

DRAMA

Paper 0994/12
Written Paper

Key messages

Reading and Responding to Questions: Candidates are advised to read each question carefully to ensure they fully understand what is being asked. Marks are often lost when responses address only part of the question. For example, **Question 1** required candidates to suggest a costume and explain why it was appropriate. Some responses included a suggestion but did not provide any justification. Similarly, **Question 2** asked for three pieces of performance advice for the actor playing Oscar, but some candidates offered only one or two.

Demonstrating a Sense of Drama: Candidates are encouraged to show a stronger sense of drama in their responses, particularly when describing how actions communicate emotion or intent. In **Question 3**, while many candidates offered ideas on portraying Felix, they often did not explain how these choices would reflect his obsessive behaviour. For **Question 4**, candidates made thoughtful suggestions for how they might portray Felix and Oscar but did not always highlight the contrast between the two characters, as required.

Set Design and Technical Elements: Some candidates confused set design with other technical areas such as lighting or sound, focusing more on those aspects. While lighting and sound can enhance a set design and may be credited when used effectively, responses should remain focused on the set unless otherwise indicated.

Understanding the Director's Role: There was also some confusion between the role of a director and other production roles. When asked to explain how they might direct a particular aspect, some candidates focused on technical elements like costume, lighting, or sound. While directors may have input in these areas, questions about direction should primarily focus on how actors and the script are used to realise the intended vision.

Reflecting on the Devising Process: More candidates showed a better understanding this year of the devising process in **Question 10**. However, some moved too quickly from identifying an issue to describing their final performance. A stronger response would describe how the group addressed the problem, including the steps taken to develop and refine ideas.

Evaluation and Reflection: In **Question 11**, many candidates described their devised piece without any evaluation. Some focused on their initial intentions without considering what worked, what did not, and how they might improve these aspects in the future. Encouraging candidates to reflect critically on their own work will help develop stronger evaluative skills.

General comments

The texts used in the assessment prompted a range of interesting responses. Many candidates showed good understanding of dramatic techniques, particularly in the earlier questions.

It is important to note that some questions ask for close reference to specific lines or sections of the extract. Candidates who do not refer directly to these may find it difficult to access the full range of marks available.

Finally, candidates should be mindful of time and the expected length of answers. The layout of the answer booklet is intended to give a guide to appropriate response length. Some candidates wrote far too much for the shorter questions in **Section A**, which left them with insufficient time for more detailed responses required in **Section C**.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

There was scope for interpretation in this question, with many candidates basing their costume choices on either the character's age or the historical 1960s setting. Where candidates focused specifically on costume and justified their choices, responses were well-considered. However, some candidates did not fully address the requirements of the question, either by failing to provide a justification for their costume choice or by suggesting irrelevant items such as accessories (e.g., handkerchiefs), which were not credited.

Question 2

Candidates engaged positively with this question, suggesting a range of vocal and physical techniques such as facial expressions, timing, and gesture. Where candidates gave three distinct pieces of advice, responses were appropriately rewarded. However, common issues included offering fewer than three suggestions or repeating similar points. Some responses lacked clarity, making it difficult to interpret the advice intended. Candidates should ensure each suggestion is specific, distinct, and directly applicable to the character.

Question 3

Many candidates provided a range of ideas regarding how to perform the role of Oscar and referenced relevant techniques. However, fewer were able to clearly link these choices to Oscar's obsessive and neurotic nature. To access the top band, candidates needed to make explicit how proposed performance choices would communicate these personality traits. Responses that remained general or descriptive struggled to reach the higher levels of the mark scheme.

Question 4

Candidates approached this question with enthusiasm, often suggesting how they might interpret both characters. Those who considered the contrast between Felix and Oscar, as required by the question, were able to access higher bands. However, many responses lacked clear analysis of how these differences could be demonstrated through contrasting performance choices. Closer attention to each element of the question will support candidates in structuring more precise answers.

Question 5

The text provides minimal stage directions beyond the apartment's new cleanliness, allowing for creative interpretation. Most candidates responded positively and considered how to design the physical space. Strong responses discussed how the set would accommodate the action and how actors might interact within that space, reflecting the thought process of a designer. Some candidates focused instead on props, lighting, or sound; these were credited only when such elements further enhanced set design choices. Responses that simply described the visual appearance of the apartment without reference to practical staging were typically limited to Band 2.

Question 6

This 10-mark question proved effective in differentiating candidate performance. Most candidates recognised the need to explore both emotions but found it easier to make suggestions for sadness than for humour. Several candidates responded from an actor's perspective rather than from that of a director, missing the focus of the question. Higher-level responses showed insight into the emotional nuance of the scene and made thoughtful directorial choices to highlight the interplay between humour and sadness.

Section B

Question 7

Candidates responded to this question with varying levels of detail. Most were able to identify moments for performance choices and offer a suitable range of techniques. To access higher bands, candidates were expected to go beyond surface-level suggestions and consider how to express Alice's confusion throughout the scene. Stronger responses provided detailed examples and demonstrated a clear understanding of how performance techniques can evoke emotion and character.

Question 8

Candidates needed to interpret the practical staging challenges of this outdoor setting, particularly the large space required and the need for removable set elements. While several candidates recognised this from the extract, responses were often general. A few candidates focused too heavily on lighting or sound and demonstrated limited understanding of set design. These candidates may have been better served by choosing **Question 9**. Candidates should be reminded to choose questions that best reflect their strengths and knowledge.

Question 9

Many candidates demonstrated creative thinking, offering ideas for building dramatic impact through ensemble performance. Techniques such as pacing, proximity, and gesture were commonly (and appropriately) suggested. However, some responses lacked close reference to specific lines or moments in the extract, limiting their ability to access the full range of marks. Additionally, not all candidates considered the dramatic purpose of their choices (e.g., to create tension, provoke laughter, or engage the audience emotionally), which is essential for higher-level analysis.

Section C

Question 10

This question was well-attempted, with many candidates demonstrating increased understanding of the devising process. Strong responses clearly identified a challenge, outlined how it was addressed and showed how ideas developed over time. Weaker responses tended to move quickly from problem to solution without discussing the creative or collaborative processes involved. The best responses included references to stimuli, rehearsal experimentation, research, refining of ideas, and group discussion – echoing the iterative nature of devising work.

Question 11

This evaluation question proved challenging for many candidates. Often, responses took the form of a narrative recount of what was performed, focusing on what was intended rather than critically evaluating the actual outcome. High-level responses were analytical, recognising areas that fell short of intention and proposing specific improvements. Candidates should be reminded that evaluation involves reflecting on effectiveness: not just explaining why a choice was made but assessing whether it worked and considering alternative approaches.

DRAMA

Paper 0994/02

Coursework

Administration

In most cases, the administration of the coursework component ran smoothly with few issues. Most centres completed the Individual Candidate Mark Sheet (ICMS) accurately and helpfully although comments on the mark sheets were variable in quality. The most helpful gave valuable insights into the rationale for the award of marks; the least helpful said almost nothing, leaving the Moderator to infer why credit had been given. Several centres mistakenly thought that copying phrases from the mark scheme was sufficient justification for awarding marks, whereas what was needed were comments that linked these criteria with specific aspects of the work.

A more common error was where centres failed to upload the whole set of ICMS for all their candidates, uploading instead only the forms for those candidates in the moderation sample. Additionally, Moderators are required to check the transcription of marks for all candidates as moderation cannot take place unless the Moderator has all the forms. Finally, all ICMS forms need to be uploaded as one file, grouped in candidate number order, rather than as individual forms.

Recordings

Most of the recordings were of good quality and it was felt generally by the Moderators' Panel that the recordings were a little better this year with fewer interruptions from background noise. There were some recordings that were of low quality. This included instances where the camera was set too far away from the action to capture it adequately, or where the stage lighting had the unintended effect of preventing the camera from picking up the candidates' use of facial expression. Monologues were often filmed from too great a distance, so that facial expressions could not be seen properly; a few centres zoomed in and out on the actors and the action, which was distracting.

Most centres provided a line-up of candidates at the start of each performance and supplemented this with a description of their clothing/hair colour on the ICMS forms, which was generally sufficient for moderation purposes. Good practice was when a candidate said their name and candidate number and had this written on a large card in front of them. Some centres also very kindly put names and/or numbers above each candidate for group pieces in a still at the start of the piece.

Audience

The presence of an audience is a requirement, and communication with the audience is one of three criteria in the AO3 mark scheme, but there were several centres that recorded performances without an audience. A live audience gives greater purpose to the performances, and avoids the danger of playing to the camera, which is a common problem in the monologues.

Quality of marking

Most centres assessed their candidates' work accurately, in line with the Cambridge standard. There was evidence that the support materials provided by Cambridge in the Teacher Support Hub had been helpful in fixing the standard for teachers in Cambridge centres. The most common area of over-marking was in the assessment of AO3, where some centres awarded marks several bands higher than the performances merited. These was particularly the case where pacing, levels of emotional intensity and engagement with the audience were over-estimated.

Scripted: Individual Pieces

The marks awarded for the monologue were almost always the most accurate and the strongest performers had clear diction, appropriate volume, well considered characterisation, good use of physicality and facial expression. Choosing costumes that suit the play is also important, and wearing school uniform should be avoided, unless it is appropriate for the chosen play.

Moderators commented favourably on the wide and varied range of repertoire selected, examples of which are provided at the end of this report. Candidates used a variety of performance texts that were for the most part well suited to their age and experience. Much of the material challenged the candidates and gave them the opportunity to work systematically to give a high level of performance. There were also some candidates who tackled pieces that were much too difficult for them and required a level of depth and maturity they did not have. The lengths of solo pieces varied, and centres are reminded of the timing advice given in the Handbook and remember that a piece lasting about three minutes gives candidates a better chance to develop a character than one lasting just over a minute.

Scripted: Group Pieces

There was some outstanding work this session, which showed a real maturity of understanding of how to realise an extract from a play. Finding the best play for a group remains a fundamental element for success and Moderators reported that, as in previous sessions, the most impactful performances were aided by the choice of an appropriate performance text. A related success factor was where there had been thorough research and preparation into the chosen play, including stylistic approaches of the playwright and the social, cultural and historical context of the play. Some weaker performances paid little or no heed to historical context and often ended up creating an absurd performance of a period piece. It was noted that where a group had used the work of a local playwright, candidates' clear understanding of local culture and context enabled them to give a very strong performance.

While a few performances achieved high marks using a bare performance space and wearing rehearsal blacks, most candidates made a good attempt at costume, set, props and lighting, which enhanced their work significantly. Failure to provide even the most rudimentary of sets tended to produce unfocused entries and exits and a good deal of aimless wandering about the stage. Excessive blackouts/scene changes during pieces were unhelpful to the flow of the performance, and the weaker performances were often those with slow transitions and long blackouts, which hindered fluency. There were also some very static performances with actors sat on chairs/sofas for long periods, which produced low energy levels that were likely to create extreme boredom for an audience.

Devised: Group Pieces

There were some excellent pieces that had clear structures, smooth transitions and made sound use of dramatic devices. The strongest devised work experimented with different styles and genres, used space and staging in interesting ways and allowed characters to be explored.

In most cases, the choice of stimuli for the devised work was well researched and executed. The pieces that worked best were often clearly inspired by a specific style of theatre, which the candidates clearly understood and were able to work within. Pieces that used music and dance/movement and physical theatre to enhance the performance were often some of the most creative. There was quite a chasm between this and the worryingly high number of weaker pieces that were stylistically flaccid, the performers stumbling through static characterisation and mundane dialogue to discover ultimately that they had succeeded in communicating no particular message to their audience. These tended to be fragmentary with many slow scene changes and long blackouts.

As with the scripted work, however, a well-crafted piece could never make up for weak performance skills. Performers in the most effective pieces showed mastery of skills such as eye focus, facial expressions, physicality, diction, projection, communication to audience and characterisation. Weak performances lacked commitment, were often inaudible or lacked variety of tone, were physically unvarying and conveyed little sense of characterisation. In many cases, lighting and costume were used imaginatively and the ensemble work was excellent. In others, next to no consideration had been given to costume and the performers were wearing clothes that contributed nothing to the building of the character or even undermined the candidate's performance intentions.

Indicative repertoire list

| Playwright | Play |
|----------------------|--|
| Edward Albee | <i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?</i> |
| David Auburn | <i>Proof</i> |
| Alan Ayckbourn | <i>Absurd Person Singular</i> |
| Richard Bean | <i>One Man, Two Guvnors</i> |
| Sonali Bhattacharyya | <i>Two Billion Beats</i> |
| Andrew Bovell | <i>Things I Know to be True</i> |
| Ryan M Bultrowicz | <i>Three Women and an Onion</i> |
| Jez Butterworth | <i>The River</i> |
| David Campton | <i>Street Birds</i> |
| Caryl Churchill | <i>Cloud Nine</i> <i>Top Girls</i> |
| Lolita Chakrabarti | <i>The Life of Pi</i> |
| Denise Deegan | <i>Daisy Pulls it off</i> |
| Dario Fo | <i>Accidental Death of an Anarchist</i> <i>Can not Pay, Would not Pay</i> |
| John Godber | <i>Bouncers</i> <i>Shakers</i> <i>Teachers</i> |
| Simon Gray | <i>The Late Middle Class</i> |
| Dennis Kelly | <i>DNA</i> <i>Matilda</i> |
| Duncan Macmillan | <i>People, Places and Things</i> |
| Morgan Lloyd Malcolm | <i>The Wasp</i> |
| Martin McDonagh | <i>Pillowman</i> |
| Sharman Macdonald | <i>After Juliet</i> |
| Anthony Minghella | <i>Cigarettes and Chocolate</i> |
| Arthur Miller | <i>The Crucible</i> <i>Death of a Salesman</i> |
| Kate Mulvaney | <i>The Seed</i> |
| Norman, M | <i>Night Mother</i> |
| John Pielmeier | <i>Agnes of God</i> |
| Harold Pinter | <i>The Birthday Party</i> <i>The Dumb Waiter</i> |

Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education
0994 Drama June 2025
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|---------------------|--|
| Evan Placey | <i>Jekyll and Hyde</i> |
| Phil Porter | <i>Stealing Sweets and Punching People</i> |
| Yazmina Reza | <i>Art</i> |
| Neil Simon | <i>The Good Doctor</i> |
| Peter Shaffer | <i>Amadeus</i> |
| William Shakespeare | <i>Hamlet</i> <i>Othello</i> <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> <i>Twelfth Night</i> |
| Shelagh Stephenson | <i>Five Kinds of Silence</i> |
| Simon Stephens | <i>Punk Rock</i> |
| Jessica Swale | <i>Blue Stockings</i> <i>Home, I'm Darling</i> |
| Jack Thorne | <i>Burying Your Brother in the Pavement</i> |
| Debbie Tucker Green | <i>Hang</i> |
| Oscar Wilde | <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> |
| August Wilson | <i>Fences</i> |