

**Drama GA 1: Unit 3
Drama: Unit 4 Outcomes 1 and 3**

UNIT 3

This report is provided for the first year of implementation of this study and is based on the coursework audit and VCAA statistical data.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The audit showed that most teachers developed challenging, exciting and innovative Ensemble tasks supported by clear and insightful tasks relating to Outcome 2 and 3. These tasks enabled their students to explore the key knowledge and skills of Unit 3 Drama.

Unit 3 School-assessed Coursework requirements for the 2007 VCE Drama study are similar in scope and nature to those for the previous study. Most teachers seem to have adapted 2006 tasks to accommodate required changes and have continued to provide their students with tasks that give them every opportunity to achieve at the highest levels.

Most teachers followed the *VCE Drama Assessment Handbook* to structure the outline of the Ensemble performance for Outcome 1. These tasks clearly covered the key knowledge and skills. The better tasks in Outcome 1 were unambiguous with instructions stating the performance focus clearly and succinctly. Using the advice about 'Designing the assessment task' in Section 2 (pages 13–14) and the dot point format outlined in Section 3 (page 34) of central theme/s, characters, stimulus and reference material, performance focus, performance style/s, theatrical conventions and dramatic elements is definitely the best way to present instructions for Outcome 1 to students.

Some guidelines provided for Outcome 1 (Ensemble performance) were too complicated or unclear in their instruction. They lacked a clear focus statement and needed much deciphering in order to understand the task. This was particularly evident when teachers chose to move away from the suggested dot-point format and set general theme based topics which relied on the teacher 'tightening up' the expectations and content of the task as the students workshopped ideas. This approach does not ensure that students will be equitably treated during the task or that the initial instructions will indicate to students expected qualities of work at the highest level. Some stimulus and research material did not link well to the ensemble focus. Some excellent background information and practice tasks were developed for Outcomes 2 and 3. Most teachers chose to use essay or short-answer format tasks for these outcomes. Based on the use and ordering of key skills and criteria in instructions to students it was clear that some teachers had not fully implemented the new *VCE Drama Study Design* when they developed assessment tasks for School-assessed Coursework.

Teachers whose schools are selected for School-assessed Coursework audit should only include the audit material that is being asked for. Complete marking sheets, course outlines, extracts from text books, unnecessary photocopies of the study design, glossy programmes etc. should not be included. Exactly what is being asked for should be noted.

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SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Unit 3 Coursework

Outcome 1

Develop and present character/s within a non-naturalistic ensemble performance.

Task description

Presentation of character/s within an ensemble performance

Themes and topics

The topics developed for the Ensemble Performance gave students ample opportunities to develop characters in a non-naturalistic performance.

Time settings were varied and tended to be broken up into the past, for example 1800s–1900s, the 1950, 1960s and 1970s, the present day, and the future. Many teachers set their task using a flexible timeframe. Interestingly very few chose timeframes prior to the 1800s.

The ensembles were based on a broad range of topics such as:

- technology, for example genetic engineering, use of technology in the future
- rural and historical Australia
- social and historical issues such as Chernobyl, The Holocaust, refugees
- morality issues
- theme based such as isolation
- elements for example fire.

Most teachers chose a user friendly approach and listed a broad range of stimulus material for the students to use as a basis for their research.

The use of non-naturalistic styles were well incorporated to reflect the focus of the given topic. The more abstract topics tended to focus on styles such as Absurdism and Expressionism. By far the most commonly used style was Epic Theatre evidenced by the accessible associated conventions. A suggested challenge for teachers would be to employ different performance styles over the ensembles they develop for different years and not rely on the ‘proven tested’ formula.

Symbol, mood and contrast were the most commonly specified dramatic elements. Given that many students struggle to define and integrate the use of ‘symbol’ into their work it is encouraging and worth noting that over 50 per cent of topics included it as a specified element. Teachers are selecting elements that challenge the students in their thinking and implementation. The least used elements were focus and timing.

Most teachers listed two to three prescribed elements and conventions as the focus for assessment rather than asking the students to select the elements and incorporate any non-naturalistic convention.

Key knowledge and skills

The use of non-naturalistic styles was well covered in instructions to students by linking the theme and stimulus material to the associated theatrical conventions. The ‘top 4’ styles of Epic Theatre, Absurdism, Theatre of Cruelty and Poor Theatre featured strongly. Few teachers incorporated non-Western practitioners/traditions/performance styles.

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Although teachers may have included the implementation of disjointed time, transformation of place, space and object within the tasks they developed, many failed to list this as an **essential** requirement for Outcome 1.

Assessment

Approaches to assessing this task varied considerably. Most teachers assessed the task using the performance descriptors (including the subheadings) on page 15 of the assessment handbook in combination with the marking scheme on page 35. Many others chose to split the performance descriptors into separate assessment items (criteria) and assign their own marking scheme.

Teachers used a range of weightings to assess aspects of the ensemble performance. Even breakdowns for the 60-mark task included:

- four 'criteria' based on the sub-headings in the performance descriptors x 15 marks
- six 'criteria' x 10 marks
- twelve 'criteria' x 5 marks.

Unequal weightings of the criteria tended to place more emphasis on the performance components of the task. For example, some teachers placed greater emphasis on 'use of non-naturalistic performance styles in the development and presentation of the ensemble performance' and 'realisation of character/s within the ensemble performance'. Others allocated marks to use of specific dramatic elements, stagecraft and/or conventions.

Some teachers divided the 60 marks into 28 marks for Workbook (non performance) and 32 marks for Performance. Teachers should note that the assessment task for Outcome 1 is 'Presentation of character/s within an ensemble performance'. While research and other creative processes used in the development of the performance will contribute to the presentation, this aspect should be assessed through the performance, not through a separate workbook. A workbook or journal developed during the completion of Outcome 1 provides an excellent resource for students to use in completing Outcome 2.

It is important to note that the Ensemble Performance is a performance task that focuses on the work created by the students and their performance of that work. The weighting of assessment should be towards how construction of the performance and use of play-making techniques is evident in the performance. The suggested marking scheme/descriptors on page 35 of the assessment handbook gives 13 marks to the construction of the performance and 13 marks to use of play-making techniques. These aspects of the task should not be interpreted as purely a construction item that occurs before the performance but should be assessed on evidence from the performance. Marking schemes for this task should recognise but not emphasise 'construction' aspects of the task.

Outcome 2

Analyse play-making techniques used to construct and present ensemble works including the work created for Outcome 1.

Assessment task types

- Written report
- Responses to structured questions

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The preferred format for this task was structured short-answer questions with teachers using the advice on page 18 of the assessment handbook to set between four to six questions. Less well-developed assessment tasks lacked direction for the students or included questions that did not link well to the key skills and knowledge. A number of assessment marking sheets bore no resemblance to the questions asked. Questions should be matched with the assessment marking system.

The weighting of a question needs careful consideration for the teacher to be able to determine the quality of the answer. A detailed short-answer question should not be allocated a maximum possible mark of 1. It would be better to increase the total number of marks for the task and then divide so that the maximum number of marks is 15. For example, many teachers initially marked the task out of 30 (for example, setting 6 questions worth 5 marks each) and then divided students' scores by 2 so that the maximum score was 15.

Outcome 3

Analyse and evaluate a non-naturalistic performance selected from the prescribed playlist.

Assessment task types

- A written report
- Responses to structured questions

Outcome 3 followed the same pattern of Outcome 2. Most teachers adhered carefully to the study design and implemented the advice of the assessment handbook. Questions were structured to provide maximum guidance for the students. However, as in Outcome 2 some assessment marking sheets and mark breakdowns did not link well with the questions. The use of some of the terminology was unclear or ambiguous, for example asking the students to list too many expressive skills. Other assessment tasks failed to focus on the use of non-naturalism in performance and tended to focus on the skill of the actors and the themes or message of the play.

Summary

Teachers should ensure that they are very familiar with the **new** (2007–2011) study design and assessment handbook before they set School-assessed Coursework assessment tasks for their students. The communication lines should be kept open with the VCAA and other Drama teachers, especially the valuable resource of Drama Victoria. Most Drama teachers are more than happy to share ideas and resources.

UNIT 4

This report is provided for the first year of implementation of this study and is based on the coursework audit and VCAA statistical data.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Unit 4 Coursework

The inclusion of a short 1–2 minute solo performance (Outcome 1) to the revised *VCE Drama Study Design* aims to prepare the students for Outcome 2 by requiring them to use a range of processes to create, develop and present a solo performance. Successful completion of Outcome 1 should enable students to develop the knowledge, confidence required and skills to develop their solo for the end-of-year performance examination. The audit showed that

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most teachers successfully implemented Outcome 1 through the selection of rich stimulus material and the setting of very clear guidelines.

The challenge for teachers developing an outline for Outcome 1 was to achieve a suitable balance between the demands of the task given the limited time available for the developmental process, presentation and documentation of the solo performance. More successful tasks developed by teachers were based on a stimulus that enabled students to have an immediate empathetic response. A clear performance focus and guidelines greatly assisted students to construct a line of action and develop character/s.

Some teachers offered choice by setting a number of topics for the short solo. This may prepare them for Outcome 2 when they have to choose one of ten topics; however, there is a danger that students will waste valuable time selecting a topic. The better tasks gave students a limited or no choice and launched straight into the analysis of the stimulus and the process of solo development.

The stimulus material for Outcome 1 should be readily accessible to the students. They do not have the time to research and synthesise a large amount of information. The more difficult tasks set by teachers required the students to find their own stimulus material, and expected that they do considerable research before commencing the creation of their work. This approach added to student workload and is beyond the intended scope of the task.

It was clearly evident that teachers successfully implemented a number of formats and suggestions provided in the study design and *VCE Drama Assessment Handbook* and resource material available from Drama Victoria.

The better tasks gave clear guidelines on the timeline and expectations for every class over the developmental phase. The study design clearly states that this task should be completed between 6–8 lessons. Most teachers completed the task within a two-week timeframe.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Outcome 1

Create and present a short solo performance based on stimulus material, and evaluate the processes used.

Tasks

- Presentation of a short solo performance based on stimulus material
- Short written report that describes and analyses processes used at different stages to create the performance

The topics set for Outcome 1 included; contemporary and historical real life people and events, issues from recent newspaper articles, literature (including children's' storybooks), theme based focus statements and the exploration of a given culture.

The dramatic potential of the selected stimulus material was very good; however, some teachers chose material that was too complex or required extensive research.

The tasks set by some teachers placed unrealistic demands upon students. There is not enough time in a 1–2-minute solo performance to explore themes and messages in depth. The main

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aim of this task should be to explore the process of devising a solo performance and to develop a narrative, characters and a working script that incorporates given theatrical conventions and dramatic elements. The better tasks allowed students to readily access the stimulus material and to focus on the stages of the creative process by providing a clear step by step list of instructions that guided them through the phases of developing a solo performance.

If the chosen stimulus material requires a lot of time to watch, read or decipher, a teacher should give the stimulus to the students well before the class workshops commence.

Assessment

Most teachers used the performance descriptors in the assessment handbook to develop the assessment criteria for the solo performance and short written report.

The short written report assesses the documentation and evaluation processes used to construct the solo performance. The format of this task varied considerably between a question used to structure an 'essay-style' report to a report structured around 3–10 short-answer questions. The better tasks posed questions that were clear and straight to the point.

Note: The evaluation of the solo performance must be in the format of a short written report. An oral presentation is **not** acceptable.

Outcome 3

Describe, analyse and evaluate the creation, development and presentation of a solo performance.

Task

A written report

The most common format used by teachers to assess Outcome 3 was to set a number of short-answer questions which clearly analysed and evaluated the stages used to develop and present the solo performance. Overall, teachers used the dot points on page 25 of the assessment handbook to develop succinct and clear questions. Most teachers used approximately six evenly weighted questions and chose to ask separate questions for the following three areas:

- use of construction techniques and devices
- manipulation of performance styles, theatrical conventions, dramatic and stagecraft elements
- use of expressive skills to communicate and embody the characters.

Assessment

Most teachers used the performance descriptors in the assessment handbook to develop a marking scheme for this task.