



External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	Drama
Level	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the Examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

This year, the Question Paper format was slightly amended in a bid to improve accessibility for candidates. In Section A of the paper, the two generic questions that are set for each practitioner were further explained to help improve candidate focus.

The number of candidates sitting the exam remains fairly steady. There was a marginal decrease of 49 candidates from 2010.

The grade boundary marks remained the same as those of the past three years because the exam was of a similar standard of difficulty to those of previous years.

There was, however, a marked improvement in results from last year, which was most encouraging:

- ◆ 2.8% of candidates received an upper A this year, showing an increase of 1.7%
- ◆ 12.5% of candidates received a lower A this year, in line with 2010
- ◆ 27.2% of candidates received a B pass, showing an increase of 10.1%
- ◆ 72.2% of candidates passed the exam, showing an overall improvement of 7%, and
- ◆ 11.9% received a D pass

As only 15.9% of candidates received a No Award this year, it shows an improvement from last year when 19.8% of candidates received a No Award.

Marks remained fairly steady for both components of the exam with the average Practical mark being up 0.9 from last year and the average mark for the Question Paper having improved by 1.4, which was most encouraging.

Areas in which candidates performed well

The average mark for the Practical examination was 34.6 out of 50.

Visiting Assessors (VAs) were impressed with the wide range of texts used and the high levels of professionalism and enthusiasm of staff and pupils alike. There was total commitment to the Practical exam in the majority of centres.

Acting is still the most popular specialism. Candidates who showed character development in acting were commended by VAs who were impressed by the quality of their work.

Design is the next most popular specialism. This element was commended by VAs, who felt the quality of the work shown this year was generally of a high standard.

Areas where there could be improvement in the Practical component of the Course:

The Specialist Study Report

- ◆ It is clear that some centres are not following SQA guidance. Some reports were not completed in the specified time and were presented as over-long, typed dissertations, often similar in content.
- ◆ This is also a Unit assessment and should be completed in the recommended time allocation. Candidates are required to comment on academic sources and practical sources which help them arrive at their performance concept. They should then assess the influences they used which helped them arrive at their final performance concept. The skill of this is that a succinct report is required and should be completed in the given time. A mini thesis of unsourced academic information is not helpful to either the candidate or the Examiner. The report should not be extracted from information found on the internet which has little or no bearing on what the candidate has been asked to do.

General points

Some of these may have been made in previous years but remain pertinent.

- ◆ It is important that the audience chosen to watch the performance of the Practical exam is appropriate for the material used and should be supportive of the candidates.
- ◆ There are still a number of centres potentially disadvantaging candidates by choosing acting pieces which do not show sufficient, or at times any, character development. It is important that these do not come from one part of the play but are chosen to reflect the progress of the character over the text.
- ◆ Some staff are inclined to leave candidates to direct themselves or give them a huge amount of autonomy and, whereas this can be laudable, it can also work against the candidate who may lack real understanding of the play.
- ◆ It is unhelpful for staff to act with candidates or be directed by them, except in extraordinary circumstances because invariably the experience of the teacher works against the candidate.
- ◆ In acting it can be very difficult to mark the section relating to other characters when the other character is reading in and looking at the script all the time. In fairness to the candidate being examined, it is essential that the other actor is totally familiar with the lines.
- ◆ In the area of design, candidates must design for the whole play not one aspect of it or one act. In the case of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* many designers still become caught up in the magical female characters of the play and are apt to ignore the male characters.
- ◆ It is important that teachers regularly check how a design is progressing and developing.
- ◆ It is important that if a candidate chooses to act, design or direct from a text that they have studied that text thoroughly.

Areas which candidates found demanding

The Question Paper

Markers felt that the questions were fair and enabled candidates to answer on a wide variety of issues relating to their practitioners.

Almost all candidates chose the first question in Section A, even though the second question was very accessible. It is important that candidates read both questions pertaining to their practitioner.

Some candidates are still not addressing the question posed, even with the guide to point them in the right direction.

Stanislavski

The most popular practitioner in Section A is Stanislavski.

The majority of candidates answered Question 1, on the key influences and events which shaped and evolved Stanislavski's ideas for the theatre throughout his working life.

Most answered with the influences which can be found in the Sally Mackay/Simon Cooper book. Some referred to the main Stanislavski texts *Building a Character*, *My Life in Art*, and *An Actor Prepares*, but most of these references still come from the above book. While this is a good basis for the Course, candidates have to be encouraged to research further, in order to gain a wider understanding of the material.

Few candidates mentioned how these influences and events shaped and evolved his ideas for theatre. Some mentioned the System but few referred to any production after 1911. The most popular productions mentioned are *The Seagull* and *Othello*, often in that order.

Those who did refer to the System were apt to focus on certain parts — Circles of Attention, the Magic If, and Emotion Memory were all popular but there was little reference to how Stanislavski used these in productions. Others liked to talk about the Method, but seldom mentioned Stanislavski's time in America.

To enable candidates to answer a question in any depth, it is important that they are familiar with the whole body of work of the practitioner they study.

Those who attempted the second question wrote about Stanislavski's success in putting his theories into practice. This should have been a very straightforward question, which everyone should have been able to answer about the success of the System.

Not enough candidates know about what happened after 1906. They are familiar with *Othello* and some of the Chekhov plays. Most now, however, group these together and the only one referred to in any detail is *The Seagull*.

In any question about the success of Stanislavski's work, it would be unusual not to mention the experimental studio at the Moscow Art Theatre and its challenges, or mention the problems he encountered with the post-revolutionary regime and his time in America.

Craig

For those who answered on Craig, most opted for the first question and, on the whole, it was answered well. Some answered on the second question and, again, performed relatively well.

There is no doubt that the body of knowledge on Craig is so much easier to manage than that of Stanislavski. Most candidates studying Craig are obviously interested in him as a theatre practitioner and as a personality.

No candidates answered on Reinhardt, Meyerhold, Copeau, Piscator or Grotowski.

Artaud

Few candidates answer on Artaud and many still fall into the trap of writing down everything they know about him, without specifically addressing the question. This is common to many answers across the paper.

Brecht

Most candidates answered on the key influences in Brecht's life and some answered relatively well, but others found it difficult to explain how they shaped and evolved his ideas for the theatre. Some made a good attempt at listing Brecht's theories but this question challenged their knowledge of his theatrical practice.

Candidates know about influences and theories and are confident in handling these, but find it difficult to exemplify in ideas for the theatre.

An area which is lacking is knowledge of actual productions.

Brook

Candidates who answered on Brook generally applied their knowledge to Section B of the paper as both questions demanded a vast theatrical knowledge covering a minimum of three phases; some would claim four phases.

To answer the first question in this section meant candidates had to select a manageable amount of material. Some who answered the second question of this section tried to create an answer round the Empty Space and multiculturalism.

Most candidates who answer on Brook know their material well. Their problem is managing the breadth of material.

Boal

Those who attempted Question 19 seemed to enjoy it and did have something they could say although many essays were thin on how the influences and events shaped and evolved his ideas for theatre.

In the second question, many described his theories without applying them to the productions he had done, and, as with certain other practitioners, candidates are apt to fall into the trap of being anecdotal about Boal rather than answering the question posed.

Question twenty should have been the one where anyone studying Boal scored really well but too many concentrated on his theories and gave little on his practice.

Section B

Question 23 dealt with the importance of the actor in one or two contemporary productions and asked candidates to comment on how the practitioner they had studied saw the role of the actor in their practice.

Often candidates talked about a production they had seen but only referred to how the practitioner viewed the role of the actor in general terms, using few specifics. These questions were often imbalanced.

Question 24 asked how theatre technology was used to enhance dramatic meaning and impact and asked to what extent the practitioner whose work was studied used theatre technology in his productions.

Some, who answered on Brecht, coped reasonably well with this question but others did not seem to realise fully what theatre technology was and went on to list theatrical devices in the hope this would hit the mark.

Question 25 raised the question of directorial imprint and should have been the most accessible but this was the most poorly answered of all the questions in Section B because candidates treated it as a simple performance analysis and forgot they had a practitioner to consider as well.

Some who attempted to answer the question made questionable statements such as stating their practitioner was a conservative director in comparison to a director they had seen, who used modern dress for an Ibsen play.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

(Much of this has been stated previously, but remains the case for this year.)

Some general comments on Stanislavski

A number of centres seem to think that some knowledge of the System is enough to equip candidates for the exam. Every question asks for theatre practice, and in a career which spans more than forty years, candidates need to have a working knowledge of how this career developed. Because the source most centres use effectively stops at *Hamlet* in 1911, it is important to look elsewhere for information about what Stanislavski did in the following twenty-six years until his death.

Some general comments on Artaud

Because Artaud had such a fascinating personal life, many candidates don't get beyond that. They enjoy the fact that he despised the elitist society of nineteenth-century theatre goers, and wanted to shock. Moving on to his work, the aspects which clearly spark their imagination are those regarding the horrific aspects of his work such as the scorpions in *The Jet of Blood*. Unfortunately, they can get stuck there. Equally, if they refer to *The*

Philosopher's Stone, what is mentioned is the dismembered parts of Harlequin's body. The fact that many only refer to *The Cenci* and *The Jet of Blood* means that the body of work they are addressing is very narrow and instead of addressing the question asked they get caught up in the sensationalism of the man.

Candidates are apt to drop names and not follow through on information. An example is 'The Conquest of Mexico' being the pinnacle of Theatre of Cruelty but we are not told why this is the case.

Some general comments on Brecht

Candidates studying Brecht regularly write about Brecht the playwright, not Brecht the theatre practitioner. It is vital that candidates have knowledge of the plays Brecht directed. Instead, many write copious pages on Brecht's plays and theories and do not link them to his productions.

It is very similar to the way many candidates approach Stanislavski — there they learn the System but do not apply the System to the plays Stanislavski directed. In the case of Brecht, they learn the techniques but they do not apply the techniques to the plays Brecht directed.

In Section B of the paper, some candidates studying Brecht are apt to compare a contemporary production of a play by Brecht with a production Brecht did of the same text. This limits the candidate to discussing one production in a vast body of work where the rest is often ignored. This is not what candidates are asked to do. It is important they look at the body of work, not one play directed by the practitioner.

Some general comments on Brook

Although there is a vast body of Brook's work to study, the fact that his work can be classified into various areas makes it both exciting to study and manageable. Those who study Brook appear to be interested in the practitioner and often score well in the exam.

Some general comments on Section B of the paper

It is worth remembering that candidates seem to find it easier to address one contemporary production, rather than two. When they are using two, they are apt to lose focus and find the amount of material they have to handle difficult to manage.

It is advisable that candidates read the written text of the production they are going to use so that they are familiar with it. That way they can argue points from an informed position.

It is also beneficial for candidates to read preview material issued by a company or the director of a performance they are about to see. It is also important to take advantage of post-show discussions as these can offer invaluable insights into the work of the director.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	376
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	327
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 100				
A	15.3%	15.3%	50	68
B	27.2%	42.5%	89	57
C	29.7%	72.2%	97	46
D	11.9%	84.1%	39	40
No award	15.9%	100.0%	52	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

Each year, therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Head of Service and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.

The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related as they do not contain identical questions.

SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as Arrangements evolve and change.