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Examiners' Report/  
Lead Examiner Feedback  
January 2018

BTEC Level 3 Nationals in Performing  
Arts  
Unit 1: Investigating Practitioners' Work  
(31555H)



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January 2018

Publication Code 31555H\_1801\_ER

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## Grade Boundaries

### 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.

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### 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.

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<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

## Unit 1: Investigating Practitioners Work (31555H)

Grade	Unclassified	Level 3			
		N	P	M	D
Boundary Mark	0	10	20	32	44

# 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 per year with a different task released in December and in March. This Level 3 externally assessed unit is mandatory and has 90 guided learning hours.

The paper takes a set task approach. It is expected that learners spend four weeks carrying out research and preparatory work, prior to three hours of supervised assessment, which should take place in week five of the timetabled period. Learners need to produce a piece of extended writing (up to 2000 words) and a separate bibliography.

Learners may take their own notes into the supervised assessment. These can be handwritten or word-processed. The learner responses must be printed out and sent to the examiner.

Learners should approach the task as an investigation into the performance, production and/or repertoire of **two** practitioners. Effective research into the theme and the contextual influences of the practitioners, and how this has affected their work and/or repertoire, is an essential part of the preparation for this unit. Reference to performance, production and/or repertoire can be a response to live, recorded or any practical work completed during the qualification. The use of performance work, scores and practitioners' 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 the completion of the set task.

The set task for learners in this series was to select and justify the inclusion of the work of two practitioners for a week of performances being organized by the local authority who are looking for performance work exploring the theme of 'Breaking the Mould'. Centres and learners should study the set task brief carefully as this provides the vocational context for the completion of the task. Centres are reminded that at least one of the two 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.

There was evidence this series that some learners had chosen practitioners that were not appropriate for successful completion of the task. Examples of such practitioners are individuals or companies who do not have international recognition and an established reputation and presence. The most successful work was from learners who also ensured they could critically analyse the practical performance, production and repertoire work of the practitioners they choose and did not just, for example, describe the plot of a play text which 'broke the mould' or from a practitioner that 'broke the mould'.

Careful choice of practitioners that link to the requirements of the whole task and not just the theme is an important part of the research period and will lead to a more successful response 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. The use of citations within the body of the extended piece of writing is good practice, to support the learners' critical analysis of the practitioners' performance, production and/or repertoire.

# Introduction to the Overall Performance of the Unit

Much of the information in the Lead Examiner report from the last series is relevant and thus repeated in the report for this series. Many examiners reported that the same issues occurred during this series in terms of administration and learner responses as in the last series. The purpose of this report is to assist centres in preparing learners for the completion of the set task.

Examiners reported seeing a range of work and a wide range of marks were achieved. Most learners responded well to the task and produced a structured piece of writing that reflected the set task.

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. As mentioned earlier there was more evidence this series that some learners had used a practitioner that was not suitable for the task. It is clearly stated in the unit specification and the paper that practitioners should be internationally recognised. Learners who had selected an inappropriate practitioner often found it difficult to identify the contextual factors; this also impacted in the selection of the practitioners' practical performance, production and/or repertoire, which was often not directly linked to the set task including the theme. Occasionally some learners did not understand what the practitioners had accomplished and how the contextual influences helped create, and shape the practitioners' work. With this in mind, it is important to remember that factual information needs to be accurate

Overall work was presented clearly, and examiners generally reported that the writing was clear with an appropriate tone and level of subject specific terminology. However, examiners did see some misspelling of practitioners' names. The use of spell-check is permitted and it is advised that this tool should be used in future series. It is recommended that learners proof read their work at the end of the supervised assessment period.

Responses that gained higher marks had carefully selected two appropriate practitioners and had clearly researched the contextual factors and how these factors had influenced the development of the practitioners' work (performance, production, and repertoire). The selection of performance, production and/or repertoire was again linked specifically to the theme and was discussed practically and critically analysed, with some perceptive insight.

Examiners reported that some learners just wrote a compare and contrast piece of writing, in which they compared and contrasted two practitioners. Others just wrote about practitioners who had developed an approach or techniques which 'broke the mould'. Neither of these approaches are appropriate for this paper as learners are required to respond to the requirements of the set task, as outlined in the Introduction. The paper specifies what the task is and who the task is aimed at, in this case a local authority.

As in the previous series, 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 were unable to cover all relevant points on their second practitioner. However, learners should be advised when preparing for this external assessment they need to consider both practitioners equally.

There were fewer examples of work which adopted a formulaic approach. It was evident that more learners had engaged in an appropriate investigation process which allowed them to focus more clearly on the set task. It was evident in the responses when learners had really engaged with their chosen practitioners' practical performance work.

Many learners produced a bibliography, however, several of these only consisted of a list of websites that had been accessed. In some learner responses, 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 responded to all the demands of the task, the work was well written with clear referencing and the application of research was evident.

Most learners adhered to the word count. Responses that were overly long tended to lack focus and were therefore self-penalising. Likewise work that was significantly under the word count missed opportunities to fully explore the practitioners' work. Footnotes and citations are not included in the word count.

When discussing the practitioners' work, learners should use a practical approach and use their critical analysis skills to demonstrate their understanding of performance, production and/or repertoire. Simply giving a plot synopsis is not very useful and makes it clear that learners have not completed an effective investigative process or applied their critical analysis skills appropriately.

Some good discussion was seen in pieces of extended writing on dance practitioners, especially in relation to Ailey, Bourne, Fosse and Graham, in this work there was a sense of the practitioners' work having been studied and analysed. There were many detailed and perceptive references linking these choreographers' work to the theme and the contextual influences.

Other learners used Berkoff and had discussed productions of Metamorphosis which allowed for a clear focus and analysis of his work. Learners who used Stanislavski and Brecht as their practitioners often did not analyse practical performance, production and/or repertoire. These essays tended to be either quite weak with tenuous links to repertoire or very literary in focus. There were a few exceptions where centres had chosen Brecht or Stanislavski and had visited the theatre to see live productions, for example in the case of Brecht, of Arturo Ui giving learners a first-hand experience to discuss performance, production and/or repertoire in a practical way rather than a literary study of the texts they worked on and/or their techniques.

Many learners discussed the work of practitioners who 'broke the mould' with little reference to the practitioners' performance, production and/or repertoire and as such they did not respond to the all of the specific requirements of the set task.

There was an increase in musical theatre practitioners being discussed which focused on performance, production and/or repertoire. It was good to see learners that chose composers discussing performance, production and/or repertoire in a knowledgeable way including tempi, key changes, time signatures etc., how these worked in performance and the effect this created for an audience. Less successful responses had focused on popular reality TV shows, such as the quest to find lead performers for Andrew Lloyd Webber musicals, rather than actual performance, production and/or repertoire.

With regards to administration, some examiners reported that on occasion, work was received without all relevant documentation completed. Please refer to the administrative support guide and forms on the Pearson website for guidance on what needs to be submitted.



# 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 practical performance, production and/or repertoire work of their chosen practitioners. Factors included should be relevant to the set task. They should explore a wide variety of both primary and secondary sources. These could include live performances, interviews and case studies. Learners should identify a range of these factors and keep them in mind as the rest of the task is completed.

Many learners still tended to give general biographical details with little sense of contextualisation. Some practitioners such as Ailey, Sondheim and Brecht have a wealth of contextual factors that influence their work, and these were often commented upon. Practitioners such as Kneehigh and Frantic Assembly were often less successful in having learners identify clear contextual factors, although there are many contextual factors that can be applied to these practitioners' work.

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 performance, production and/or repertoire. When considering what constitutes a "range of factors", three is always a good place to start.

Below are some examples from work seen this series that demonstrate assured identification of relevant contextual factors in AO1.

*"... Brecht was influenced by Hitler's rise to power, encouraging him to move towards political theatre. He used his productions to portray social and political issues whilst sharing his views on current events.... One of Brecht's biggest influences was Karl Marx and his extreme communist views which changed how Brecht saw Hitler and his Nazi regime.... Brecht broke the mould by including his political views in his theatre plays....*

*His first-hand experience of war as a medical orderly also provided him real life experience of the horrors of war and it is clearly seen in his repertoire."*

*"Newson has been highly influenced by the discrimination and negative attitude towards homosexuality in the 1980s encouraging DV8 to break the mould by challenging this view and demonstrating to the audience that it is good to test society's stereotypes....Newson is hugely influenced by his own experiences and current events such as the emergence of AIDS and being a gay man working in Glasgow."*

**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 task and theme and explain why/how practitioners created the selected examples of performance, production and/or repertoire that each learner is analyzing in their piece of extended writing. This needs to be supported with examples from the practical performance work and connections should be made between the practitioners' intentions and the set task and theme. Many learners focused on the theme, some to an extreme where almost every sentence had a reference to 'breaking the mould'. However, learners who had identified and made clear links between contextual factors, the theme and the practitioners' performance, production and/or repertoire mostly wrote in a focused and structured way, gaining high marks.

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.

Below is an example from work seen this series that demonstrates an in-depth understanding for AO2.

*"Using African American spirituals..... Ailey's Revelations fervently explore the places of deepest grief and holiest joy in the soul." (Alvin Ailey Foundation, 2018). "Revelations is a tribute to this tradition." Revelations breaks the mould as the aim of the piece is to educate the wider audience and change the universal opinion that 'whites' are superior to 'blacks'." In addition Ailey was concerned about making a social statement in Revelations, due to his use of an all African-American cast to enforce his vision."*

Here you can see how the learner has linked the creative intentions of the piece of performance repertoire to the contextual factors. There is also evidence of some insightful connections between the creative intentions of Ailey's work and the

theme. There were a range of examples given by this learner in relation to the performance work of both of their chosen practitioners.

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/or repertoire.

This assessment outcome really does need a practical discussion of the practitioners' performance, production and/or repertoire work. Again, it is the careful selection of the material that will help. Learners should select and critically analyse material that supports the set task, including the theme. 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 performance, production and/or repertoire. For dance learners there was usually very clear reference to specific moments in dances such as Lamentation, Revelations and Swan Lake which not only clearly explained moments but analysed the work, offering personal engagement and the learners' opinions on the pieces. This was sometimes not seen in relation to drama practitioners where detailed theoretical understanding of Stanislavki's system or Brecht's techniques were given, but with superficial reference to texts and rarely to the performance and/or production of these practitioners' work. There were still instances where the reference to performance, production and/or repertoire did not go beyond plot summary.

Only a few learners referenced their own practical work but when it was focused on a relevant text it was often detailed and pertinent.

This series, examiners reported a significant shift in emphasis in this particular AO. Learners appear to have missed opportunities to discuss performance, production and/or repertoire in detail and tried to focus more on either the practitioners' relationship to the theme and/or the referencing element of the set task. The practical discussion of performance, production and/or repertoire this series was noticeably weaker than the previous series. There were some responses that had no practical detail whatsoever, in other cases examples were provided that were not relevant to the specific requirements of the set task. However there were also examples of perceptive analysis of performance, production and/or repertoire that were clearly linked to the set task and theme.

Below is an example from work seen this series that demonstrates an accomplished application of critical analysis skills with an in-depth understanding of performance, production and/or repertoire.

*"Lamentation is a piece choreographed around a lone grieving woman on a bench.....Graham sits alone on a white bench with her feet apart in second position, her head is positioned down to the floor, which gives an immediate feeling of isolation. This is further indicated by the infinite darkness and emptiness surrounding Graham created by the use of lighting and use of props..... Graham starts to shake her head and shift her weight from side to side which creates a sense of panic and disbelief.....This results in choppy movements without flow from one to the next increasing visual and emotional impacts"*

The description of the repertoire here is detailed and you can visualise what was happening on the stage. It is clear that this learner has completed a sophisticated investigative process and so can be rewarded in AO3 and AO4.

Please note that performance, production and/or repertoire can include text, choreography, score, content, genre and style. Performance skills could include discussion of the use of voice, movement, dynamics, timing, facial expression, gesture, characterisation etc. Production, design and technical elements such as set, costume, make up, lighting, sound, special effects and multi- media can also be used to critically analyse the practitioners' performance work.

**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 new aspect of assessment for BTEC learners. However, it will provide learners with the skills necessary for completing work in Higher Education. 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 and they should be encouraged to formulate their own opinions and make their own judgements on the performance, production and/or repertoire work of practitioners.

Below are some examples from work seen this series that demonstrate a sophisticated and engaged application of the investigation process. Independent judgements are authoritative with comprehensive justification.

*"... I chose Ailey because 'his choreography broke the mould for modern dance, incorporating jazz and blues and the African-American experience in audience-pleasing, theatrical works that raised some eyebrows in the spare and earnest world of modern dance' (wbur.org, 2015)"*

Graham primarily broke the mould by creating her own style of dance and Ailey did so by successfully changing the dance world forever in relation to ethnicity. They are both significant pioneers of modern dance and are recognised in dance education and this is why I think their performances should be selected. Even though it may have been seen as controversial and 'Breaking the Mould', their extraordinary approach to choreography is exciting and has widened the dance world forever.

Berkoff largely focused on the performance itself, with language and physicality being key, while Brecht's transformation was more meta in nature, revolutionising the way in which theatre is consumed and experienced. However, they are each exemplary representations of 'breaking the mould' when it comes to theatre. It can be argued that Brecht has had both a larger impact and influence, but Berkoff is still relevant to the conversation. He simply hasn't had the time to be immortalised in memory yet, and his theories are more a combination of others rather than something completely new as in the case of Brecht. However, as mentioned earlier, doubt has been thrown over whether or not he should be given full credit for some of his biggest accomplishment. Recent evidence has suggested that he passed much of his three partner's work off as his own and was simply believed. Whether the work be his or otherwise though, it has certainly had a lasting impact, and is perhaps the best example of 'breaking the mould.'

Here you just some examples of how the learners used referencing and made authoritative, independent judgements in response to the set task and theme.

Essays were generally well written and structured, with only a very few having an inequality between practitioners.

Most learners had provided a bibliography which ranged from a quite comprehensive list of sources from live performance/production work, recordings to books, while others only used references to Wikipedia and/or YouTube, which can be a useful resource if learners are watching professional or good amateur work. There was generally an increase in the use of effective referencing.

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.

There was also evidence this series of learners providing audience feedback from practical work they had either seen or been involved in, for example questioning

audience members as to whether they thought the work 'broke the mould'. This is not appropriate for this set task. Centres should again look carefully at the demands of the set task.

## Summary

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

### Learner responses

- Learners should begin the research of the theme early in the series. This should allow for the selection of appropriate performance, production and/or repertoire work and appropriate practitioners to use in response to the set theme.
- 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.
- A wide variety of resources should be used when conducting research with less reliance on sources such as Wikipedia.
- Ensure that the chosen practitioners are appropriate for successful completion of the set task.
- Learners should be encouraged to give equal consideration to both practitioners when preparing for the assessment period.
- Examples of performance, production and/or repertoire that link to the theme should be chosen. The discussion of the performance, production and/or repertoire should be practical in detail. Simple plot narratives are not appropriate.
- Carefully select suitable examples of performance, production and/or repertoire and discuss it in **practical** detail. If the selection of performance, production and/or repertoire is specific to the theme, all the better.
- There is no need to provide any audience feedback on how work being discussed addresses the theme in this Unit. This is not an appropriate approach for this task.
- Remember that this is not an essay that compares and contrasts two practitioners. There is a vocational context to the set task. It is an investigative process where learners are asked to make recommendations based on their investigation.

### Administration

- Ensure the correct question paper for the series is used. There are two opportunities for learners to respond to the external assessment for this unit and each series will have a different focus and set task that learners must respond to.
- It will be beneficial to learners if they have an opportunity to practice their response to a set task before they complete the assessment for this unit in either series. Past papers should be used to provide learners with an opportunity to practice for this assessment.
- Work should be a word-processed document that is printed off and sent

to the examiner. Learners should be encouraged to proofread their written work. A spell-check may be used.

- 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.
- Keep each learner's work and documentation together either by stapling it together or keeping each learner's work in a plastic wallet.



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