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# ASCA NEWS

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**The ASCA Newsletter**

**January - March, 2016**

**Keeping you up to date, and in the loop with ASCA goings on.**

Congratulations to all ASCA members on a very successful 2015!

Welcome to current members and a very warm welcome to two new student members,  
**Harsimran Gill** from NSW and **Elana Nerwich** from Queensland.

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**The ASCA Annual General Meeting** was held on the 6<sup>th</sup> February 2016 and the following members were elected;

**Office Bearers**

President	Sandra Carter
Vice President	Jillian Burgess
Treasurer	Carolyn McKenzie
Secretary	Dr Paul March
Assistant Secretary	Susanne Harrison

**Committee Members**

Minutes Secretary	Jillian Burgess
Publicity Officer	Samantha Luck
Newsletter/Publications Officer	Susanne Harrison
Events Officer	Jan Adams
QLD representative	Genevieve England
VIC representative	Robyn Schiller

**Ordinary Committee Members**

Elizabeth Walsh  
Andrea Crawford  
Anita Eldridge  
Rachel Hennessy.

The start of the year is probably a good time to get students organised with palm cards for their Personal Projects.

### **A Note to Teachers** **A reminder about palm cards**

Palm cards should be small, plain and unobtrusive for the audience. If students are using large cards, it can distract and create a barrier between them and the audience, especially in primary and smaller students. The cards should be made of cardboard rather than paper so they don't move or make any sound. It also makes it harder for a nervous speaker to fiddle with them.

**Esselte System Cards** are a cheap and easy option. The best size to use is 76x127mm. They are available at Officeworks (or similar) in a box of 500 for \$30 approximately or a box of 100 for approximately \$7.



You can also get smaller packs of plain white cards at newsagents, 100 should last most students right through school.

1. Number them – so you don't get them in the wrong order.
2. Stapling them or putting them on a key ring makes it easy for young students to keep them in order.
3. Aim to get as much information on each card as you can BUT don't write smaller than you can easily read.
4. Use the minimum number of cards possible.
5. Make sure they're in good condition – don't let them get bent and dirty, it doesn't send a good message to the examiner.

And lastly, palm cards should not be held in two hands in front of the student. They should be held in one hand, to the side of the body, and when the student isn't using them the hand can be dropped down to their side.

**Electronic "palm cards"** , are also acceptable, as long as they are used unobtrusively.

There will be more information about this in a later newsletter.

## **Membership reminder.**

Just a reminder for anyone who hasn't sent their 2016 membership form and fees - they are now due. The forms were sent out last year and need to be filled in, particularly if your details have changed from 2015.

Membership fees are:

Student Associate Membership	\$20
Individual Membership	\$40
Corporate Membership	\$50

Please make cheques payable to ASCA and send with completed form to Mrs Susanne Harrison, ASCA Membership Secretary, PO Box 322, Manly, NSW 1655.

## **Syllabus reminders.**

### **a. Junior Grade 2. Yellow Syllabus.**

Section 1, Personal Project. There is now an alternative to the narrative or recount and that is a book review.

### **b. Individual Junior Performance Drama, Junior Grade 1,2 and 3. Green Syllabus.**

Section 2 or 3, Improvisation.

This must be an Improvisation and not a prepared piece.

Below are some ideas on preparing students for this section provided by Andrea Crawford, from Melbourne.

# IMPROVISATION HANDY HINTS

In the Communication through Performance Syllabus there is an improvisation section for Junior Grade One (IJP1), Junior Grade Two (IJP2) and Junior Grade Three (IJP3) and below is a brief guideline on how to prepare students for this section.

## Improvisation defined:

- simply means to create something spontaneously or **without preparation**.  
Improvisation is a form of spontaneous theatre in which characters, dialogue, relationships, scenes and plot are all created in the moment.

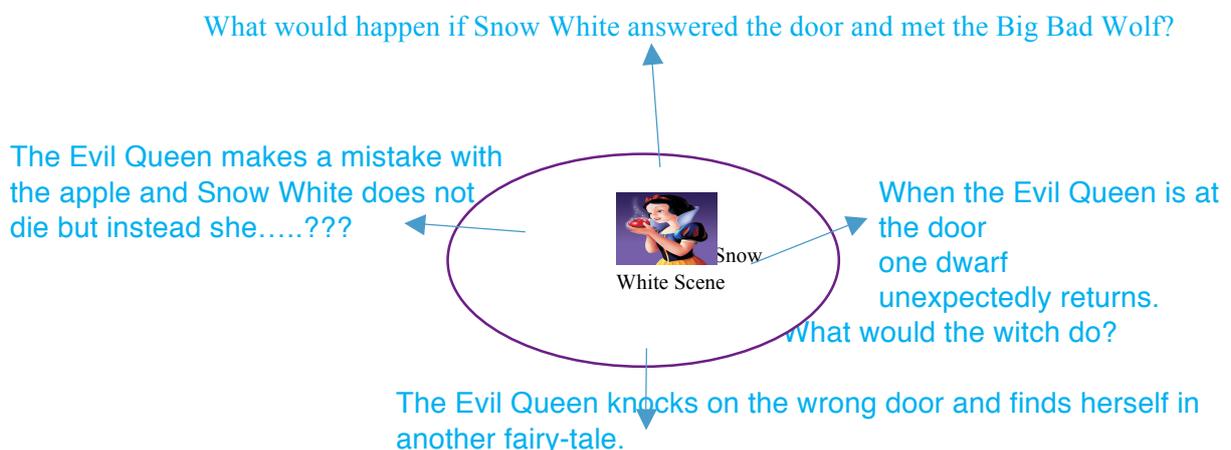
## Therefore what are the examiners looking for?

- A logical, simple sequence of events
- Spontaneity
- Having a go
- Conversation
- Imagination
- Creativity

## What are examiners NOT looking for?

- Perfection
- A prepared scene (unless teacher has notified examiner due to candidate's special needs)

This is an example of some ideas in regards to an improvisation based on a drama that an examiner may give. Remember this is a guide and **not** all inclusive.



improv is unscripted.  
improv is unplanned.  
improv is unpredictable.  
improv is a powerful art form.  
improv is having conversations.  
improv is overcoming your fears.  
improv is an experiment in how to live life.  
improv is more than just comedy.  
improv is everywhere.  
improv is storytelling  
improv is saying yes.  
improv is organic.

## **Important Information for Teachers about Examination Entries**

A reminder that Examination entries (complete with numbers, grades and examination fees) must reach ASCA 6 weeks prior to the proposed examination date. It is also a good idea to send a draft Examination entry early in the year to give ASCA an Overview of the year. This will assist planning.

The busiest examination time of the year is Term 4, November and December in particular. For this reason, any teacher wishing to hold examination in December must send entries before November 1.

**The cut- off date for December 2016 Examination is November 1.**

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## **Brain food for Teachers and Senior Students.**

The following is an Article by Dr Paul March, ASCA's secretary.

Hope you enjoy reading it.

### **THE PRIMACY OF ORACY**

It is interesting to note the way oracy (speaking and listening) has drifted in and out of favour in education systems over the last few decades. As teachers of speech, drama and communication we need to be fully aware of the centrality of speaking (talking) and listening in the school curriculum and we need to be sensitive to the way speaking and listening are firmly integrated throughout all of the *Key Learning Areas*.

The term *oracy* was coined by the late Professor Andrew Wilkinson (University of East Anglia) in 1965 and since then speaking and listening have received varied emphases in the curriculum. In the late 80's in the UK, for instance, there was a National Oracy Project which only lasted for five years. In education, as in medicine and many other fields of endeavour, the pendulum swings with changes of government or a new group of professors. Oracy, as a concept analogous to literacy, is credited to Andrew Wilkinson and his colleagues in the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE), who gave it currency in their written and spoken output, just as the AATE and ETA, locally, did!

In fact, the idea of *oracy* goes back 1,000 years to the early English scholar Aelfin who wrote the first textbook in Anglo-Saxon and Latin in the form of a catechism (Low, 2003):

‘We children beg thee, oh teacher, to teach us to speak, because we are ignorant and speak incorrectly,’ the class asks.

‘What do you want to say?’ asks the teacher.

‘What do we care what we say?’

they reply, ‘so long as it is correct speech and useful and not foolish or bad.’

Aelfin’s model lesson was echoed by the Bullock Report in 1975 when it looked at standards of reading in the context of the state of the English language as a whole. It was a time when sociology and linguistics were in fashion, teaching was seen as a kind of barter, or negotiation, between teacher and class, and NATE was in its heyday. One of Lord Bullock’s committee members was Professor James Britton of London University and greatly influenced the outcome. Teachers now had to learn about social interaction and negotiated meanings.

These concepts gathered momentum over the years and when Professor Michael Halliday assumed the inaugural Chair of Linguistics at Sydney University in the middle eighties the new *Systemic-Functional Grammar* emerged, with an emphasis on language as *making meanings*. The concept of *language registers* also emerged at this time and these referred to variations in language affected by field (content), tenor (relationships) and mode (formality) (March, 1986).

Subsequent English Syllabuses took aspects of these grammar and register studies, which emerged *text-types* or *genres*, both oral and written, in classrooms. The new *Australian Curriculum: English, F-6, 2012*, has embraced these concepts with a sociolinguistic thrust:

Students learn that language used by individuals varies according to their social setting and the relationships between the participants. They learn that accents and styles of speech and idiom are part of the creation and expression of personal and social identities.

AND

Students learn how texts (oral/written) are structured to achieve particular purposes, how language is used to create texts that are cohesive and coherent, how texts about more specialised topics contain more complex language patterns and features; and how the author guides the reader/viewer through the text through effective use of resources at the level of the whole text, the paragraph and the sentence. (p.6)

Speaking and listening, then, are pervasive throughout the *Key Learning Areas* and, as teachers of speech communication, we have a responsibility to ensure that our students are clear, fluent, authoritative speakers. The Linguist, Professor Michael Halliday, states that he has spent most of his life arguing for the importance of the spoken language in education (in Walshe, March, Jensen, 1986, p.5). The following comments by Routman (2012, p.160) support the research by Halliday and others:

To be an effective and engaging speaker, one must be knowledgeable and pay close attention to the appropriateness and relevance of the content, needs and interests of the audience, the pacing of the talk, what's most important to say and how to say it in a limited time frame, possible technology support, and much more ... being a competent and clear communicator and being able to make an effective and persuasive argument are necessities for interacting successfully with others and for giving useful feedback in life and work.

Such comments support a social view of language as advocated by the *Australian Curriculum*. This means that language – oral, written and visual – can best be developed in a variety of social contexts. It recognises that there is a relationship between a text (whether oral or written) and the context in which it was generated. It also allows us to construct and interpret spoken, written and visual texts so that we are increasingly *gaining control over meaning* in the text and seeing how the speaker/listener/writer/reader is positioned (Halliday in Walshe et al. 1986, p.5).

There definitely has been a major shift in thinking about how best to teach language in recent decades. Half a century ago, it was generally thought that students entering Foundation (Kindergarten) were regarded as ‘clean slates’, when in fact we know that such students have an excellent grasp of their oral language and they can use it for many purposes: they have internalised its grammatical rules and can, indeed, *make meaning* very well. Another problem was that some teachers realised there had been too much concentration on errors – a paradigm of language as a set of ‘table manners’ or rules to be learnt and followed.

This resulted in a ‘benevolent inertia’ whereby students were allowed to tell and write about anything without correction. The way forward is for the teacher to provide models for ways students can *gain control over meaning*:

We had a big fight in the 60's getting rid of the notion that language is just about correctness – getting things right. Even today people still think of a linguist as somebody who makes rules about language; but in the University the Department of Linguistics is concerned about what the students mean, and we can understand what they are getting at, that's fine ... What you are doing when you are learning language, both spoken and written, is achieving *forms of control* – a social, interpersonal process, not an individual one ... Writing to learn implies that there are models of how this can be done and that these can be learnt ... Don't let's speak of the child *owning* the discourse, but rather of *achieving control* over it, with the help of a teacher who provides structure (Halliday in Walshe et al., 1986, p. 5).

Let us consider the pervasiveness and importance of *oracy* across the curriculum with a focus on the nexus between speaking and writing. It is concepts like Halliday's above that have driven the genre or text-type approach (which is an integral part of a social view of language) to teaching speaking and writing in the classroom. The nexus between speaking and writing is unmistakable: although they are different ways of meaning, behind both is a common system that we call language. One of the advantages is that it brings language into consciousness. Accordingly, it is important to see that learning to read and write makes it possible for students to *reflect* on language in the process of their learning. Sometimes this *reflection* is carried out in the oral mode through *discussion* or *interaction* with others. The written mode is a more permanent language system, although at the same time it can be modified and constantly updated to suit the needs of the communicator and the audience. This is where technology in the form of computers can play a major role with respect to word-processing.

It is important to remember that written language tends to be organised quite differently from spoken language. It tends to have more formal language structures, whereas spoken language can be characterised (depending on the formality of the occasion) by broken sentences, ellipses, non-sequiturs, and so on. The world as heard in speech is quite different from the world as seen in writing. This, in fact, is a positive feature because we get complementary, mutually reinforcing pictures of the world. A successful and language-rich classroom has a balanced interaction of talking and writing as some things are learned better through talking and others through writing.

Talking can take place at all stages of the writing process. Students need to brainstorm a topic initially – this brainstorming can be both oral and written as the *nature* of the writing task and ways of moving forward with it can be discussed in a small group or paired situation with

other students and/or the teacher. In fact, this kind of *conferencing* can take place during the actual writing and rewriting stages as well the publication stage when the final piece of writing can be shared with others in a lively interactive way. Talk can be used to clarify, test and organise ideas that will be committed to paper. In other words, the quality of speaking and listening ( using many different text-types) is just as important in the writing process as writing itself!

Halliday believes that we do not need a theory of ‘literacy education’ as much as a theory of learning based on language: ‘The psycholinguists haven’t given it to us. It won’t come out of linguistics without the help of the classroom nor vice versa ... my colleagues and I have been working for some years with teachers towards a theory of learning – of learning through language’ (Halliday in Walshe et al., 1986, p.6) This notion has certainly influenced current Syllabuses:

The study of English in this Syllabus is founded on the belief that language learning is recursive and develops through ever-evolving contexts ... students ... examine the contexts of language usage to understand how meaning is shaped by a variety of social factors. As students’ command of English grows, they are able to question, assess, challenge and reformulate information and use creative and analytical language to identify and clarify issues and solve problems ... (Board of Studies, *English K-10 Syllabus, Vol. 1*, 2012, p.13)

From the research over recent decades, several implications for good practice can be extracted. The following suggestions for both classroom and private practice are based on current curricula, both local and overseas, and on the work of Alexander (2012), Coultas (2007) and March (in Winch et al. 2014):

\*Speaking (or talking) is essential to students’ thinking and learning and to their productive engagement in the home, community and school contexts. We now have additional evidence, from over 20 major international studies (Alexander, 2012, p.2) that high quality classroom talk raises standards in the core subjects as typically measured in national and international tests.

\*The *primacy of oracy* cannot be doubted – our task as teachers is so important!

\*We need to give students practice in different kinds of talk (narratives, recounts, discussions, arguments, debates, informative talks and so on) in order to extend the repertoire of student talk and to raise the standard and cognitive impact of group and classroom talk overall.

\*Although the terms ‘speaking and listening’ and ‘communication skills’ indicate objectives of indisputable significance, they have become devalued by casual use and

should be replaced by terms that signal the emphatic step change in thinking and practice that is needed. *Oracy* is a neologism which some find unappealing; *spoken language* fits the bill reasonably well, though it doesn't have the connotation of acquired skill that, by analogy with *literacy*, *oracy* possesses.

\*Teachers are now accepting the fact that talk makes a unique and powerful contribution to students' development, thinking and learning and that it must, therefore, have a central place in their education.

\*As speech teachers, we need to go beyond just getting our students to engage in recitation work – we need to engage them in talking about and thinking about the recitation pieces and authors that are being studied. We can involve our students in exploration, speculation, argumentation and carefully structured discussion to replace mere recall of predetermined responses or in Martin Nystrand's words: classroom talk 'requires students to think, not just to report someone else's thinking' (Nystrand et al., 1997, p.72).

\*For both learning and life, students not only need to be able to provide relevant and focussed answers but also to learn how to pose their own questions and how to use the appropriate text-type in particular social situations – that is, to *gain control over language registers*.

The challenge, then, to put speaking/listening at the centre of the curriculum (the *primacy of oracy*) is before us and those involved in teaching speech communication and speech/drama can play an important part in this process.

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Some wise words to help us through exam season  
“Tough times never last – tough people do”  
Robert Schuller – American Evangelist

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### Queries

If you have any queries about ASCA, the syllabus, or examinations, please contact us by email, or write and they will be handed to the committee for an answer.

CONTRIBUTIONS to the newsletter gratefully received by the editor, Susanne Harrison. <b>All newsletter correspondence should be sent to: PO Box 4570, North Rocks, NSW 2151</b> <i>Newsletter.asca@gmail.com</i>
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