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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Drama and Theatre (9DR0)
Component 3: Theatre Makers in Practice

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Introduction

This is the seventh year of examination for this Component (9DR0/03) Component 3: Theatre Makers in Practice.

The component takes the form of a two and a half hour written examination and requires candidates to consider, analyse and evaluate how different theatre makers create impact. Throughout the component, candidates will have studied how production ideas and dramatic elements are communicated to an audience from the perspective of a director, a performer and a designer as well as an informed member of an audience themselves. There are three areas to be covered:

Section A: A live theatre evaluation (20 Marks)

Section B: Page to Stage: realisation of a complete performance text (18 marks + 18 marks = 36 marks)

Section C: Interpreting one complete performance text, in light of one practitioner for a contemporary audience (24 marks).

Section A: Live theatre evaluation

Section A gives candidates a choice of questions which are designed to give opportunities to discuss performance elements as well as design elements. At the heart of the question is a statement that invites a personal response from the candidate, whilst analysing what they have seen or heard, and then going on to evaluate it. For this section, candidates are expected to see a **live theatre production**. In the unlikely event of this not being possible, centres had to request permission from Drama Assessment to see a digital performance as the live theatre demand is an Ofqual requirement. It is really disappointing to read that some candidates are still writing about digital performances which is a different medium to being in the same room (theatre/performance space) as the performers. It was even more disappointing to read that some candidates stated that they had seen the digital performance they were writing about, many times, which means that we are not comparing like with like and this is something that we are concerned about.

One very positive improvement this year was there were very few candidates writing about musicals or dance shows that contained no dialogue. If candidates do opt for this route, they are unable to meet the required demands of this Drama and Theatre specification which is quite clear that sung-through productions or productions without the spoken word are not allowed. There was also a significant reduction in candidates writing about performance texts from Section B or Section C which are forbidden texts and as such, have to be awarded zero marks. This has been emphasised in a number of places over recent years and our newly formatted forms required centres to state all their text choices across all 3 components and this has had a really positive impact on reducing duplication and the use of forbidden texts.

In 2024, Question 2 was more popular than Question 1. Popular productions for both questions included many that have been touring for several years now such as *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, *Things I Know to be True*, *Frankenstein*, *Life of Pi*, *Drive your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, and *Othello*.

2:22 *A Ghost Story*, *Kin*, *Bluebeard* and *The House of Bernarda Alba* were popular newcomers.

Question 1 **'Live theatre should make an audience laugh, not think.'**

This was the least popular of the two questions. Some candidates focused on one element of the statement (either 'think' or 'laugh') and these were not as successful as the candidates who approached the statement as a whole, making connections with theatre that had made them both think and laugh, or indeed, theatre that did not make them laugh but that this was not an issue as it made them think (or vice versa). Many candidates chose to suggest that laughter is also a way of engaging in the thought process that theatre offers and could create a sophisticated line of response to support that idea. Very few candidates suggested 'laugh' led only to escapism and the majority saw that laughter in theatrical productions serves more than one purpose.

Some candidates had a prepared answer for this and did not engage with the statement, rather, focused on how entertaining or engaging the performance was.

Most successful answers had the statement woven throughout the response with well-chosen and detailed examples from performance in support. Analysis and evaluation were frequently personal, insightful and enthusiastic in these answers, allowing candidates to really give a strong sense of how the production had impacted on them.

Overall, however, it seemed that very few failed to refer to the statement. Many responses offered a good balance between performance elements and the necessary analysis and evaluation of these elements. This meant many responses were placed in the assured level and higher. Higher level responses were also then able to return to the wording of the question and further analyse or evaluate from that perspective.

It was noted that some candidates struggled with describing the event only and/or forgetting to weigh up the examples used in the light of the 'laugh not think' element of the question – this limited some responses as they tended towards reporting the event, rather than looking at the specifics of the statement and where there was analysis and evaluation, this was not necessarily in relation to the statement.

Where candidates appeared to struggle it was, at times, because they lacked terminology and so were attempting to outline the performance elements without the vocabulary to do so.

It is clear that many candidates have three key moments clearly prepared in their notes. Weaker responses tended to just copy out these 3 moments with no reference at all to the statement whereas stronger responses made their notes work for them by successfully addressing the statement alongside the detail from their 3 key moments.

Question 2 **'There should be more emphasis on technology rather than actors when creating a live performance today.'**

This was more popular than question 1 possibly based on the word 'technology' which gave a very specific focus.

The best answers really grappled with the statement and most referenced the symbiotic nature of collaboration between actors/designers. The less successful answers only focused on one area (design or acting) and the more successful answers were able to refer to examples where both were used, together, for impact.

Successful responses took a reasoned response and usually (but not necessarily) suggested that a collaboration between technology and actors was the best example of live theatre. This also enabled candidates to engage successfully with the notion of theatre makers and the corresponding vocabulary seen to support that analysis/evaluation led to higher level responses.

Personalisation was well used to reflect the communal experience of live theatre, and this usually supported higher level responses.

Some candidates struggled when they used a 'Netflix generation style argument' as they positioned themselves as audience members who could be distracted by 'pretty lights' as

this then meant they either over-described or undervalued their own understanding of what was being created in front of them. This approach limited some responses.

Candidates tended to work through the performance citing which episodes had technological elements and which didn't and which worked best. A few more successful ones decided immediately that the actor was 'queen' and went out to prove this. However, unlike with statement one, there was a lack of direct evaluation of the statement itself.

Well-prepared candidates could convey very specifically ways in which technology (lighting/hydraulics/sound/SFX) was tailored to the needs of the production and the thrill of the entertainment on offer.

Weaker candidates took a lot of time to struggle through their argument and seemed to feel the need to examine key moments in only one aspect of the statement to bolster conclusions.

Overall, centres are preparing candidates well for Section A and it seems to be question timing, overuse of prepared notes (and so not connecting to the question) and limited subject specific vocabulary which hampers responses the most, but overall responses were successful.

Observations/Tips for Success from examiners

The best answers focussed on detailed moments from the performance and constantly referred back to the essence of the question/statement

Candidates don't need to 'tell us the story'- it is the *how* and the *why* not the *what*; they should avoid complaining about the price of theatre tickets, the unreliability of public transport, the successful tour and the disadvantages of being stuck in the 'gods'.

The best responses bring the performance to life whilst addressing the statement – in such a manner that if I have seen it too, I'm thinking – "that's an excellent observation – I had not thought of it that way" or if I haven't seen it– I'm thinking – "I wish I had seen this!" The choice of the performance seen can make all the difference.

A well-chosen, relevant quote from one of the performance's theatre-makers, a succinct point about pre-visit research and expectations met/changed, putting the performance within a context of wider cultural events and current affairs – these suggest an informed and prepared member of the audience.

In order to gain higher marks candidates needed to give clear examples from the performance seen, whilst analysing and evaluating these key moments. The statement needed to be referred to throughout and connected to the key moments. There needed to be a personal response throughout.

Section B: Page to Stage: Realising a Performance text

Candidates must practically explore a performance text to consider how theatrical ideas might be realised in performance and communicated to an audience. They must write about one of the texts below:

Accidental Death of An Anarchist

Colder Than Here

Equus

Fences

Machinal

That Face.

The texts cannot be taken into the examination room. Candidates are given an unseen extract which they should then place at the heart of their response.

This section of the examination gives no choice of question: candidates have to respond as both a performer and as a designer.

Fences is still the least popular text but without actual data, the other texts all appear to be equally well used.

A clear working knowledge of the performance text is essential to success and many candidates had an impressive idea of exactly how they would stage their chosen performance text and had well-crafted responses to being both a performer and a designer. The weakest aspect in Section B was candidates not referring to the rest of the performance text, they nearly all made good use of the extract but for many, that was as far as the response got.

Question 3 **Use of vocal skills.**

Question 3 clearly states that they are in the role of a performer ('As a performer...') and the majority of candidates are now writing in the first person although there can be a tendency to move into the role of a Director as they describe the characteristics/motive/feelings of the character, rather than being the character.

A number of candidates focused on two characters – Martha and Henry or Dysart and Alan, for example. The best answers incorporated the playwright's intentions and style of the play, with candidates drawing on how their performance skills would impact the audience. More limited answers did not refer to the performance text as a whole or struggled when only referring to one character, even though this was an option.

Most candidates focused on vocal skills in their answer successfully, but there were some answers that did not refer to the extract or the focus of the question and this was self-penalising. Some candidates also seemed to have 'prepared' answers for this question which was more generally based on the performance text as a whole, rather than the specific extract and question focus.

For detailed responses seen there was terminology surrounding voice used with fluency and depth in a notable number of cases. The Level 4 and Level 5 responses were also able to reflect on how voice would work with other performance skills such as gesture, facial expression and proxemics, for example. It was clear that, in preparation for this section, candidates had been given the terminology needed to succinctly outline what they would do and why they would do it – so comparatively few responses struggled.

When struggles did appear – this was when candidates wrote a character study or when they relied on too much context. Candidates that struggled want to explain narrative or genre and spent too much time doing this – by necessity this limited the time left to get into the core content of the question.

Responses that were fluent were able to focus on the words – *enhance meaning* but it appeared that many candidates had missed the opportunity to make this explicit in their responses which would have rounded off some lines of argument for how and why vocal skills were being used.

References to the whole play were better as they more concretely connected to the question with phrases such as 'this would juxtapose against...' or 'As a performer I would also use

this in...' and then the response would go on to discuss the alternative moment with relevance and depth. Overall, it appears that candidates have moved away from simply mentioning the token alternative moment in the play and nearly everyone wrote from an 'I' perspective.

As in previous series, question 3 tended to be answered more successfully than question 4 although there is a noticeable improvement in Q4. Assured and sophisticated responses tended to be able to cross-reference other areas of the performance text in support of decisions made in the given extract rather than writing about it in isolation.

Question 4 **Use of theatrical space.**

The focus of this question was open to interpretation depending on the choice of text studied.

Some candidates focussed on set and props within the space whereas others took a broader view and looked at how the actors would use the designed space. There was an impressive use of technical and subject specific language used across all texts. Theatrical space was interpreted in several ways – stage space, the audience relationship with it - these included platforms, levels – the bed in 'That Face', for example and heights of tables and chairs in 'Machinal'- entrances and exits and genre specific choices.

The assured responses were able to discuss in detail the role of the designer to create the stage space through configurations, set, props and how the extract engages with the space. The best answers reflected the style of the piece and/or the playwright's intentions – e.g. expressionism with 'Machinal', 'Commedia Dell' Arte' with 'Accidental Death...' Some strong answers reflected on how the whole space would be used – focusing on the use of set, costume, sound design, lighting for example. As with question 3, the best answers really focused on the performance text as a whole and were able to make connections with the extract and other specific scenes/moments. Some candidates used diagrams or sketches, but these were rarely useful at illustrating or demonstrating a point. Where detailed responses were seen, the word *impact* was crucial to the success of the higher-level responses. Other successful responses included set design and the actors use of the set, lighting design to define theatrical space used and the audience perspective of this. Proxemics dominated in a number of responses, but this did not always limit the marks on offer where examples often drew on set or props to help explore the impact of the use of theatrical space on the audience.

When work did struggle – it was lack of reference to impact or a lack of terminology which limited the responses given. As previously mentioned for this section as a whole, a few responses relied on too much context before getting into the core content of the question.

Observations/Tips for Success

Avoid lengthy context about the writer's life or the play's 'story'- the examiner knows these

As examiners we need to know that your ideas fit the WHOLE PLAY. Too many candidates treated the extract in isolation, especially with the design aspects

It is so important to refer to other moments from the rest of the play, this is embodied in the Mark Scheme and allows the candidate to show further knowledge and understanding

Be clear about your role: As a Performer I will... or As a Designer I will use ...

There is no need to reference practitioners in section B, remain focussed on the specific task

Section C: Theatre Makers in Practice: Interpreting a Performance Text

Candidates must practically explore a complete performance text in the light of a chosen practitioner in order to outline and justify their ideas for a production concept. They must write about one of the texts below:

Antigone

Doctor Faustus *

Hedda Gabler

Lysistrata *

The Maids

The School for Scandal

The Tempest

Waiting for Godot

Woyzeck. *

* These are carry-over texts from the legacy qualification and are available as a free download from the Edexcel website. It is recommended that students use these editions.

The practitioner must come from one of the list below:

Artaud

Brecht

Berkoff

Complicite

Kneehigh

Joan Littlewood

Punchdrunk

Stanislavski.

Candidates take in to the examination room a clean copy of their chosen text. They have to complete either Q5 or Q6. Question 5 was more popular than Question 6 this year. The most popular texts were Woyzeck, Lysistrata, Antigone and Hedda Gabler. The least popular were The Maids, The Tempest, The School for Scandal and Waiting For Godot with

Dr. Faustus falling somewhere in the middle. Many examiners didn't see any items at all from the least popular texts.

There were a lot of very detailed and well-developed responses in this section.

Some candidates moved a long way from the playwright's original intentions – as far as we understand them – across the texts. Some of the more extreme examples of concepts were negated at times by candidates referring to them in the opening paragraph, but then not mentioning them again.

In responses to both questions, there seemed to be more evidence this series of candidates not referring to the play as a whole. Often, the OPC was referenced effectively in relation to the specific demand of the question but ideas around the extract were then presented in isolation.

For both Questions examiners reported that the simpler concepts worked better than more outlandish ones as candidates often either mentioned this concept once or struggled to sustain their ideas when considered against the demands of the extract. Many 'simple' concepts such as poverty, futility of war, gender and class inequality, good vs evil, mental health, trauma, rich/poor gap, abuse of the vulnerable are all focused and enabled candidates to work with practitioner methods and the demands of the question with more consistent focus. The adage *less is more* appears to hold true here when looking at the range of marks awarded against the mark scheme.

For several candidates there seemed to be confusion over the words *staged* and *set*, as in *my production will be staged in...* or *my production will be set in...* This meant examiners had to make decisions about the use of subject specific terminology.

Some candidates referred to *my play*. This is, of course, not the case – it is the playwright's play, the candidate's production of the play.

Question 5

This was the more popular question in Section C. Candidates earning marks in Level 4 and Level 5 were able to make strong connections with how voice and gesture could be used throughout the extract and the play as a whole.

Many candidates made connections with Brecht's 'gestus' and/or the use of voice/sound in relation to Artaud or Punchdrunk. Some candidates did not refer to the focus of the question and there was much more of a sense of 'prepared answers' for this section, more than in Section A and Section B.

Candidates gave balanced responses overall. Where they did not this was often because of time management issues, it is assumed.

There were some imaginative settings, particularly when using Punchdrunk as the practitioner, an example being the Norwood Cemetery and Catacombs to explore Faustus, for example. There were still some settings/concepts that seemed out of kilter with the original intentions of the playwright – setting plays in highly improbable locations.

Examiners reported that the issue with core content was notable in the responses that struggled in this question. Responses that struggled would often not get to the *voice and gesture* elements until 3 or 4 pages into the response. What occurred before this was often an outlining of all the candidate's ideas about set and costume, for example, showing they understood the OPC and/or practitioner methodology and setting out and justifying the chosen concept, and very few of these pages connected this knowledge to the question requirements. By necessity this had an impact on the amount of time that could be then used to address the highlighting of voice and gesture.

Successful candidates appeared to address the specific demands of the question quickly and related the wider context to the impact this would have on highlighting *voice and gesture*. This included ideas about theatrical venue, audience positioning and directorial intentions. Terminology was also usually successful and reflected the engagement in practitioner methods to illuminate the importance of directorial intentions. This meant that detail and depth of ideas about voice and gesture could be communicated and sat within a wider framework of concept, relevant OPC and practitioner methods.

Examiners noted that most responses to this question across the texts were able to balance *voice and gesture* examples which helped with the depth and breadth of the response overall.

Question 6

This was less frequently answered than Question 5 but there were many very imaginative accurate responses so candidates that chose this question did so with knowledge and enthusiasm. When answered well, candidates were able to make distinct connections between the use of sound and the practitioner – live music and song for a Brechtian inspired piece for example or live actor musicians for a Kneehigh influenced piece. Less successful answers tended to focus on how the actors used voice, rather than sound as a design aspect. Some candidates referred to secondary practitioners (Artaud when discussing 'Punchdrunk' for example) though this was not always relevant.

Punchdrunk, Brecht, Berkoff and Artaud were the most commonly used practitioners, with Artaud often the least successful. Ideas were often both imaginative and practical with many candidates able to access the higher marks through their responses. There was more a sense of a fully rounded performance concept with responses to this question when compared to Q5.

There were core content issues – exactly as noted in Q5 – with pre-prepared ideas simply written out in full and not related to the specific demands of the question.

Successful candidates were able here to use theatrical venue – or created venues for Punchdrunk-inspired responses, audience positioning and directorial intentions to frame their responses and included relevant OPC and examples of practitioner methodologies.

Responses used recorded digital sound and soundscaping (ranging from echoes/reverb, distortion and amplification, human and machine-like sounds), live music or live band on stage or within the pit, performer and chorus vocals as well as use of mics, subwoofers and performer movement to create vibration.

For example, for Brecht, a folk band on stage, creating distancing underscoring, effects, announcements, juxtaposing music and lyrics etc.

Punchdrunk featured well here too with their use of soundscapes, surround sound and music and Complicite through microphones, voice overs, sound effects, live video, and to a lesser extent, Artaud although this tended to be 'loud noise' to assault the audience, although ideas of amplified ticking clocks, breathing, heartbeats, screeching violins were all feasible.

Some candidates struggled a little with terminology but on the whole, this was a successful set of responses.

