

Drama

2012 Chief Assessor's Report



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2012 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

OVERVIEW

Chief Assessors' reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Group Presentation

The group presentations were diverse, whether students had studied a dramatic innovator or a play-script. Students were generally strong in the area of knowledge and understanding but required more scaffolding and depth in the areas of application and analysis. The presentation format varied according to whether the students had studied a dramatic innovator or a play-script. Those who studied the latter often presented a small scene and then discussed their dramatic decision and choices as a practitioner, actor, director, or designer. It was to the student's advantage to adopt a clearly defined practitioner role to help to focus the study. Those who studied a dramatic innovator generally presented a short performance in the style of their innovator, which assisted many students to clearly demonstrate application of the practitioner's theories and ideas. These presentations included stage performances, instructional videos, and short films. In some groups, students took the role of designers, writers, and directors. Students did well when they spoke about the application of their chosen innovator's theories.

Careful planning of the presentation is vital to ensure performance standards are met and that the presentation adheres to the required time limit. Some students produced a product and then spoke to it, the two presentations together exceeding the allowed time limit. Teachers and students need to be aware that the presentation is the product. Students may choose to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, application, and analysis solely through a performance, without speaking directly to camera about their choices, or their performance may be shorter and they can speak to camera explaining their role. The record of evidence can be cited to verify student's knowledge and understanding, application, and analysis, and to confirm the teacher's assessment decision.

The record of evidence included a range of materials, from detailed explanation of planning and student choices, to brief notes on group decisions. The record of evidence assisted the moderation process when teachers indicated on the marks sheet how they arrived at the student's grade and whether they used the record of evidence to substantiate the grade. It was also helpful when teachers clearly annotated their decisions. Teachers can do this by highlighting the grade of the relevant performance standards or by indicating where they thought the grade sat in a particular grade band.

It was useful when clear information about the identity of students was provided, especially photographs. The group presentations were generally visually clear and adequately lit, and sound recordings were audible.

Assessment Type 2: Folio

As in 2011, many folios followed the format of two reviews of live performances of up to 1000 words each and a production report of up to 2000 words, but an increasing number of folios included three pieces of written work of varying length, to the maximum word-limit of 4000 words. This approach gave students more scope to respond to productions that fired their imaginations.

A few students also experimented with reflective writing, taking advantage of the folio's flexibility. Some students were able to reflect on many productions in a single review by comparing a specific aspect of those productions, such as a similar theme, with contrasting staging choices. Students produced successful folios when they demonstrated analysis and evaluation by selecting key staging moments and vividly describing them, with insightful deconstruction.

Students who wrote about films were most successful when they discussed the filming techniques of the director and cinematographer as well as the acting and design choices of a number of practitioners.

When a student submits fewer than the required number of tasks, teachers must reflect on this when applying the performance standards to make an assessment decision. Fewer pieces of work restrict the variety, breadth, and depth students can demonstrate in terms of analysis and evaluation. Teachers are reminded that 'I' is to be used when a student does not submit any work.

Assessment Type 3: Interpretative Study

The majority of teachers noted that the length for the interpretative study changed in the 2012 subject outline, so that the interpretative study was a maximum of 1500 words if written, a maximum of 9 minutes if oral, or the equivalent in multimodal form. Most students chose to write their study. The most successful outcomes in studies of an innovator were presented as an essay in response to a precise and focused question. The most successful studies of a play-script adopted the hypothetical role of a specific practitioner and developed a clearly described and illustrated production concept. In the former case, the application can take the form of appropriate terminology in the deconstruction of the work of an innovator, while in the latter, application can be demonstrated through actual staging ideas.

It is important that students create a manageable focus when shaping a question for the innovator study; the more specific the question, the clearer the argument that responds to it. Students and teachers can consult past exam papers as a valuable source of ideas for question design. In exploring the work of innovators, it is also essential that the response centres on an exploration of dramatic techniques. Students who explored a play-script as a practitioner successfully demonstrated dramatic application not only through words but also through diagrams, illustrations, sketches, and photographs. It is most appropriate to use these mediums to represent ideas visually.

Students' responses were not as strong when they chose topics that were too diverse, particularly when students in a class were given free choice of texts or

innovators. If a teacher chooses this approach, they need to scaffold each text and innovator precisely, to allow students to achieve at a high standard.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 4: Performance

The development and presentation of a dramatic product, whether a group performance, individual performance, or presentation is the vehicle through which students apply their knowledge and understanding, work collaboratively or independently, develop a range of skills, extend themselves, develop creative solutions to problems, take risks, and finally present the outcome to an audience.

Often, students and teachers invest a significant amount of time and passion, providing an experience that mirrors the processes and outcomes that occur in the theatre industry itself.

The selection of an appropriate play-script is essential to the successful fulfilment of the requirements of this assessment type. It is vital both to provide roles and opportunities that extend students and to avoid productions that are too long and place unreasonable demands upon students in the rehearsal and performance phases.

Plays that are set within a 'teenage' context tend to contain only stereotypical characterisation, and employ predictable staging elements. Such plays can limit both the potential for students to develop nuance and subtext in their performance, to explore different theatrical styles, and to develop a sophisticated director's intent. Conversely, plays that extend students' understanding of different theatrical conventions, contexts, and styles and allow for challenging characterisation provide opportunities for both a creative directorial vision and resourceful, imaginative theatre.

As mentioned above, the duration of the chosen production is important. It is appropriate to edit works to shorten them, after careful consideration of copyright; however, care must be taken not to lose the continuity of the work, particularly in the trajectory of characters. It can make an actor's job too difficult if there is no opportunity to explore a character's development. Teachers should also be careful when allocating a range of smaller roles to students, since a lack of opportunity to develop light and shade, motivation, and subtext can limit an actor's skill application.

In choosing a play, teachers should also consider the development of a creative and in-depth directorial vision. From its original conception, through the organically changing stages of the rehearsal process, trial and error, and problem-solving, to its final manifestation as a theatrical product, this vision should be communicated to students in all its phases. Such communication enables students to maintain focused knowledge and understanding, creates cohesion among the practitioners who are on and off stage, and provides the essential material from which the production report will later emerge. When students were able to articulate the nuances of this intent in off-stage presentations, and explore the ways in which it influenced their process and product, they were also able to more successfully meet the knowledge and understanding assessment design criteria. The intellectual process of deconstructing text, exploring subtext, establishing production meetings, discussing the thematic and stylistic concerns of the play, and unpacking characters is fundamental to the journey from page to stage.

A cognitive understanding of what is being undertaken can facilitate a far more sophisticated application in the performance itself by all practitioners, on and off stage. This year, students who understood the style, their own role, and their place within the ensemble, and could apply these with consistency and depth, achieved the most success in this assessment. These students developed insightful and creative characterisation, demonstrated an internalised understanding of theatrical conventions, displayed a consistent awareness of the audience and of their fellow performers, and had obviously honed and shaped their practical skills through the rehearsal process.

The most successful off-stage presentations were well prepared. This preparation ensured students' familiarity with the material and also helped in their content planning. It is important that students survey the evidence they provide against the specific features of the assessment design criteria for the assessment type. The presentation need not spend time on aspects that are already evident (for example, the product on stage), but should focus chiefly on aspects that require further demonstration. It is appropriate for students to use various resources in demonstrating their achievement (for example, powerpoint displays, video evidence, interpretative displays, and backstage tours), which can complement oral explanations and evidence presented in folders. Teachers and students should view these methods as appropriate and viable alternatives to performance work, as they are creative, essential to the ensemble, and presented to the audience.

While only a few students chose to develop an individual performance or presentation, this option is viable for those who prefer to develop an independent theatrical product and/or who are interested in pursuing roles that are not feasible in the group performance, particularly scriptwriting and directing. This year, students achieved the best results when they displayed a passion for the area in which they were working, had obviously researched the field in depth, and had created an imaginative and clearly dramatic product. It is important that students who develop an individual performance or presentation focus on only one practitioner, as this gives them the best opportunity to express specific knowledge and understanding, develop specific processes, and create a specific outcome.

This assessment type is externally assessed and teachers are reminded that markers do not discuss their assessment decisions.

Many teachers have commented on the value of hub groups, networking with subject experts, and arranging for other Drama teachers to view a dress rehearsal or performance and provide feedback. Similarly, clarifying forums, and support materials on the SACE Board website, are designed to assist teachers in understanding and applying the performance standards.

Teachers may also wish to note the following guidance.

It is essential that performance notes sheets are presented at the external assessment so that each student may be easily identified. It is appropriate to, for example:

- list students on the sheets in accordance with the order of their first appearance on stage
- photograph students in costume
- provide information about students' distinguishing features

- allocate a colour (e.g. using a ribbon) where identification might be challenging

Approaches such as these will help markers to recognize every student quickly and effectively.

Teachers should ensure that, during the performance, they are free to write detailed performance notes. It is inappropriate, for example, to be preoccupied with a task such as stage management or lighting operation while marking. The notes that are prepared during the performance are an important tool in justifying marks and recording the evidence of an otherwise ephemeral event.

In communicating with the contact marker, teachers should:

- confirm receipt of documentation about the visit
- communicate details about the venue and parking
- notify them if it appears that the assessment process will be lengthy for some reason (for example, if there are a number of off-stage presentations).

In the third scenario, markers will attempt to negotiate an approach that makes the process fair and manageable for all.

For details of the learning requirements, and information about dates and assessment processes, teachers should refer to the 2013 subject outline and subject operational information for Drama, available on the subject minisite.

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