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Examiners' Report/
Lead Examiner Feedback
Summer 2017

BTEC Level 3 Nationals in Performing
Arts

Unit 1: Investigating Practitioners' Work
(31555H)



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What is a grade boundary?

A grade boundary is where we set the level of achievement required to obtain a certain grade for the externally assessed unit. We set grade boundaries for each grade, Distinction, Merit, Pass and Near Pass.

Setting grade boundaries

When we set grade boundaries, we look at the performance of every learner who took the external assessment. When we can see the full picture of performance, our experts are then able to decide where best to place the grade boundaries – this means that they decide what the lowest possible mark should be for a particular grade.

When our experts set the grade boundaries, they make sure that learners receive grades which reflect their ability. Awarding grade boundaries is conducted to ensure learners achieve the grade they deserve to achieve, irrespective of variation in the external assessment.

Variations in external assessments

Each external assessment we set asks different questions and may assess different parts of the unit content outlined in the specification. It would be unfair to learners if we set the same grade boundaries for each test, because then it would not take into account that a test might be slightly easier or more difficult than any other.

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, are on the website via this link:

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Unit 1: Investigating Practitioners Work (31555H)

Grade	Unclassified	Level 3			
		N	P	M	D
Boundary Mark	0	11	22	33	45

Introduction

This examination requires learners to investigate the work of performing arts practitioners and develop critical analysis skills and contextual understanding of how practitioners communicate themes in their work. The paper is set twice a year and released in March and December. This Level 3 externally assessed unit is mandatory and has 90 guided learning hours.

The paper takes a set task approach and learners need to complete the task under supervised conditions. A maximum of 3 supervised hours is required to complete the task. Learners need to produce an extended piece of writing (up to 2000 words) and an individual bibliography. These can be handwritten or word-processed. If the work is word-processed, it will need to be printed out and sent to the examiner. USB drives/discs do not need to be submitted to the examiner.

Learners should approach the task as an investigation into the work of the practitioners. Effective research into the theme and the contextual influences of the practitioners and how this has affected their work and repertoire is an essential part of the preparation for this unit. Reference to repertoire can be a response to live, recorded or any practical work completed during the programme. The use of published texts, scores and practitioner's choreography is to be encouraged, especially during the completion of research notes. This should aid learners in becoming more selective in their choice of appropriate material for use in completion of the set task.

The set task in the June 2017 series was a 'Celebration of Relationships.' Centres should study the set task brief carefully as this provides the vocational context for the completion of the task. The set task information is provided as a starting point for learners to begin to explore the theme and possible practitioners. Centres are reminded that at least one of the selected practitioners should be from the list of prescribed practitioners. The other practitioner can be one of the learners' own choice, but may also come from the prescribed list.

Careful choice of practitioners that link to the theme is an important part of the research period and will usually lead to more successful responses to the set task.

Referencing of sources is an important part of this unit. Learners should know how to reference and cite their sources. There is no set style of referencing prescribed, however, Harvard appears to be the most popular format used in this series. Citations within the body of the extended piece of writing is good practice, to support the learners' critical analysis of the practitioners.

Introduction to the Overall Performance of the Unit

Examiners reported seeing a range of work reflected in the wide range of marks achieved. Most learners had responded well to the task and had produced a structured piece of writing that reflected the set theme. Many learners produced a bibliography, however, many only consisted of a list of websites that had been accessed. In some learner's work, it was difficult to see how the investigative process had been applied to the task, as there was no reference in the writing to the sources listed in the bibliography. High quality work was seen where learners linked all the demands of the unit with the work being well written with clear referencing and application of research.

A number of practitioners proved very popular, e.g. Matthew Bourne, DV8, Frantic Assembly, Konstantin Stanislavski, Bertolt Brecht, Bob Fosse, Stephen Sondheim and Akram Khan.

It is worth pointing out again that careful selection of practitioners is paramount to success in this unit. There were some responses that used Antonin Artaud as a practitioner. Whilst merit worthy as a choice of practitioner, there is very little evidence of repertoire that can be used in the investigation process, which can be self-penalising for learners. With this in mind, it is important to remember that factual information needs to be accurate. Occasionally some learners did not understand what the practitioners had accomplished and how the contextual influences helped create, and shape practitioners work. There were some inaccuracies in basic understanding e.g. "...Brecht, a Russian playwright..." and "Stanislavski wrote Frankenstein."

Overall work was presented clearly and examiners generally reported that the writing was clear with an appropriate level of tone and subject specific terminology. There was some misspelling of practitioner's names such as "Berlot Breckt" and "Antony Artod". For learners who word process their work the use of spellcheck is permitted and it is advised that this tool should be used in future series. All learners should proof read their work at the end of the supervised assessment period.

Responses that gained higher marks "took you on a journey" and they were a pleasure to read. Examiners reported reading work that was clearly well researched and showed excellent knowledge and critical analysis skills being applied.

Responses that gained fewer marks tended to produce writing that merely compared and contrasted two practitioners and included a lot of biographical detail. This approach was not particularly useful in meeting the requirements of the set task.

At times, there was evidence of responses that were unbalanced in terms of time spent on one practitioner. It is possible that learners were running out of time and merely wrote a few relevant points about the second practitioner. Learners should

be advised when preparing for this external assessment they need to consider both practitioners equally.

Some examiners reported that whole centres following a very formulaic approach. This may be useful to help learners work on the structure of the task but it is possible that some learners may be restricted by following a “house style”.

The majority of learners adhered to the word count. Work that was overly long tended to lack focus and was therefore self-penalising. Likewise work that was significantly under the word count missed opportunities to fully explore the practitioners’ work.

When discussing repertoire, learners should use a practical approach and use their critical analysis skills to demonstrate their understanding of performance, production and repertoire. Simply giving a plot synopsis is not very useful. Responses gaining higher marks were selective in their choice of repertoire and were linked to the theme. A good example of this was seen in “Lovesong” by Frantic Assembly. Learners clearly explained what certain movements meant and what they represented. They also linked in production values such as set design and colour schemes.

Individual Questions

Task

Assessment Outcome 1 (marking grid 1) requires learners to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of contextual factors that influence the work of performing arts practitioners.

This assessment outcome requires learners to identify what contextual factors have influenced the work of the chosen practitioners. Factors that should be included should be relevant to the set theme, as this will help learners structure their writing. They should explore a wide variety of both primary and secondary sources. These could include live performances, interviews, case studies. Learners should identify a range of these factors and keep them in mind as the rest of the task is completed, as they will help them to focus on the rest of the writing

A significant number of learners provided biographical detail that was not applied to the contextual influences that affected the practitioner. Contextual factors were generally lacking in these responses with little sense of cultural, historical, and/or political factors. A contextual influence can come from many sources such as the influence of geographical and physical factors, the influence from other practitioners and performers and influences from education, teachers and mentors. Responses gaining higher marks identified the contextual influences and then linked these to the theme and repertoire. When considering what constitutes a “range of factors”, three is always a good place to start.

Assessment Outcome 2 (marking grid 2) requires learners to apply their knowledge and understanding of how the contextual factors have influenced the creative intentions and themes in the work of performing arts practitioners.

Learners are required to use what they have learnt in AO1 and apply it to the set theme and how practitioners created the selected examples of repertoire. This needs to be supported with examples from the work and make connections between the practitioners’ intentions and the set theme. For example in “West Side Story” the lyrics in the song “America” comment on the differences between the native American lifestyle compared to the Puerto Rican lifestyle, it also comments on the attitudes between men and women, all of which would be relevant to the discussion.

Learners discussed the creative intentions of the practitioners work and this is where learners who had used the investigative process effectively clearly demonstrated their knowledge and understanding. The majority of learners were able to relate the creative intentions back to the theme. Learners who had difficulty identifying contextual factors in AO1 were again limited in applying their knowledge to practitioners’ intentions in AO2. Creative intentions and the theme of

relationships for example could be discussed in terms of how the theme is communicated to the audience. There may be some discussion of the target audience for a piece of work and what the intended dramatic effect was. There could also be some discussion of how the practitioners' work has influenced others. Looking at reviews and critical responses to the works would be a good starting point for this particular AO. Taking this approach should then allow learners to be more critically selective in the materials to be discussed as part of AO3.

Assessment outcome 3 (marking grid 3) requires learners to apply their critical analysis skills to develop and demonstrate their understanding of performance, production and repertoire.

This assessment outcome really does need a practical discussion of practical work experienced. Again, it is the careful selection of the material that will help. Please select material that supports the set theme and how it has been performed. Examiners do not need a complete discussion of the whole piece of repertoire. Learners need to take the examiner on a journey and direct them to examples of appropriate pieces of repertoire. For example, a description of the plot of *West Side Story* would not gain many marks. However, a detailed practical discussion of a song, scene, section of the musical that is appropriate to the set theme would probably gain better marks.

Examiners reported seeing some excellent work. It was clear that learners had seen a wide range of practitioner's work. This work was live, recorded and through active participation. There were some reports of learners working with practitioners in the industry. This should be noted as best practice as first-hand experience of practitioners at work will help learners develop a stronger understanding of contextual influences and creative intentions. Some examiners did however note that some learners just provided a literary analysis of characters with no practical application. This was very notable where, for example, Stanislavski's repertoire was being discussed in relation to plays such as "An Inspector Calls", "The Crucible" and "A Doll's House." Where musical theatre was discussed there was a lot of narrative detail at times with little reference to lyrics, songs and choreography. There was, however, an excellent discussion of the theme from learners who had explored the Prologue from "West Side Story"

Please note that repertoire can include text, choreography, score, content, genre and style. Performance skills could include discussion of use of voice, movement, dynamics, timing, facial expression, gesture, characterisation. Production, design and technical elements such as set, costume, make up, lighting, sound, special effects and multi-media can also be used to develop the critical analysis skills required for AO3.

For assessment outcome 4 (marking grid 4) learners are required to apply an effective investigation process to inform the understanding of the work of the work of performing arts practitioners, communicating independent judgements.

This AO is a very new aspect of assessment for BTEC students. However, it will provide learners with the skills necessary for completing work at Higher Education level. Whilst it may seem daunting for centres, it would be a very good starting point for delivering this unit. Learners should be encouraged from an early stage in the process to record the information they have looked at during the investigative process. Encourage your learners to “go and find out.” Learners need ownership of their work that will hopefully encourage them to formulate their own opinions and therefore make their own judgements on the work of practitioners that is what examiners are looking for in AO4.

Examiners reported that the use of referencing was very erratic. There were examples of no referencing at all. Where a simple bibliography was provided this was often limited to Wikipedia and YouTube but none of the sources had been commented on in the writing. Responses gaining the highest marks used research to inform the investigative process with careful use of referencing and citation to support independent judgements.

Summarising key points of information during the preparation period will help learners begin to make independent judgements on the work of the practitioners. They should be able to make decisions on what examples of work and what sources of information they are going to use when completing the written task. Keeping the bibliography up to date as learners prepare their notes will help them keep a focus on what sources they have looked at and which of them will be useful to use in their work to support them in explaining their independent judgements to the examiner.

Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, learners should consider the following:

- Learners should begin the research of the theme early in the series. This should allow for the selection of appropriate practitioners to use in response to the set theme.
- A wide variety of resources should be used when conducting research with less reliance on Wikipedia and YouTube.
- Examples of repertoire that link to the theme should be chosen. The discussion of the repertoire should be practical in detail. Simple plot narratives are not appropriate.
- The bibliography should be completed during the research period. This will allow learners to be selective in the use of relevant sources when referencing/citing. Centres should encourage learners to practice the use of referencing and citation when preparing their notes. Remember that there is no set format for referencing.
- Remember that this is not an essay that compares and contrasts two practitioners. There is still a vocational context to the set task. It is an investigative process where learners are asked to make recommendations based on their investigation.
- Learners should be encouraged to give equal consideration to both practitioners when preparing for the assessment period.
- Work should be presented as either a handwritten or word-processed document that is printed off and sent to the examiner. Learners should be encouraged to proofread their written work.
- The Learner Record Sheet and Centre Register need to be completed and sent with the completed task to the examiner. Each learner's work needs to be clearly identifiable.
- Ensure the correct question paper for the series is used. There are two opportunities for learners to enter for this unit and each series will have a different paper.
- It will be beneficial to learners if they have an opportunity to practice the assessment before they complete the assessment for the unit in either December or May. There are two Sample Assessment Material papers available on the Pearson website that can be used as practice papers.

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