



## External Assessment Report 2009

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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**

In 2008, the Question paper format was changed to increase accessibility for candidates and this proved to be a positive step. In Section A of the Question Paper, the two same generic questions are set for each practitioner and this helps provide equal parity across all theatre practitioners.

The main difference to the external examination in 2009 was that the weighting of the external components changed from a 45/55 split to a 50/50 split. The Practical component is now worth the same amount of marks as the Question Paper component and brings Drama more in line with other related Expressive Arts subjects. This new weighting had little effect on the A passes, but showed a positive increase at other levels.

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.

The number of candidate entries for Advanced Higher Drama in 2009 was stable, with a marginal increase from 2008.

Marks remained steady for both parts of the external examination with the average Practical exam mark being exactly the same as last year.

### **Areas in which candidates performed well**

The Practical component of the exam performed very well with an average mark of 31.7 out of 45. This translates to an impressive 35/50.

Visiting Examiners were impressed with the wide range of texts used and the high levels of professionalism and enthusiasm of staff and candidates alike. There was total commitment to the Practical exam event in the majority of centres.

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

Design is the next most popular specialism. This element was commended by Visiting Examiners, who felt the quality of the work shown this year in design was of an exceptionally high quality.

### **Areas for improvement in practical work**

#### **The Specialist Study Report**

- ◆ It is clear that some centres are not following SQA advice and the reports are not being completed in the specified time as they are presented as long, typed dissertations.
- ◆ This is a National Assessment Bank (NAB) instrument of assessment and should be completed in the recommended time allocation. Candidates are required to comment on academic sources which help them arrive at their performance concept, practical sources which helped them arrive at their performance concept and should then assess the influences they used which helped them arrive at their final performance concept. The skill required here is that it is succinct and should be completed within the given time constraint. A mini thesis of unsourced academic information is not helpful to either the candidate or the examiner.

## **General Points**

It is important that the audience chosen for the Practical exam is appropriate for the material being performed and should be support the candidates.

There are still a number of centres who disadvantage candidates by choosing acting pieces which do not show character development.

It is unhelpful for staff to act with candidates or be directed by them except in extreme or adverse circumstances because the experience of the teacher may work against the candidate.

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 become caught up in the magical female characters of the play and are apt to ignore the male characters. The Mechanicals are often sidelined.

It is important that if a candidate chooses to direct from a text that they have studied it thoroughly.

With regard to acting it is 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.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Question Paper: Section A**

#### **Stanislavski**

The most popular practitioner in Section A is Stanislavski.

The majority of candidates answered Question 1, on the relationship between the actor and the director. Most answered on aspects of the System, some referred to the main Stanislavski texts *Building a Character*, *My Life in Art* and *An Actor Prepares* but most of these references came from the Sally Mackay and Simon Cooper 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 Stanislavski's theatre practice in any detail and few had any relevant information about his writings, hence only attempting half the question asked. It is important that candidates are familiar with the whole body of work of the practitioner they study.

Those who attempted the Question 2 wrote about the theatrical climate but had little to say about the political or social climate apart from the fact that Stanislavski came from a very wealthy family. Unfortunately, a wealth of important political facts was largely ignored and few mentioned:

- ◆ the 1905 Revolution and its effect
- ◆ the 1917 Revolution
- ◆ the deposition of the royal family and how that affected Stanislavski's contemporaries
- ◆ life under Lenin
- ◆ life under Stalin
- ◆ the treatment of Meyerhold
- ◆ how the Arts were portrayed in revolutionary Russia

## **Craig**

For those who answered on Craig, most opted for the first question and, on the whole, it was answered well. Most candidates studying Craig are obviously interested in him as a theatre practitioner and as a personality.

The body of knowledge on Craig is much easier to manage than that of Stanislavski.

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

## **Artaud**

Few candidates answered on Artaud but many of these wrote down everything they knew about him, without addressing the question. This is common to many responses to questions across the paper.

## **Brecht**

When Question 15 was done well, it was done very well, but others fell into the habit of listing the theories of Brecht without referring to Brecht the theatrical practitioner.

Some candidates made a good attempt at answering this question, making adequate reference to the political climate as well as the social and theatrical climates. It was necessary, however, to go beyond the First World War and the writings of Marx to score well in this question.

## **Brook**

Candidates who answered on Brook in this section of the paper chose Question 17, as it gave them a huge amount of scope. Of those who attempted it, most answered well and had a comprehensive knowledge of the work of the practitioner which they applied to the question.

## **Boal**

Those who attempted Question 19 did not seem to have enough background to address what they were asked. Many described Boal's techniques 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 20 should have been the question where candidates studying Boal could score really well, but too many concentrated on his theories and gave little on his practice.

## **Grotowski**

One centre answered on Grotowski.

## **Question Paper: Section B**

Question 23 dealt with the status of design within a contemporary production and asked candidates to comment on how the practitioner they had studied saw the role of the designer in their work.

To respond well to this question, it helped if the candidate had some knowledge of who the designer actually was and had researched their relationship with the director. A number of candidates described one or two productions they had seen but did not refer to the status of design within the production.

For the second part of the question, many candidates described a production of the same play done by their practitioner. They did not refer to the body of work but to one play. Others listed off techniques

of the practitioner and said ..... *Would have liked this about the contemporary production but ..... would have disliked this.* This is not what the question asks and if the candidate did not address the question they were penalised.

Question 24 was the question which was best answered as it lent itself to a performance analysis. This is now an area where candidates are feeling more comfortable and know how to manage the material. For those who addressed the actor audience relationship, they scored well. The hook in the question which helped many candidates was *how the practitioner whose work you studied.....used the audience in their theatre making.*

Question 25 was the most poorly answered of all the questions in Section B. It was as if some candidates did not understand the difference in meaning between the pretext and the performance text. This is a vital part of the Course. Similarly, it is important to know the differences the theatrical practitioner made to their performance texts from the pretexts they used.

## **Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

### **Question Paper: Section A**

#### **Some general comments on Stanislavski**

Some knowledge of the System is not 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 book most centres use effectively stops at *Hamlet* in 1911, it is necessary to look elsewhere for information about what Stanislavski did in the following twenty six years until his death.

#### **Some general comments on Artaud**

Artaud had a fascinating personal life, and many candidates cannot 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 candidates tend to mention 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, they get caught up in the sensationalism of the man.

Candidates are apt to make passing statements and references and not follow this through with 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. This is very similar to the way many candidates approach Stanislavski, ie candidates 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 Question 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 work to study in Brook, 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 respond well in the exam.

### **Question Paper: Section B**

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 pretext of the production they are going to use so that they can note and understand the differences between the pretext and the performance text. This is vital in understanding the status of the written word and the performed play.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	272
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Number of resulted entries in 2009	286
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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	14.7%	14.7%	42	68
B	30.4%	45.1%	87	57
C	35.3%	80.4%	101	46
D	9.4%	89.9%	27	40
No award	10.1%	100.0%	29	-

### 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 SQA therefore 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 Business Manager 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.