

Guidance for teachers on the discussion task for Solo and Pair exams

Introduction

All of Trinity College London's Drama solo and pair graded exams contain a task which requires the candidate(s) to engage in a conversation (Foundation Level) or discussion (Intermediate and Advanced Levels) with the examiner on aspects of the performed pieces the candidate(s) presented in their exam.

This document is designed to guide teachers and candidates through the different levels of questioning expected at the grades. Using examples of poetry, prose and play extracts, the document provides examples of general and specific questions that an examiner might ask. For definitions of terms used such as mood, emphasis and phrasing, please consult the glossary at the end of this document.

Objective

The objective of the Discussion task is to explore the candidates' understanding of the pieces they have performed and where appropriate to encourage them to articulate such areas as meaning and context and character development as well as (at higher levels) performance techniques, the processes of rehearsal and their imaginative journey from choosing the material to their performance in the exam.

In commenting on the Discussion element, examiners not only report what was discussed: the marks awarded will also reflect how well it was discussed - with what degree of articulacy, readiness, accuracy and engagement.

The process

The conversation/discussion is between 4-5 minutes in duration depending on the grade (some discussion may also occur between the tasks).

Once the performance tasks have been completed, the examiner will ask the candidate(s) to sit. The candidate then engages with the examiner in a discussion about the performed pieces.

The examiner will encourage the candidate to talk about their selection of material in general terms and in relation to the specific quality of that material, and then may ask more specific questions about words and phrasing and emphasis, or pace or form and style, or any aspects that may be set down in the specifications for the candidate's level of entry.

In all solo and pair exams, candidates are given the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of their performed pieces and relevant aspects of performance skills.

Note: In testing understanding of breathing, relaxation, voice, staging, candidates may be asked for brief individual demonstration.

Topics that are relevant for each grade

Candidates will not necessarily be asked questions on all the topics listed for a given level.

Reference is made in the exam requirements to specific subject areas, and candidates should be aware that they may also be asked questions on topics covered at lower grades.

Topics	Initial	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Content	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meaning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mood				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pausing				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Emphasis				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Phrasing and pace					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Context					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vocal and physical aspects of Characterisation (Acting)					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vocal techniques						✓	✓	✓	✓
Writer's use of language (Acting)						✓	✓	✓	✓
Staging choices (Acting)						✓	✓	✓	✓
Preparation/rehearsal techniques							✓	✓	✓
Challenges of performing different styles of writing							✓	✓	✓
Breathing and relaxation in relation to safe practice and effective performance							✓	✓	✓
Interpretation								✓	✓
Resonance and articulation in relation to safe practice and effective performance								✓	✓
Selection of repertoire									✓
Physical techniques									✓
Conditions of original performance and their effect on play structure (Acting)									✓

FOUNDATION

The following is an example of a poem that could be presented at Foundation level. **Note:** An extract is shown here for illustrative purposes, however the candidate would perform the whole poem for the task unless an extract is specifically requested in the requirements.

The King asked
The Queen, and
The Queen asked
The Dairymaid:
'Could we have some butter for
The Royal slice of bread?'
The Queen asked
The Dairymaid
The Dairymaid
Said, 'Certainly,
I'll go and tell the cow
Now
Before she goes to bed.'

The Dairymaid
She curtsied,
And went and told
The Alderney:
'Don't forget the butter for
The Royal slice of bread.'
The Alderney
Said sleepily:
'You'd better tell
His Majesty
That many people nowadays
Like marmalade
Instead.

(excerpt from *The King's Breakfast*
by A A Milne 1882 – 1956)

The questioning at the earliest grade levels focusses on the candidate's thoughts on what the piece is about and may include a question or two on specific points in the poem.

Through poetry a candidate becomes acquainted with **rhythm** and so there may be some questions focussed on this area. The examiner may also ask a general question or two linked to the pieces performed, and these will always appropriate for the level of the exam.

Grade level	Topic	Sample questions
From Initial	Meaning, content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What did you like about the poem?• Do you think it's a happy or sad poem?• Is it both happy and sad? If so, where does it change?• What do you think the Alderney looks like?• Does the poem rhyme? Does this help you when you are learning?• Have you read anything else by A.A. Milne? Do you know his most famous character?

From Grade 3, questioning brings in a focus on specific **vocal skills**, such as **pausing** and **emphasis**.

Another key area of dramatic performance that should be introduced to candidates at this stage is **mood**. Candidates should be prepared for questioning at this level to cover an exploration of their awareness of the mood of the piece in general and how their movement, gestures and vocal tone helped to create and enhance it.

Here are some sample questions covering these elements of performance:

Grade level	Topic	Sample questions
From Grade 3	Pausing/ emphasis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">(referring the candidate to the text of the piece in their book) Look at the layout of the lines at the beginning of your poem: can you clap the rhythm/beat of the verse here? Where are the pauses?What did you want to achieve by using pause there?What do we use pause for?You changed the pace at ... can you explain the effect of that?How did the slower pace there help the audience understand the story?
From Grade 2	Mood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">How did you show the Alderney's mood in your voice/face/movement?What mood was the King in at the beginning? When did his mood change?How would you describe the mood of the poem? Is there more than one mood?How did you change your voice/face/body to show that/those change/s in mood?

Outcomes at Foundation Level

A Distinction level candidate will be quick, accurate and articulate in response and eager to share knowledge, demonstrating a good understanding of meanings, characters, and specific required aspects such as mood.

At Below Pass a candidate may be slow to respond and uncertain about meanings of words, and the role of the required vocal skills in performance.

FOUNDATION TO INTERMEDIATE

The poem here could be performed at foundation or intermediate level. **Note:** An extract is shown here for illustrative purposes, however the candidate would perform the whole poem for the task unless an extract is specifically requested in the requirements.

Up the airy mountain
Down the rushy glen,
We daren't go a-hunting
For fear of little men;
Wee folk, good folk,
Trooping all together;
Green jacket, red cap,
And white owl's feather!

Down along the rocky shore
Some make their home,
They live on crispy pancakes
Of yellow tide-foam;
Some in the reeds
Of the black mountain-lake,
With frogs for their watchdogs,
All night awake.

(excerpt from *The Fairies*
by William Allingham 1824 –
1889)

As with *The King's Breakfast*, the questioning for a candidate who has offered *The Fairies* as their performance piece at Foundation Level, is focussed around the candidate's awareness of and thoughts on the **meaning** of the piece including a question or two on specific points in the poem.

Grade level	Topic	Sample questions
Grades 1-3	Content, meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the little men? How do you imagine they look? • What was your favourite word or phrase /group of words in that poem? Why? • What was your favourite moment in your performance of that poem? What did you most enjoy about that? • Does the rhythm of a poem help you decide where to emphasise?

At the top end of the Foundation Level, and moving into the Intermediate level, the questioning will bring in more focus on the detail of the piece:

Grade level	Topic	Sample questions
From Grade 3	Words (content, meaning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why does he say 'rushy' glen?/ What does a rushy glen look like? /What does 'rushy' describe? • Does 'rushy' mostly describe the rushes or reeds (grass-like clumps) or rushing water falling down steep slopes, or the way the hunters rush down the slopes, or all these – what do you think? • What is a 'glen'? • Who are the people you are when you are speaking these words? • What do you think an audience might enjoy most in it?

Some questioning at this level may focus on **mood** and **emphasis**. In the case of this particular poem there are some good opportunities for the candidate to emphasise particular sections in their performance to create **mood** and certain images in the audience's mind, and the questioning will encourage the candidate to talk about this:

Grade level	Topic	Sample questions
From Grade 2	Mood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where did you notice a change of mood in the poem? • What changes did you make to your performance to enable the audience to feel the change in mood? • What physical things did you do to show different moods? (from grade 5)
From Grade 3	Emphasis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What word did you emphasise most at the beginning? / in the third line/ in the last line of this verse? • How did you emphasise it? • Why did you think that word needed emphasis?

Grade 4 sees the inclusion of an awareness of **phrasing** which, like pausing, gives variation to the delivery, helping to convey meaning and create interest.

Grade level	Topic	Sample questions
From Grade 4	Phrasing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tell me how you phrased this section/about your phrasing in this section/ this line/ these two lines.• Can you provide an example of lines that you performed all as one phrase? Why did you link them in this way? / Was there anywhere where your phrasing ran over into the second line? Why did it have to do that? What was the effect of that?• What is the difference between the phrasing of (<i>depending on the candidate's performance</i>) lines 1 and 2, and lines 3 and 4?

INTERMEDIATE

The following piece can be offered as a poem by a solo candidate and it is used as such here.

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the cauldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt, and toe of frog,
Wool of bat, and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork, and blind-worm's sting,
Lizard's leg, and howlet's wing,
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

Double, double, toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf,
Witches' mummy, maw and gulf
Of the ravin'd salt-sea shark,
Root of hemlock digg'd I' the dark,
Add thereto a tiger's chaudron.

Double, double, toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

(excerpt from *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, IV i
by William Shakespeare 1564-1616)

At Intermediate level (Grades 4-5), examiners will look for specific knowledge, and may ask questions that investigate in more depth the **meaning of words** and **language** used in the piece:

Grade level	Topic	Sample questions
Grades 4-5	Content, meaning, vocal and physical aspects of characterisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are the witches making this brew? • Why are they asking for 'double' toil and trouble? Is 'double' an adjective or a verb? • What are the witches wanting to achieve? • Why is the snake called a 'fenny' snake? • Why do you think these particular creatures are chosen to go into the mixture? • What is a broth? So, what is a hell-broth?
	Writer's use of language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you enjoy about the language of this scene? • What style of verse is the piece written in?

As covered earlier with *The Fairies* extract, Intermediate Level grades will expect an awareness of **phrasing** and here are some further examples of the types of questions that could be asked:

Grade level	Topic	Sample questions
	Phrasing and pace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you have to be careful about your phrasing anywhere in that scene? • How do the lines you speak here direct you as to phrasing/pace/physicality/tone of voice? • Does this make a difference to your style of performance?
	Emphasis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you repeat one line of the spell and then clap its rhythm? Where does the emphasis come?

The discussion at this level also starts to focus on a candidate's **characterisation** and the **vocal and physical aspects of creating a character**:

Grade level	Topic	Sample questions
	Vocal and physical aspects of characterisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does a newt look like/feel like? • What does the skin of a bat feel like? • How did/might costume help you to create your character? • How old do you think your character might be? How did you show that physically? • How did you alter your voice to help show your character? • You had your back to the audience sometimes – how did you ensure that the audience could understand you? • Did you make many alterations to your normal voice or pace in your performance – why?

Outcomes at Intermediate level

A Distinction level candidate will enter eagerly and knowledgeably into discussion of specific elements in the text and performance choices.

At Below Pass a candidate may have learnt their lines without being aware of specific meanings and be uncertain about the reasons for performance choices.

ADVANCED

At Advanced Level (Grades 6-8), examiners will use the same procedure – always asking specific questions about text and performance choices. For example, consider this passage from *The Journey of the Magi* by T.S. Eliot (1888-1965). The poem is written in free verse, and the examiner may probe a candidate's understanding of the shaping of these lines and the implications of that shaping for performance.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

(excerpt from *The Journey of the Magi*
by T S Eliot 1888-1965)

An examiner would be alert to an understanding of the performance techniques needed to accomplish the three-word-line 'This set down', prefaced as it is by a suspensive pause and followed by considerable space which needs careful judgement before the emphatic beginning of the next line, 'This:'.

An examiner would want to probe how the movement of the poem precisely follows and projects the movement of difficult thought, and would hope to discover the performers' awareness of the line structure and the performance implications which that demands.

Similarly, a poem with a precise formal lyric structure, such as 'To Daffodils' (*right*)

The simplicity of this brief two-stanza lyric in its language, is hand in hand with a sophistication of structure and thought which the performer needs to embody, in order to capture mood and meaning fully. An examiner may probe understanding of the performance implications of allusions in the text, and the challenges and effects of the chosen form, e.g. the two-syllable lines in the centre of the stanza the use of suspensive pause here, and how the structure helps to embody meaning.

Another example (*below*). **Note:** candidates presenting an edited piece like this should bring in to the exam room the original version of the script as well as the edited version for the examiner to refer to.

FAIR daffodils, we weep to see
You haste away so soon;
As yet the early-rising sun
Has not attain'd his noon.
Stay, stay
Until the hasting day
Has run
But to the evensong;
And, having pray'd together, we
Will go with you along.

We have short time to stay, as you,
We have as short a spring;
As quick a growth to meet decay,
As you, or anything.
We die
As your hours do, and dry
Away
Like to the summer's rain;
Or as the pearls of morning's dew,
Ne'er to be found again

(*To Daffodils*
by Robert Herrick 1591-1674)

VLADIMIR:

That Lucky might get going all of a sudden. Then we'd be ballocksed. He's here - As large as life. (*Gesture towards Lucky.*) For the moment he is inert. But he might run amuck any minute.

(*Hears Pozzo's (offstage): Help!*)

(repeats – confirming Estragon's suggestion)... So, give him a good beating, the two of us. You mean if we fell on him in his sleep? That seems a good idea all right. But could we do it? Is he really asleep? (*Pause.*) No, the best would be to take advantage of Pozzo's calling for help—

(*Hears Pozzo's (offstage): Help!*)

To help him—

(repeats – confirming Estragon): We help him? In anticipation of some tangible return.

(repeats dismissively Estragon's): And suppose he -

Let us not waste our time in idle discourse! (*Pause. Vehemently.*) Let us do something, while we have the chance! It is not every day that we are needed. Not indeed that we personally are needed. Others would meet the case equally well, if not better. To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us! What do you say? (*Estragon says nothing.*) It is true that when with folded arms we weigh the pros and cons we are no less a credit to our species. The tiger bounds to the help of his congeners without the least reflection, or else he slinks away into the depths of the thickets. But that is not the question. What are we doing here, *that* is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come—

Or for night to fall. (*Pause.*) We have kept our appointment and that's an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) Extract from Act II
Adapted (retaining all dialogue and original indications of pause) as a monologue for Vladimir

At Advanced level, an examiner would want to probe a candidate's awareness and preparation of this text, for example to discover if he has a sophisticated understanding of timing in delivering Vladimir's words, and has understood the significance of the playwright's pauses – and other textual and contextual matters:

Grade level	Topic	Sample questions
Grades 6-8	Meaning, context, preparation, interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happens in the pause after 'asleep'? How did you decide how long to make the pause after 'say'? • Why does Vladimir mention a tiger? • What are congeners? • Why does he call mankind a 'foul brood'? • What are the possibilities facing Vladimir 'at this place in time'? • At what point are these possibilities dismissed? • How would you describe the style of writing? • What kind of voice do you imagine for Estragon? Does he influence Vladimir at all in this scene? Does Pozzo? • What language was this play first written in? • What is the underlying mood of this scene? • Are 'doing' and 'waiting' necessarily the same? • What is the structure of this play? Where does this scene fit in? How does the play's structure add to the effect of this scene?
Grade 7	Possible staging options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you know anything about the first performance of this play? • How was it staged? • How might you costume your character? And Pozzo? • What style of venue would suit this play/your particular rendition of this extract? • Describe a different staging of this scene? • Is Vladimir a tragic or comic character? • Is Pozzo? • How did you decide on Vladimir's voice? • What comic aspects could there be to this speech? • What would happen to our perception of meaning and style if you changed your pace completely here?
Grades 7-8	Vocal and physical techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you go about creating the physical aspects of the character? • Describe an appropriate vocal warm-up for preparing to perform this role.
Grade 8	Rehearsal processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you describe the rehearsal process that led to this performance? • Can you suggest a good way to relax a nervous performer about to go on stage? • What might be a suitable improvisation to help you explore aspects of this character?

As a final note, in the Advanced grades, candidates may be asked about how skills are blended to create effective performance. The candidate may be required to make connections between technical skills and the finished performance.

Can you explain how your breathing and inflection contributed to phrasing?

What were the challenges of the longer phrases? What exercises did you do to help you to sustain energy through to the end?

A Distinction level candidate will be relaxed, confident, and able to articulate clearly both the writer's and their own means of imaginative communication through various techniques. With *Godot* that would mean awareness of subtle details of the text, and of both the absurdist situation and the profound moral content, which makes the audience think:

- Should one member of the 'foul brood' of mankind ever try to help another?
- Is it possible to help Pozzo?
- Was there a moment here when Vladimir might have transcended humanity, or tried to?

A Below Pass level candidate may be slow to respond, uncertain about specific meanings, may not have been aware of the importance of accurate memorisation of words and pauses, and may struggle to articulate the reasons for their performance choices.

Glossary of terms in relation to performance

Articulation	The act of speaking or expressing in words; an utterance using the organs of speech (articulators), especially in relation to consonant sounds.
Content	the subjects or topics covered
Context	the parts of a piece of writing or speech which precede and follow a particular word or passage usually influencing its meaning or effect: the set of circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, situation.
Emphasis	The vocal pressure placed on a word or words, or other technique, such as use of pause or quietness, to make them stand out.
Interpretation	The choices made by a performer about the way to perform.
Meaning	The signification or sense of the piece: what it is saying, its purpose.
Mood	The emotional tone of the performance. The outcome when several dramatic elements work together to create a particular feeling or effect.
Pace	The rhythm or tempo of the piece; also, the rate at which it is performed.
Pausing	A beat or two of silence within text or dialogue, used to highlight what has just been said or to heighten anticipation of what is to come, or to clarify meaning.
Phrasing	The linking of words together in order to make sense of the piece.
Resonance	The intensification or amplification of vocal sound through engaging the human bodily resonators when producing vowel and voiced consonant sounds.