



GCSE Drama

Developing knowledge of 'Describing, Analysing and Evaluating live theatre'

Understanding the question

Section C of the exam focuses on live theatre evaluation, and there are three questions worth 32 marks each, from which **one question will be chosen**. Each question will focus on a different aspect of the production, e.g. performers, costume design, lighting design, etc.

Command words - describe, analyse and evaluate

When reading the question it is very important to understand exactly what is being asked, and it can be useful to underline any key words in the question. Exam questions use command words that help define what is expected. For the live theatre evaluation the command words are:

- describe
- analyse
- evaluate

To **describe** is to **set out the characteristics** of something. When describing an aspect of performance, lots of detail should be used as well as specific drama terminology. Rather than writing *'The light looked like it was coming through a window'*, higher marks would be gained from *'A window-shaped **gobo** was used over a **profile spot** to create a beam of light that produced the effect of sunlight shining through a window pane'*.

It is important to think about the performers' **vocal** and **physical interpretation of a character**, as well as the use of **set design**, **costume design**, **lighting design**, **sound design** and **puppet design**.

To **analyse** is to **look at the information provided** and **break it down** to identify and interpret the main points being raised. When analysing a performance, specific effects being created on stage should be talked about. For example, if an actor increased their volume, comments will need to be made on the performer's intention.

Key fact

Describing says **what** happened within a production, and analysing helps to understand **why** it happened.

To **evaluate** is to **make a judgement from the evidence available**, and a personal judgement about what was seen should be provided:

- Was the aspect of the production referred to successful or not, and why?
- Were the company successful in communicating meaning to the audience?

Example

Below is an example of describing, analysing and evaluating a performer's use of physical skills within a performance:

- **Point** - *'Phillips used her physical skills effectively to help reinforce her characterisation of Maggie.'*

- **Describe** - *'As Phillips put the shoes on, she stood up and walked across the stage tentatively, moving with a bold and fast pace that slowed down after the first few steps. She also held her arms out as if she was trying to stabilise herself.'*

- **Analyse** - *'This showed that she was determined to walk proudly in her shoes, but that by doing so she was putting herself in physical pain. She could no longer do the things she did as a younger and healthier woman.'*
- **Evaluate** - *'Her use of movement was effective in demonstrating to the audience that Maggie was an older woman who was finding it more difficult to move. Her use of movement and physicality helped to demonstrate her character's struggle and determination that her illness would not limit her. I found this a particularly emotive part of the production.'*

Responding to the question

Making a mini plan

It can be useful to make a mini plan to help structure a response to the question, as it can keep the response focused. There is no correct way to do this and it will very much depend on the question being asked.

A typical question might be:

Describe how one or more actors in a particular scene or section used their vocal and physical acting skills to create convincing characters. Analyse and evaluate how successful they were in communicating their character to the audience.

You should make reference to:

- the use of voice
- physical skills
- the actors' use of space

[32 marks]

AQA material is reproduced by permission of AQA - AQA 2018.

Structuring the response

As a 32-mark question, the response will need to be longer than previous questions, and it is a good idea to use paragraphs to help separate points.

There are many different ways to approach the response to this question. The response could be structured:

1. according to the separate skills, ie voice, physical skills and use of space
2. by referring to different moments in the play
3. by focusing on how different actors used their vocal and physical skills throughout the play

Introduction

Before getting into the main body of the essay, writing a mini introduction is a good way to help introduce the response. In the introduction, the name of the play should be included as well as a brief synopsis or overview to help place the response in context.

Summary

When summarising any points made in the response, it is a good opportunity to link the response back to the original question.

Answering the question

Don't waste time writing a detailed description of the *plot*, as the question won't ask about the story. The response should instead be focused on **analysing** and **evaluating** the production using accurate drama terminology.