

# RESPONDING TO DRAMA

A GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



**WINDMILL  
THEATRE CO**

# WHY SHOULD STUDENTS RESPOND TO DRAMA?

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Being able to understand and respond to theatrical performances helps students to improve their own creative output and makes them better dramatic artists. Understanding that effectively responding to live performances is a critical skill for all drama and arts practitioners is an essential concept to communicate to students.

Students regularly respond to a variety of arts experiences both formally and informally. Responding to live theatre works, although a less common experience to many students than other things they regularly respond to, like film and television for example, should be framed as a natural extension to the students experiences as emerging dramatic artists, rather than an assessment requirement alone.

Students should be empowered to comment, discuss and critique dramatic works they have seen in a playful and personal manner. They should also be encouraged to integrate their responses into their own creative practice wherever possible. Many students feel that they are not qualified, or are not confident to hold an opinion of the relative success of a live theatre work. Breaking down the barriers to responding, which are often linked to the lack of experience many students have in a viewing live performances, is a critical component to their success.

Learning how to effectively respond to performances provides students with the skills to unpack and investigate closely a production they have seen or an experience they have been part of, and then comprehend:

- How the creatives achieved what they did.
- Why they individually responded to work in the way they did.
- If the overall effect and the proposed intention worked.

Students can then use this experience to help make the creations that they imagine come to life in the classroom and ideally also within their individual creative practice.

Before starting a responding task, it is often worthwhile exploring with students:

- What they thought the artist/s' intention was for the work and the impact they were hoping to have on their audience?
- Why this particular story was important to tell?
- Why they thought the creative team was chosen to tell the story?

This can help frame their analytical response and also remind them to consider these points when creating their own theatre work.

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# HOW CAN STUDENTS APPROACH RESPONDING?

The fundamentals to responding are consistent across the year levels and curriculum frameworks and comprises of two essential skills:

## ANALYSING

Judging **HOW WELL** the artist/s created the intended impact or effect? Asking, "Did it work?"

## EVALUATING

Identifying and describing **HOW** the artist/s created the intended impact or effect?

The ability to respond effectively to live performances is a critical component for drama students ongoing development as emerging theatre makers. This can be accomplished through step based process that progresses through the year levels. The following approach can be used and adapted for years 7-12 and is aligned to the current Australian Curriculum for years 7-10 and SACE Stage 1 and 2 subject outlines for years 11-12.



# YEAR 7-10

## What skills do students need to respond to drama?

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### ANALYSING

#### What is analysing?

Analysing is breaking down the performance into each of its core components (for example direction, lighting, sound etc) and then investigating each component closely

#### How do I analyse?

Identify each component of the performance (sound, lighting, direction etc) relevant to your assessment task and investigate thoroughly, taking into consideration specific moments from the performance throughout

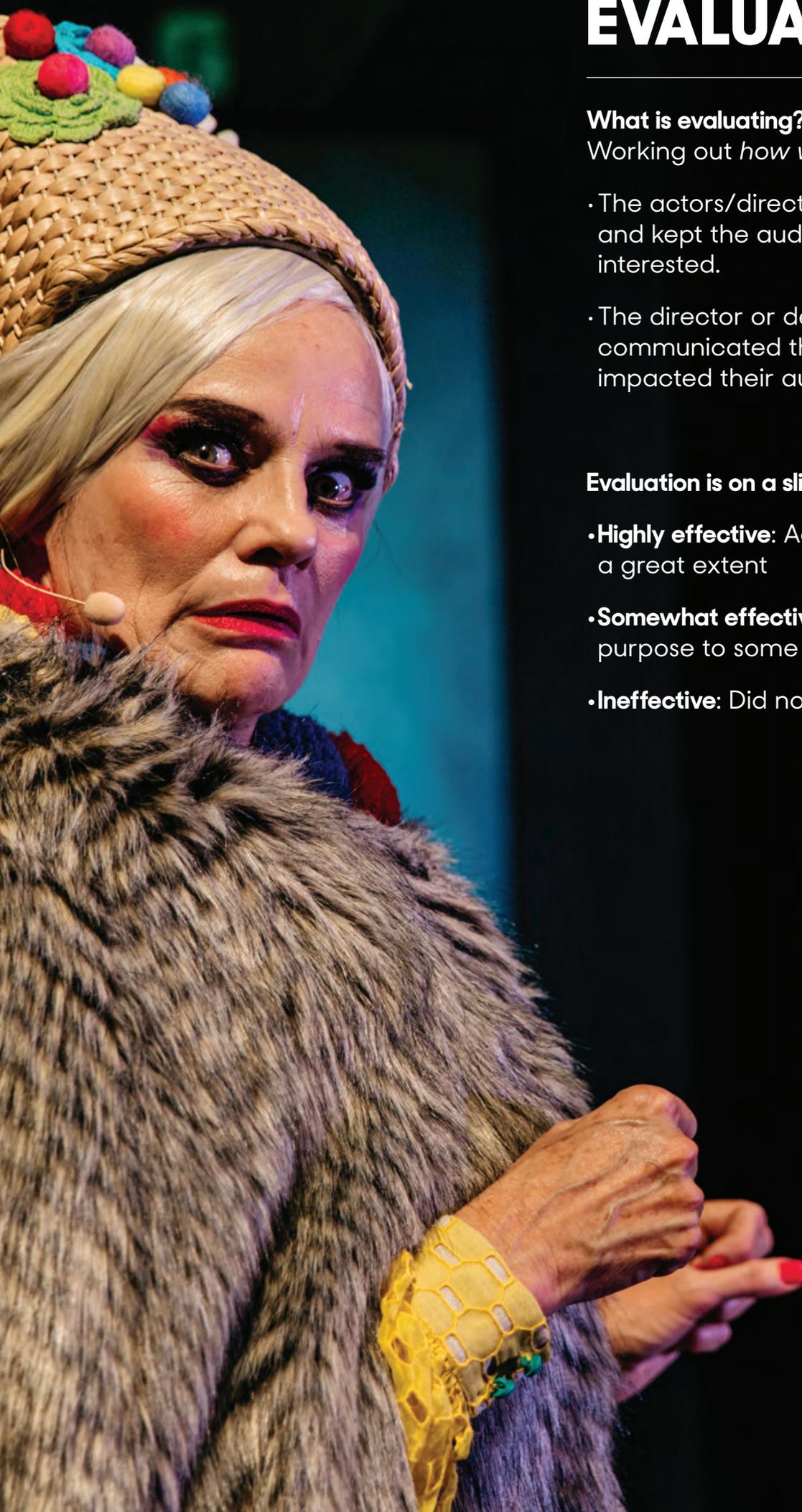
#### Drama terminology

Use drama language such as the elements of drama and conventions of style when you are describing your ideas

#### For example:

How the actors used voice (pitch; pace; pause; volume) and movement (gesture; facial expression; posture) to portray their character





# EVALUATING

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## What is evaluating?

Working out *how well*

- The actors/director told the story and kept the audience engaged and interested.
- The director or designer has communicated their intention and impacted their audience

## Evaluation is on a sliding scale:

- **Highly effective:** Achieved its purpose to a great extent
- **Somewhat effective:** It achieved its purpose to some extent
- **Ineffective:** Did not achieve its purpose

# YEAR 7-10

## Can't find the word you're looking for?

List compiled by Zoey Mansfield, Kristen Doherty and Karen Sierp. Used with permission.

### Joining or comparing ideas:

However  
In contrast  
Whilst  
Conversely  
Similarly  
Furthermore  
Importantly  
Though  
Different  
Despite  
Although

### Stating the Effect:

As a result  
Consequently  
For that reason  
Therefore  
Thus  
Hence  
Which meant that

### Sequencing:

Afterwards  
Finally  
Further  
Initially  
Most  
Later  
Next  
Then  
First  
Secondly  
In conclusion  
Following

### Supporting:

For example  
For instance  
In particular  
Such as  
That/this is

### Evaluating:

Achieves  
Affects  
Illustrates  
Proves  
Resolves  
Uses  
Highly  
Moderately  
Somewhat  
Ineffective

### Explaining:

Shows  
Conveys  
Demonstrates  
Evokes  
Emphasises  
Portrays  
Highlights  
Generates  
Creates  
Resembles

### Elements of Drama:

Role  
Relationship  
Context  
Focus  
Mood  
Tension  
Space  
Time  
Symbol  
Contrast  
Language  
Movement

### Drama Terminology:

Dramatic conventions	Backdrop
Dramatic style	Motivation
Context - local, global, contemporary, historical	Lighting/Sound FX
Character	Ensemble
Actor	Performance
Set	Focus
Costume	Artistic choices
Directorial concept	Staging
Blocking	Interpretation
Mood	Stage presence
Conflict/Contrast	Audience
	Tempo

# SACE STAGE 1 AND 2

## What skills do students need to respond to Drama?

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### INVESTIGATING & ANALYSING

#### What is investigating and analysing?

Dissecting the performance/ experience; examining and explaining how

#### How do I investigate and analyse?

Identify each component of the performance (sound, lighting, direction etc) relevant to your assessment task and investigate thoroughly how each component was realised

#### Drama terminology

Use drama language such as the elements of drama and conventions of style

#### For example:

How the set used space, colour and texture to heighten the mood of a scene



# INTEGRATING & SYNTHESISING

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## **What is integrating and synthesising?**

Making connections between the different components that have been analysed and explaining how the connections work together to create dramatic meaning for the audience

## **For example:**

How the sound designer used music to heighten the tension between the two main characters to convey the director's intent



# REFLECTING

## What is reflecting?

Thinking deeply and carefully

## How do I reflect?

Supporting ideas with relevant and detailed examples from the production

## How do I reflect?

Writing or creating a thoughtful and in-depth response.

## How do I reflect?

Linking ideas back to the original set task



# EVALUATING

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## What is evaluating?

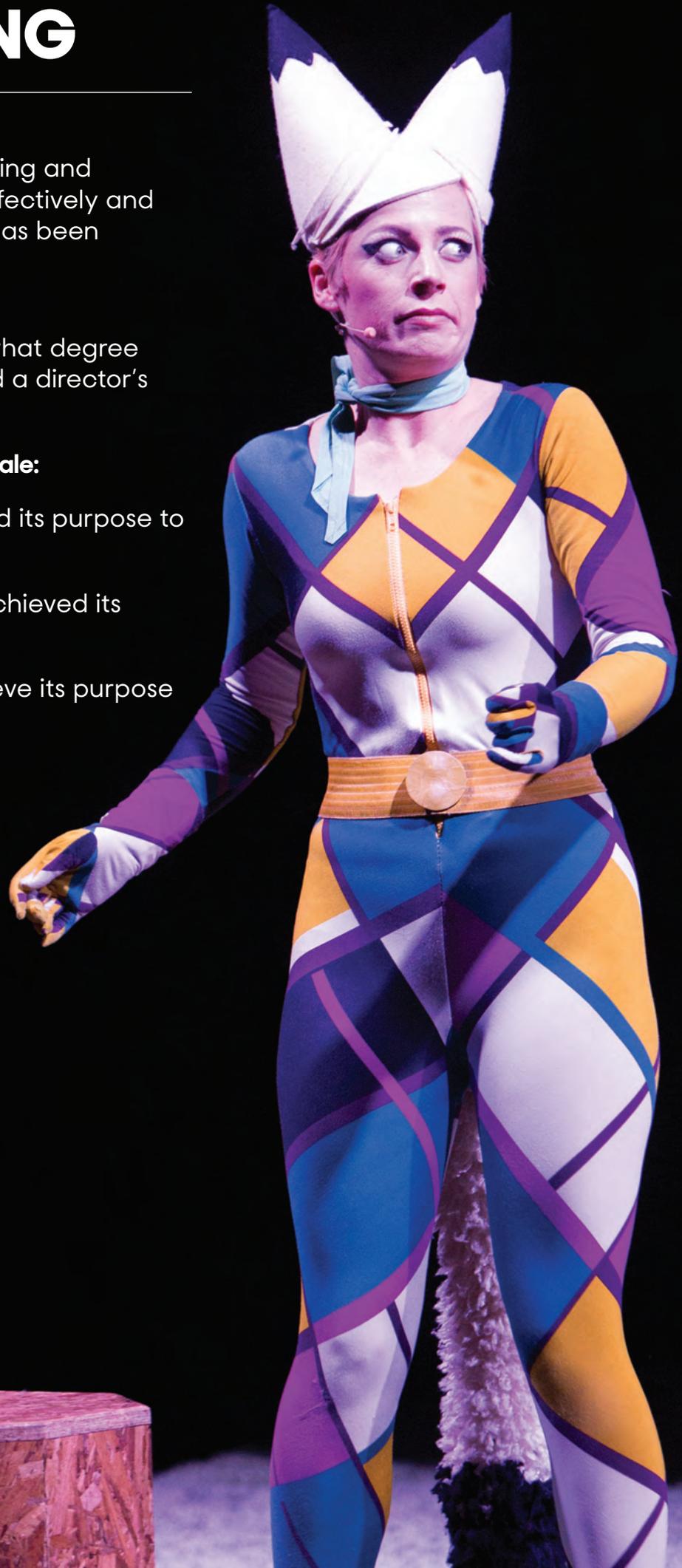
After analysing, synthesising and reflecting decide how effectively and to what degree a work has been successful.

## For example:

How effectively and to what degree a production has realised a director's original intent.

## Evaluation is on a sliding scale:

- **Highly effective:** Achieved its purpose to a great extent
- **Somewhat effective:** It achieved its purpose to some extent
- **Ineffective:** Did not achieve its purpose



# COMPARING & CONTRASTING

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## What is comparing and contrasting?

To identify and describe the similarities and differences within a work or between multiple works.

## For example:

How the themes in two play texts by different Australian playwrights are similar and/or different.



# YEAR 11-12

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# STRUCTURING A REVIEW

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Writing a review takes time and practice. For younger year levels such as year 7 and 8, short answer responses to questions can be an effective way for students to become confident with analysing and evaluating without having to also conquer essay writing. Year 9 can further develop these skills by writing in paragraphs and finally in year 10, essay writing can be introduced which can then be continued into years 11 and 12.

The following is a suggested structure for essay review writing:

## Top Left

- Name of performance in italics
- Production company
- Director
- Playwright
- When you saw the performance
- Venue of the performance

## Introduction

in no particular order

- Ensure it is engaging to keep the reader reading; for example, beginning with a relevant quote from the director or play
- Outline the purpose of the review
- Identify the theatrical style of the performance
- Simple plot outline
- Themes evident in the play

## Body

- In depth analysis, reflection and evaluation of ideas
- Detailed and specific supporting evidence

## Conclusion

- Restate in new words the purpose of the task
- Provide an overall evaluation of the production linking it to the purpose of the task
- Finish with a concluding sentence that sums up the entire review
- Avoid introducing new points

# SUGGESTIONS

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## Final suggestions to students when responding to drama:

- Before they see the show make sure they are familiar with the task's requirements
- Make detailed notes at intermission and after the show.
- Use the Study Guide for further information.
- Start on planning and writing review as soon as possible so they can remember the details of the performance.
- Write in third person.
- Draft and edit work carefully.
- Once an artist's full name has been referred to, only their last name is required
- Remember it is the actor who performed the character, so when analysing an actor's performance use their name rather than the character's.
- Use drama terminology.
- No paragraph headings.
- No need to recommend the play to others.





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