

DRAMA

<p>Paper 0411/01 Written Examination</p>
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General comments

Generally speaking, Centres are demonstrating an understanding of the paper that has improved over recent sessions, and candidates are showing greater knowledge of some of the technical aspects of performance. However, there remain significant gaps in certain areas (see later) and some Centres appear to be hampered by a lack of subject-specific knowledge. However, in some Centres there was a noticeable improvement in the appropriate use of performing arts vocabulary.

The responses to the questions about the devised work continued to display a wide range of ability but this was slightly less apparent than in previous sessions. While many candidates demonstrated the ability to link theory to practice, there were still too many candidates who were reliant on narrative or anecdotal content. As always, candidates who planned their time and strategy carefully produced confident responses. Those who did not had a tendency to ramble or repeat the same, often unremarkable, points pertaining to performance.

Examiners remarked on the fact that in some cases the quality of candidates' handwriting gave cause for concern and Centres are requested to encourage their candidates to write legibly. Examiners were often obliged to spend an unnecessary amount of time working labouriously through the scripts of individual candidates trying to make sense of handwriting. Candidates whose work is illegible are self-penalising, since credit cannot be awarded to ideas that are indiscernible.

There was a sense that, in some cases, practical work was insufficiently realised or inadequately developed. A few Centres appeared not to have completed all of the practical aspects of the syllabus and, in some cases, there was evidence that candidates simply lacked an understanding of key dramatic ideas. There is no doubt that, particularly in the case of questions relating to the devised work, the strongest responses came from those Centres where the ideas had been explored fully in performance so that candidates had the opportunity to reflect critically on their own actual experience of creating drama. The few Centres that seemed to be trying to 'double up' using one or two approaches to encompass all aspects of the paper are doing their candidates a grave disservice. It is appreciated that teachers are under considerable pressure to deliver a wide range of outcomes but it is essential for them to realise that candidates at this level lack the ability to project their thinking into a scenario of 'virtual performance' and those who attempt this rarely produce answers which offer insight into text or method.

There was a marked improvement in the way candidates approached the discussion of technical issues although there continued to be evidence of inadequate understanding about the nature of lighting and how it is actually used in the theatre not only to illuminate but also to create atmosphere. This is often a subtle process where the success of the lighting is judged by its being virtually 'invisible' to an audience.

There were still many candidates who self-penalised simply because they had not read the question properly. Candidates must attempt to answer the question set rather than one they wish to answer. A few candidates attempted all the questions in **Sections B** and **C** and in such cases benefit was awarded to the answers which addressed the greatest number of assessment criteria. Naturally, because of the time required to produce a strong answer for a 25-mark question, such candidates were unlikely to score above single figures for each section. Centres are encouraged to counsel candidates in this respect before they sit the examination.

Comments on specific questions**Section A****Questions 1 – 5 *The Memorandum*****Question 1**

Many candidates were able to engage with the question and gave good responses. Where marks were lost, this was due to a suggestion being made without referring to the effect it would have or vice versa. There were also examples of vague responses that lacked specific detail, for example recommending the use of 'gesture' without detailing precisely what this meant, or describing the intended effect as 'dramatic' without further explanation. A few candidates seemed to have fundamentally misunderstood the significance of the playwright's intention and chose to give Ferdinand Pillar his own lines.

Question 2

Most candidates were able to offer a suitable suggestion. However, in some cases too little detail was given, for example, merely suggesting that lighting should be 'bright' or 'dim'. Supporting evidence for suggestions was, also, often either far too vague or so complicated that it obscured the intention. Popular answers included the creation of the naturalistic effect of an office or of daylight through the use of a simple white 'wash'. Many candidates highlighted the boredom and mundane feel of the office or the importance of Gross as the boss. Some delightfully original suggestions featured the use of 'faulty' fluorescent lighting tubes which flicker irritatingly as Gross tries to make sense of the memorandum.

Question 3

This question produced a mixed response. Some candidates simply gave a running commentary on the speech itself but failed to make any specific references about how the comic effects might be brought out in performance. Others ignored the speech entirely and concentrated on achieving comic effects through such diverse means as the choice of costume and props, the introduction of slapstick routines or the invention of additional dialogue. Some candidates did make performance suggestions linked to the text but their understanding of comedy was less than convincing. A common approach was to identify clearly three points in the text but then to overlook the need to explain how humour could be created. A number of candidates limited themselves by selecting, for example, three vocal elements or three physical elements relating to the character of Lear rather than demonstrating an understanding of the breadth of possibilities suggested by the text. The best responses were closely related to the text and cited a range of appropriate suggestions that included both physical and vocal elements and specifically acknowledged the importance of timing in the delivery of comedy.

Question 4

This was a very successful question for candidates of all abilities. Most candidates were well prepared for a question of this type and generally provided imaginative and well-justified suggestions. Some weaker candidates merely described appropriate costumes, without giving any reasons for their ideas, while others gave vague suggestions, such as 'formal' clothing with insufficient detail as to what was meant by this expression. There was a slight tendency for some candidates to attempt to justify their suggestions with reasoning that was not entirely evident from the text, including some highly unusual suggestions that were not supported with sufficient explanation.

Question 5

Very few candidates were able to access marks in the highest range in this question which required a perceptive understanding of the significance of Josef Gross's speech and how to maximise its effect in performance. Although many candidates showed an understanding of its significance at that point in the drama, the discussion stopped short of showing an understanding of its importance within the context of the extract as a whole. An awareness of practical solutions in how the part might be played was also a little disappointing in many cases; few candidates managed to stretch beyond the 'show anger', 'scream with frustration' kind of response. Those who did achieve the higher range of marks in this six-mark question demonstrated a more subtle approach by offering considerable insight into the text itself and a range of sophisticated possibilities for the development of the role at this point.

Questions 6 – 8 *Devised work*

Question 6

It was seldom clear whether the word 'climax' was understood, and a sense of structure was rarely seen in the responses. Candidates were able to describe what happened, often in great detail, but its effectiveness in performance was not always communicated. For many the climax was the only piece of action in the piece or the moment of revelation (often physical) that communicated the most. There was virtually no evidence of psychological climax, for example, or one that was created through means other than narrative or plot.

Question 7

Candidates were able in most cases to provide a clear statement of message but many found it difficult to explain how this was communicated, often reverting to a narrative step-by-step version of what happened rather than an explanation of style and intent.

Question 8

Some candidates gave a simple statement of what the 'flag' stood for, but therefore limited themselves to only one mark. Some Centres seemed to have had a much clearer notion of what 'the flag' could mean and it was here that the richest and more complex responses emerged.

Section B

Questions 9 – 11 *The Memorandum*

Question 9

This was a popular choice and most candidates showed good understanding of the role of Ballas. In a significant number of cases the question was misread and candidates gave an analysis of Gross – this was unfortunate. Where the response was less effective, this was due to candidates giving matter-of-fact statements about Ballas's character with little discussion, linked with only vague references to the text itself. In order to access the higher bands of the mark scheme, it was necessary for candidates to identify **three** distinct points in the text and use them in context to analyse the character of Ballas. The best candidates were able to show links between their chosen sections and to demonstrate the development of the character. However, some excellent character analyses were marred by a failure to discuss how the role could be realised in performance. The best responses combined detailed reference to the text with the demonstration of a wide range of practical suggestions as to how the part should be played.

Question 10

Candidates who chose this question often lacked a full understanding of the quotation. As a result, some candidates proceeded to go off on a tangent unrelated to the question. This was often manifested in essays which betrayed a misunderstanding of communism and the very specific period with which it is allied. On the other hand, there were a few highly sophisticated responses which demonstrated a clear parallel between ideology and dramatic writing and, as a consequence, were able to present lucid and workable suggestions for practical application in production.

Question 11

At best, candidates showed great imagination exploring a wide variety of practical solutions which produced creative and imaginative scenarios. A few candidates explored performance space, props and action without relating them to food, drink etc. and therefore limited their access to the mark scheme. In many cases candidates showed a lack of awareness of how comedic effects might be produced. A number of responses highlighted the Absurdist genre and were able to make suggestions appropriate to the genre, although in a number of these imagination was stretched to the point that recommendations were unlikely to be workable.

Section C

Questions 12 – 14 *Devised work*

Question 12

This was not a popular question, but where it was chosen, it elicited a disappointing response as few candidates seemed to understand what was meant by 'style of dialogue'. Most responses failed to recognise the need to explore how dialogue is used and its effect. Many answers were superficial stating it was 'funny' or 'dramatic' with little to support these claims.

Question 13

Many candidates simply did not understand the term 'audience reaction'. In some cases there was explanation of reaction but it was unclear how this was achieved; in others clear intent was set out but then it was difficult to assess what had been done to achieve it. Many candidates failed to build on their answer to **Question 7** leaving superficial responses lacking detail or specific analysis of process, content, style or characterisation. Evaluation of success also appeared to be very simplistic, often contained in a sentence or two, more a narration of events than analysis of outcome. Anecdotal response such as 'a friend overheard a member of the audience saying...' is best avoided unless this forms some part of a specific audience survey which was not what the question is about. Performers are encouraged to learn how to gauge audience reaction during the performance and link this to their intention.

Question 14

This proved a popular and successful question. A few candidates misread the question and offered a limited explanation of each individual design aspect rather than a detailed examination of **one** specific area. Candidates who did this were limited by default to a maximum of 10 marks. In some cases, having identified very clearly what they consider to be the main design aspect, candidates continued to explore a range of possible scenarios without specific application to their own piece of work (this is particularly apparent where the work has not been produced and physically performed). Technical understanding was often very patchy. Again it is important to consider carefully evaluative comments regarding the success of the performance aspect rather than leave this process to brief comment at the end.

DRAMA

Paper 0411/02

Coursework

General comments

As in previous sessions, Moderators reported on their generally favourable impression of the overall standard of performance and, in particular, the quality of the best work since this demonstrated a mature and sensitive understanding of how to perform to an audience.

Video/DVD recordings

The quality of DVD recordings improved as Centres became increasingly familiar with the appropriate technology, particularly the skills necessary to produce a chaptered DVD. Where this was the case, the moderation process ran extremely smoothly and Moderators were able to locate the sample candidates easily. There was, however, considerable diversity in the format in which recordings were submitted and it is hoped that this will quickly become standardised in future sessions.

The DVD format often proved complicated this session as some Centres submitted files in a variety of formats that caused problems locating appropriate equipment to read them. Other Centres failed to 'finalise' the DVD meaning that it was impossible to recover the files at all. Other discs played only in computers and there was a range of formats that did not play at all and had to be returned to the Centre for re-formatting.

For reference, the following points should be noted with regard to the production of DVDs for future sessions:

- Mini-DVDs taken directly from cameras, rather than standard-size DVDs, are **not** acceptable
- DVDs should be double-checked to ensure that they play on a standard DVD player (and not merely on a computer)
- DVDs should, if possible, be chaptered (as mentioned above)
- MPEG or wavefiles are **not** acceptable

A minority of Centres submitted recordings in VHS format. Some videos were damaged in transit and Centres are requested to pack the material carefully to avoid unnecessary delay to the moderation process.

Candidates should be identified prior to each piece and identified clearly on the accompanying Individual Candidate Mark Sheet with identifying features clearly stated. A sheet containing candidate photographs was included by some Centres and this was most helpful to the moderation process. The identification of candidates was helped considerably by those Centres who had candidates say their name and candidate numbers before each performance, and was also aided by chaptered DVDs.

There were a few very poor-quality recordings with mumbled, unintelligible candidate identifications. Additionally, a few pieces were edited badly clipping the identification of the candidates. Sound quality was frequently an issue, especially with outdoor performances. Recording the pieces with natural light behind the performance sometimes threw the performers into silhouette and this made it difficult to identify them. Likewise, recording from the back of the performance space often recorded more of the audience than the intended performance.

Documentation

There was an improvement in the overall quality of the administration in terms of the accuracy of the arithmetic on the Individual Candidate Mark Sheets. Staff at most Centres had noted the need not to round candidates' marks up or down until the very end of the process. There was still a small minority of Centres who did not heed this, however, and as a result several of their candidates had inaccurate marks submitted, which needed to be corrected before the moderation process could commence.

The majority of the documentation was very well organised with the new forms making the whole process considerably more straightforward. A handful of Centres used the previous (obsolete) forms, and are reminded that these have now been superseded. Some of the larger Centres did not identify the sample or collate the marks and work of those candidates separately, which meant that the Moderator had to work out which candidates should be in the sample before the moderation process could commence. This was an infringement of the syllabus requirements, which clearly states that the sample of six candidates should be chosen by the Centre and included on the moderation video/DVD.

Most forms were very well-presented, with some Centres word-processing the documentation (the forms are available in Word format from CIE). This made them easy to read, which was in contrast to some other forms where teachers had almost illegible writing such that their comments were very nearly indecipherable. The quality of information provided on the forms was generally good, although some Centres did not always include essential information. For each performance, it would also be helpful if the following could be provided:

- The name of the playwright as well as the title of the extract (text-based) **or** the category of dramatic stimulus chosen (original devised)
- The point in the play from where the extract is taken (text-based)
- The character(s) played by each candidate
- A recent photograph of each candidate, and a description of what he or she is wearing
- In the case of work by local playwrights, which may not be readily available in the UK, a copy of the script

Most Centres were efficient and produced accurate and detailed comments. The majority used the assessment objectives to focus their comments and these provided the most useful guidance for the Moderator. Some comments consisted of little more than general praise of the candidate's efforts and these inevitably rendered the assessment vague and too personal. Specific comments on vocal and movement skills helped considerably.

Other administration and/or technical issues

Some technical aspects such as continuous use of blackouts and incidental 'muzak' playing throughout performances hindered rather than enhanced the presentations. Some music was used in a very clichéd way in the manner of background music to a film, and this always distracted from the focus of the piece, which should be the performance. Mood-enhancing music at appropriate moments was sometimes able to enhance a performance but is usually used in drama at the end and beginning of a scene or within a scene where a character has actually turned on a radio or TV.

General performance issues

Once again it should be reiterated that this is not a cinematic acting course. Candidates should also be reminded that their work should be conceived as being for a live audience rather than TV or film.

There were a number of other performance issues. A significant number of candidates lacked the maturity to be able to handle long silences and pauses. There were a few performances that were punctuated by "corpsing" or expletives when the candidates went wrong – displaying a definite lack of rudimentary stagecraft and discipline. Ultimately, the best work was presented in front of a live audience, which was in keeping with the underlying philosophy of the course and often meant that performances were lifted as the performers responded to the feedback from the audience.

Text-based performances

The scripted work was dealt with well and the majority of candidates performed enthusiastically, even when their acting skills were modest. Generally, candidates had enough exposure time and they handled the material well. Most Centres chose texts that were appropriate to the level of their candidates, and this year there seemed to be more Centres tackling Shakespeare, particularly for the individual pieces. Weaker candidates frequently struggled with texts that were beyond their ability. A common challenge for most candidates was the assimilation of standard pronunciation of words so that the lines were both meaningful and delivered with feeling. There were some old-fashioned declamatory performances which were very mechanistic and showed little real understanding of what was being conveyed either in terms of the meaning of the dialogue or the emotional power of the work. Centres are advised that the 'Talking Heads' approach was variable in allowing candidates success.

It was refreshing to note that a much smaller number of Centres selected screenplays for their text-based performances, and it is stressed again that these are **not** acceptable. The correct choice of material is from plays written for stage performance. The desire to offer film and television acting was most prevalent in individual work where the intention was often to replicate the original screen version. Centres are reminded once again to steer their candidates away from film and television acting and repertoire.

There was a noticeable increase in the number of candidates offering text-based pieces from the genre of musical theatre. Singing skills were not assessed for their own sake, but whilst these were not the focus, Moderators expected that candidates who offer Musical Theatre should be able to sing if the chosen extract demanded it.

Whilst it was good to see candidates considering performance values, there were instances where the emphasis on props often overshadowed the craft of the performance, and over-complicated sets undermined the qualities that the course is seeking to assess.

Examples of text-based extracts performed in 2009

Playwright	Play
Abelman, Paul	<i>She's Dead</i>
Albee, Edward	<i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf</i>
Ayckbourn, Alan	<i>Absent Friends; Between Mouthfuls</i>
Bont, Ad de	<i>Mirad, A Boy From Bosnia</i>
Chekhov, Anton	<i>The Cherry Orchard</i>
Delaney, Shelagh	<i>A Taste of Honey</i>
Elton, Ben	<i>Popcorn</i>
Fugard, Athol	<i>Master Harold and the Boys; No-Good Friday</i>
Godber, John	<i>Shakers</i>
Gogol, Nikolai	<i>The Government Inspector</i>
Hansbury, Lorraine	<i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>
Horvath, Odon von	<i>Don Juan Comes Back from the War</i>
Hwang, David Henry	<i>FOB; M. Butterfly</i>
Keatley, Charlotte	<i>My Mother Said I Never Should</i>
Laurents, Arthur	<i>West Side Story</i>
Marchant, Tony	<i>The Lucky Ones</i>
Miller, Arthur	<i>Death of a Salesman</i>
Molière, Jean-Baptiste	<i>Tartuffe</i>
Pinter, Harold	<i>A Kind of Alaska; The Collection</i>
Priestley, J. B.	<i>An Inspector Calls</i>
Russell, Willy	<i>Blood Brothers</i>
Shakespeare, William	<i>Othello; Romeo and Juliet</i>
Shaw, George Bernard	<i>Pygmalion; Saint Joan</i>
Sherriff, R. C.	<i>Journey's End</i>
Simon, Neil	<i>The Odd Couple</i>
Sophocles	<i>Antigone</i>
Stoppard, Tom	<i>The Real Inspector Hound</i>
Wertenbaker, Timberlake	<i>Our Country's Good</i>
Wilde, Oscar	<i>A Woman of No Importance</i>
Williams, Tennessee	<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i>

Devised performances

As mentioned every year in this report, the dramatic stimuli issued in the Pre-release material for Paper 1 **must not** be used as the basis of the practical submission for Paper 2. CIE reserves the right to refuse to award marks to coursework that duplicates a task set for the Written Paper. Additionally, it is now a requirement for Centres to identify from which of the options in the syllabus the devised work is taken.

Some of the devised work was very strong and creative but the success of these pieces often rested in the choice of subject matter. The strongest devised work demonstrated a personal engagement with drama where candidates had chosen to focus on themes and issues that were obviously relevant to them. It was good to see such a willingness to engage with contemporary social and political issues such as the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko, and also historical context, such as the Mau Mau times in pre-independence Kenya.

As in previous sessions, there were some fine examples of dramatically effective political theatre and those who had clearly thought through their relationship with the audience were much more successful in delivering strong work. There were some stunning examples of performance work, which fully embraced the features of the chosen style and there were some particularly effective pieces of Physical Theatre work that showed a maturity beyond the candidates' years.

Weaker candidates often seemed more comfortable with the text-based work and found the devised work intimidating and appeared ill-at-ease at times. There were some really quite awkward performances that were predictable and wooden, and seemed to be in danger of breaking down at any minute. There were some extremely naive and immature pieces that lacked any real sense of form and development and seemed to be improvised. The weakest devised work was unstructured and rambling, and Centres are encouraged to enforce the time restrictions for each piece to enable candidates to avoid these pitfalls. This could include more attention to creating a tighter structure and eliminating complicated transitions. The same points applied to the weaker devised individual pieces, which often suffered from starting well but losing their sense of direction and lacking a clear conclusion.