

2023 VCE Drama written external assessment report

General comments

The 2023 VCE Drama written examination included Section A, which assessed key knowledge from Unit 3 Area of Study 3, and Section B, which provided unseen stimulus to assess key knowledge from Unit 3, Area of Study 2 for devising an ensemble performance, and Unit 4, Area of Study 1 and Area of Study 3 for devising a solo performance.

The format of the exam provided scaffolding in the preamble to each question in Section B to allow students to specify the key aspects of the questions they intended to respond to, such as stated performance styles, stimulus numbers, play-making techniques, themes and conventions. This structure was intended to assist the student to clarify what they would be developing and writing about and 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 2019–2024* and can also reference performance styles and their associated conventions with some confidence.

A large number of students required more space to answer questions; they 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 prioritise their time according to the marks allocated to each question.

Data suggests some students clearly ran out of time by the end of the exam and did not attempt the last few parts of Section B Question 2. It is always advantageous to attempt every question and therefore students should consider budgeting a certain amount of time per question in order not to spend too long on easy questions with lower marks and be unable then to spend an appropriate amount of time on questions with more marks.

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 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 one question with three parts about one play from the VCE Drama playlist they attended in 2023.

The most popular choices were *Nosferatu* and *The World According to Dinosaurs*. Also reasonably well represented was *Moth. Wittenoom*, *Small Metal Objects* and *Frankenstein* featured less, perhaps due to their season dates or having shorter seasons.

Generally, this question was confidently handled; however, accuracy in understanding drama terminology and conventions associated with theatre styles was important and sometimes only the characters, and not the actors, were discussed. Students needed to pay attention to the bold numbers in the questions that specified how many aspects were required to be examined. Although providing more examples than required was not penalised, extraneous examples were not marked and therefore a waste of precious time.

Question 1a.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	3	30	67	1.7

The question was generally well answered. Most students were able to confidently describe how focus was used by one actor in one moment in their chosen play. Quite a lot of responses over-answered this question by providing either more than one actor's use of focus or in more than one moment. Similarly, many students wrote more than a simple description and often required more space. Higher-scoring responses were succinct in their description of how one actor in one moment used focus. Lower-scoring responses inevitably confused the actor with the character or wrote with confidence about how the actor applied focus but didn't give a specific moment in the play which illustrated this.

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

Max Brown applied focus when he was trapped under Orlok's power. In this moment, Brown held strong eye contact with a spider that was sitting on the dining table, drawing the audience's attention to the spider under the cup, demonstrating the power that Orlok had over humans.

Question 1b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	30	67	3	30	67	3.1

This question asked students to evaluate how one actor applied and manipulated two dramatic elements in their chosen play. Again, there are specific numbers required in answering this question, provided in bold. Students should always be encouraged to observe the bold words in each question. High marks were awarded to students who were able to evaluate the application as well as the manipulation of both selected dramatic elements with evaluation being embedded throughout the response. These higher-scoring responses understood the difference between evaluation and analysis and were able to support their judgments of the use of two dramatic elements with evidence from the performance.

Lower-scoring responses inevitably confused dramatic elements with expressive or performance skills or even some conventions. Students who scored lower in this question often couldn't explain how the dramatic elements were manipulated by actors, instead just opting to discuss what dramatic elements were evident in

the play. Too many students continue to forget to evaluate at all or just tack a single word on at the end, which is insufficient.

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

Max Brown expertly manipulated the dramatic element of contrast by clearly distinguishing his character Knock's mannerisms from those of Count Orlok at the beginning of Act 2. As Brown began his fevered monologue, he spoke in quick, jittery outbursts, his body twisting and writhing in agony. Through this, Brown successfully created significant contrast between himself and the cool, cold and unwavering Count Orlok, thereby communicating well to the audience that Knock has no power in this relationship and that the mere presence of Count Orlok turns him mad. This contrast is adeptly combined with the dramatic element of climax, as Knock builds up to the imminent climax of his murder by Count Orlok. This is done successfully by Brown through gradually escalating his feverish and chaotic energy, beginning slower and subdued and growing more and more agitated and chaotic as he goes on. This deftly communicates to the audience that things will only get worse the longer Knock is under Orlok's power, building up to the climax and making the audience fear what is to come. Max Brown is therefore able to successfully manipulate and apply contrast and climax to apply meaning to the audience, warning them of what's to come.

Question 1c.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	6	1	4	12	20	20	17	12	7	4.7

This was an analysis question that challenged the students to show their understanding of how a convention of a performance style was used by actors to manipulate the actor–audience relationship. The question assisted students to unpack the question by providing bullet points as a scaffold to their response, but also required students to reference one or more production areas.

The majority of students responded in the midrange with this question, suggesting that many did not address all aspects of the question. For example, stating a convention without referencing the performance style it is associated with; not providing a moment from the play to discuss, or perhaps not referencing one or more production areas. These all contribute to insufficient analysis for this question. Students need to be reminded to read and respond to all aspects of the question.

Higher-scoring responses showed a clear understanding of performance styles and were able to clearly link a convention to that performance style, and how that performance style and convention affected the audience. Responses that scored highly were also 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 also tended to be able to link the selected production area(s) with the play’s purpose and the character’s status or actions.

Lower-scoring responses did not discuss production areas, or discussed them in limited detail, and/or referred to more than one moment or convention in their responses. 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.

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

Sophie Ross was able to manipulate an actor/audience relationship through the prologue of the play, making use of the foreboding mood convention of Australian Gothic. This convention was highlighted through the use of lighting and the use of prop. During this prologue, Ross applied a clear actor–audience relationship through the use of direct eye contact with the audience, projection of her voice towards the audience and inclusive language as she pleaded with the audience to be aware of the dangers of

Nosferatu. The convention of a foreboding mood from Australian Gothic was applied through this moment, as Ross spoke with a gradually increasing pace of speech and a sense of urgency in her tone. This foreboding mood elicited emotions of fear and uneasiness into the audience as they were being alerted of the danger that is lurking around the corner. Further, the use of a dim blue spotlight was placed on Ross, creating an ominous and eerie mood. This dim blue lighting symbolised the innocence of the town of Bluewater, before the destruction by Nosferatu. The lighting then quickly snapped to a sharp vivid red light as Ross began to speak at a quicker pace. This red lighting symbolised the blood-shedding, the murder and the violence that was brought upon the town by Nosferatu once Orlok entered. The use of lighting enhanced the foreboding mood, linking to Australian Gothic, and provoked emotions of fear amongst the audience. Through the prologue, Ross also manipulated the use of a prop knife with blood dripping onto the stage. At the beginning of the prologue, Ross had the knife placed behind her long jacket, however, shifted the audience's focus to the knife when she revealed it later in the prologue. To do this, Ross looked down toward the knife, shifting the audience's focus, as she pleaded with the audience to escape. The use of the prop knife symbolised the power and brutality of Orlok over the town, and foreshadows the killing of humans in the town of Bluewater. The red liquid seen dripping from the edge of the knife, down onto the stage was symbolic of human blood and the killing upon the arrival of Orlok. This use of blood and knife prompted the audience to feel as though they too have been put in danger and added to the foreboding mood. Therefore, Ross' manipulation of prop, lighting and the convention of a foreboding mood worked in conjunction with a strong actor/audience relationship to display the dangers of Nosferatu.

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 drama. Question 1 focused on devising an ensemble performance and Question 2 focused on devising a solo performance.

Question 1

In this series of questions students were required to select four characters from the stimulus material with which to devise an ensemble performance to a specific audience which students were to state. Students were given a choice of 12 colour images of the animals representing the Chinese Zodiac signs. Each stimulus image comprised a colour graphic as well as some adjectives to denote character traits.

The five parts to Question 1 were structured to allow students to go through the process of devising by selecting characters, describing the dramatic potential of these characters, and then brainstorming how these characters may be developed through improvisation. Students were then encouraged to consider how a costume or prop may be used symbolically by actors to help communicate to the audience, how to use the process of improvisation to communicate a specific moment and then how to refine this moment.

Students needed to have read the entire question and corresponding parts carefully before responding, to ensure they are able to be consistent across all five tasks, through a judicious choice of stimulus initially.

This question requires students to be confident in their understanding and application of playmaking techniques as well as appropriate conventions.

Each part had a preamble to guide the creative direction of the devising process, as well as to allow students to specify the key aspects of the questions they intend to respond to, such as stimulus characters, story, ideas, themes, and impactful moments. This was intended to assist the student to clarify what they would be developing and writing about.

Question 1a.

Mark	0	1	2	Average
%	0.4	7	92	1.9

Students were required to list the four animals they had selected from the stimulus, although this task was not allocated marks.

The task required students to briefly describe the dramatic potential through an idea, story or theme that might be explored with these four animals in the devising of the ensemble.

The vast majority of students were able to answer this question well. These responses made it clear whether it was a story, idea or theme being explored and how this provided dramatic potential. Lower-scoring responses inevitably just listed the characters without any reference to the dramatic potential of these characters.

Question 1b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	0.6	3	18	43	35	0.6	3.1

In this task students were invited to brainstorm how each of their four selected characters may be developed through improvisation. Although the preamble to this part explains that character development is being developed through improvisation activities, the brainstorm only required students to consider how expressive skills might help develop each character. Students were required to complete each box and within each box demonstrate some brainstorming of the dramatic potential for each character through applying expressive skills. Higher-scoring responses explored multiple possibilities to link their expressive skills to their chosen animals.

Lower-scoring responses inevitably just listed one expressive skill appropriate to the character without considering how this might be applied in creating a character. Although this is a four-mark question with four parts to complete, students who just wrote an animal with one expressive skill in each box inevitably did not achieve full marks.

Question 1c.

Mark	0	1	2	3	Average
%	2	13	56	29	2.1

This task required students to apply production areas, specifically one costume or one prop that can be manipulated to symbolically communicate one of three options to the audience: character, idea or theme. For a successful response to this question, it was important to be able to explain how the actor will manipulate the selected production area.

Higher-scoring responses clearly articulated the symbolic nature of their prop/costume choice in relation to the selected intended character, theme or idea, while also being able to explain how the actor will use it. These responses made clear their understanding of manipulation such as how the actor might work with the prop or costume; merely wearing a costume is not manipulating the costume.

Lower-scoring responses simply stated that a prop or costume item would be symbolic without discussing what it would represent or how. Lower-scoring responses did not discuss application of symbol at all.

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

The ensemble actor playing the Ox will manipulate the prop of a metal chain to symbolically communicate his character's struggle. The actor will bang the chain on the ground with each heavy-footed step, symbolic of their aching joints, nagging together painfully, to show the Ox is 'shackled down' by his large size and finds it difficult living this size. The actor will further this by placing the chain around their neck and pulling down on it, communicating the immense weight and pressure the Ox is under.

Question 1d.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	4	31	33	20	11	3.0

The preamble to this question required students to consider how the ensemble would explore a dramatic moment in their performance that would be required to have an impact on the audience. Students were asked to articulate what this impact would be. The preamble then explains that the students are to consider that they are still in play-making stage using improvisation to explore how the performance space and one convention may be manipulated to explore different intensities of energy. Students are instructed that the conventions applied are not to be transformation of character, time or place.

The question asked students to analyse how the actors use improvisation in order to explore the performance skill of energy in order to achieve the stated impact upon the audience. The question also guided students to ensure their answer addresses the various levels of energy, the one convention other than transformative and the use of space.

This was a challenging question requiring students to ensure they addressed the various components of the task. Higher-scoring responses generally made appropriate choices with a convention which allowed them to be flexible with the way space and energy could be explored. These higher-scoring responses anchored their answers in the rehearsal room and either explicitly named improvisation activities or kept referring to the general activity of improvising in order to make it clear this was not a performance. Some integrated the various energy levels and spatial usages throughout their response, whereas some spoke about them (energy & space) in isolation to each other. Higher-scoring responses also analysed their ensembles work through identifying how and why they were doing what they were doing and linking it directly to how they wanted the audience to experience their stated impact.

Lower-scoring responses inevitably left aspects of the task out. Many lower-scoring responses described a moment in performance where different uses of energy and/or space were used, rather than an improvisation. Some responses did not discuss the actor–audience relationship or were unclear about how their improvisations would help develop their performance.

A great many lower-scoring responses got very confused in their answers and spent far too much time describing the narrative rather than how actors were exploring their abilities to create the impact through use of space, energy and one convention.

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

Impact of moment: Unnerving.

The group will use the Laban movement improvisation workshop to explore how their character can manipulate space and energy through their stylised movement.

The actors must manipulate the four Laban factors of space, time, flow, weight to help in the process of characterisation – for example – the actor who intends to play the goat character will harness low levels of energy to control their movement to be bound and heavy with their head held low to clearly convey the shy nature of this character. Inspired by this character's rigidity, the actor will use a very confined space to further convey this character's desire to retreat from society and be by himself. Whereas the

actor playing the horse will contrastingly employ high levels of energy to bring great intensity to their movements so they can manipulate it to be flittery and free to demonstrate this character's cheerful, carefree nature. This actor will also employ a great breadth of space manipulating depth and proximity to highlight the energy of this character.

The group will then improvise with stylised movement to create a dramatic moment where the predator character will employ low levels of energy and bend and twist their arms above their head to symbolise the claws and fangs of predatory characters, further contorting and bending their legs to employ stylistic movement as they ominously move toward the two prey animals. The two prey animals will employ slightly higher levels of energy to demonstrate that they don't know that they are being stalked. This difference in energy creates an ominous performance dynamic which clearly conveys that something bad is about to occur, thus intending to elicit a sense of unnerving for the foreboding and suspenseful events about to occur.

Question 1e.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	6	9	34	33	17	2.5

The final question required students to analyse how they would refine their scene to make the intended impact on the audience clearer, again using space and energy.

In the preamble the student is told that the work created in the previous question is presented in an informal setting such as a classroom for feedback. Some lower-scoring responses were confused by this and thought the instruction was to set their performance in a classroom. This is a salient reminder to read the entire question carefully prior to responding.

The majority of responses made a clear alteration to the way they intended to communicate space and energy. Higher-scoring responses demonstrated a clear understanding of the refining process, and referred to how they acted on the feedback that the impact of their scene was not clear. They discussed specific choices they would make to refine their work and make the impact clearer and provided a strong understanding of how they could use space and energy to affect the actor–audience relationship.

Lower-scoring responses tended to either repeat the narrative and not acknowledge the refining process or had already been confused in the previous question and found themselves with little to work with.

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

The actors portraying the Rabbit, Dog and Tiger will refine their use of chorus moving around the space to become more impactful. By timing their circular movement around the Rat to be more synchronised, their sense of hatred and injustice toward the Rat will become more clear. The actor playing the Rat will refine their use of energy, from the feedback, to become more frantic and erratic, by darting their eyes around the place and responding with flinching movements to the synchronised movements of the others.

This will establish the Rat's sense of panic to strengthen the sense of sympathy shown by the audience.

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 10 items of stimulus from which they were encouraged to envisage a character, setting, idea or theme for their solo performance.

The preamble to the series of five parts to Question 2 instructed the students that their two characters are to know each other and that the solo performance they are devising will include a disagreement between these two characters and will communicate a specific theme or idea to the audience.

To assist the students in establishing a context they were to state the names of their two characters and identify two settings for their performance and stage one idea or theme. They were also instructed to state the performance style as being eclectic with aspects of another style of their choosing.

Students applied key knowledge from Unit 4 to show how they would explore and experiment with play-making techniques to create these 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.

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 indicated the question was not read in its entirety.

Question 2a.

Mark	0	1	Average
%	1	99	1.0

This is a single mark question, which asked students to offer a brief description of each of the two characters they have already named.

This was easily achieved by all students.

It is worth noting that quite a few students wrote far more for this question than space or the task required, which makes them run the risk of spending too much time on this one mark and potentially running out of time later in the exam.

Question 2b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	2	5	33	36	25	2.8

This question required students to describe how they would apply one transformation technique, using one or more expressive skills, to transform from their stated first character to the second character, demonstrating contrast between them. The preamble required that this be set in the first setting as stated by the student. The students were invited to state the transformation technique they intend to use.

The expectation of this question was for students to be able to describe how they complete their transformation technique as well as apply the expressive skill, and not just discuss the expressive skill and say that a transformation has happened.

Higher-scoring responses clearly described the moment of transformation as well as the process, rather than simply naming a transformation technique, and described how the chosen expressive skill would be manipulated to develop contrast. Better responses also integrated the contrast within the transformation not as an adjunct. This level of response also ensured that the setting is acknowledged for the character's transformation.

Lower-scoring responses didn't address all aspects of the task accurately, such as transforming from the second character to the first, or didn't clearly articulate how the two characters would contrast, or failed to identify an expressive skill.

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

Transformation technique: Snap.

The actor will use transformation technique of snapping to transform from 'The Boss' to 'The Worker'. As 'The Boss', the actor will make use of a tall gait, with open shoulders, straight legs and back and holds their head high to show power and authority. The actor leads with their hips while moving around the space as 'The Boss'. The actor will then snap into 'The Worker' by creating a contrasting posture, using a small gait, hunched back, bent knees and head held low to explore the powerless nature of this character, creating clear contrast.

Question 2c.

Mark	0	1	2	3	Average
%	5	39	42	14	1.7

This task invited students to consider a second key moment in the solo performance when the second character transforms through time to the moment of disagreement with the first character. The preamble stated that the emphasis of this moment is on the transformation of time. The question required the student to explain how the actor shows this through one of three dramatic elements supplied.

This was clearly a difficult question, which many students struggled with. Generally, the choice between mood, sound and tension was balanced with none more popular than another.

The better responses were able to use one of the listed dramatic elements to good effect to make that transformation clear with a simple and succinct explanation.

Lower-scoring responses got caught up in the narrative and transformed place or character rather than time.

It is worth noting that in more challenging questions like this, students often forget that it is a solo performance and make the mistake of implying multiple actors.

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

The actor, as 'Sunshine', will use mood to show transformation of time, beginning in present day as a 30 year old, with a serious mood synonymous with adult life, establishing via serious facial expression of a flat, pursed mouth, and singing: "Happy Thirtieth Birthday, to me." Then the actor will morph into the past by twirling in a circle and showing a bright optimistic mood of childhood, where 'Sunshine' is about 6, using lively energy with jumping and excited movements, a big grin and high-pitched voice, singing, "Happy Sixth Birthday to me!"

Question 2d.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	7	4	24	35	20	10	2.9

In this task students were asked to analyse how the actor shows a different transformation, this time transforming place from their selected Setting 1 to Setting 2. The preamble helped guide the student to ensure they described the correct transformation, but the challenge in the task was that students had to consider the application of the dramatic element of rhythm as well as the convention from one of the performance styles listed in the stimulus and apply a production area of sound design or set pieces.

Higher-scoring responses described the moment of transformation of place by clearly describing how both settings would be conveyed in the performance space, and then how the actor would transform between the two through the use of rhythm. These responses had made good choices about which conventions of their

chosen performance style suited their ideas and allowed their chosen production to enhance the successful transformation, ensuring these suited a solo performance.

Lower-scoring responses described a transformation of time or character, and/or did not address all aspects of the question. Their conventions were not congruent with their chosen performance style, and their production areas were unclear. It is worth stating that changing places is not the same as transforming places. A character who goes through a door into a new room has not transformed the place. The intention is always that the actor is demonstrating that the space has changed, thus the use of the suggested dramatic elements.

Some students lost sight of the solo performance and stated that both characters appeared. Some also made less significant but still inaccurate errors, by transforming from Setting 2 to Setting 1. The challenge with a question such as this is to ensure that students read the preamble and task carefully and ensure they address all its aspects.

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

Another moment in the performance will show the businessman father leaving his home to visit his son's school for a parent teacher interview. The set piece of a standing door and door frame will be used for this transformation of place. This use of fragmentary set piece is a convention of epic theatre. The father shall use three sound emitting movements when leaving the house, interacting with the door (twisting the key, creaking a crkkk sound with their mouth, turning the door knob and shutting the door, creating a sense of rhythm through this use of sound. The father will then exit through the door taking unevenly paced walking steps and holding his arms out in front of him as if to depict the disjointed rhythm of being stuck in traffic whilst driving. These steps will lead him to the initial starting point of the door, which he will knock on three times, referencing the three sound rhythm earlier established, to indicate that this is not the same door as his house door, but instead the door of a classroom in his son's school.

Question 2e.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	8	5	33	33	20	2.5

In the final question students were asked to script the direct-address by either of the characters they have created. The task asked for both dialogue and stage directions to ensure the actor can manipulate the relationship with the audience to evoke an emotional or intellectual response.

This was handled reasonably confidently. The majority of students easily conveyed dialogue and stage direction in their response, although the diverse approaches to layout suggested that many students were unfamiliar with the conventional format of most plays.

Higher-scoring responses made very good links with the idea/theme of the piece in this section. They also conveyed what they wanted the audience to think/feel. These responses also made it clear that this was the final moment of the solo performance. There was a clear moment where the actor–audience relationship was manipulated by eliciting a specific response from the audience.

Lower-scoring responses described the scene, rather than writing a script, or implied that there was more than one actor on the stage.