often focusing on only one or two parts, or discussing a different production area to part 1c.

Question 2

Students were invited to consider how they would use stimulus images to create two characters for a devised solo performance. The students were supplied with eight stimulus images, each of which featured potential characters in varied situations to encourage their creative process.

Students applied key knowledge from Unit 4 to show how they would explore and experiment with play-making techniques to create the two characters. Students needed to explain how they would develop each character in turn and then how they would transform between these characters by applying expressive and performance skills and symbolic use of space. The students were also invited to demonstrate their understanding of the playmaking technique of scripting to analyse the convention of transformation of place.

Students needed to have read the entire question carefully to see how they were to work through a process of devising. It was important that students read the question thoroughly in order to address the intention of the task. Weaker responses indicate the question was not read in its entirety.

Question 2a.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	1	6	94	1.9

The first part of the question was similar to Question 1a. It invited students to explore one stimulus image and identify a detail, and explain how this detail could be directly linked to the first character. However, a great many students discussed a second character in this question, which was not required, as the second character featured in the next part of the question.

Lower-scoring responses did not provide the link to the image. As stated in Question 1a. above, it is important that students identify as required and not assume assessors will make a link to the chosen image.

Question 2b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	2	21	39	25	11	3.2

In this next part of the question students were required to consider a separate stimulus image and from this image another specific detail which they could use to develop a second character. This task invited students to explain how they would use improvisation as a play-making technique to explore the physical expressive skills used to create this second character. The task offered the set piece of a door frame with a door to allow students to explain two ways this set piece may be used in an improvisation activity to explore the development of character. In assisting students to see that this is a play-making activity, students were also required to imagine what information about the character might be discovered by doing this activity.

High-scoring responses clearly focused their response on the improvisation activity to experiment with character. They clearly discussed how an actor could vary and change their movement and gesture when trying out new ideas in the improvisation activities. They also described experimenting with the door in different ways. Some of them talked about different ways they could interact with it as a door: opening, closing, inspecting, walking up to it curious about what might be on the other side, walking through it, knocking, locking, unlocking etc. Others experimented with ideas on how the door frame could be transformed and played with in the improvisation activity, such as a frame to be trapped in, a mirror, transforming it into different objects – a bed, a plane, a suitcase etc. The strongest discussions summarised their description of their playmaking improvisation process, with a discovery about the character as required by the question.

There were several components to the question and many students did not cover them all in their response. Lower-scoring responses did not address this as a development of the solo, but rather as the performance. Some students didn't clearly demonstrate an understanding that this was an improvisation play-making activity to discover a second character, and discussed a scene where character 1 interacted with character 2. Some students tended to fall into a trap of describing the movement or gesture or ideas about a character without explaining how ideas might be generated through the process of improvisation and experimenting with a door frame. Is the door being used in two different ways? Students would describe walking through the door with one posture, and then describe walking through the door with a different posture, but this wasn't using the door in two different ways: it was still the same activity, walking through a door. Movement or gesture need to be specific, not a generalised comment such as 'the actor will play with movement'. The final dot point in the question, the information discovered about the character, was often missed. Therefore, higher grades were awarded to students who were able to align the use of the door with the movement/gesture used.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

> *Inspired by the street and useful nature of the cap, the actor could improvise ways a trendy, cool teenager in modern society would enter or exit a room to develop mannerisms. First, the actor would improvise knocking, walking into a room (exploring gait) and saying hi (using any colloquial phrase with the intent to greet). Then the actor will explore gesture by improvising gestures that mean or imply goodbye and walking out the door. The actor could also explore gesture further, by using the door as an implied obstacle (i.e.: locked door, tree blocking something) and exploring through improvised mime how to get around it. Through improvisation the actor could discover that a trendy, cool teenager might have very relaxed movements and use modern hand gestures such as peace signs or gang signs.*

Question 2c.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	6	2	17	29	26	15	6	3.4

The next part of the question required students to combine their two characters and analyse the moment when the second character transforms into the first character. The task required the actor to show the moment of transformation by making a clearly contrasted symbolic use of space for each character and applying a performance skill (but not actor-audience relationship). The format of the question was structured to scaffold students' answers by asking them to identify the performance skill and the transformation technique prior to starting their response.

The selection of an appropriate performance skill was key to a strong answer. Energy was a popular performance skill chosen to support the distinction between characters. Higher-scoring responses included some good discussions about how an actor used their gaze and point of focus to support the implied presence in the scene. The symbolic use of space appeared to be a challenging idea for many students to answer.

Higher-scoring responses were very explicit in describing what the second character would be doing on the stage, what that represented for the character, and how they would then transition into the next character using transformational techniques. They integrated the symbolic use of space into the character transformation descriptions, then linked back to this at the end of the discussion. High-scoring responses were able to creatively manipulate space, rather than defaulting to just different sides of the stage. The best tended to anchor their responses in the notion of levels, proximity, use of patterns or the amount of space taken up by a character through movement.

Generally, the analysis of how the actor would show transformation was strong, with a wide range of transformation techniques applied. It was important that the student described how the actor used these techniques rather than just list the techniques. Some students just said they would 'snap' and the description remained vague. Lower-scoring responses needed more explanation of how a technique such as a 'snap' would happen. Lower-scoring responses didn't describe how an actor would transform and play both roles, or were vague on what would actually happen in the performance space. Once again, it is important that students address all parts of the question.

Question 2d.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	9	9	36	32	14	2.3

The final part of Question 2 asked students to show how the actor would create a clear transformation of place, using a production area to assist in the transformation. The challenge with this task was for students to demonstrate their ability to apply the play-making technique of scripting. Not all students actually wrote a script to address this task; some students described how they would apply scripting (e.g. 'The stage descriptions would then say … the dialogue would then say …'). Sophisticated responses scripted a response with correct layout, dialogue, stage directions and a clear transformation of place.

Some students described a transformation of place that would require two or more actors to achieve the transformation. Or they relied on a production area that required another person to operate it, such as lighting or sound. Stronger responses acknowledged this and talked about pre-programmed lights or soundscapes.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

THE PILOT: (Holding fabric outstretched across both outstretched arms in a straight line, tilting arms up and down to signify a plane flying.)

> *May day! May day!*

> *Oh no, we're going down.*

(Morph downwards bringing arms together in front of body whilst holding fabric. Gently swish fabric up and down to imitate waves in the ocean.)

> *Phew! Lucky we landed in the open sea.*