

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel GCSE
in Drama (5DR03) Paper 01
Drama Performance

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5DR03 2015 Drama

Introduction

This report is compiled from the reports written by complete the examining team. In 2015 many examiners reported that their comments were very much in line with those in previous series so additional comments in relation to 2015 have been added in bold. Valid information from the 2014 report has been retained to support new teachers and centres or to remind others.

Overall work was seen that was of a higher standard than in 2014.

The Performance examination is worth 40% of the total GCSE qualification.

This is an externally examined unit and the assessment objectives and criteria do not change from those printed in the specification.

In preparing candidates for this unit the specification must be read with close reference to the Administrative Support Guide for the current examination series.

Centres choose the options taken by candidates, the texts or content for devised work and the audience present for the examination performances.

All work presented for examination must meet the requirements of the Assignment Brief for that year.

In response to feedback from both the examining team and centres there were concerns that much of the information in previous reports was repeated year on year.

This report will focus on significant aspects of the performance and some administrative issues of the 2014 series.

Overwhelmingly examiners reported that many of issues they noted that affected student performance would have been avoided if all centres read and understood the requirements of the unit. The Assessment Support Guide which is updated annually gives detailed information to support the administration of the unit. Both are available on the GCSE Drama and Theatre Studies homepage.

Centres can access previous reports on the homepage for GCSE Drama and Theatre Studies.

The Assignment Brief

In line with units in other GCSE specifications that have a written examination, a different focus must be set by the awarding body each year.

The Assignment Brief for 2015 was available on the website from the last Monday in October 2014.

Centres are reminded that the texts or ideas in the brief are suggestions only and it remains Edexcel policy not to approve or recommend any texts or material for Unit 3.

The Assignment Brief details the options (A-G) available and all the options were seen in 2015.

- The chosen option must be entered on the D3a form Group Performance Sheet. Many centres did not complete this in 2014.
- Examiners reported there was a correlation between the amount of detail of the written support material as detailed on the D3a form and the polish and success of the examination performances.

The Assignment Brief for 2015 was:

'Imaginative, believable and in depth characters are essential to engage the audience in a performance'.

It is a requirement of the specification that the Assignment Brief gives each year a new focus for the Unit 3 examination.

In previous series examiners had expressed concern that some students were producing final examination performances which disadvantaged students in achieving marks in the criteria for Roles and Characterisation and Communication (to audience members).

These were

- Performances where there was too much focus on abstract movement/physical theatre which could appear to be 'bolted on' and not intrinsic to the performance.
- Performances that were focussed on ensemble work with choral and whole group movement sequences dominating
- Performances where all students played many small roles for often a brief amount of time
- Performances where the main, some or all roles were divided between all students
- Performances where either no or unsuitable audiences were present for the examination
- Performances where the content was unsuitable for the audience

It is positive to report that the majority of centres had responded well to the Brief and there was an increase in students achieved consistently across all the criteria. This was often evidenced in the supporting written documentation where students made clear reference to the Brief and included details of the roles that would be seen in performance.

There was also an increase in centres considering the target audience for performances and detailing this.

It is disappointing to also report that there some centres who seemed to have ignored the Brief or presented work that was very similar to previous series. This was the first year that examiners returned to some centres for a second consecutive year and there were reports of the same texts or devised work being seen for a second time.

Option A: Devised work

- This remained the most popular option
- Most centres detailed the stimulus material as required
- This could be the same for all groups or different for some groups. There were no advantages in either choice
- The topic/theme/issue from Unit 1 was used with success in some centres
- Most centres provided details of each performance
- Most work seen had serious and often demanding stimulus material
- Many performances demonstrated high levels of research into the source material

Option B: Short Published Texts

- This was a less popular option
- Some short published comedy 'sketches' were less successful
- Most centres included the texts as performed
- Confusions by Alan Ackbourn was again a popular choice
- Single stories from Grimm's Tales and other Carol Ann Duffy texts were used

Option C : Extracts from full length texts

- There was felt to an increase in this option in 2015
- Overall the choice of extract needed to be chosen with care to make a coherent performance
- More centres sent the examiner the extract as performed by each group
- The same extract for many groups within a centre did disadvantage some students
- Dividing a complete text into sections disadvantaged some students

Option D: Adaptations of full length texts

- This was often very successful with skilful and thoughtful adaptations by centres
- The episodic form worked best overall for example choosing scenes from Bouncers/Shakers but maintaining the overall narrative arc of the original text.
- Most successful centres sent the adaptation of text as performed to the examiner
- This was often chosen by centres who also taught GCE Unit 2
- There was an increase in this option in 2015, perhaps because it supported the Assignment Brief
- There was an eclectic and more wide ranging choice of texts in 2015
- Texts by Willy Russell and John Godber remain popular and supported the Assignment Brief

Option E: Combination of Devised and Published Text

- This was the second most popular choice
- It supported a flexible and creative approach and gave all students an opportunity to make an individual contribution
- More centres did send the script of the performance so examiners could be well prepared. Good practice was indicating the dialogue taken from the original text and the new devised work by highlighting or change of font.
- This often produced very strong work demonstrating the individual student's research into the text

Option F: Theatre in Education

- This was seen very little in 2015 perhaps because the of the focus of the Assignment Brief
- Strongest work was seen when the target audience was present
- Most centres included an outline of the performance

- The most successful work demonstrated an understanding of the particular demands of this style of performance
- There were examples of both published texts and devised work

Option G

- This was listed less but elements of this option were frequently seen in Option A
- Successful work demonstrated considerable in depth research and a range of material
- It supported students in showing a wide range of skills
- The most successful sent a copy of the complete text as performed to the examiner
- This was seen very little in 2015 perhaps because of the focus of the Assignment Brief did not support a structure that uses a range of material would have supported in depth characterisation

Overall Achievement in Unit 3

- Work was seen by examiners that covered the full mark range.
 - Overall the performance work was of a higher standard than in 2014. This may reflect the increased understanding of many centres in preparing students for the examination performances
 - A few students were present at the examination but did so little that no marks could be awarded.
 - Full marks were also awarded to some students in some criteria
 - A few students produced performances that exceeded the GCSE level. This was in line with student achievement in previous series.
 - Work awarded marks in the higher levels was a result of a well-structured preparation and rehearsal period
 - Work in the higher levels had built on the skills and understanding gained in the Programme of Study.
 - There were examples of a 'house style' in centres that supported the students approach and final performance. This could be limiting for enabling more creative and imaginative performances
 - Tightly structured ensemble work could make identification of individual students' achievement very difficult for examiners and disadvantaged some students
- Devised Performances Option A
- The content of devised performances was very wide ranging and often thought provoking
 - More successful work reflected the research undertaken in the preparation process
 - Overall more work was seen that was serious in content and often had a strong didactic focus
 - Much work was relevant to the students own experience and engaged an audience of their peers
 - Strongest performances demonstrated and confident use of a wide range of skills and strategies chosen carefully to support all criteria in balance
 - Contemporary issues remain the most popular and often successful basis for performances
 - Simple staging including costumes/set/lighting was most supportive to effective performances
 - Less successful work tended not to create a theatre performance but relied on a linear narrative and more realistic approach perhaps influenced by television drama

- Less successful work relied too much on externals such as costume/sound/music/props/blackouts/miming to songs/dance etc that hindered the performance.

Again many centres are commended for supporting their students in the creation and realisation of devised performances that demonstrated their passion, conviction and commitment to creating vibrant 21st century theatre.

Scripted Performance (Option B/C/D)

- The majority of performances were well rehearsed and presented.
- Successful performances demonstrated students' understanding of the author's intentions.
- Successful performances showed depth of understanding of the crafted characters in the original text
- Students were supported where there was a sense of engaging with the full character arc
- Using Unit 2 texts supported students in depth of understanding of the text
- Students were supported by the well-crafted language of the text
- Students had varying degrees of security with the text. This was the basis of an effective group performance
- The proxemics were well rehearsed and effective in most performances
- Simple staging was most effective in supporting the performance
- Less successful work was when students did not understand the demands of scripted performance.
- Some students in a group lacking security with the lines affected the achievement of all in the group
- Some students were so poorly prepared that they had to either read the lines or receive many prompts

Combination of Devised and Scripted Performances (Options E and G)

- Play texts, and factual material were the most popular choices of stimulus
- This approach was supportive to all students giving them a clear foundation for the performance.
- This approach gave a clear framework to support all criteria
- Centres used effective use of flashback, devised pre or post scenes based on a text with often considerable understanding

Less work was seen on Options E and G but many of the points listed above apply to these performances

Performance Support (Used to support all options)

- No performance support students were seen by most examiners in 2015.
- Some centres had several PS students the majority had only 1 or 2
- PS was most often seen in centres with Performing Arts status or a clear focus on the teaching of these skills
- Most successful work was seen where the teaching of the skill had been part of the Programme of Study
- Most successful work was seen where centres had the facilities and resources to fully support this option

- This remains an option where the full range of marks is often not seen as students tend to be polarised at either the higher or lower mark levels
- Most students completed the minimum requirements for documentation but many exceeded this with very detailed and creative work
- Less successful students had very little or no supporting documentation and often refused to do a presentation or were absent on the day of the exam.
- Very few presentations were pre-recorded.
- Successful work clearly enhanced the performances
- Students can only offer one skill at GCSE level some offered 2 or more but only one could be awarded any marks
- Many portfolios/documentation were projected.
- More successful students then gave a summary of the main points
- Less successful students read the projected text verbatim.
- Far too many presentations far exceeded the 5 minute time limit .Examiners did not consider anything said after this time.
- Some students supported their presentations with 'visual aids' for example demonstrating lighting cues or having students present in costume.
- Lighting and Costume were the most popular options in 2015
- There was a great diversity in the achievement seen in 2015 and centres need to consider very carefully if they have the resources, facilities, skill and knowledge to support PS students to achieve at GCSE level
- There was evidence of strong support being given to students by school technicians as well as teachers
- Some students presented virtually identical documentation. Centres are reminded that although a framework can be given this must reflect the individual students work.

Administration of the Examination Performances

Examination Dates and Times

- There was a change in the initial contact made by examiners in 2015. Examiners were instructed to contact all centres in their allocation. If the initial examiner was unable to attend the centre they had to inform Edexcel.
- In 2015 examiners could attend the same centre in consecutive series. This will continue for the final two series of this specification
- Some centres were very tardy in contacting their examiner after the initial contact had been made. Examiners are not required to 'chase' centres for confirmation of dates.
- There was a new Initial Contact Form which enabled centres to provide much more detail to their examiner. The majority of centres completed this very well
- Centre visits have to be agreed on a first come first served basis
- It seemed more centres in 2015 were unable or unwilling to negotiate a mutually agreed date(s) and time(s) for the examination sessions. If a centre can only offer a single date and time then they must be prepared to make a recording for examination purposes in future series. Edexcel will not find another examiner
- It seemed in 2015 more centres requested a last minute change of date and time for the exam sessions. In some cases there was a valid reason for this, 'not being ready' was not. Centres must be prepared to make a recording for examination purposes in future series. Edexcel will not find another examiner.
- Examiners are not required to work on Saturday or Sunday

This is a complex examination to administer and it is hoped that both centres and examiners will have the flexibility to ensure this live performance exam works effectively in the remaining two series.

Performance Times

- Examiners must examine at least 20 students in a 3 hour session. **In 2015 there were fewer centres expecting examiners to wait for unacceptable amounts of time during the school day.** Centres are reminded that this is an examination and the 3 hour session must be observed.
- Examination conditions should apply to Unit 3 as it would to all other formal external examinations
- In 2015 most examinations were completed well before the 9.00 p.m deadline
- In 2015 most examinations started on time.
- There were still a number in very short performances or performances with a large number of very short scenes (often with lengthy blackouts). This disadvantaged students and did not enable them to achieve in the higher mark bands.
- Few performances were considerably overtime Examiners stopped marking at the maximum time limit as detailed in the ASG 2015
- Any work outside the maximum time limit was not awarded any marks by examiners
- The majority of groups were between 4 to 6 performance students in 2015
- Groups that tended to the lower end of the time requirement maintained energy and focus
- In 2015 as in 2014 there was an increase in examination sessions taking place in May
- Twilight and evening sessions remained popular in 2015 but centres are reminded that this is an examination and this must be the focus of the session.
- All examination sessions must run on consecutive days to give parity for all students. Some centres requested different sessions where there were students from different year groups.

Centre Documentation

- The majority of centres completed this well and met the deadlines both before and after the exam sessions
- Some centres failed to complete the written documentation and this did not support examiners being well prepared for the examination sessions
- More centres had attention to detail and had completed all documentation very well. There was a noticeable improvement in the detail provided to support the individual group performances as completed by the students.
- However there was an increase in the sending of incomplete D3b forms. Examiners are not required to complete these forms
- In particular the student descriptions on the D3b forms were frequently left blank. These should be completed by the individual students even if photographs will be available on the day.
- Those centres that failed to provide examiners with the materials in the detail required disadvantaged their students
- Examiners noted there was frequently a correlation between the detail and rigour with which the documentation had been completed and the quality of the examination work
- Poorly completed documentation was often reflected in less well prepared and secure performances

Examination Conditions

- Most centres ensured appropriate and supportive audiences were in place
- There were several examples of very small or no audiences that disadvantaged students
- There were fewer reports of large and inappropriate audiences. These less supportive audiences were usually for twilight or evening performances
- Centres must ensure that audiences remain for the complete 3 hour examination session
- Many examiners were not provided with a suitable private and quiet space to consider their marking when in the centre
- Some centres did not allow enough time between performances for examiners to consider their marks. The timetable as agreed prior to the examination should be adhered to by both centre and examiner
- There were also reports of overlong amounts of time between performances which resulted in examiners being present in centres well over the time allowed for the number of students
- Very few centres and students expected examiners to speak to them either before or after the performances. There was clear understanding that examiners are not permitted to speak to students except to clarify identification.
- Many centres gave the same importance to ensuring exam conditions were in place as they would if it were a written examination. All centres should do this.
- The most successful centres had prepared students for the formality of the examination

Identification of Students

- Despite the information in the 2014 report regarding the importance of easy and clear identification of all students there were still far too many students all wearing similar costumes most often 'theatre blacks'
- Other challenging costume choices were boiler suits in identical colours (white and orange being most popular) pajamas, school or military uniforms.
- Students having such insignificant identifiers such as coloured ribbons that cannot be seen clearly either in performance or recordings
- There were a number of students having many costume changes that were not detailed prior to the performance and this made it very difficult for examiners to clearly identify them
- Costume details not sent to examiners in advance
- There were in some cases many unnecessary costume changes
- Students who wore masks for considerable time in performance were disadvantaged

This remains the overwhelmingly major concern from examiners yet again in 2015. This has been detailed in every report since the first year of this specification.

- Centres must understand that if all students cannot be easily identified this disadvantages these students.
- Large clear photographs of each performance group in costume provided on the exam day with names/numbers/roles played greatly supported the identification of students
- Wearing of very different coloured tops or tabards is excellent practice for straightforward student identification

The importance of the DVD Recordings

- Overall the quality of the DVD recordings had improved in 2015. Many were exemplary.
- It was felt that centres had taken on board the importance of the recordings being in fact the 'scripts' for this examination.
- There remain many centres which cannot have checked the quality of the complete recording. There were many cases where the recording was incomplete, inaudible at times, out of focus at times or did not capture the whole performance space.
- There were also recordings where it was almost and in some cases absolutely impossible to identify individual students
- The main concern in 2015 was the despatch of the recordings to the examiner. The majority did not come as detailed in the ASG in hard protective cases. Most were in clear plastic or paper covers some with the addition of some bubble wrap or similar padding. The worst were just sent in an envelope with no protective covering.
- Examiners do not check recordings or request replacements.

Problems with Unit 3 Recordings

This is repeated from previous reports as it is a comprehensive list.

- Never sent to examiner/not sent within 10 working days
- Not finalised so could not be played on any DVD player
- Not recorded so could be played on a DVD player (Examiners will not check on computers)
- Recordings made behind rows of audience
- Recordings where examiner's head obscures the action
- Recordings made at a great distance from the performance space
- Recordings that go in and out of focus
- Recordings that do not capture complete performances
- Recordings where the sound is distorted
- Recordings where the sound is overlaid by comments from the camera operator (s)
- Incomplete recordings
- Recordings that either freeze or jump
- Recordings particularly of Section A that are not chapterised
- DVD time sheets not being accurately completed
- DVDs not sent in hard protective cases so become damaged/broken in transit

However on a more positive note there were many excellent recordings that captured the live experience of the examination with real professionalism.

Accompanied Visits

Edexcel thanks those centres which had an accompanied visit in 2015. This is an essential part of the monitoring process.

In a few cases this did affect the running time of the examination and Edexcel apologises for this

The Principal Examiner would like to thank all the centres that she visited this year for the professionalism and positive approach they maintained in the light of having a quartet of examiners present. It is a most rewarding part of the role to see the diversity of the live performances presented for the examination.

Good News Bad News

In 2014 I wrote at the request of the majority of examiners a plea that all centres avoid in future series both too many blackouts and black clothing in order to support all students and examiners in having successful examination sessions.

The good news is that examiners reported that there were only a few centres that had used blackouts so frequently that it disadvantaged students
The bad news is that there are still too many centres who continue to disadvantage their students by allowing them to wear theatre blacks.

All examiners have the responsibility to give every student the correct mark and the mark which they deserve but centres have the responsibility to ensure that all students can be identified.

There are two remaining years of this specification and I am hopeful that perhaps in 2017 there will be no group performances where all students are dressed in black or near identical costumes.

A range of coloured costumes that reflect the admirable diversity of the performance work seen would be a wonderful ending for Unit 3.

Summary

Students achieving in the 2 higher levels produced performances that reflected they had clearly been taught the specific skills required throughout the course. It was felt that marks in the lower levels were often symptomatic of students' lack of commitment or even disaffection not lack of centre support. It was of note that there was an increase in the number of students entered who did not attend for the examination performance.

Unit 3 is a unique examination that enables candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of drama by demonstrating it in a performance.

Beyond the requirements of this unit the work done by centres to encourage leadership, working as a member of a group, meeting deadlines, making decisions, and working cooperatively will prove to be of great value to these students in their future lives.

At the beginning of the report it was stated that this is a composite of the reports sent by the examining team. I end with a selection of the words and phrases used to describe students and their work in 2015.

Clearly hard working, enthusiastic, committed, well prepared, confident, creative, sensitive, energetic, thoughtful, skilled, high level of understanding of drama forms/styles, life enhancing, thought provoking and a privilege to examine.

I am certain that even in these uncertain days for Drama in the school curriculum that many of the above also apply to many teachers who have supported their students so admirably again or even for the first time in 2015.

Based on their performance in this Unit, centres and students should:

Centres:

- should make the opportunity for every student to realise their full potential in performance
- must ensure all students can be clearly and easily identified in performance
- must understand the importance of the DVD recording
- send the DVD recordings in careful packaging as detailed in the ASG
- understand and act upon the information in the Specification and Assessment Support Guide
- select texts/stimulus material that is accessible to all students
- select texts/stimulus materials that stretch the most able students

Students:

- understand the importance of working as a member of the group in preparing for Unit 3
- make sure they complete detailed group notes on the performance to send to the examiner
- make sure they can be easily identified in the performance by wearing different clothes/costumes
- work with commitment throughout the preparation period
- be a supportive audience member to fellow students
- be prepared to work as an individual as well as with the group in researching performance material

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>