

Theatre

These subject guidelines should be read in conjunction with the “Introduction”, “Outline” and “Details—all essays” sections of this guide.

Overview

An extended essay in theatre provides students with an opportunity to undertake independent research into a topic of their choice, to apply a range of skills in order to develop and explore a focused research question appropriate to theatre in an imaginative and critical way, and to test and validate their research by considering its effect on the practice of the investigated theatre form.

Choice of topic

Owing to the composite nature of theatre, students may choose to take an interdisciplinary approach in their research. Whatever approach they choose, it is important to frame an appropriately focused research question. It is the task of the supervisor to ensure that the research question leads the student along a path that uses appropriate theatrical sources and that encourages the application of relevant theatrical concepts, theories or ideas. The essay topic may relate to an area of the Diploma Programme theatre course, but this is not a requirement and other areas of the subject may be explored. It is important that the topic reflects the student's particular interest and enthusiasm within the subject area.

The scope of the essay should not be too broad as such essays are rarely successful. The best research questions are well focused, thus encouraging analysis in depth rather than breadth. It is also important that the theatrical context of the essay is clearly established early in the essay. The title of the essay should clearly indicate the essay's main aims and objectives. It is not always a requirement for extended essays in theatre to deal with applied research that is practicable in nature. However, even if the student chooses to explore a purely theoretical topic, a connection between theory and its application in practice should be clearly noted. The least successful essays are generally those in which theory is completely divorced from practice; a narrow literary approach must be avoided. For example, if the student chooses to explore the use of fans in Restoration comedy, the wider cultural context informing the historical and social meanings behind this convention should be illustrated by a discussion of how it is applied in a production of a chosen Restoration play.

Absolute reliance on textbooks and web sites is discouraged and no extended essay in theatre should be based exclusively on either. Both these types of source should be consulted in conjunction with other relevant research material as support material for the student's own original research. Essays based on original research require a more personal involvement, which, in turn, encourages a more in-depth study.

A sound methodology, including a bibliography of high-quality research sources, is the foundation of a good extended essay in theatre. Good sources give the student scope for the type of in-depth analysis that characterizes the best pieces of work. Essays based entirely on published textbooks rarely score highly.

Comparisons between two or more theatrical practices are permissible, but students should be careful to ensure that the comparisons are valid and are a product of sensitive and objective analysis.

The following give some indication of the possible range of titles, research questions and approaches.

Title	An investigation into the functions of mask in two of Zeami Motokiyo's plays
Research question	What are the main uses and types of mask in Noh drama, and how does the mask contribute to the creation of a character in Noh?
Approach	Relevant research materials are collected on the history, acting styles and stage conventions of Noh, and on the types of mask and their uses. The use of mask in two of Zeami Motokiyo's plays and the significance of mask for character development in these plays is analysed, and the uses of mask in the two plays are compared and contrasted.
Title	Female stereotypes and their performance in a selection of Brecht's plays
Research question	What female stereotypes did Brecht employ in his plays, and how can these be compared and contrasted in performance, based on an analysis of a selection of Brecht's plays?
Approach	Relevant research materials are collected on the types and nature of female stereotypes Brecht used in his plays. These stereotypes are explored in relation to the chosen plays' themes and context, and are compared and contrasted by examining how they may have worked in production. The possible changes in the fundamental nature and working of these plays if the use of female roles were changed are explored.
Title	An examination of Soyinka's use of rhythm in acting, based on an in-depth exploration of one Soyinka play
Research question	How did Soyinka use language rhythms in his plays and how may these rhythms be applied in production?
Approach	Relevant research materials are collected on Soyinka's use of language in playwriting. The language rhythms used in Soyinka's plays are analysed in-depth by investigating the characters' use of language rhythms in one Soyinka play. The way these rhythms can change/contribute to the play's meanings, character development and relationships between different characters in the chosen play is examined.

Title	A study of the effects of the use of fabrics and lighting in <i>The Tempest</i>
Research question	How can fabrics and lighting contribute to the creation of magical effects in a production of Shakespeare's last play?
Approach	In-depth research is carried out into the use of fabrics (in furnishing and costuming) and lighting in previous productions of <i>The Tempest</i> . There is a discussion, based on these examples, of how fabrics and lighting work with other production elements, how they can contribute to the creation of magical effects and how these affect the readings of the play. The way that appropriate/inappropriate use of both can affect a production is examined.

Treatment of the topic

When the research question has been established, the student should make a research plan. The research plan should be flexible enough to allow the student to explore the topic in a creative manner. The student should not be afraid to take risks throughout the research process: originality is encouraged, as is the employment of a number of different research models.

The emphasis of the extended essay should always be on written analysis, interpretation, evaluation, and the construction and development of a sound argument. It is vital that the methodology of the essay is tailored to the research question and allows for an in-depth exploration.

Appropriate resources for an extended essay in theatre must include primary and secondary data, such as books, newspapers and magazines, interviews, and Internet web sites. The use of other materials such as sketches, drawings, pictures, plans, photographs, CDs and DVDs is encouraged, but should not overwhelm the extended essay to the detriment of the research discourse. Where they are used, they need to be appropriate to the development and support of the argument. The sources of any such materials that are not original must be properly acknowledged.

The personal involvement of the student in the extended essay is of paramount importance and this can become evident through the research path that is followed. The use of active primary source material (that is, play texts and productions) is encouraged, as well as secondary source material. The research outcome should always include a link with a practical dimension.

Interpreting the assessment criteria

Criterion A: research question

The research question must be focused, appropriate to theatre, give the essay an appropriate context and encourage an investigative approach. It may be presented in the form of a question or as a statement or proposition for discussion. It must be specific and:

- appropriate to the particular aspect and/or area of theatre being explored
- centred on theatre and not on peripheral issues
- stated clearly early in the essay.

Criterion B: introduction

It is important to place the research question in an appropriate historical, sociocultural and theoretical context. A clear indication should be given of the reasons why the particular topic was chosen and how it will be approached. The introduction should be clear and concise, and it should outline the topic, the scope and the methodology. It should also demonstrate how the topic relates to current theatrical knowledge and theory. Over-lengthy discourses should be avoided: the introduction should not be seen as an opportunity for the student to present personal opinions. Such opinions, and arguments for them, belong in the essay itself.

Criterion C: investigation

It is important that the investigation uses a range of sources of information, such as those listed in the "Treatment of the topic" section. Where relevant and possible, students may wish to consult theatre practitioners such as performers, directors, researchers, writers, craftspeople or critics; they may wish to visit theatres, galleries, museums or theatre companies; or they may even wish to engage with the subject on a practical level at some point in the research in order to test their hypotheses. Whatever information is selected, it must be relevant to the topic and should provide the evidence needed to support the argument.

Good planning of the investigation involves the selection of a suitable methodology, and the collection and selection of appropriate data. All sources must be clearly acknowledged.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Knowledge and understanding of theoretical background, and an awareness of the academic context and its practical consequences, are essential for a good essay. This should be achieved through the integration of the student's own ideas with current philosophical and theoretical thought, and their practical application in theatre. The student must demonstrate a contextual understanding of the theatre practice or tradition that is being researched. The context should be understood as the historical and sociocultural background that may inform or shape the topic chosen by the student. The nature of the chosen topic will determine the emphasis given to the different aspects of context mentioned here and will also determine the direction of the research. Knowledge and understanding of the topic allows the student to develop a critical understanding of, and personal point of view about, the research findings, whether they come from primary or secondary sources.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

Students should be aware of the need to give their essays the backbone of a developing argument. Essays that are largely narrative or descriptive, or that simply state value judgments or personal observations, will not score highly on this criterion. The best essays develop an argument, backed up with evidence, to convince the reader of the validity of their findings. The argument may be personal, but at the same time must remain logical and balanced. Reasoned argument must be the fundamental structural basis for an extended essay in theatre. The accumulation of research data may form part of the preparation for the writing of the extended essay but the ability to select relevant elements from this data is a crucial skill.

Where relevant, the argument should present evidence that leads towards acceptance or rejection of the original hypotheses. In the context of the investigation of an issue, conflict or problem, bias should be avoided.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject

The student should be able to analyse and evaluate the theatre work, whether this is a scene from a play, a costume design, a lighting plot or any other aspect that might be part of the chosen topic. The ability to analyse and evaluate is part of the process through which the student articulates a relationship to the work and speaks with an individual voice.

It may be that the results of the analysis are unexpected or contrary to the student's initial hypotheses. Students should not be discouraged by this. Some of the best essays have emerged when students have had to reconsider and re-evaluate their original ideas, and modify their argument accordingly. Such an awareness of the need to make constant corrections and to recognize shortcomings is an essential element of research.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject

Theatrical terminology must be used accurately and appropriately. Furthermore, the ability to write clearly and coherently about the chosen topic is an important skill. The inclusion of visual images may also be a crucial part of the extended essay. These images should be annotated in a detailed and specific way, as they need to have an illustrative rather than merely decorative function.

Criterion H: conclusion

The conclusion must not introduce any new or extraneous material, nor should it merely repeat the content of the introduction. The conclusion should synthesize the findings of the investigation and briefly reiterate the evidence relevant to the research question. It should also state, where relevant, which hypotheses have been accepted or rejected and why. The hypotheses that have been rejected may be modified or replaced, suggesting new avenues of investigation.

The conclusion should also critically evaluate the appropriateness of the methodology and acknowledge any flaws or limitations in the research process. Any unresolved questions that have arisen from the research should be mentioned at this stage.

Criterion I: formal presentation

This criterion relates to the extent to which the essay conforms to academic standards about the way in which research papers should be presented. The presentation of essays that omit a bibliography or that do not give references for quotations is deemed unacceptable (level 0). Essays that omit one of the required elements—title page, table of contents, page numbers—are deemed no better than satisfactory (maximum level 2), while essays that omit two of them are deemed poor at best (maximum level 1).

The essay must include a bibliography, and diagrams, photos, pictures or sketches should be attributed and suitably annotated.

Criterion J: abstract

The abstract should clearly state the research question; give a brief account of how the investigation was carried out, the methods that were used and the types of information that were dealt with; and summarize the findings as stated in the conclusion.

Criterion K: holistic judgment

This criterion refers to the quality of the student's response to the research question or the chosen topic. It rewards intellectual initiative in the choice of research paths, the depth of understanding demonstrated by the student in reflecting on the findings of the research, and creativity in testing and applying the research in a practical context.