

TEXT AND PERFORMANCE

Overall grade boundaries

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 15	16 - 30	31 - 46	47 - 59	60 - 71	72 - 84	85 - 100

Preamble

- This was the fifth year in which candidates completed this course and both their results and their response to the course were again more than satisfactory; it was particularly pleasing to see that a high proportion of them achieved grades above those predicted by their teachers.
- However, numbers of candidates and also of schools participating are still not rising as one might have hoped, and though it is still both desirable and possible that the course should eventually go mainstream, it may be advisable to delay a little longer until a few modifications have been made.
- As the course is due for further review and a key change of personnel is imminent in the review team, with consequent new insights and initiatives possible, this report, whilst concentrating on covering the most recent examination session, will also attempt to feed the review by looking more broadly at the ways in which the various assessment components have been working and by indicating some of the points where modifications might be needed.

Standard level internal assessment

Oral presentation

Component Grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 4	5 - 8	9 - 12	13 - 14	15 - 16	17 - 18	19 - 20

- Candidates had mostly understood the value of good preparation in ensuring that the content of their presentation was seen in its best light.
- There was generally good appreciation of the element of performance involved in giving a presentation: with some exceptions, communication was clear and comprehensible, presentations were well structured and delivery was fluent and well articulated.

- In a few cases, delivery was so fluent and articulate as to sound somewhat over-prepared; no doubt nervousness leads some candidates into learning much of their presentation by heart. Understandable as this may be, it is not a good use of time and energy and should certainly not be encouraged. The best way to be able to talk well about the transformation process, relying solely on notes as a basis for improvisation, is to have been fully committed and completely immersed in that process to the point where it is an unforgettable experience in all its manifold detail. This was certainly how it was for the candidates giving the best presentations.
- Most candidates were able to make correct use of appropriate terminology, whether literary or theatrical, when discussing the text or the transformation respectively.
- Though some candidates' comments on the primary literary texts on which transformations were based were somewhat lacking in relevant detail, there was overall plenty of evidence to suggest that these had been carefully studied and generally well understood. Many candidates based some very persuasive arguments for the proposed transformation precisely on an accumulation of well observed details and the personal insights which these had triggered.
- More attention could generally have been given to situating these texts and demonstrating "understanding of the cultural and literary traditions" from which they derived. However, there was little point in doing this purely for its own sake, as a few candidates did; background information and interpretation was only of interest if focused towards explaining the rationale for the transformation and clarifying the artistic choices made in the process.
- There was rich variety in the kinds of response to the primary text and the degrees to which it was transformed by the students: some confined themselves to trying to retell the original as closely and simply as possible whilst inevitably slanting it towards their own reading of it; others reflected on it, sometimes focusing on a single aspect, allowing it to stir their imagination and creating something new which was nonetheless clearly a parallel or offshoot of the original. What practically all had in common was an admirable concern for telling a story and telling it clearly; the best also sought to tell it entertainingly, in the widest sense of that word.
- The best candidates gave very clear accounts of the primary text and its dramatic potential, with good understanding of the essential differences between the experience of the reader and that of the spectator.
- It was also very pleasing to find examples of good imaginative work based on multiple texts which had mutually illuminated each other and led to sometimes surprising insights into each individual text.
- Accounts of the actual process of transformation generally followed a narrative pattern, beginning with the candidates' essentially intellectual and aesthetic considerations about how best to present the essence of the chosen piece in dramatic form. This usually moved on to a discovery of the ways in which their ideas had to be modified to meet practical considerations and difficulties; a number of candidates gave insufficient weight to such considerations, but the best showed good understanding of the organic nature of the relationship between practical matters and meaning in theatre, sometimes to the point of discovering how the act of looking for

solutions to practical difficulties can itself lead to refinement and enhancement of the aesthetic quality.

- Another crucial discovery, underlying the comments of many candidates though not always made explicit, was the power and importance of communal endeavour in theatre and the ways in which this can liberate the individual imagination.
- Retrospective reflection and evaluation generally needed more prominence, being sometimes rather bland and hurried. There were nonetheless a satisfying number of candidates who were able to look back at what they had done in an objective, honest, specific and detailed way, understanding that creative work is never finished and that proper awareness of deficiencies feeds future improvement.
- So far as technical problems are concerned, some candidates at a few schools were under-recorded and a few tapes had not been properly rewound before being despatched, which can of course itself lead to technical problems. In the interests of just moderation, every effort should be made to avoid such problems.
- The overall justice of the moderation process is also greatly enhanced by those teachers who take the trouble to write a fully detailed justification of the marks they have awarded. Not everybody does however.

Performance

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 3	4 - 6	7 - 9	10 - 12	13 - 15	16 - 18	19 - 20

- Each year the range and variety of the transformations is greater. Candidates are generally to be congratulated on the level of serious disciplined commitment and the increasingly confident efforts of a liberated creative imagination which they bring to this task.
- Behind their endeavours there is evident in nearly every case a search for the best available theatrical means for telling their chosen story and for telling it as clearly as possible.
- In this search there is an increased unwillingness to be content with an unthinkingly plain and literal retelling; instead there is a growing readiness to be bold in exploring and experimenting with the great range of possibilities that theatrical performance has to offer, even for those with minimal resources.
- Adopting a more inventive approach and trying to find a very particular style of presentation, as many candidates did, inevitably obliged them to give specific consideration to a whole range of basic elements of performance such as physicalisation, vocalisation, movement, use of stage space and so on. In this way it

reduced the tendency to take anything at all for granted and thus enhanced the performance in unforeseen ways.

- There were of course examples of plain and literal retelling which were good when that was the most appropriate way of doing things; what mattered in all cases, and what was generally very impressive, was how much thought candidates had given to finding the exact style of performance which would best convey their reading of the text.
- Some candidates had perhaps chosen the plain and literal retelling as the easy option; in fact, it is in many ways the most difficult one with which to impress the spectator and to hold audience attention, since it requires especially good characterisation, very precise attention to phrasing and vocal delivery in general, and above all an unerring sense of pace and the ability to control it.
- If there is a matter to which all candidates could ideally give more consideration, it is precisely this question of pace. This is certainly a difficult and complex matter, involving questions of rhythm and structure and depending initially on the quality of the script. It will probably only ever be mastered by the very best candidates, but it is the crucial element in holding audience attention and, once the script has been finalised, the performers are the ones who control the pace in live theatre.
- On screen, of course, it is controlled by the director and the editor. Most candidates' perception of the nature of performance prior to entering upon this course will no doubt have been formed precisely by what they have seen on screen, whether small or large. On the evidence of the performance work of a fair number of candidates, this perception has not been entirely shaken off; perhaps it will not be unless they are explicitly alerted to the many differences between stage and screen acting, and in particular made to understand that on stage it is purely their responsibility as live performers to ensure that the audience remains enthralled by whatever they are saying or doing.
- This particular problem is not made any easier by the presence of a camera at the candidates' performance. It cannot be reiterated too often that it is there purely because "the performance must be video recorded for moderation purposes" or that "these are recordings of live performance, not 'mini-films'." To judge by the deliberately low-key style of some performances, mumbly Method-oriented and with little attempt at projection, the full implications of this latter injunction do not always seem to have been properly appreciated by all those concerned.
- A similar reflection is prompted by a practice, observed more than once, of seemingly allowing candidates to choose their own performance spaces, which often seemed more suitable for screen than stage - in some cases, rooms where it was clearly easy enough to install a camera but, apart from the person behind it, not an audience. And on some moderation videos, no audience is audible and one can only assume that none is there.
- Without an audience there is no live performance. "In the context of this course a performance is defined as the presentation to an audience of a rehearsed theatre piece". No doubt some schools have practical difficulties in getting an audience

together at a suitable time, but difficulties are not impossibilities and this is a course requirement.

- In any case, as one teacher noted, the presence of a sizeable audience had a striking effect in raising the commitment and performance-level of the candidates. Live theatre is after all an interaction between performers and spectators, and there is nothing like the presence of a lively and responsive audience when it comes to galvanising or inspiring performers to reach new heights - which are presumably what teachers would like their candidates to do.
- There were again technical problems concerning the visibility and audibility of the video recordings. There is always the risk that the justice of the moderation process may be affected, so it is important to pay very careful attention to these matters. Appendix 1 of the Subject Guide gives helpful advice.
- It is even more important in this respect to ensure that identification of candidates is absolutely clear and unmistakable. Teachers should put themselves in the skin of the moderator who, unlike them:
 - a) has NEVER seen these candidates before;
 - b) knows them essentially as NUMBERS not names;
 - c) needs to SEE them standing still displaying these numbers CLEARLY for at least 15 seconds each before they start their performance.
- This may seem tedious and irksome to the candidates, but it lessens the chances of the moderator awarding marks to the wrong person.
- The transformation exercise, with its two inextricably related assessment components, emerges more and more clearly each year as the cornerstone of this course, the very epitome of its definition as "a transdisciplinary synthesis of language A1 and theatre". There are still at least two problems to be solved: first, finding a way of making certain that performance always takes place in conditions which guarantee genuinely live theatre as defined above, thereby bringing the distinctive nature of live performance into proper focus for teacher and students; second, ensuring that the presently flawed method of moderating this element is in some way rendered foolproof. But these matters are essentially administrative and logistical in nature; as an educational undertaking, the exercise is highly successful - the commitment, enthusiasm and sense of discovery experienced and expressed by the candidates involved in it are unmistakable. Whatever modifications may be made to the course as a whole, this exercise must be protected. Indeed, if one were to start again to design the whole course, this would be the foundation on which to build.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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Mark range: 0 - 7 8 - 14 15 - 22 23 - 28 29 - 35 36 - 41 42 - 50

- In general there was good knowledge and understanding of the texts which had been studied.
- Candidates seemed to find the poetry section the more demanding. They had particular difficulty getting to grips with Question 3 (“a poem should not mean but be”) and were generally happier discussing content than analysing form.
- Much more enthusiasm was shown for the prose section, candidates dealing particularly well with Question 6 (considering cultural influences) and Question 8 (“the vision of an ideal”).
- They were generally less at ease with Question 7 (present in relation to past and future) and often seemed uncertain of the direction to take.
- Candidates often failed to answer questions as set, simply delivering the material they had learned with little attempt to use it in order to address the issues raised. Questions are usually carefully phrased, with some attempt to give guidance on how they might be approached; they should be carefully read and considered in advance of attempting an answer, with due attention being paid to prompts such as “in the light of this statement” or “consider this thought with appropriate reference” and so on.
- There was an apparent tendency to forget that consideration of literary features is one of the five criteria to be applied in the assessment descriptors. This means more is required from the candidate than simply indicating these features; it is also important to assess what they do and what are their effects.
- There apparently remains a technical weakness among candidates in the area of understanding and commenting on poetic form; this perhaps needs to be addressed more thoroughly and systematically in the teaching of the course.
- In discussions of prose works there was too often a tendency to fall into regurgitation of narrative rather than adopting an approach based more on analysis.
- Candidates need to be advised that assertions without supporting detail do not suffice for valid literary argument. The number of texts studied in the course is such that candidates are expected to offer an argument based firmly on evidence derived from the texts.
- In many cases the first answer written by the candidate was quite effectively composed, while the second was relatively skimpy and weak. This suggests that more careful thought should perhaps be given to strategic decisions not only about choice of questions but also the order in which they are attempted, as well as organisation of time over the examination as a whole.
- This exercise works well as an examination tool in terms of differentiation of candidates. It is possible that it might work even more efficiently and hence more fairly with some modifications to its format. For instance, the relatively inferior quality of many candidates' second answers mentioned above is clearly a problem which needs to be addressed in a practical way. This is not the place to suggest particular

possible solutions, but it is appropriate to point out that they must not in any way risk diminishing the rigour of the exercise.

Standard level written tasks

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0 - 3	4 - 6	7 - 10	11 - 13	14 - 16	17 - 19	20 - 25

Task 1 (*account of participation in rehearsal and performance of a play text*)

- Most of the work was reasonably well presented, made good use of the right kind of terminology and was written in a register appropriate to a report which is personal as well as academic; a few candidates strayed too much on the side of informality, but virtually none in the other direction.
- At one or two schools, candidates seemed to adopt a rather uniform approach and structure for this task, presumably following helpful guidelines suggested by the teacher; perhaps this sort of attempt at uniformity is not entirely appropriate when applied to an essentially personal report.
- The reports covered a range of performance experiences, from the preparation and staging of single scenes to involvement in the whole process of more elaborate productions. Audience size probably varied similarly, though there was rarely enough information about this.
- Candidates were usually very conscientious about demonstrating their awareness of “ways in which performance elements can be deployed in order to affect an audience” as indicated in the assessment descriptors. However, they sometimes concentrated too exclusively on one such element (blocking for instance) in a way which showed little real insight and came to seem mechanically dutiful rather than enlightening.
- Most discussion of these performance elements focused on the candidate’s own experience of them, which is of course important; however, awareness of actual audience response also matters, and attempts to analyse or even simply describe this were relatively rare. In a few cases, the impression given was that no live audience had been present. Occasionally, it seemed to be implied that a camera was the only audience, contrary to both the spirit and the letter of the course requirements; it should be borne in mind that, however this course may develop in the future, it is at present transdisciplinary between English A and Theatre Arts, not Film.
- Most candidates at most schools wrote about their experience with excitement and a sense of personal discovery; those whose work lacked these qualities also showed less awareness of the presence and power of a live audience. There is a clear connection here.
- Candidates usually devoted a substantial part of their report to narrating, describing and, less frequently, analysing their experience of the process of rehearsal and

performance, but in general the emphasis needed to shift a little more towards retrospective reflection and evaluation.

- Most of them gave the impression of having derived great benefit from the experience, especially in terms of personal development, but they were rarely able to articulate this in a specific and detailed way, conveying it more often through a tone of enthusiasm occasionally lurching towards self-congratulation and euphoria. Subjective appreciation of the immediate experience is of course hugely important, and the ability to combine this with a more objective balancing and weighing up in retrospect is a difficult one to achieve, but in this subject this is surely the kind of synthesis towards which candidates should be aiming; tempering the fire of passionate insight with the cool breath of objective discipline - what else is performance about?
- In the particular case of theatre, it is of course also very much about discovering the value of communal creative endeavour, and it is pleasing to be able to report that a fair number of candidates did report this discovery.

Task 2 (critical analysis of a significant feature of a play text):

- At one or two schools a strangely narrow range of topics was attempted, sometimes with several repetitions of the same topic by different candidates. Teachers will of course rightly see it as their duty to guide their students towards making a choice, but in these cases it was difficult to resist the impression that the topic had been imposed rather than chosen. It is surely important for candidates to feel that they personally possess their topic if they are to bring to the exercise an appropriate degree of enthusiasm and commitment, and hence of focus and insight.
- In such a short exercise, sharpness of focus and clarity of structure are of course more than usually important, and the general standard in this respect was moderately satisfactory.
- However, quite a few candidates could give more careful thought to tightening the structure by avoiding wasting precious words in overlong introductory paragraphs and instead attacking the core of the topic at as early a stage as possible.
- Sharpness of focus is also affected by initial choice of topic. In a fair number of cases, topics were not precise enough; at more than one school the approach was mainly thematic, and this tended to lead to topics which were too broad to allow of the required "close reading" within the word-limit. Candidates should be encouraged to focus more sharply on narrower, more specific topics as suggested in the subject guide.
- It is worth noting too that the subject guide refers to "analysis" as the essential task. A good number of students understand this and make a fair attempt, but there are still those who slip too readily into a descriptive or narrative mode.
- Some of the same weaknesses mentioned in comments on Paper 1 regarding proper marshalling of arguments and adducing appropriately detailed supporting evidence were also to be seen here, though to a lesser extent.

- In general there was good knowledge and understanding of the texts which had been studied, and work was mostly well presented and written in an appropriate register.
- As has been observed in previous reports, these two tasks complement each other well to create a bridge between the two related disciplines of text and performance. More importantly from the point of view of their efficiency as examination tools, because they are two very different exercises - one personal, narrative and reflective, the other formal, succinct and analytical - they each test very different mental and writing skills. Nonetheless, it is apparent from some of the observations on candidates' work in both this and previous years that a significant proportion of them are not giving careful enough attention to certain aspects of the tasks - for instance, the essential element of self-evaluation in the first and the unusually specific kind of focus and succinctness needed in the second. Several explanations for this are possible, but it is certainly worth considering whether the task requirements are clear enough as set out in the rubric or whether they need rewriting with more precision.

Conclusion

- As stated at the beginning, this pilot course is still not quite ready to go mainstream without a few essentially minor adjustments. This report has tried to signal some of the outstanding problems in need of attention. Certainly, there are still a few negative aspects, but both in number and significance they are slight in relation to the positives.
- The course started out as an attempt to connect two related but essentially very different disciplines - Language A1 and Theatre Arts. At first there was an inevitable tension between the conflicting family demands of these disciplines, and the challenge was to create something at the core which would give this course its own distinct discipline, related to both its parents but separate from them. It is perhaps now legitimate to claim that this distinct discipline is embodied in the transformation exercise.
- It might be argued that the way forward now is to reject the parents altogether, allowing the new core discipline to forge its own relationships and create its own family around it.
- However, it is difficult to imagine how the core exercise of transformation could function if it were not first of all based on a detailed analytical study of a body of texts, in other words on the same initial procedure as in traditional Language A1 studies.
- Moreover, it has to be remembered that in the real world of requirements and regulations beyond school, there is and will no doubt remain a common insistence on a recognised qualification in Language A1. As things presently stand, Text and Performance is generally (though not universally) accepted as such a qualification and this is one of its attractions to students as an alternative to the conventional Language A1 course; this attraction, and therefore large numbers of potential candidates, would presumably disappear if it were somehow to cast off that particular parent.

- The latter point is implicitly corroborated by the very positive unsolicited comments of a headmaster, based on his observation of the experience of participating candidates in his school. Speaking of the appeal of the course to students who find traditional literary studies alien to their style of learning, to the point where they lose faith in their own abilities, he describes the course as "a tremendous success", precisely from the point of view of Language A1 study, going on to aver that "its modes of learning should be encouraged, promoted and spread".
- So far as the other parent discipline is concerned, it is difficult to see how Theatre could be cast aside in a course concerned with performance. It might be argued that other kinds of performance could be added, such as Dance or Music, but these are quite often included by candidates anyway, sometimes as a major element; after all, Theatre is an all-embracing performance art.
- There is of course the question of Film, which may be worth discussing. However, to include film-making as an option would surely be to put the emphasis on production rather than performance.
- Moreover, this report has already argued extensively in favour of strictly live performance, very largely because for students to be obliged to stand up in front of an audience and give their all, now, in this very time and place, without the possibility of a second take - especially when they are exposing their own material - takes courage and commitment and is in itself a huge learning experience which they are unlikely ever to forget. This much is attested time and again by candidate after candidate in their written reports and oral presentations.
- The reaction of candidates to the course as it stands is the main reason for not making any substantial changes. Year after year it has been observed that it clearly stimulates a lot of interest among the candidates, and the kind of excitement that only comes with a genuine sense of learning through discovery. What most of all characterises the work and response of the candidates is a powerful feeling of enthusiasm and commitment.
- The same driving sense of commitment has been consistently shown by the teachers involved so far in this course. For their professionalism, hard work, imagination and unfailing goodwill they are to be thanked.

(All quotations are from the relevant Subject Guide, except for those in the Conclusion)