



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel GCE Drama & Theatre (9DR0)
9DR0 / 03: Theatre Makers in Practice

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9 DR0/03 Theatre Makers In Practice

Written Examination (Externally Assessed)

Introduction

This is the eight 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: 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 as a member of the live audience**. In the unlikely event of this not being possible, centres were required to contact Drama Assessment at Pearson as the live theatre demand is an Ofqual requirement.

There were a very small number of candidates writing about musicals which are forbidden in the specification or dance shows that contain no dialogue that severely limited the candidate's ability to access the full range of criteria for this section. There were no reports of candidates writing about performance texts from Section B or Section C which are forbidden texts and as such, have to be awarded zero marks. It is genuinely heartening that this didn't appear to occur this year.

In 2025, Question 2 was more popular than Question 1. Popular productions for both questions included many performances 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*,

The Other Place, Stranger Things: First Shadow, Bull, War Horse, The Duchess of Malfi, and An Inspector Calls which still provided sound evidence for both statements, especially Question 2. One that did not seem to work was *House Party*, which tended to produce lower-level responses.

Centres had prepared their candidates well for this section as most responses had examples in place, strong use of pertinent terminology and were reflective in tone. It became very obvious when there was a formulaic approach to responses or a sense of over reliance on the 500 words of notes. These responses tended to have a hurried feel about getting everything down on paper but invariably, missed the focus of the statement and its demands.

Frantic Assembly's *Metamorphosis* was possibly the most popular choice. What was notable for this production was how candidates had clearly engaged with depth and detail from the production itself (not just listing Frantic Assembly's techniques). Responses often offered an introductory paragraph where the most successful responses were engaging with the content of the statement from the outset. Responses that agreed/disagreed or offered a balance were all able to write successfully within this introductory paragraph. Less successful responses opened with a description of the narrative of the production seen and then went into the 'prepared answer', sometimes addressing the specifics of the statement almost in passing.

The majority of responses were clearly written 'in the moment' of the examination and audience experience – whether analysed from a personalised or more distanced perspective was at the heart of most successful responses. Further success was evident when each paragraph which followed the introduction demonstrated a connection to and a reflection of the statement (this included those responses that were in disagreement with the statement). In some cases, this became slightly formulaic but did still offer structure and supported reflective writing. More successful responses could return to elements of the statement within each paragraph and offer fluency in terminology and engage in reflective writing which helped develop a sophisticated line of argument.

Most candidates seemed to **agree** with the statements, although many of the most successful candidates were able to offer a balanced argument, considering both sides.

Design discussions featured in both Question 1 and Question 2 responses, and examiners stated that design is being given much greater credence than in previous series.

Question 1 responses often referenced design effectively to support their argument: for example, the use of video in *Oedipus*. Question 2 responses quite often successfully placed a greater emphasis on the performers than on the design elements: *Oedipus* again being a good example. The evidence was that many candidates wrote with passion on productions that had clearly touched them. Responses which were successful were personalised and often indicated that candidates had been highly motivated by the live production seen. This enabled less fluent candidates to achieve within the scope of either

question. Lower achieving marks in this section were either due to not accessing a live event and falling into descriptive writing or running out of time (perhaps leaving Section A until last within the exam time frame itself). A few responses did not address the statement.

Question 1

This was a very demanding and exciting statement and was successfully answered by many candidates.

Responses that garnered the highest marks were those that, of course, chose appropriate examples from their live theatre experience and that were able to articulate the how and why: weaker responses tended either to be one sided or to roam into a generalised philosophical argument about the nature of humour in the theatre. A common issue was an over-focus on arguing that theatre lacks connection, which often came at the expense of offering specific practical examples. 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. The statement did elicit candidates to reflect on their own lives in the light of the content and there were some very personal responses eg. about mental health; post-covid issues; and the context of wider issues broke into their responses too – war with Ukraine and wider thoughts about life and conflict. Some responses tended to be more descriptive and narrative than analytical and evaluative. A number of responses fell into the trap of discussing themes in the performances at the expense of detail and specifics from the actual performance.

The production seen seemed more imperative for this question. Interpretations of the statement were various – there was ‘if it wasn’t an exact replica of ‘my life’ then this performance is a no’, then there was ‘it isn’t relevant to me but it was still well done,’ to it ‘shouldn’t/doesn’t have to be about my life but about that of others so that I can be educated’ – those were the most pertinent, and fascinating; in particular, *KIN* (NT) was well applied here across the ability range with some personal and passionate responses that clearly appreciated what it was like to have to flee one’s homeland - and *Oedipus*, already noted, for contemporary politics and personal exposure in the media. *Kyoto and Feel Me* (Paperbirds) also produced passionate and personal responses for passionate and relevant causes.

Question 2

There was a real balance in this response; most candidates had a lot to write about and, in the main, did this effectively. There seemed to be a high standard of response for this question, possibly because of the range provided by the shows seen. Weaker responses tended to focus either on acting or overgeneralised and vague technical aspects too

heavily. The question prompted discussion of practical design elements seen in live performance. Those who agreed with the statement generally gave stronger answers, supported by effective examples. Candidates who disagreed entirely often struggled to fully justify their view and provide enough evidence. Most successful answers referred to the statement throughout. However, for some candidates it was a bolt on at the end and the answer gave a sense of being prepared before. Theatre that fully engaged students from the live experience made for some powerful responses to the statement. Candidates who did particularly well balanced the idea of design complementing outstanding acting.

The Question 2 dilemma was whether a candidate picked up on the word 'sophisticated', some ignored it and just discussed whether a successful performance needed design – of any kind; others focused on the descriptor and argued that the design was not sophisticated, just 'simple' lights and sound, however, it was still effective. Our Country's Good, a new reworking – provided candidates with worthy material for this approach, especially the opening scene and the visualization of white-man's abuse of the colonized land. Again, weaker candidates did not seem to be able to 'make up their minds' and tended toward generalisations.

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.

Examiners saw a range of different responses across all six set texts, the majority of which were successful. *Equus*, *Machinal* and *That Face* seemed to dominate, with *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* and *Colder Than Here* close behind. *Fences* was seen quite regularly. Candidates wrote fluently and often with depth for both questions. However, it was noted that some candidates struggled to manage their time for this section and overly long Section B responses may possibly have had a detrimental effect on Section C or, in some cases, candidates had left Section B until last and appeared to have run out of time.

A good number of candidates struggled to successfully embed examples from the whole text into their responses for either Question 3 or Question 4 which meant the work was restricted to the lower levels of the Mark Scheme. This appeared to be more of an issue this series. It would be good if candidates were aware that Question 3 and Question 4 are marked by the same examiner so they would not need to repeat a lengthy introduction from Question 3 in Question 4.

Lengthy introductions are unnecessary as the examiner knows the texts and in particular the focus extract. Successful candidates embedded examples from the whole text by homing in on relatable or contrasting acting/design moments and demonstrated a thorough understanding of both the text and where the extract fitted within the acting/design throughline. These responses also evidenced the planned impact on the audience with equal success for both questions. For both Question 3 and Question 4 some candidates struggled and fell into descriptive writing which limited the responses in terms of the second half of the question. Other issues candidates faced included falling into play analysis or writing extensively about genre or playwright intentions, usually in a lengthy introduction to Question 3 and Question 4. While these elements may inform part of a successful response, candidates who were able to home in on the question as opposed to outline everything they know about the playwright's life (Stenham, Shaffer and Fo primarily) or the genre of the text were able to secure marks in the higher levels.

Question 3

Vocal and Physical Skills

Vocal and physical skills were appropriately balanced across the responses to Question 3 and very few candidates struggled to keep this balance across the response. Strong responses referred to stillness and silence as well as homing in on moments of gesture or intonation (for example). At times genre or practitioner ideas informed responses and this was sometimes successful – Expressionism being notable here for *Machinal* responses. At times this was echoed in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* responses where Commedia was linked successfully to physical choices.

Some Question 3 responses become a little formulaic as the candidates wrote about more than one character from a performer perspective but fell into a trap of listing the techniques used for each character and not fully outlining how this would communicate meaning. These responses became a 'everything I would do as a performer in this extract' response and consequently these candidates often made only superficial reference to the whole text. It was noted, however, that some candidates who wrote about more than two characters were still able to achieve well within the mark scheme as they kept their focus on how techniques communicate meaning. The majority of candidates did focus on **one** character, the question stated 'one or more' to give equal opportunity between the different texts/extracts.

Question 4

Use of Design

The full range of design options was seen in Question 4, with some successful Sound responses for example, although Lighting remains the most popular. There was an increase in Costume responses this year and many of these were successful, but some responses struggled to move beyond descriptive. The use of appropriate terminology was a struggle for some Costume candidates, and this was also true for some Set design candidates (*Machinal* set design responses were the exception to this). At times these responses felt like the candidates were struggling to articulate how elements convey meaning although ideas of time period and character traits were well articulated in costume and set responses, for example. Conveying thematic ideas such as poverty or entrapment also worked well for candidates but it appeared Costume and Set elements were less confidently outlined by some candidates. Appropriate terminology for Sound and Lighting was more successful with candidates able to discuss their ideas and use terminology to inform their responses with fluency. Some candidates did list angles or levels without exploring how they would convey ideas within the extract or the whole text, but the majority of Sound and Lighting responses were successful with secure connections to whole performance text references in place. The team reported that a few candidates wrote about more than one design element.

Overall comments from examiners for successful Section B responses seem to be to use quotes to root the work in the extract, cross reference the whole text with connecting moments from the extract and frequently refer back to the question to stay focused.

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 can have access to a clean copy of their chosen text in the examination venue. They have to complete **either** Q5 **or** Q6.

Question 6 was much more popular than Question 5 and interestingly, examiners felt that it also elicited the strongest responses. There were a very small number of limited responses that were either very short, as if the candidate had run out of time or very muddled with little understanding of the text in context i.e. the playwright's intentions, the Original Performance Conditions (OPC) and their own reimagined version of it today. There were also many excellent responses which were able to discuss a clear and coherent production concept with direct reference to both OPC and their chosen practitioner.

The demands of Section C are many, and responses seen were sometimes struggling with the core requirements of the questions. Some higher-level responses submitted evidence where fluency and creativity were at the heart of the work. These candidates worked consistently across the extract in the light of the whole text in order to explore their chosen practitioner methodologies with depth. These responses often sat within the assured or sophisticated mark range and demonstrated that text, concept, practitioner and relevant OPC strands had been well considered and explored within the centre's preparation for this section. Some of the less successful responses indicated that practitioner knowledge and understanding was weak. This meant candidates offered responses that were less secure in terms of methodologies. It seems that when one of the aspects is unclear, incorrect or neglected, it has a negative effect on much of the response. The balancing act is to address all required elements in equal measure.

The team noted that for less successful candidates, areas of insecurity across both questions also indicated that the main text itself was not fully appreciated in terms of what it offered theatrically. But there is a notable improvement in ideas offered being practical and the concept working with the original performance context.

Some candidates threw everything into the response and forgot in the pressure of the exam to select examples which supported a response to elements of the wording of the question/s. This was slightly more notable with Question 5 than Question 6 where some candidates spent too much time outlining the framework of directorial ideas than responding to the **'acting style'** and **'communicate effectively'** element of the question.

Both questions appeared to offer candidates the opportunity to achieve highly with some creative, mature and well researched responses.

Play texts seen less frequently were *Waiting for Godot* and *School for Scandal*. Several centres had picked *The Maids*, *The Tempest* or *Faustus*. *Woyzeck* dominated but less so than in previous series with lots of *Hedda Gabler*, *Antigone* and *Lysistrata*.

Almost all candidates make some reference to the OPC but it remains a bit of an add-on that is rarely used to support the response. Higher attaining candidates are able to use the OPC to inform and inspire their creative choices rather than simply providing them as a cross reference. The Mark Scheme repeatedly stresses that the original performance conditions are not a history lesson, rather it is a clear understanding of when and why the play was first performed and how that connects with an audience today.

Brecht remains the most popular practitioner used particularly with *Woyzeck*, *Antigone* and *Faustus*. Some centres appear to be teaching *Antigone* alongside Brecht's version of it. Candidates who can write about practically applying their chosen practitioner's techniques to the play studied are at a clear advantage. They really do need to know how the two will work together.

Similarly, candidates who have experienced Punchdrunk write far more accurately and convincingly; Punchdrunk is not a theatre practitioner that one can analyse/evaluate by proxy. This is also true of Complicite.

Hedda Gabler was successful with Brecht as well as Stanislavski and often used a 1960s/70s middle class/upper class housewife syndrome. There were some interesting staging responses here, perhaps still influenced by Ivo van Hove's version (staple-gunned flowers!) There was a long time ago, a Royal Exchange version set in a huge domed cage with Hedda dressed like a bird of paradise; that still seems to be an influence. *Antigone* also worked well with Punchdrunk and the idea of the different stories – with the audience either following Antigone or Ismene and able to explore their respective 'rooms'.

Artaud as a practitioner in this context is often less successful. On paper, when it is reduced to distressing the audience with fake blood and screams and pinching them and moving their bags, it rarely convinces. Perhaps because all the 'set' plays are dense with language and are partially studied for the delivery of this – Artaud seems to reduce this and becomes a series of, often unnecessary, special effects and assaulting the audience!

Competent responses tended to give a minimal range of methodologies being repeated within the context of the extract such as placards for Brecht, making the audience uncomfortable for Artaud and Punchdrunk, and 'natural acting/set design' for Stanislavski. Successful candidates could home in a method such as *gestus* and consider it within a wider practitioner informed framework which meant a fluency of writing and range of examples was in place. This meant that the team witnessed stronger responses for Brecht, Artaud, Punchdrunk and Berkoff for both questions. As reported in the previous series, it appears that on the whole Stanislavski remained problematic with

candidates writing about rehearsal techniques and referring to rehearsing for the role rather than responding to techniques in the performance. There were exceptions to this, with sets of responses where the candidates located the work within the actors' effective communication to an audience.

The final aspect required for Section C is the concept and this is probably the aspect that can determine a successful or unsuccessful response. Candidates should be advised not to offer unrealistic and dangerous concepts just to be 'different' because in doing so they bar themselves from achieving the higher levels.

Question 6 was better at embedding the concept but often it was stated at the beginning, e.g. 1961 New Orleans or 1945 East London pub or 1950s US plantation and never mentioned again. Many concepts were simply the 'theme' e.g. class war/mental health, make love not war; when in doubt, it is good practice to remain true to the key themes and the playwright's intentions.

There was an increased in the study of *The Tempest* this year, and some were well answered especially for staging. *Woyzeck* and *Hedda Gabler* seemed the most popular texts this year and the best answered, especially *Hedda Gabler*, followed by *Antigone*, although this did not always produce 'sensible' responses or credible concepts.

Strong candidates have sure-footed, whole production, well-prepared design ideas for their version of the play – they write as if they are, or even have, directed it.

Some production concepts lacked development and a sense of the candidate's own confidence in their ideas and it does seem that some candidates could be guided and challenged more in their concepts as they prepare them for the exam.

Occasionally concepts were either fanciful or non-existent, but the vast majority had been well worked through, respecting the playwright's intentions. Where candidates had real ownership of their concept, passion for the techniques of their chosen practitioner and a detailed understanding of the OPC, work was produced that was a pleasure to read.

Pearson continue to provide and add to resources available on the website as well as offering training and other support mechanisms all listed below.

Subject specific content and teaching queries including *Ask the Expert* queries:
teachingperformingarts@pearson.com

Assessment administration including request for permission for non-assessed candidates, digital theatre, extension requests:
drama.assessment@pearson.com

General centre related queries including reporting lost coursework, requesting special requirements, queries regarding entries and results:
[Pearson Qualifications Support - Contact Us](#)

Centres are also advised that the FAQ page is updated regularly and designed to answer questions regarding the delivery of the specification. It is important centres look at support materials, as this will help them gauge the expected standard and requirements of this component.

The web address is:

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-a-levels/drama-and-theatre2016.html>

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