



Pearson

Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Drama and Theatre Studies (6DR04) Paper 01

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In the final series of this examination this report will highlight a number of areas that examiners noted this year and offer reminders about the structure and purpose of the examination itself.

Examiners' Reports from previous series of this unit are still available on the Pearson Edexcel website and form part of the ongoing support material for centres.

For this unit, candidates sit a written examination during which they respond to focus questions around the chosen text for Section A and Section B and the live theatre experience for Section C.

The focus of each of the sections of the examination is as follows:

Section A is about rehearsal and candidates are given an extract from the chosen text to respond to in a three-part question that is worth up to 20 marks

Section B is about bringing the text to life for a twenty-first century audience in performance and is worth up to 30 marks

Section C is about candidates responding to a live theatre performance of a play originally written and performed in one of the other stated time periods for this unit and is worth up to 30 marks

The unit is worth up to 80 marks and is a two and a half hour examination in which candidates are supported by their annotated copy of the chosen text and up to 1,000 words for their theatre evaluation, connecting the live experience and an understanding of the play's historical context.

Historical context is a key feature of this unit, particularly with reference to responses in Section B and Section C. Candidates who are not able to demonstrate an accurate understanding of the historical context of the text explored or of the live production seen will not be able to access the higher levels of marks. Examiners have reported for this series more inaccurate references to the historical context of the chosen text and/or the live performance seen than ever before.

Basic facts about original performance conditions/context are essential for candidates to be able to access the higher levels of marks and these facts do need to be accurate. There is some leeway on this in the exploration of *Woyzeck*, as there are conflicting accounts of the play's original performance, depending on the source material. However, whatever the source, research should reveal accuracy in the material presented – there is no truth, for example, in the presented 'fact' that Buchner was a Marxist – at the time of writing the play, even Marx was not a Marxist. Nor is it a 'fact' that Buchner had been given a copy of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* to proof read or that Edward Gordon Craig was the designer on the Munich 1913 production of the play and that Max Reinhardt was its director. The

information about the original performances of the other two texts is readily available and much less contradictory.

There is an expectation from examiners that candidates have prepared for the examination with annotated copies of the text and notes to support Section C responses that candidates offer in the answer booklet. Information about what can be included in the annotation and the notes can be found in the specification, the FAQs and the Administrative Support Guide.

The demands of this unit are that candidates prepare to respond to the specific focus of the questions rather than offer a generalised overview based too closely on pre-prepared material. The published mark scheme – which is available to download from the website – indicates where examiners make decisions around responses that read as though they have been taken straight from the annotated text or from the Theatre Evaluation Notes.

In this final series of this examination, examiners report that there is evidence of candidates being well-prepared for the demands of this unit. This is particularly the case for Section C responses where productions seen have led to responses that have addressed the specific demands of the chosen question. Worryingly, however, there appears to have been an increase this series in candidates responding to performances seen via digital theatre. Section C is about candidates responding to live theatre, by which, for the purposes of this specification it means actor and audience in the same shared space.

In Section B, the evidence suggests that a significant number of candidates presented responses to the chosen question that recognised the historical context of the play and made creative sense of it as an intended theatrical experience for the audience.

The popularity of texts was very much the same as it was in 2016, with **Woyzeck** and **Lysistrata** almost evenly distributed and **Doctor Faustus** remaining very much in third place in this final series. As reported last year, there were, again, fewer examples of candidates offering inappropriate or unworkable interpretations of the chosen text this series – but there were some. What the examination is demanding of them in Section B is that they respond to the chosen question as a director wanting to bring an interpretation of the chosen text to life for a twenty-first century audience, making specific reference to its historical performance context. What the examination is not demanding is that they create a new play based on, suggested by, or making passing reference to, the original text and its historical performance context. The vast majority of candidates have, however, prepared for the examination with these points in mind.

Where candidates struggled to justify an interpretation of the chosen text, they tried to move too far away from the original or had not considered the text as a whole in their interpretation and offered examples of how the intended

interpretation might work in performance but could not fully justify these in relation to a whole production of the play.

Where interpretations that would not be appropriate in relation to the demands of the examination were notes, either the candidate did not understand the context of the chosen play or they chose to ignore it.

Some struggled to consider audience in relation to the interpretation, making hardly any reference to how their chosen interpretation would engage the audience in relation to the play itself.

Examiners struggled with the following notable interpretations:

- Having actors dressed as animals
- Woyzeck as a fly
- Woyzeck as a schoolboy in 1970's California with Marie as his father's nurse
- Woyzeck set on the International Space Station with the audience 'in pitch darkness'
- Lysistrata to be played by Hilary Clinton; the magistrate to be played by Donald Trump
- Lysistrata trying to influence the Brexit vote by leading the 'wives of politicians' into a sex strike until they stopped the vote.
- Doctor Faustus as a 'gang boss' who 'goes on a rampage'

These are just a few examples. A notable trend this year seems to be for candidates to state a context for their production in the opening paragraph – various war zones, conflicts and time periods, for example – and then not mention it again as they went into the 'prepared answer'. Saying something is so, does not necessarily make it so.

For all three texts, the majority of candidates offered updated contexts for productions and, with some notable exceptions, these were successfully explored in the responses and offered opportunities for candidates to make the necessary connections and to justify their ideas in relation to the specific demands of the question.

In **Section A** across all 3 texts, examiners reported a mixed response, with a significant number of candidates not able to respond to the specific demands of the extract and the question with appropriate rehearsal techniques, methods or strategies.

There were, however, fewer examples this series of candidates not completing this section with time-management clearly something that has been addressed during the life of this specification. There were also fewer instances of candidates writing about performance in c), not rehearsal.

What was disappointing though was the number of candidates who were not able to define the purpose of rehearsal or, at times, to apply the techniques, methods or strategies to the specifics of the question and/or the extract. Examiners reported that this felt as though there was a list of techniques in the annotated scripts and these would be applied no matter what the extract or the focus of the question. Examiners further reported that there was a strong feeling in some cases of candidates copying word for word from the annotated texts in cases, for example, when they just stated the technique and why it might be used with nothing to connect it to the given extract. In other instances, candidates tried to justify the technique in relation to the extract but failed to do so because it was not appropriate.

There were, however, large numbers of candidates who could access the higher levels of marks in this section by offering confident, well-considered and appropriate techniques, methods and strategies to demonstrate a clear understanding of a director working with a company in rehearsal.

As reported in 2016 – and previous series of this unit - in **Section B**, across all 3 texts, candidates were not able to access marks above Level 3 (13- 18 out of 30), because:

- There was no specific and developed reference to the play's OPC. Due to this requirement not being met, there were examples of highly-imaginative and theatrically challenging responses that were written to the demands of the question that did not justify the intended interpretation in relation to an understanding of the play's historical context
- The response was too brief. For up to 30 marks in an A Level examination, there is an expectation that candidates who are looking to access the higher levels of marks (Levels 4 and 5 in this case) are presenting well-rounded and considered responses that are developed around the specific demands of the chosen question and offer sufficient examples

from the intended interpretation in relation to the play's OPC, to demonstrate to the examiner that their ideas could work in performance

- The chosen interpretation was either not developed with the full production in mind and evidenced in the response or it moved too far away from the chosen play's context that it read more like a play based on the text rather than a production of it.

Other responses did not achieve the higher levels of marks for other reasons, some of which have already been mentioned in the report. Centres are encouraged to read the mark scheme and previous Examiners' Reports to gain a more-rounded overview of what will enable candidates to access the higher levels of marks in this section.

The pairing of questions in this section followed exactly the same pattern as in previous series and, once again, the even number questions were by far the more popular choice for candidates and, overall, were tackled more successfully than those who chose the odd number questions, mainly because of connections to the chosen play's opc.

Responses to **Section C** were mixed but, overall, for many candidates this earned them the highest mark in the paper. There were 3 main reasons why candidates were not able to earn marks in the higher levels (4 and 5) in this section:

- Responses were not sufficiently analytical or evaluative and merely reported the experience from the viewpoint of a member of the audience
- The specific demands of the question were not met – including sufficient reference to the statement in Q10 – and there was a clear sense of the response being taken straight from a structure provided by the Theatre Evaluation Notes. Centres are reminded that these notes are to support responses with information about the live production and its historical context connections. They are not intended to be a framework for structuring responses.
- The responses were too brief - see point 2 under **Section B** as expectations in this section terms of length of response for up to 30 marks are very similar.

Where responses were balanced, however, offering clear, thoughtful and considered opinions as an informed member of the audience, candidates were able to access the higher levels of marks and demonstrated an enthusiastic response to live theatre in relation to the demands of this unit. In a significant number of cases, candidates were accessing the higher levels of marks in Section C but struggling at Level 2 or 3 in Section B. It appears that these candidates are not able to make the clear connection between the demands of the two sections in terms of referencing the social, cultural, historical and political contexts. Whilst

many candidates appear to get this right in Section C, there is clear evidence of candidates struggling with this requirement in Section B.

Section C responses, by necessity will reference a vast range of productions seen. Of the two questions, Question 10 was by far the more popular choice again in this series and, for those candidates tackling Q11, responses were mixed with candidates not always able to connect staging into the bigger picture of the production and/or its historical context.

The most popular productions seen for this section included:

Hedda Gabler, The Tempest, Antigone, Twelfth Night, Much Ado about Nothing, King Lear, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Romeo and Juliet and Macbeth.

At the time of writing, there were no reported instances of candidates writing about productions that did not comply with the regulations for this unit. As previously mentioned, however, there were more instances of digital theatre in 2017 as in any other series and this is concerning.

It appears that the vast majority of candidates completed the paper in the time allowed and within the pages of the answer booklet without needing additional sheets. Those who did require additional sheets, however, did not always access the higher levels of marks with examiners reporting unfocused and rambling, repetitive responses, not specifically or significantly addressing the chosen question and often reading like prepared answers. Taking size of handwriting into account, there is no expectation for candidates to write beyond the pages of the booklet to access the higher levels of marks.