

“Excellence” Drama Exemplar:

AS 90608 (3.2) Interpret scripted text and integrate drama techniques in solo or paired performance – Level 3, version 3

This exemplar provides **extracts** from recorded documentation for the **first criterion** at the **Excellence** level with comments provided to indicate reasons for this judgement. The extracts are typical of the whole portfolio.

Achieved	Merit	Excellence
Interpret scripted text and select a range of appropriate drama techniques for performance	Interpret scripted text and select a range of appropriate drama techniques for performance	Interpret scripted text perceptively and select a range of appropriate drama techniques for performance

Notes:

Explanatory Note 7 of the standard states “*Interpret* means to **read, identify, analyse and find meaning** that is **appropriate**, and that can be translated into performance”.

Explanatory Note 6 states “Evidence must include a portfolio that includes an **annotated script** and **detailed interpretation of the extract in relation to the play**, and **justification of techniques**.”

Students are required to read the play text and the scene for performance with attention to detail. They should understand how the role has grown out of what has gone before in the play and how this scene shapes future events in the play for the character.

Selection of techniques for performance needs to be seen as a natural result of the depth of understanding of the text. This is about how **sighted techniques demonstrate textual meaning**, rather than about how many techniques can be sighted.

An audience should not be so aware of the individual techniques being played out but of the impact of the whole role. Careful selection will be a very conscious thing. The student must be in control of and responsible for performance choices. It is not appropriate for the teacher to be working as director for this standard.

Perceptively refers to the depth and breadth of thinking about the scripted text and how drama techniques communicate this. It is expected at the Excellence grade that students will explore the layers of the role and make insightful comment about the role within the text.

Overall comment

The **Excellence** grade is awarded for the first criterion for the following reasons:

- The student has read the play closely several times and made perceptive comment about the world of the character within the whole context of the play
- The student has interpreted the role for performance, providing evidence for a depth of understanding of character motivation

- The student has provided justification for choices for performance, both within the commentary and on the well annotated script.

The student plays Biff from *Death of a Salesman*

Extracts of student evidence	Comment
I am performing two scenes from the play. The first being the bedroom scene in which I am talking to Happy about my dreams and future. The second scene is towards the end of the play where Biff is finally confronting his father about his life. I am Biff Loman, 34, I have worked on farms in Texas, Arizona, Dakota and Nebraska in the past few years. I find it hard to settle down. Before I moved out to the West I lived with my mother and father in a small house in New York. I am also a kleptomaniac.	<i>The student provides some details about the character's background. <u>The selection of scenes provides opportunity for contrasting emotion.</u></i>
The drama takes place in the house. In the first scene Happy and I are contemplating our lives and talking about our father's habit of talking to himself. My father has expressed his dislike about my current line of work. Earlier that morning my father and I had an argument about my future.	<i>The student provides details about a significant relationship in the play – that of Biff and his father.</i>
In the kitchen scene Happy and I have just returned home after abandoning my incoherent father at a restaurant after a heated argument. The argument originated from my realisation in which I admitted to myself that I had no place or interest in the business world. I am tired of the pointless lies and arrogance that have been holding our family together for so many years and I am tired of lying to myself. I am now eager to confront my father for the last time and tell him I am leaving for good. Willy needs to understand that.	<i>The student provides insight into the character's motivation for the scene to follow. In providing a rationale for the argument in the restaurant by exploring <u>the inner desires of the character,</u> the student moves into the 'perceptive' range of the Excellence grade for interpretation of text. The final comment also provides evidence of a driving force or motivation for the scene to come.</i>
Willy and I have a cold relationship due to our mutual dislike for each other. After I walked in on him with another woman 17 years ago my judgement of him changed completely. I regard him as a fake. Willy expects me to be a successful businessman and I want to break free from the pressures of that world. We constantly disagree and argue. <u>We share a common dislike but underneath we wish for each other's acceptance.</u>	<i>The final comment is a powerful one but would be enhanced with some evidence for how the student becomes aware of this through the events of the play.</i>
Linda and I have a fairly distant relationship. My absence in the household frustrates and saddens her. My dislike for Willy saddens her as she just wants the family to get along like we used to. When I express my dislike for Willy she gets angry and defends him.	<i>Comment on how the role impacts on other roles in the play, provides breadth of information.</i>
I want to live the life I want, follow my dreams and remove my father's blind faith in myself. The objective is to confront him for the last time and set things straight.	<i>The character's objective is very clear.</i>
The main obstacle for Biff is his father, Willy. Willy has always talked highly of Biff. He has always told Biff he is going to be amazing in life, usually either a famous football player or a rich businessman. After seeing his father as a fake, Biff became lost in a way, not sure what to do with his life. This was a pivotal point in	<i>The student reflects on the inner life of the character – there is perception in the comments about Biff becoming lost and lying to himself.</i>

<p>which the character lost his confidence and his way in life. This disgusted and greatly disappointed Willy. Up until the final confrontation in the play Biff's main obstacle is the constant expectation and disappointment Willy has towards him. Because of this pressure Biff's mind has become cloudy, even lying to himself about his future. This is another obstacle for Biff.</p>	
<p><u>The Laban movement that is best associated with Biff is the wringer.</u> Biff is constantly suppressing emotion, often poorly. He is always trying to express himself calmly, always with some deep emotion underneath. This deeper emotion always manages to break through.</p>	<p><i>The student uses Laban's theory to help explain the inner nature of the role. It is not the Laban movement that becomes important here but the underlying information about the role that it highlights.</i></p>
<p>Biff is not confident so I stutter often and stand slightly hunched due to nervousness and insecurity. This changes at the end of the play where I speak clearly and confidently and straighten my posture. When I portray Biff as a teenager I stand firmly, upright and powerful as Biff was an overconfident and arrogant teenager. I use pause a lot in Biff's dialogue as it helps me to portray the emotion. When I am angry, pause adds to my inner tension. When I am angry and frustrated I also breathe between words.</p>	<p><i>The student is able to make selection based on the understanding of the role.</i></p>
<p>The first time I read the play I took great pity for Biff. I felt that Biff was the main victim of the play. After the second reading I began to realise that Biff isn't as innocent as I believed him to be at first. Biff causes his own problems in a lot of cases and he constantly lies to himself up until the end of the play. This is when I realised <u>I needed to bring these darker aspects of Biff into the open, so the audience realises that like Willy, Biff is deeply flawed character.</u> I also wanted to bring some shame into his character – especially his shame of being a kleptomaniac.</p>	<p><i>EN 6 of the standard states that the written portfolio must be submitted before the performance. This is to ensure that students have completed a process of analysis and made selection of techniques as a result of this, prior to performance. It would be expected that students would work in an on-going fashion to explore and analyse role, trial and refine their use of the techniques, in the playing out of the role. The analysis and the trialling of the characterisation become interchangeable. As students begin to play out the role, they may become aware of other aspects of the role that the reading of the text did not bring to light. Reflective comment made, as in this extract, is acceptable as evidence. There is an expectation in the Explanatory Note that this reflective comment would be made during, as well as after, rehearsals. Interpretation and selection are aspects of pre performance work.</i></p>

Extracts from annotation of text –

- “What’s he say about me?” **Fast paced**, as soon as Happy finishes his line, **so you can hear** Biff’s **frustration** and **eagerness**
- **Staring** at Happy, **searching for an answer**
- “There’s one or two other things depressing him, Happy”. An almost **ridiculing voice**, **unsatisfied** with Happy’s answer
- “Well, I spent six or seven years..” **Speak with enthusiasm, true desire**
- **Pause to show pain**
- “Maybe I oughta get married” slight chuckle, **disbelieving** in himself
- Drops hand, **in defeat**
- “Exactly what is it that you want from me?” speak **with contempt and quiet hatred**
- “You’re one of the two assistants to the assistant, aren’t you?” **no remorse, completely exposing him.**

The student links choices for performance to a rationale.

The explanation or justification adds to the evidence for the perception of the Excellence grade.