



Common questions about National 4, National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher Drama

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National 5 course assessment

Question paper

What would be considered an appropriate response for ‘the advantages of different types of staging’?

Markers will accept as broad an interpretation as possible of potential advantages of specific types of staging, recognising that responses represent a candidate’s understanding of the type of staging within the context of their own centre. Advantages may include examples such as:

- ◆ the audience all viewing the drama from one perspective (End-on)
- ◆ the type of staging being representative of the conflict within the plot, as two sides face one another (Traverse)
- ◆ enabling a character to move closer to the audience (Thrust)
- ◆ communicating a theme such as entrapment (In-the-round)

The key guidance to offer candidates is that answers must be positive and not negative (for example a candidate shouldn’t justify one type of staging by explaining why another type of staging is less suitable).

Performance

What is the assessment model for the National 5 Drama performance and how does the process work?

Detailed information about the assessment is in the [National 5 Drama Course Specification](#) which you can find on SQA’s website.

- ◆ SQA appoints a visiting assessor (VA) and one day is allocated to each centre for the visit.
- ◆ The centre selects a sample of 12 candidates, representing a range of abilities, and including acting and production candidates, as appropriate.
- ◆ The designated centre assessor marks the preparation for performance in advance of the VA visit. This provisional mark is written on the preparation for performance in pencil.
- ◆ The VA reviews the preparation for performance marking at the start of the day. The VA and centre assessor then discuss the preparation for performance marking and agree marks. A quiet, private space is needed for this.
- ◆ The VA and the centre assessor collaboratively assess 12 candidates in recommended two to four performances. This includes the pre-show checks of each candidate. This establishes the standard, and the agreed marks for the sample are final.
- ◆ If there are more than 12 candidates, the centre assessor assesses the remaining candidates within two weeks of the visit.

- ◆ If a candidate is absent for the duration of your two week period, you must contact SQA's Assessment Arrangements Team for advice at aarequests@sqa.org.uk.

You can find [documentation](#) to support this process on SQA's website.

What are the requirements for the National 5 Drama visiting assessment?

Preparation for performance

Preparation for performance responses can be written or typed and should not exceed 400 words. A review that significantly exceeds this recommended length is not considered to be concise and therefore cannot access the top range of marks (9-10). A box has been added to the candidate mark sheet to indicate the word count of the preparation for performance. This should be completed in advance of the VA's arrival. The preparation for performance should be produced in open-book conditions and must be completed and marked by the centre assessor before the visiting assessor arrives. There must be a quiet and private space for the VA to read the preparation for performance responses, and for the VA and designated centre assessor to discuss national standards and decisions. This space should be for the sole use of the VA and centre assessor.

Acting candidates

Candidates should perform as a group with a minimum of two and a maximum of ten actors. The performance must last a minimum of 10 minutes and not exceed a maximum of 50 minutes, which would be enough to assess up to 10 actors. Duologues should not be used for all candidates. Acting candidates should be cast in only one role.

Production candidates

Candidates must demonstrate their chosen production role using actors in performance. During the visit, the VA looks at the candidate's plans, drawings, designs, plot sheets and mood boards. Before the performance, the VA and the designated centre assessor watches the candidate's pre-show checks.

You can find full details in the 'Course assessment structure: performance' section of the [National 5 Drama Course Specification](#). This includes guidance for each production area.

Could a script with 11 actors be used?

No. Groups should contain a minimum of two and a maximum of 10 actors. If a script has 11 actors or more, you could cut one of the characters or cut the play into two performances. Otherwise, you should choose another script.

Can more than one candidate do the same production role in a performance?

No. Candidates work in a group to demonstrate their production role through a performance with actors on a chosen text. So, two lighting candidates cannot design and apply their lighting skills during the same performance, as their individual production skills need to be examined in performance. This applies to all production roles.

Higher course assessment

Question paper

What is the definition of an acting concept?

An acting concept refers to an actor's use of voice and movement to communicate an idea and meaning. At Higher the description of these concepts should be detailed, coherent and clearly justified.

It could refer to the following:

- ◆ characterisation
- ◆ acting techniques
- ◆ acting style
- ◆ rehearsal techniques
- ◆ voice
- ◆ movement
- ◆ stage proxemics
- ◆ interaction between characters and any other relevant features*

(*An example of other relevant features could be how the actor would make use of a prop at a particular moment to communicate an idea.)

Section 1

Are candidates able to use the same acting concept more than once?

Yes. If the candidate is describing detailed acting concepts related to their textual analysis points, they are describing integrated aspects of an actor's use of movement, voice and/or space.

It is good practice for candidates to describe an acting concept using more than one voice and movement term (it is unlikely that a detailed acting concept can be communicated through facial expression alone). Whilst repetition is therefore possible across acting concepts, you should encourage candidates to vary their use of movement, voice, and/or space across their response.

As a director, can a candidate refer to just acting or a combination of acting and production areas?

There is scope for candidates to cover all areas and it is good practice to reference more than one area, but it is not essential. A candidate could gain marks by only referring to acting, but equally could gain marks by only referring to other production areas. They could also combine an acting and production area (such as lighting) together to make one point. The candidate needs to write enough detail to allow their concept to be clearly visualised.

When describing the moment, how much detail is required to access the b mark?

Marks are awarded for a holistic concept. For example, when writing about acting, one voice or one movement term is not considered a concept. The candidate needs to write enough detail to allow their concept to be clearly visualised. Accurate and appropriate concepts will be awarded marks.

When describing an acting concept, do candidates have to include a description of both voice and movement?

Marks are awarded for a holistic acting concept. If possible, candidates should try to include relevant voice and movement for the moment being discussed, to fully describe their acting concept. Voice can be very important when discussing how the character will deliver the quoted text, however, movement may be equally relevant.

There are some moments in a text where voice may not be used by an actor and some moments where use of movement may be less relevant. A candidate's description of their holistic acting concept should be appropriate to the example given in the first part of their answer.

When describing acting concepts, how much detail is required?

Accurate terminology combined with an appropriate adjective is required, for example angry facial expression. Accurate use of terminology can enable candidates to offer more succinct responses. If the candidate can give extra details, then this is commended and helps create the picture on stage. At Higher level, candidates are expected to use a range of voice and/or movement terminology when describing their acting concept.

What would be considered an insightful comment for the b1 mark?

The comment should justify why the concept would have an impact on the audience and should relate to the first part of the question. It could also, for example, allow us to think about the deeper meaning of a moment or the social and/or historical circumstances of the time, or foreshadowing something that is to come.

Do candidates need to draw examples from the whole play?

Candidates are asked to consider the play as a whole and it is good practice to do so. However, they may decide to focus on one particular part of the play, and this is acceptable. Some questions even state to consider a particular scene. Candidates do not need to draw from the whole play to gain marks.

Is it best if candidates only offer acting concepts for one actor on stage?

In questions to be answered 'As an actor' candidates may be asked to discuss the acting concepts of one character, who would be the focus of their answer. However, when discussing relationships, it would be relevant to talk about another actor. For example, one character being centre stage (CS) in close proxemics to another character.

Section 2

Should quotes be used?

Quotes are not required, but clear reference to the selected text **is** required in order to provide context.

Should theatre terminology be used?

Accurate theatre terminology and appropriate adjectives should be used throughout.

Should there be a link between section 1 and section 2 of the question paper?

Not necessarily. The questions in section 2 enable candidates to show further breadth and development of their understanding of their selected text. They can do this by applying skills inherent with acting and/or directing and/or designing, however, their responses must be on the **same** selected text for section 1 and section 2.

The specimen question paper has questions from the role of a designer and director — will this be the same every year?

No. Questions will vary each year from acting, directing and/or design.

Are ground plans or designs with annotations marked as part of responses?

No. However, if candidates feel that a ground plan and/or design with annotations help to support their answer, then that is acceptable, but these are not marked.

Section 3

What aspects might performance analysis questions focus on, and what are the possible performance areas to select from?

Candidates may be asked to focus on aspects of a production they have seen. They must choose two from the following four production areas:

- ◆ choice and use of the performance space
- ◆ director's intentions and effectiveness
- ◆ acting and development of characters
- ◆ design concepts and their effectiveness. (Candidates can refer to one, or more than one, design concept in their response.)

How many moments should candidates analyse?

Finding and analysing 10 moments is best practice. Candidates often miss out on marks if they use the same moment for both production areas. Using five key moments is acceptable and candidates can still gain 10 marks for each production area if analysis and depth is produced in their answer. However, candidates must avoid repetition.

Are quotes required in the performance analysis essay?

Quotes are not required, but clear reference to the performance text **is** required, (for example, what happened on stage). It may be useful for candidates to look at the play text, if available, to gain an understanding of directorial decisions made.

What level of description is required of the moment, and what emphasis is there on the correct use of terminology?

The 'how' part of the answer must provide enough depth and detail that the marker can visualise what is happening on the stage at that moment. Metaphorical language can create different images for different people. Using terminology correctly is best practice. There is some flexibility here, as not everything you see on the stage in every production can be described and analysed with specific terminology.

Is it best to advise candidates to only offer directing and/or acting concepts for one actor on stage?

Candidates can refer to many different actors throughout the play when analysing what they saw.

Performance

What is the recommended length for Higher acting pieces?

Recommended timings for the performance examination can be found in the Higher Drama Course Specification.

What constitutes a full and detailed account of research findings on the chosen text, with thorough insight into the social and historical context?

Preparation for performance responses can be written or typed and should not exceed 500 words. For acting candidates, approximately 250 words should therefore be allocated to each role. For preparation for performance, candidates should give a relevant and concise account of their research, and how this has informed the development of their role

For example, with *Men Should Weep*, it is appropriate for candidates to give relevant historical research. For *Gilt*, the social context of consumerism or the individual issue relating to the character being portrayed may be more relevant.

Are there examples of preparation for performance?

You can find examples of candidate's preparation for performance on the Understanding Standards Drama pages of [SQA's secure website](#), along with the performance commentary.

The preparation for performance should be a clear and concise summary. Candidates should give details of key parts of their research of their chosen text, and the process, development and progression of acting, directing or design concepts.

Should we include rehearsal techniques used to develop roles such as character cards or hot-seating in the preparation for performance?

There is no requirement to detail these characterisation techniques.

What are the definitions of a 'made costume' and a 'made prop'?

A 'made costume' is made to meet the demands of the text in terms of the practicalities, interpretation of key design concepts (for example style or period of the play), and must be made to fit an actor or mannequin to demonstrate its functionality. The costume can be sewn or held together with fabric glue as the method of 'making' is not prescribed.

A 'made prop' must be fully functional and fit for purpose to be used on stage. It must demonstrate the design concepts, in terms of the practicalities and interpretation of the style of set and period. The prop can be personal or a set prop. It can be created entirely from craft materials or created using other objects.

If a candidate selects props, is this set dressing also?

Candidates design props for the whole play and this could include set dressing.

For sound, can candidates use a recording app on a smartphone?

If candidates can accurately communicate their sound concepts, this is an acceptable approach.

What are the requirements for the Higher Drama visiting assessment?

You can find full details in the 'Course assessment structure: performance' section of the [Higher Drama Course Specification](#).

Advanced Higher course assessment

Project–dissertation

Can candidates look at musicals or dance as part of their dissertation topic?

No. The project–dissertation should not be about an aspect of ballet, opera, film or musicals. The performance issue identified must be about an influential theatre practitioner and their impact on professional theatre practice; or professional theatre (contemporary or historic) theories, processes and practices within the context of their identified performance issue.

Is there a maximum word count for the project–dissertation?

Yes. It should be 2,500 to 3,000 words and candidates should acknowledge sources and include visual evidence, as appropriate. They must submit their word count with the project–dissertation, however, if the word count exceeds the maximum by more than 10%, a penalty is applied.

Is it necessary for candidates to reference a historic practitioner in their project–dissertation?

No, unless it is relevant to the performance issue they are discussing.

Assignment

Can candidates devise their own question for the assignment?

No. SQA annually provides a choice of two performance analysis questions. Candidates must choose one of the questions as a basis for the assignment. You can find the questions on the [Advanced Higher Drama subject page](#).

Can candidates write about the same theatrical production or theatre practitioner as they did for the project–dissertation?

No. The assignment is a performance analysis. Candidates must study a different theatrical production and theatre practitioner than they studied for the project–dissertation. You can find a list of influential practitioners in 'Appendix 2' of the [Advanced Higher Drama Course Specification](#).

How does the assignment differ from the project–dissertation?

For the project–dissertation, candidates choose an aspect of drama that interests them. They carry out independent research and communicate their findings in a dissertation of 2,500 to 3,000 words. The assignment, however, is an analysis of a performance of a play and

candidates have 1 hour and 30 minutes to complete this, under controlled conditions. The resource sheet must be submitted with the assignment, and 4 marks are deducted if it is not. You can find the assessment arrangements in the [Advanced Higher Drama Course Specification](#).

How important is the use of subject specific terminology in the assignment?

The Advanced Higher Drama course does not have a required lexicon of terminology, however, candidates can use the full range of terminology from the Higher lexicon to support their analysis, as appropriate.

Candidates should give detailed, relevant, and effective analysis from their chosen production. If they give examples with clarity and express them vividly, this is acceptable.

For example, if a candidate is analysing lighting in their assignment, their detailed analysed examples should focus on the meaning and impact created on stage. They should not be referencing lanterns and levels used, as these may, or may not be accurate and lack relevancy to their argument.

What is assessed is the holistic quality of the analysed examples and how they are used to address the question and build their argument.

Performance

For the monologue, can other actors be on stage with the candidate?

No. The candidate must appear on stage alone.

Can stand-alone audition pieces be used for the monologue?

No. Monologues should be taken from full-length play texts. The marking instructions detail where reference is made to the interpretation of the character in the context of the textual and sub-textual clues.

For the Advanced Higher Drama visiting assessment, what are the requirements for acting, design and directing?

You can find full details in the 'Course assessment structure: performance' section of the [Advanced Higher Drama Course Specification](#).

All levels

General

Is there a guide to choosing texts?

SQA has published an extensive list of recommended texts that offer a great deal of choice, breadth and scope. This list is based on centre choices that are appropriate for National 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher. If teachers and lecturers have any doubts about suitable texts when making choices for their candidates, they should use the SQA recommended texts list to ensure that candidates are challenged at an appropriate level. You can find the recommended texts list in 'Appendix 3' of the course specification at each level.

Can I make edits to a script for the Performance exam?

Yes. It is common practice to cut or reduce lengthy speeches and to cut some minor characters lines where this does not affect the integrity of the playwright's work. Changes should not be made that affect the playwright's intentions, the textual clues and the accent.

Edits should not include redistribution of lines written for one character being allocated to another character.

Edits should also not include the addition of lines/scenes that are not present within the published text.

Can I change the setting of a play?

This can depend on the text selected. To allow for personalisation and choice, teachers and candidates have the choice of the text used for performance. You should ensure the piece is suitable for your candidates and that it allows them to meet the marking criteria given in the course specification. Teachers and candidates should refer to the recommended text list as guidance for text appropriate to the level. The playwright's intentions should be kept in mind and if the setting is integral, it shouldn't be changed.

Is there a glossary of drama terms available?

You can find the National 5 Drama lexicon in 'Appendix 2' of the [National 5 Drama Course Specification](#) on SQA's website.

You can find the Higher Drama lexicon in 'Appendix 2' of the [Higher Drama Course Specification](#) on SQA's website.

Should candidate performance be recorded?

Yes. Although this is not mandatory, we recommend centres record performances on the day of the VA's visit. This ensures that they can use the [exceptional circumstances consideration service](#) or the [appeals service](#), if necessary.

- ◆ National 5 technical — candidates must be recorded carrying out their pre-show checks.
- ◆ Higher and Advanced Higher design — candidates must be recorded demonstrating their additional production role.

Centres that choose not to record the performance assessment can still request a review of the question paper for National 5 and Higher, or the project–dissertation or assignment for Advanced Higher.

You can find more information about [recording performances during visiting assessment](#) on the Drama page of SQA's website.

Is there any guidance on gender when choosing acting roles in performances?

We recognise that no candidate should be put in a position where they feel uncomfortable taking on an acting role for their performance assessment, including roles of a particular gender. Candidates who are assessed for their drama performances have the option to choose roles that are the same as, or different from, the gender they identify with. This option applies to all acting pieces.

It is important to note, however, that the textual clues that make up the character they want to play (such as age or personality) must be adhered to. The gender and names of the characters within the play must not be changed, as it will affect the context and viewing of the play, and what the playwright intended. You should help candidates choose the most appropriate role for their performance assessment.

Can I use a musical for any component in Drama?

No. Musicals, pantomime, ballet or opera must be used for any component in NQ Drama. They must not be used for the Performance component at any level. Musicals must not be used for the Higher Drama question paper (Section 3), the Advanced Higher Assignment or Dissertation.

How do I put in place alternative assessment arrangements for the performance?

Flexibility within the assessment allows candidates (with your support) to choose the piece and the role that best suits them. This could be an acting or a technical role, however it should maximise a candidate's ability to engage with the assessment.

It is **not** the role of the VA to make any decision on assessment arrangements. You must contact SQA's Assessment Arrangements Team (aarequests@sqa.org.uk) as soon as possible with details of the candidate and the assessment arrangement required for consideration. They will inform the VA of any assessment arrangements agreed in advance of their scheduled visit.

Unit assessment

Note: unit assessment is no longer mandatory for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher National Courses. However, all units are still available as freestanding units.

General

In the unit assessment support packs for Drama units at National 4 and SCQF level 5, there is a set of stimuli. Are these stimuli suggestions or do they need to be used explicitly?

Packs 2 and 3 provide specific stimuli. Alternatively, you can use UAS package 1 to work with your own stimuli.

The judging evidence tables for both packs are very similar, and it may be useful to refer to pack 2 to see how the specific stimuli are used for evidence. If you are choosing your own stimuli, you should use pack 1.

The stimuli in the packs are examples, so you can change the context. If you plan to make considerable changes to the assessment, you should have your assessment prior verified. This is only necessary if you make changes to the nature or the level of demand of the task.

You can find more information on [submitting a prior verification request](#) on SQA's website.

Your SQA co-ordinator can access [support packs and materials](#) on SQA's secure site.

When candidates complete an evaluation at the end of each unit assessment, must this be completed in controlled conditions?

No.

Can the National 4 Added Value Unit performance be a scripted play?

Yes, but it doesn't need to be. The performance content is agreed between you and the candidate, and may be devised or scripted. This offers flexibility, as candidates can improvise or work from text.

SCQF level 6

What are the expectations of 'complex production skills'?

The progression for production skills is seen through candidate responses. It is demonstrated in their exploration of concepts and application of skills, to challenging stimuli and/or play text and

contexts for study. It is up to you to offer candidates increasingly complex materials and stimuli for them to explore. For example, this could be in terms of thematic content, language, imagery, and technical demands of text. The descriptive language used in the acting mark sheets for the performance can be useful to help inform assessment judgements.

For the unit assessment, however, the director would only be applying their skills to a particular extract and may not have knowledge of the whole text to communicate overall concepts.

With design for production skills, you would only be looking for candidates to develop concepts and/or ideas for one production role that relates to an extract. It is good practice to get candidates to create a ground plan and elevation to contextualise their ideas to help to inform their understanding of overall concepts. However, this is not mandatory evidence for a unit pass in one production skill.

SCQF level 7

What are the freestanding units at SCQF level 7

There are two [Drama freestanding units](#):

- ◆ Drama Skills unit at SCQF level 7
- ◆ Drama: Production Skills unit at SCQF level 7

For Drama Skills, the candidate devises a drama that is informed by practices and methodologies of one or more practitioners.

For Drama: Production Skills, the candidate develops and applies selected production skills as an actor, director or designer, which is informed by research of one or more practitioners.

You will find general questions and answers about National Qualifications on our website at www.sqa.org.uk/faq.