

Moderators' Report/  
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2012

GCE Drama and Theatre Studies  
(6DR01)

Exploration of Drama and Theatre

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## 6DR01 Exploration of Drama and Theatre

### Introduction

Candidates are required to explore two dramatic texts from a practical perspective; these should be whole, formally published and substantial plays written for the theatre. Practical exploration is the backbone of the unit and the results of this exploration provide candidates with the knowledge and understanding necessary for them to write a set of Exploration Notes. There is a word limit of 3,000. Candidates are asked to explore the plays through a series of elements:

- Language
- Non-verbal-communication
- Vocal awareness
- Characterisation
- The social, cultural, historical and political context
- The visual, aural and spatial elements of production
- The response to a practitioner- for one or both of the texts
- Interpretation

Practical exploration of the texts is the most heavily weighted assessment area for Unit 1. This assessment is carried out by the teacher through a series of structured workshops and requires the application of the assessment criteria against the candidate's response to the practical exercises. This is not about performance; rather the marks should reflect the application and creativity shown in the workshops.

Exploration Notes must be illustrated with examples of how specific practical explorations allowed candidates to develop their knowledge and understanding of the texts. These examples should be embedded within the notes so it is clear how candidates arrived at the understanding they have gained over the course of the unit. The notes may refer to the exploration elements separately, for each play, they may be written as continuous prose or include sketches, diagrams and designs. It is not necessary to compare the two texts in any way, although candidates may do so if they wish. Assessment of these notes is carried out holistically, across both texts and notes must be balanced so that each text receives, as far as possible, equal attention.

Centres are asked to send a recording of an active practical drama session where candidates can be seen exploring one of the chosen texts. This should not be a performance, or preparation for a performance, rather it is an exemplification of the type of practical drama exploration that is carried out in the centre. Centres assess the relative success of their candidates in this workshop, providing marks and justification for the highest, middle and lowest attaining candidates in that session.

The final aspect of the unit is the candidate's response to a live production. Candidates produce a written evaluation of a live theatre production, of no more than 1,000 words, in which they address the elements of both performance and production, analysing and evaluating what they saw. This is an opportunity for

candidates to put what they have learned during the unit into effect, by calling on knowledge and understanding of plays, the ideas of practitioners, dramatic devices and structures, appropriate vocabulary and critical awareness developed through evaluating their own and others' practical drama.

Centres are asked to supply a Record of Work that details how each of the texts was explored.

Marks for this unit are awarded as follows:

Exploration Notes 20

Practical Exploration 25

Evaluation of Live Theatre 15

There is essential guidance for centres in the Assessment Support Guide. This document includes the requisite forms and instructions for Unit 1. It is required for all units and includes information about procedures for Unit 2; it is updated annually with forms and deadlines that apply to the administration of all units in both AS and A2. Centres should download it from the website as soon as it is available in November.

The website is [www.edexcel.com/gcedrama](http://www.edexcel.com/gcedrama)

There now follows some specific observations from the moderation team, based on centre responses to this specification in the 2012 series.

### **The Unit Elements**

Centres are free to choose their texts and most are appropriate to the age of the candidates. In reality, the range of texts chosen appears to be limited, the most popular still being *Metamorphosis*, *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *A Doll's House*, *Our Country's Good*, *Miss Julie*, *Antigone*, *The Crucible*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Glass Menagerie*. There were some choices made that broke this mould, such as *Saved*, *Noises Off*, *Freedom of the City*.

Moderators reported that centres have chosen plays that better suit the needs of their students and that where teacher examiners have achieved this effectively, candidates have a clearly better chance of success. Where centres choose texts that stimulate the interest of their students, candidates are inspired and show enthusiasm and excitement in their responses. Poor choices in terms of level of challenge and subject matter lead to weak responses. Candidates struggled to write in depth, and many could not move beyond what the play's stage directions told them about how scenes or characters might be interpreted.

The use of support structures for the Exploration Notes, such as scaffolding questions that candidates set about answering, have led to strong responses. The straightforward use of a question that poses, 'what have you learned from your practical exploration of the text that you didn't understand when you read it?', worked effectively for some centres.

There is a unit recommendation that there should be at least 10 years between the two texts and the majority of centres chose texts from distinct time periods of theatrical development. Where this was not the case, candidates were short changed since the social, cultural, historical and political contexts of such texts proved too similar. Even where plays appear to be very different, if they have been written too close together, there can be hidden similarities that weaken the breadth of the whole AS year. Where centres choose texts that demand similar practitioner ideas candidates were also sometimes short changed; it is key to provide a variety of approaches to meet the needs and tastes of any group of students and this creates a strong foundation for those going on to the A2 year.

### **The Practical Exploration of Texts**

This element of the work is assessed by teachers in centres. Many centres are getting this absolutely right with a wide range of practical activities in workshops. This means candidates have been afforded opportunities to access the full range of marks available for the unit.

The most successful candidates had clearly been given the advantage of explorations that engendered confidence and encouraged risk taking. The weakest elements, as reflected in the written work, were again language and the social, cultural historical and political contexts of the texts. These two elements still seem to challenge centres' ability to find ways candidates can explore them practically and then go on to reflect on their findings in their exploration notes. Few candidates find techniques and exercises to support discovery of how language works in performance, or how the context of a play can inform its interpretation.

Interpretation also still proves to be difficult for some and it is not uncommon for candidates to write long wish lists of how a version of the play might be staged. Where candidates fail to explain how any of their ideas could be brought to fruition through strong links with their own practical explorations, notes do not attract high marks.

Moderators have found that where practical exploration was strongly structured and led, with the written elements in mind, it remains clear that candidates are best able to reflect on their learning and growing understanding of the plays in their writing.

### **Exploration Notes**

Candidates' notes fall generally into distinct categories. The majority of candidates write separately about each element of exploration across each text. Some write about each element, combining thoughts about both texts, either closely linked or in separate paragraphs. The strongest responses still come from candidates who choose the route of continuous prose, rather than note forms.

Some candidates included extracts of texts, but of those that did, many still do not grasp that annotations must take the key role if this approach is to be successful. Occasionally, candidates included very extensive text extracts, by the side of which they wrote ideas for interpretation or characterisation, or what they would be doing

when they said the lines. Sometimes this resulted in candidates failing to make the crucial link between the text and the annotation. Some candidates even used the back of their photocopied texts on which to write down their thoughts. Suffice to say, these examples tended to be less successful because candidates did not draw any substantial conclusions and notes were too linked with the narrative line of the play. It is essential that Exploration Notes awarded marks in the higher bands make a very close connection to the candidate's practical exploration.

Fewer candidates this year developed large-scale designs and drawings. Centres have generally accepted that the Exploration Notes are the final point of a process of honing ideas and understanding, and are not a working notebook.

The range of theatre practitioners, whose ideas informed explorations, was relatively small. Most candidates used the theories of Stanislavski and Brecht, with Artaud, Berkoff and *Kneehigh* also being popular choices. Centres had clearly chosen texts and combinations of texts with practitioners in mind and, while there is no requirement for both texts to be explored in the light of the work of a practitioner, many centres did. This often allowed some interesting comparisons to take place.

Overall, candidates' notes fulfilled the needs of the unit and many produced work that was highly informative, giving a real sense of what they had genuinely come to understand about their texts, through fully applied practical drama exploration. Weaker responses were overly descriptive of practical activities, did not relate to practical activities, or were the result of research carried out in libraries or on the Internet.

Where centres lacked appreciation of the requirements of the Exploration Notes this sometimes led to them being far too long. However, the majority of responses kept more closely to the word limit this year. Centres are reminded that work that exceeds the word limit in the final version of the notes should not receive any marks and it is the responsibility of the teacher-examiner to reflect this, if appropriate, in the marks awarded and indicate it to the moderator. Candidates need to be fully aware of the word limit for this and other units within the specification. There are no exceptions to this.

## **Language**

This element is used to demonstrate how the language of a play might be practically explored in workshop activities. However, moderators still report that candidates write about the nature and style of the language of the playwright, with limited reference made to how they had come to this understanding through practical activity. The most successful examples of this element still show how a candidate had explored a section or comparative sections of the play using several approaches, coming to conclusions that were clearly rooted in their practical exploration. Too often, candidates simply report their findings from research and so work cannot reach higher mark bands.

## **Non-verbal communication**

Candidates that are more successful wrote effectively about their practical work on how actors and directors give a text meaning through non-verbal means. The best write about a range of strategies used in practical exploration, reflecting their understanding of how a text may be brought to life. Some show how exploration of the use of the body and the stage space has shown them something surprising, that they had not picked up from reading the text. Other candidates tended to limit the success of their work by writing about how they might physically express themselves whilst delivering lines. Unless ideas have come about through a clearly practical route then high mark bands are not reached.

## **Vocal awareness**

Candidates often write successfully about vocal explorations of characters but many do not. There is a tendency to limit notes to showing how lines will be said in a future performance, or to describe how they were said and what the candidate believes that showed about a character. This is not vocal exploration. Vocal awareness must be about exploring vocal possibilities within a role. For example some successful work has been seen where candidates explored the voice of the chorus in *Antigone*. Through this they discovered the purpose of a chorus, how it can take on a character within a narrative, or have more than one voice. With clear examples from the workshop, this style of writing can prove worthy of higher mark bands.

## **Characterisation**

Moderators have said that, overall, candidates showed fair understanding of how characters can be explored to develop how they might be portrayed in performance. It is still common, though, for candidates to fail to show how a range of exploratory strategies helped them find the truth of a character. Where candidates do not demonstrate how they had formed their opinions about characters, but still write at length about them, their notes lack substance.

Successful work tends to deliver a clear picture of how a candidate's understanding came about through trial and error, working with others and by watching their peers. To gain high marks work is then personalised and expressed in the first person.

## **The social, historical, cultural, and political context**

Candidates rarely pursue ways to relate this element to their practical explorations. The majority simply report their researches with little or no reference to anything they did as a result of this knowledge. There was a very limited range of examples where candidates gave a clear indication of how they had used their understanding of what they knew about the play's context to help them understand how it might be explored or interpreted. For example candidates have not grasped that what you know about a play, the time in which it was conceived, might inform the style of acting or design of the stage space. Often where they do appreciate the links, they

do not then use them in the workshop so cannot furnish their writing with real examples.

### **The visual, aural, spatial elements of a production**

A minority of candidates made good use of sketches and designs for this section. Many failed to annotate their work sufficiently so few marks are gained. Centres are reminded that sketches and designs themselves are worth few marks; it is what is said about the sketch or diagram or, increasingly, photograph, that earns the candidate marks. Several sets of notes included extensive photographs depicting practical work but their content was not embellished with notes that showed what the exercises meant to the candidate. This does not merit marks in higher bands.

Where candidates incorporate how the photos capture specific moments in practical exploration that aided understanding, work is more successful.

### **Interpretation**

The most successful responses to this element are generally those that show how understanding developed in the studio through experimentation, what worked, and what did not. Weaker responses often incorporate lengthy wish lists for whole productions, many of which have little to do with the candidate's experience in the exploration of how theatre is made from text. More successful responses often concern the adaptation of the methods of recognised theatre practitioners, such as *Frantic*, *DV8* or *Berkoff*. Centres have not fully embraced the way this element can be applied to short scenes and sections of the text, rather the whole play, making exploration much more the focus of the exercise.

### **The response to a practitioner**

Candidates are asked to write about practitioner ideas they have made use of when exploring at least one of their texts. A minority still limit their responses to the ideas themselves, without referring to how they had put them to good use. Centres have not fully taken on the fact that the ideas themselves are not necessarily interesting, but the ways they can be put to good use are. Many candidates have tackled this section through a separate workshop, unrelated to text exploration at all. This is of little merit. Where centres have looked at a practitioner for each text, candidates are able to bank a lot of understanding and practical ideas for future use in Units 3 and 4. Whilst this is not a requirement, it is interesting when candidates are able to make some valid comparisons between methodologies.

### **The Evaluation of Live Theatre**

Live productions viewed are mainly related to those shown by the professional theatre throughout the year. The vast majority of candidates wrote about performances of plays, rather than any other form of production. The most successful responses of necessity include an effective mix of analysis and evaluation and frequently provide a lively and engaging critical view of what was seen. Weaker responses fall back on extensive descriptions or overly subjective and unjustified evaluation. Higher band candidates are comfortable using the vocabulary and



experience of drama they have mastered during work for the unit, to illustrate their writing. A lot of this work tends towards high levels of focus and effective presentation. This is perhaps indicative of the level of teacher input into this contained area of experience, the amount of permitted re-drafting and familiarity with the task itself.

Some centres encourage candidates to write about a production of one of the texts studied within the unit. Where this is the case, there is little evidence that this element of assessment is any more or less successful than where productions were of plays not studied. The theatre experience, however, could have had more of a positive impact on the Exploration Notes.

### **Records of Work**

Most centres comply with the requirement to send a single record of work for both texts. These help moderators considerably in determining the level and style of work delivered to candidates. It is not necessary for centres to send highly detailed accounts of what went on over the course of the unit; these should be general accounts of the workshops delivered on both texts. The most helpful records of work were those that were closely aligned to the assessment objectives and that indicated which session was the one filmed for sampling.

### **Sample Practical Session**

The practical activities carried out for the Sample Session generally range from the highly imaginative and directly applied to the exploration of the text in question, to extensive discussion. Preliminary conversations and warm-ups need not be filmed.

Sessions are still sometimes over-directed by teachers or do not clearly show candidates working together on a text. Many moderators reported that candidates were very difficult to make out or identify. The most effective sessions are still those where candidates are clearly identified at the start, their names frequently used throughout and the camera focuses on areas where candidate work is going on apace.

Centres are still requested to experiment with how well they can capture practical sessions in their studio space, before recording their final version, to ensure lighting and sound elements are sufficient to the task. Centres with larger groups are asked to consider splitting the group to enable the moderator to see a recorded session with, for example 9 of the 18 candidates in the group taking part in the workshop so identification becomes much easier.

There is no requirement for all of the candidates in the centre to be seen in this recorded session so centres might consider how to construct the session with the moderator in mind. It is a sample session so it is good to see a range of candidates with the top, middle and bottom evident within that range, but a studio with 18 to 20 seventeen year olds in it may not provide the most conducive environment for moderation. There is no necessity to make separate recordings for candidates who

are re-sitting the unit. These candidates are considered along with the whole of the cohort taking the examination.

### **Teachers' assessments, comments, and annotations**

Centres' marking of the Evaluations of Live Theatre is still felt by moderators to have been more accurate than for the Exploration Notes. This has been noted for every year of the examination by the moderation team. There appears to be a rather more realistic view taken of work for the Evaluation.

The assessment of the Exploration Notes remains problematic in some centres, with moderators applying the standard of this unit and adjusting candidates' marks accordingly.

On occasion, centre rank orders have had to be modified since centres had incorrectly rewarded work that had obviously taken effort, but was not always related to the criteria. Teachers' comments and annotations did not always reflect the marks awarded. Teacher annotations are vital to the process of moderation and, where usefully applied, can help show the thinking and assessment processes. A minority of centres again, where candidates' work exceeded the word limit, felt that they should highlight the work they thought the moderator should read. Some teachers flagged this for the moderator, asking them to ignore the rest of the non-highlighted material. It must be re-stressed that this is not allowed, since all work must be that of the candidate alone and teachers must not edit or aid the compilation the notes for the candidate by pointing the moderator in the 'right direction'.

Over long work should be weeded out at the first draft stage. If this is not effectively done, then the teacher-examiner must ask the candidate where the 3,000 words begin and end so they may mark against the assessment criteria. If it is not clear to the moderator, they are instructed to moderate the first 3,000 words and to ignore anything that follows. This may result in a change of marks if all of the elements are subsequently not covered.

Moderators have again reported examples of good practice where teacher-examiners had drawn a line across the page of work that reached the word limit to indicate to the moderator where the centre has stopped marking.

Many centres helpfully annotated their candidates' coursework so that moderators were able to follow their thinking. The moderator's task is considerably eased when annotations show how the assessment criteria have been applied. In some centres, there was evidence of genuine department standardisation and cross moderation of work, something that is essential for the security of marks awarded to candidates in centres where there is more than one teacher-examiner.

### **Practical exploration**

Marks given for the Sample Session were still generally too high. Clearly there may be an imbalance in the marks awarded for each of the areas of assessment but it is expected that candidates' practical marks should bear some correlation to that

given for the written elements. Where centres over award for the practical exploration and the written components appear to be weak in comparison moderators report difficulties in carrying out their tasks. The attention of centres is drawn to the report from the first series of this unit in 2009.

### **Administration**

Most centres ensured their work arrived on time and in good order and many ensured it came in early to moderators. This aided the process considerably. However, there were some very common mistakes made by a large minority. Centres did not always include all of the asterisked candidates from their OPTEMS sheets. It was worryingly common for centres to omit their highest and lowest attaining candidates or documents had not been correctly signed; information in the Assessment Support Guide indicates what must be sent to the moderator and the examination board deadline for this.

Where centres requested special consideration for candidates, or felt there were circumstances in play that meant the work of candidates was not as strong as it should be, they were directed to Edexcel directly. It is not the business of the moderation team and centres should not be approaching their moderator with any information regarding the work of their students. A formal request for special consideration is always advisable, and these should be made through the examinations' officer, not through the moderator.

Several centres had not ensured their Sample Session recordings were visible, could be heard, or had been copied on to regular, standard size discs, playable on any domestic player. Others did not package up materials safely and DVDs were damaged in transit. It cannot be overstressed that where centres use large numbers of plastic envelopes for work and papers, or cardboard folders, they do so unnecessarily and waste time for their moderator. Centres are again reminded that work should be presented on ordinary paper, not card, stapled together for each candidate and DVDs packed in protective envelopes. Centres are also reminded to ensure that candidates' names are on all of the pages of the Exploration Notes in case they become separated. Centres are also reminded once again that work over the word limit must not be assessed.

### **High scoring work was felt to show some of these features:**

Candidates had been well taught and given the opportunity to practically explore two substantial plays that had been well chosen

Candidates' practical explorations were embedded in their writing about the plays, across all of the elements

Candidates had clearly been given the advantage of practice that engendered confidence and risk taking.

Candidates' written Exploration Notes were the end product of a process of summarising and honing ideas gleaned from practical exploration. They were not their logbooks.

Exploration Notes were balanced across both texts

Candidates referred to their own work, not just that of their group. They made use of "I" rather than "we".

Exploration notes were concise and made full use of the available number of words but did not exceed them

Diagrams and sketches were fully annotated

Key lessons were delivered that allowed the candidates to focus on each of the elements

Candidates found ways of discovering how language works in performance or how the various contexts of a play can inform its interpretation

The Sample Session was well focused and showed a range of practical workshop activities with the emphasis on the candidates working on the text, rather than the teacher

The Evaluation Of Live Theatre made clear distinctions between the play and the production and provided evidence of considered objective analysis of the production

Responses showed a good mix of analysis and evaluation and frequently provided a lively and engaging critical view of what they had seen

Teacher comments were detailed and specific, allowing the moderator to see examples of how and why marks had been awarded

**Middle scoring work was felt to show some of these features:**

Texts did not fully meet the needs of the candidates

Practical activities were not sufficiently explorative

Exploration Notes were imbalanced across the two texts

Writing for some of the elements of exploration was not sufficiently rooted in practical work

Evaluations of Live Theatre were descriptive, rather than evaluative and analytical

Teacher comments were brief and did not help the moderator see why marks had been awarded

**Low scoring work was felt to show some of these features:**

Texts were poorly chosen, were not clearly understood by candidates, or were too simplistic

Practical activities were teacher dominated

Exploration Notes exceeded the word limit and failed to meet the criteria in terms of being concise and rooted in practical exploration

Candidates carried out elaborate comparisons between texts that were sometimes Inappropriate, fruitless or too difficult

Practical insights were not used to inform the Exploration Notes

Candidates included extracts of texts, but did not grasp that annotations must take an important role. There were extensive text extracts, by the side of which they wrote ideas for interpretation or characterisation, or what they would be doing when they said the lines, failing to make the link between the two sides or any substantial conclusions

Elements of the notes were reproduced from other sources and were not related to candidate work, or were missing

Candidates wrote long wish lists of how their own version of a play might be interpreted or staged, without showing how any of it would work through practical examples

The plays' contexts were approached too theoretically, without practical exploration

Evaluations of Live Theatre were too descriptive and lacked analysis and evaluation, or were missing

Centres were poorly organised, had lost coursework, had not carried out centre standardisation or did not have sufficient specialist drama staff to deliver the unit

In general, however, the majority of centres still proved they have a firm understanding of the purpose of this unit and this was evident in all of the material presented for moderation. In most centres, teachers were clearly well prepared and focused on the demands of the unit and had effectively served their candidates.

## **Grade Boundaries**

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