



GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**GCE (LEGACY)
MEDIA STUDIES
AS/Advanced**

SUMMER 2019

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MEDIA STUDIES

General Certificate of Education (Legacy)

Summer 2019

Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

MS1: MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS AND RESPONSES

General Comments

The print based texts for this examination was the DVD Covers for *Brotherhood* (2016) and *Fences* (2017).

Candidates found the texts and accompanying question accessible; it provided rich opportunities for relevant media responses and candidates across the mark range were able to analyse the texts to varying degrees. It was pleasing to see good reference to relevant media terminology. Candidates were well prepared for the question and, in the main, it was the strongest response on the paper.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 Candidates demonstrated confidence in discussing the codes and conventions of the DVD Covers. Of particular note was their ability to analyse the visual codes and layout and design. Narrative was dealt with less strongly with some simply explaining what they felt was the narrative of the films. The strongest candidates successfully discussed the purpose and effect of their points, the range of and use of visual codes. The command word 'analyse' required candidates to do more than merely describe the issues and it was pleasing to see that some candidates seemed well prepared for this higher order skill. There was some good analysis using a wide range of media concepts and theory (on occasion) applied well to the texts. The stronger responses explored a range of ideas to give a valid and personal interpretation of the texts, showing understanding of the genres. Even weaker responses made some attempt to analyse, although some candidates tended to list or describe visual codes and the narrative without analysing the purpose and effect. Others recognised the layout and design aspects but failed to then explore them in any detail.

The question provides quite specific guidance in the bullet provided, indicating that candidates need to cover all of these points and providing them with an appropriate structure for answering the question. Some candidates focused on audience and representation at the expense of the focus required. Narrative was the aspect of the question that was handled least well. Although some responses made reference to binary oppositions and/or enigma codes, some centres had several candidates who ignored this bullet point completely and some (otherwise good) candidates tended to download some theorists such as Todorov. Those candidates who had a clear focus on the bullet points produced a more structured and coherent response.

The range of points made included:

Brotherhood:

Visual Codes

- clothing reflecting representation of urban youth
- setting - intertextuality with other films in the franchise
- muted colour scheme suggestion 'dark' narrative, dark sky as backdrop
- iconography linked to urban danger: masks and baseball bat
- clothing and physical appearance suggesting roles in narrative
- gesture and body language associated with aggression. Direct mode of address from characters, challenging expressions. Clenched fists of main character
- facial expressions related to character roles

Layout and design

- codes and conventions of a DVD cover are followed
- central image introducing main characters
- name of film - intertextuality with other films in the franchise in theme and font style e.g. use of upper and lower case
- tagline suggesting narrative displayed in 'paint wash' style
- 'sell line' suggesting additional features
- mark of quality featured 'from the creator of....' and 'A Noel Clarke film'
- central character features on back cover alongside thumbnails
- blurb has central place to establish the narrative
- use of dark colour scheme to reflect genre and narrative

Narrative

- genre conventions of social realist film
- 'blurb' suggests links to previous films and contains enigmas
- use of hyperbolic language suggesting tension and conflict e.g. 'explosive finale'
- thumbnails establish plot situations e.g. masked gang
- tagline suggesting narrative and linking to other films
- central character is alone on the back cover suggesting his importance and that this is 'his story'.

Fences:

Visual Codes

- clothing reflecting time period and class of characters
- combination of black and white and colour suggests juxtaposition of nostalgia and a more stark reality
- clothing and physical appearance suggesting roles in narrative e.g. working clothing and also the uniform of the central character in thumbnail
- gesture and body language: indirect mode of address from characters, range of expressions suggest elements of the relationships within the narrative
- inclusion of film company logo suggests a high quality production

Layout and Design

- codes and conventions of a DVD cover are followed
- central image using a close-up shot introducing main characters
- name of film - font style
- star billing - audience will recognise Denzel Washington
- mark of quality featured with references to the film company

- central characters featured in thumbnails on back cover in plot situations reinforcing their roles. Range of ages reinforces idea of a family saga.
- blurb has central place to establish the narrative
- inclusion of 'Special Features' as a selling point for the DVD and establishes the more serious tone of the film.
- references to digital platforms to broaden audience reach
- expert witnesses - quote from *Chicago Tribune*

Narrative

- genre conventions of period drama
- 'blurb' establishes enigmas and gives clues to the narrative related to the historical context and possible racial tension
- blurb also establishes the idea of struggle within the narrative and between characters; this is reinforced in the thumbnail images
- name of film and its connotations are referenced in the blurb and create further enigmas for the audience
- use of hyperbolic language suggesting tension and conflict e.g. 'fights to provide for those he loves'
- thumbnails reinforce this and include the iconography of the baseball bat in the hands of the young man giving clues to other areas of conflict within the film

- Q.2 (a)** Question 2(a) was accessible and there were many confident responses with candidates gaining full marks. Candidates could refer to one or both texts in their response. As has been the case in previous years, candidates need to be aware of their timing in the exam and not spend a disproportionate amount of time on a question only worth 4 marks. Weaker candidates did not consider two different types of representation, as required by the question or referred to two examples with no justification for their choices.

Suggestions included:

- negative representations of black youth in *Brotherhood*
- gang members including women. Woman as part of the masked gang.
- gang leaders
- historical representations in *Fences* related to racial tensions and place of people of colour in America at the time
- role of the father as provider referencing time period
- strong black matriarchal representation
- code of expression also suggest positive representations related to relationships, the community and to success (basketball player as mentioned in blurb)

- (b)** Question 2(b) required candidates to make a connection to the texts, thereby applying their media knowledge. As has been the case in previous years, it was important that candidates focus on the 'how the representation has been constructed' aspect of the question rather than provide a merely descriptive answer. The choice of ways selected for 2(a) affected the response for 2(b) and there needed to be this connection in order for the marks to be awarded. Candidates considered (in relation to their choice of representation for 2(a):

The expectation here is that candidates will develop their points in more detail exploring:

- iconography: clothing, props etc.
- visual codes: colour, expression, gesture

- mode of address
- how layout and design are used to construct the representation
- language used to anchor the representation
- role within the narrative

(c) Question 2(c) required candidates to explore how stereotypical the representations of ethnicity in the media. It was expected that relevant examples were used to support this evaluation. There was a range of ways in which candidates approached this question. Those who focused well on the question, exploring the meaning of 'how stereotypical' representations are while substantiating their response with relevant examples were able to access most of the marks available. The majority of responses for this question lacked depth and development with weaker candidates did not consider a range of different examples, thereby limiting their achievement. The answer required candidates to refer to their own examples but as is the case in previous years, some candidates referred only to the resource material. The candidates that did select their own examples selected appropriate examples from a range of industries (music videos, films etc.) which allowed them to discuss a range of relevant points.

Candidates explored:

- 2/3 specific examples of how representations of ethnicity conform to or challenge stereotypes. on the concept of representation.
- awareness of how different texts may reinforce or subvert representations of ethnicity, for example, unrealistic and constructed stereotypes for humour in situation comedies e.g. *Citizen Khan*, more realistic and challenging representations in television drama to relate to reflect social realism, stereotypes and archetypes in action films to reflect the escapist genre. Candidates may have shown awareness of how and when ethnic groups are under or mis-represented.
- candidates attaining the higher levels demonstrated an understanding of the concept of representation and were able to anchor their chosen examples in terms of context and purpose.
- The chosen examples were be relevant and analysed in some detail. The more able candidates engaged with examples on a more sophisticated level that went beyond simple descriptions or assertions of positive and negative.

This question proved problematic for some candidates and it was evident that many candidates were not prepared to engage in detailed textual analysis of specific texts. It is important for a coherent response that candidates select specific scenes, pages etc. and can analyse these in specific detail. Some candidates engaged in general analysis of, for example, magazine front cover/newspapers without discussing a specific edition, TV programmes with discussing specific episodes etc.

This has been a concern throughout this specification that some candidates do not display effective essay writing skills. Some responses provided an effective introduction that unpacked the question and provided some signposts to the reader as to what the main body would consider. A clear paragraph structure was expected with links made that took the reader through the essay.

Some candidates concluded and gave evidence of an overview that supported their overall conclusion, but these were limited. Weaker responses lacked structure and moved from one example to the other without the development of a point of view or exploration of purpose. These were the majority.

Q.3 Candidates should have demonstrated an understanding of the fact that all media texts are constructed to attract audiences and may have referred to the following in their response:

- layout and design
- technical and audio codes
- editing techniques
- mode of address
- visual codes
- audience positioning
- use of language
- content
- choice of stars/celebrities/endorsers
- accept any other relevant points

Question 3 proved an accessible question and was generally answered well with many candidates seeming prepared for a question on audience targeting. It was expected that candidates focused on the concept of audience and needed to refer to 2/3 examples across different forms. There was an expectation that candidates who attained the higher levels would demonstrate an understanding of the concept of audience and be able to anchor their chosen examples in terms of context and purpose. The chosen examples needed to be analysed in some detail and higher-level responses needed to engage with them on a more sophisticated level that went beyond simple descriptions or assertions of positive and negative. Higher level responses needed to use examples to both challenge and reinforce the statement.

Question 3 proved problematic for candidates who had not been adequately prepared in all areas of the specification. Some candidates were able to demonstrate their understanding of the focus of the question and candidates were able to develop their answer to discuss a range of points. The best responses used a specific example, e.g. a magazine front page and then analysed in detail how the audiences had been targeted, for example, the choice of the central image, the use of language and mode of address etc. Weaker candidates failed to establish the focus of the question.

Some candidates gave very brief responses and did not develop their examples in adequate detail. There were many cases where students were too general or descriptive with the texts they referred to, limiting their ability to get into higher levels. Generally, most responses lacked the expected range of examples. The length of the essay required for this question again proved challenging for candidates. Structure is often lacking and candidates need to be better prepared with essay writing skills. Ideally, there should be an introduction that unpacks the command and topic words then signposts how the main body will progress. Very few candidates introduced the concept, demonstrated their understanding of audiences through the analysis of specific media texts and then summed up their points in a conclusion. As with question 2(c), essay skills were lacking in a significant number of scripts.

Summary of key points

Learners' must be better prepared with essay writing skills that facilitate effective discussion and analysis. They must engage better with commend words such as 'analyse' to ensure that they are meeting the requirements of the question. Using bullet points and prompts that are provided as part of the question is vital. More successful candidates are able to make reference to a range of examples when that is required.

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MS2: MEDIA PRODUCTION PROCESSES

General Comments

Very few Centres entered candidates for MS2 for this, the last year, of the legacy specification. Appropriate briefs had been set for candidates and all Centres had selected print options.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Pre-Production:

These ranged from magazine pages to film scripts and displayed a range of different media skills. Assessment was a little varied, but most candidates were placed in the correct levels.

Production:

Magazine pages, DVD covers, and film posters dominated the submission this year. Technical skills were sometimes a little weaker than the marks awarded suggested with some pixilation errors, general layout and design errors and poor font choices being the most significant problems. There was a tendency towards generosity in the assessment of this element.

Report:

Not all the work reflected the requirements of the Assessment Objectives, but there was evidence of some good research and thorough evaluation from candidates across Centres.

Summary of key points

The briefs set were appropriate and there was some evidence of Productions, particularly the in assessment of technical skill, being generously awarded.

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MS3: MEDIA INVESTIGATION AND PRODUCTION

General Comments

A limited number of centres entered candidates for MS3.

Assessment was generally accurate, and most centres had clearly engaged with the requirements of the Specification. There was evidence of generosity of assessment in a minority of cases.

Each of the elements requires a range of skills, including: independent secondary research; technical and creative skills and an ability to evaluate with insight.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Research Investigation

The most effective research investigations demonstrate the following features:

- Titles clearly focused on a key concept (narrative; genre or representation) which incorporates between 1 and 3 specific media texts for investigation.
- Primary research, in the form of close textual analysis.
- Secondary research, clearly focused on the key concept identified in the title, that makes use of academic, clearly referenced sources such as textbooks, journals, essays and academically credible websites.
- The application of secondary research findings to the primary research, highlighting the development of candidates' conceptual understanding.
- Clearly drawn, insightful conclusions which can be used to inform the Production element.
- Common issues which limited the effectiveness of the Research Investigation and therefore created problems at the Production and Evaluation stages were:
 - Titles that are: too broad; attempt to explore a concept over more than one media platform; lack focus on a key concept
 - Titles which encourage a focus on audience/audience responses.
 - An over-reliance on user-generated sources, which lack academic credibility, such as Wikipedia, Slideshare, Blogspot or Prezi.
 - Overuse of sources such as reviews and newspaper articles.
 - A lack of referencing skills.
 - Description rather than analysis.
 - Audience research, in the form of surveys, questionnaires and focus groups, which is unnecessary and unlikely to aid conceptual understanding.

Production

The most effective productions displayed the following features:

- Clearly demonstrated use of research findings and conclusions to inform the production artefact/s.
- An effective understanding of, and adherence to, the relevant codes and conventions of both the media form produced and its genre – usually achieved through detailed analysis and well-drawn conclusions in the investigation.
- Appropriate levels of technical competence for the marks awarded, for example, effective editing and use of original images for higher levels.

Common issues which limited the effectiveness of the Production:

- Limited application of the research findings and conclusions; most often where candidates produce work in a media form or genre other than the one they investigated, have investigated audience rather than a key concept.
- Failure to adhere to codes and conventions of the media platform, including incorrect aspect ratio; usually due to the candidate not having analysed appropriate texts or not having paid sufficient attention to technical details in completing their investigation.

Evaluation

The most effective evaluations demonstrated the following features:

- A clear understanding of how research investigation findings and conclusions informed the production element.
- An effective ability to analyse technical features of the candidate's own work in relation to the research findings and conclusions.
- Exclusive focus on the relationship between the research investigation findings and conclusions and the production artefact.

Less effective evaluations were characterised by:

- Discussion of the pre-production processes such as storyboarding and scripting.
- Discussion of the production processes such as filming and editing.
- Discussion of the strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement of the production element.
- The introduction and discussion of new research / texts which did not appear in the investigation.

Assessment

There was some generous assessment. Generous assessment of the Research Investigations frequently occurred where candidates either lacked credible, academic secondary sources or failed to incorporate and apply such sources to primary research in the form of detailed textual analysis.

Where productions were over-rewarded, this tended to be because they lacked the close attention to detail needed for the levels awarded. In some instances, the codes and conventions of the form produced were not apparent; possibly because of the lack of detailed analysis in the investigation. This was most often the case where candidates worked in one media form for their Research Investigation and a different form for Production.

Administration

There were some centres who failed to annotate candidates' work, or who used annotations in the form of advisory comments to the candidate, making it difficult for moderators to understand how and why the assessment criteria had been applied or how marks awarded were arrived at.

Centres which submit work late, without an agreed extension, or present candidates' work without appropriate attention to detail as outlined above, make the moderation process difficult and raise issues with regards to parity across centres which may necessitate marks being adjusted to ensure uniformity of assessment.

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MS4: TEXT, INDUSTRY AND AUDIENCE

General Comments

Entry for this legacy paper was very small. Despite this, there was a range of responses, with higher level learners producing some sophisticated debates. There was less of a middle ground, and there were quite a few lower level responses, perhaps reflecting the legacy nature of the paper. The paper was accessible to all, but some centres/candidates were much more prepared than others.

Popular texts included *Chanel*, *Stranger Things*, *Luther*, *The Hunger Games*, *Skyfall*, *Wonder Woman*, *GTA*, *Fortnite* and *Tomb Raider*. Centres who studied 'the news' or other television programmes without a specific broadcast struggled to include adequate detail. There were still a few rubric infringements. The most common were not completing all questions or not using three texts in each.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Text

A1: Discuss how far your three main texts conform to conventional narrative structures.

The majority of candidates did focus on narrative, however some responses tended to veer into the areas of genre or representation – e.g. citing changing female representations as the reason why narratives were unconventional. Whilst there was an element of validity in discussing characters' narrative functions, this clearly limited responses. Often there was a tendency to describe the plot. Candidates were able to refer to theorists such as Todorov, Levi-Strauss and Propp, but weaker candidates failed to address the concept of 'how far' their chosen texts conformed to conventional structure.

A2: Explore the ways representations are constructed in your three main texts.

This was a popular question and most candidates were able to describe the representations of gender, ethnicity or age within their chosen texts. At the top end, a few responses were sophisticated, drawing on relevant theory, ideological context and textual analysis to answer the question. However, many candidates did not address the way that representations were constructed through e.g. visual and technical codes, performance or modes of address etc., and simply described the actions of characters within the texts.

Section B: Industry and Audience

B1: “Marketing plays an important role in ensuring the success of a text”. To what extent is this true of your three main texts?

This question was attempted by many candidates and was often reasonably well done, with the better responses discussing the marketing of their texts in detail and assessing its role in ensuring the success of the text. Other reasons for a text’s success, such as its industrial context, budget, stars, script and genre, were mooted by candidates who offered higher level responses. However, at the bottom end, it was surprising to note that some candidates had barely any awareness of the marketing of their texts. Candidates’ references to single advertisements and single music videos and their generic discussion of magazines and television programmes with no specific episode/issue limited many responses.

B2: Explain why different audiences are attracted to your three main texts.

This was a popular question and the higher-level responses were very good indeed, referring to a number of reasons why different audiences might be attracted to their chosen texts. However, a small number of candidates focused on Reception theory with little or no reference to the texts themselves on anything other than a superficial level. There were several responses that focused on ‘target’ rather than ‘attracted to’, and became less relevant, whilst some candidates did not discuss ‘different audiences’, offering a generic, sometimes subjective description of audience responses.

B3: “Regulation has a real impact within media industries”. How far do you agree with this statement? Refer to your three main texts.

A minority of candidates answered this question. Whilst there was some knowledge of regulation, candidates tended to struggle with the ‘impact’ element of the question and described how their chosen industries were regulated with little debate.

B4: How do producers of media texts encourage audiences to respond in a specific way? Refer to your three main texts.

Good responses engaged with the question and explored audience positioning in some detail, referring to relevant concepts such as encoding and preferred meanings. They were able to discuss modes of address, technical and visual codes and narrative. Weaker responses lost focus, describing audience response and applying e.g. the Uses and Gratifications or Hypodermic Models with little sense of the text as an artefact constructed by producers.

Summary of key points

Centres are occasionally disadvantaging their candidates by not covering an industry thoroughly (according to the Specification and Guidance for Teachers). There was some extremely superficial knowledge and understanding, often at barely more than a common-sense level. Some candidates appeared to have free choice of texts, which did not benefit them.

Simple English grammar such as capitalisation, paragraphing and use of inverted commas continues to be a problem for many candidates. Whilst there is no direct penalty for this, we would expect a higher level of literacy in an A Level examination.



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