



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

MEDIA STUDIES

SUMMER 2013

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MEDIA STUDIES

General Certificate of Secondary Education

Summer 2013

Unit 1

Principal Examiner: John Ashton

It is very pleasing to report on a successful examination given the evidence from senior examiners, and the scripts completed by this year's cohort. The topic of Television Drama proved particularly popular with both teachers and learners and provided stimulating texts to explore the Media Studies framework. The text chosen for Section A, *Downton Abbey*, proved particularly accessible for candidates, who were able to respond to the text at their own level of ability. There was clear evidence of some outstanding responses which read the text in sophisticated ways, expressed in clear and elegant written communication and drawing on the central concepts of the subject.

The area of representation, addressed in Question 3, continues to prove challenging for a number of candidates and senior examiners expressed some concern that this key Media Studies concept is perhaps addressed less well in centres' teaching. Some candidates confused the term 'representation' with 'audience' and explored the age of the audience, rather than the age of the characters represented, in the Television Drama they had studied. Indeed, there appears to be a general trend for many candidates to use audience reception theories to explain how texts appeal to audiences, rather than considering the genre conventions, technical, symbolic and narrative codes and how these build representations. Candidates should be prepared for the examination by studying a range of case studies which explore the codes and conventions of the set genre, and the issues of representation raised by these texts.

It was particularly gratifying to see evidence of a clear knowledge and understanding of the topic of Web-based Drama for Section B, where candidates demonstrated obvious engagement with this contemporary development in Media Studies and applied pre-production and planning skills in most creative and imaginative ways. Many senior examiners reported their enjoyment of marking the tasks of developing ideas for a new Web-based Drama, particularly Task 3 - developing ideas for the storyline for a new webisode.

Section A: Thinking About the Media - Investigating Television Drama

Q.1 The vast majority of candidates performed very well on this question in identifying two different settings from the extract. These ranged from the battlefields of the Somme in 1916 and the trenches, to *Downton Abbey*, the rear of the house, the Grand Hall and the dining room.

Most candidates offered detailed explanations of the two settings identified and there was evidence of media language and terminology emerging in identifying types of camera shots used and symbolic codes of dress and object related to characters and narrative. Many answers reflected on the use of lighting in building the mise en scene and higher level responses often referred to the Period Drama genre, or a sense of history and period. The very best answers demonstrated sophistication in exploring how settings were used to build narratives for audiences and the appeals of these codes and conventions of the Period Drama genre, as well as the iconography in the extract, which reflected war or class based narratives and representations.

- Q.2 Surprisingly, this question appeared to be somewhat more challenging with candidates achieving fewer marks overall compared to question 1, due mainly to the requirement to write in detail about the stories identified and to use media language in their responses. Many candidates struggled to apply appropriate media language and terminology effectively and there was little evidence of candidates using terms such as narrative, character functions, themes and plots, or even applying a basic sense of genre codes and conventions. However, there was evidence from those achieving higher marks of some outstanding responses, which demonstrated real sophistication in exploring the two storylines identified and their use of Todorovian narrative structures, or Proppian character functions. Answers achieving higher marks explored issues of conflict and disruption, and binary oppositions through class and gender, with some outstanding responses which made explicit reference to the storylines linked to production values and quality drama on television and how the storylines appeal to a range of audiences.
- Q.3 As mentioned in the general introduction to the report, it was evident in a number of cases that some candidates found the concept of representation of age very challenging and indeed clearly misunderstood the term, confusing it with audience. A small number of candidates reverted to writing about audience reception theory, or the Uses and Gratifications model of audience effects related to the age of different audiences. This was clearly identified as a rubric infringement. However, there was evidence of some candidates demonstrating a detailed knowledge and understanding of representations of age, and effectively linking this to gender to explore and make explicit reference to stereotyping. A wide range of case studies were offered, including the examination text, which was wholly acceptable this year. Very effective responses often used *Waterloo Road* as a case study, where candidates clearly engaged with the range of differing representations of age, from teenagers, adults, young children, young teachers and old teachers, and young parents and old parents. There was evidence of some outstanding responses, which discussed how the stereotyping of age was reinforced or challenged through particular characters in Television Dramas based on dominant ideologies, or how these representations provide a diversity of portrayals through stereotype, countertype and archetype, and how and why these appeal to audiences. Centres are advised to ensure that the case studies explored are secure in the genre as many examiners questioned the choice of texts where Situation Comedy or even films were used as examples of Television Drama.
- Q.4 This question performed very well, with some very sophisticated responses, where audience reception theories and Uses and Gratifications models of audience effects were applied well by many candidates. These theories, combined with the more 'obvious' appeals of the generic codes and conventions and technical, symbolic and narrative codes, were often used to construct detailed, effective and well organised answers. Candidates achieving higher marks often explored wider organisational issues of distribution and scheduling and the costs of production in the making of quality Television Drama on mainstream channels, such as the BBC and ITV. At best, examples were offered to illustrate the arguments proposed.

Section B: Thinking about the Media – Planning Web-Based Drama

This year candidates were asked to develop ideas for a new Web-based Drama. On this occasion, candidates did not have to complete a task which relied on design and layout skills but one which required skills in story writing. It is very gratifying to report that this task performed particularly well, with some outstanding stories for the first webisode demonstrating imaginative ideas and a clear sense of storyline structure, audience appeal and codes and conventions.

Task 1

The vast majority of candidates were able to choose an appropriate name for their new Web-based Drama and offer detailed explanations of their choice, with some sense of connotation. Higher level answers explicitly mentioned the genre such as Teen Drama, Science Fiction or Horror sub-genres and hybrids, and supported this with appropriate media language and terminology. Some candidates opted to explore spin-offs from existing Television Dramas, which was wholly appropriate.

Task 2

Most candidates were able to identify two appropriate characters and offer a basic explanation of their role in the webisode. Higher level answers explored these roles in detail and used media language effectively to explain them through Proppian character functions, or wider representational issues such as stereotype, or a character which challenged the stereotype often related to age or gender.

Task 3

Many of the storylines produced demonstrated a real sense of structure, with clear beginning, middle and end scenes in the narratives. Higher level answers supported their ideas with media language and terminology, such as applying Todorovian structures effectively. There was some explicit reference to harmony, disequilibrium and restoration of equilibrium. Many candidates explored issues of conflict and disruption, or chose to end the sequence on a cliff hanger, demonstrating a real sense of audience appeal. At best, candidates painted a clear visual picture through their written storylines and examiners could clearly visualise the stories unfolding with detailed character portraits, in a wonderfully created mise en scene with strong narrative structure. Outstanding!

Task 4

Most candidates offered an explanation of how their Web-based Drama would appeal to audiences, but again many candidates explained the appeals through audience reception theory, rather than detailed explanations of the genre codes and conventions they had developed through the series of tasks. Candidates should be advised to focus on the appeals of genre, technical, symbolic and narrative codes, and representations, rather than on the psychological theories of audience reception and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Candidates achieving higher marks clearly explored the key generic appeals in detailed and sophisticated ways, using media language and terminology effectively to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the codes and conventions of Web-based Drama.

Task 5

It is very pleasing to report that most candidates attempted the final question on a challenging paper and did so most successfully in many cases. In attempting to explain the advantages of Web-based Drama, there was clear evidence that candidates had explored this somewhat niche genre and form in real detail and depth. Popular answers explored advantages such as cost, personnel and accessibility to view on mobile devices, whilst more developed answers explored issues of piloting new series and the development of new talent in acting, scriptwriting and directing. The very best answers offered detailed explanations of the advantages through well organised answers, structured clearly around key areas of production, distribution and audience. Many candidates clearly had an excellent understanding of technological developments in the contemporary media and made explicit reference to the converging nature of the media and how television organisations are using this new environment to offer audiences new and interesting ways to engage with their products.

Advice to Centres

- Study a broad range of representations (this can often be done within one text) and case studies related to the set topic
- Be secure in the choice of text and genre for case studies
- Use media language and terminology relevant to the topic of study and the range of technical, symbolic and narrative codes within it
- Rely less on the use of audience effects theories as explanations for audience appeal and focus instead on detailed textual analysis of the genre codes and conventions of texts
- When explaining the appeals of their own ideas in Section B again reflect on the use of the genre codes and conventions

Once again, it is a real privilege to share in the tremendous work being carried out in centres in preparing candidates for this challenging and wide ranging examination. It is also most gratifying to see some outstanding work in Media Studies in the analysis of an unseen extract, in demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the contemporary media environment and in seeing some tremendous creative and imaginative planning work completed under the time constraints of the examination.

MEDIA STUDIES

General Certificate of Secondary Education

Summer 2013

Unit 2

Principal Moderator: Carol-Jane Jennings

General Comments

The specification is bedding in and centres are clearly far more confident in interpreting the requirements; this was seen, most explicitly, in the way the vast majority of centres devised appropriate tasks, from the mandatory controlled assessment task bank, across all three elements which make up Unit 2: Genre Investigation and either Narrative or Representation Investigation and the Production task's four components: research, planning, production and evaluation.

The compulsory Genre Textual Investigation elicited some excellent outcomes, the best candidates demonstrating clear focus on the title; depth rather than breadth of investigation was key to candidates accessing the higher levels and most importantly, as in all the investigations, well selected wider examples from the same genre and area of study. Stronger candidates used appropriate well-selected wider examples to highlight conventions, explore where the conventions had been challenged and indeed to illustrate how their main text may have subverted genre conventions. Candidates who also recognised the importance of the text's construction in the way it intended to directly appeal to specific audiences, in addition to recognising the influence of organisations on the text, were most successful in securing higher marks. Media terminology was well executed and applied accurately throughout, aiding analytical interpretation of texts, with high order theoretical knowledge used as an investigation tool at the highest end of the mark range. Less able candidates often quoted theorists but did little with the information of any value. Indeed, for some candidates such knowledge was more of a hindrance and such candidates would have been better advised to focus on the key concepts with well-chosen examples and explanations.

Narrative and Representation investigations were equally popular as candidates' choice for the second investigation, with a wide range of Television Dramas being the focus of many. This strategy by centres is not surprising as it enables pre-teaching of the unit 1 examination topic.

Candidates once again developed and created some outstanding original media products across the full range of print-based, audio and audio-visual work and more notably this year, some outstanding innovative interactive media for production work. Increasingly, moderators are seeing candidates using original images in their productions, which is most pleasing to see since it is strongly encouraged by the specification. Research, planning and evaluations at best were tightly focused on the final outcome and the former used to inform the production. Many candidates chose the option to work in groups. Through research, planning and the evaluation, it was clear what each candidate's significant and definable role was and better candidates referred explicitly, for example, to their editing or camerawork.

Textual Investigations

Most centres are now aware of the specification requirements to include a compulsory print-based investigation and the vast majority of folders sampled met this aspect of the specification. Popular choices this year included film posters, magazines front covers, DVD sleeves, comics, and print advertisements, although broadsheet and tabloid newspapers still retain some degree of popularity, but less so as digital versions become increasingly more widespread. Rich texts and those that interest candidates are key to success. It seems a shame when centres continue to choose media texts for study, when their relevance to the candidate is limited.

Whilst it is acceptable for centres to teach a common text to all candidates, some centres are relying on heavily scaffolded frameworks to support candidates. These are discouraged, especially when centres also allow candidates to use the same wider examples. Better advice is to ensure candidates are encouraged to select independently their own examples that will help underpin their investigation, and if possible, enable candidates to also select their own main investigation text.

A further observation is that many centres treated the Textual Investigations as an exercise in comparison. Candidates are strongly advised to focus on one main text and use other wider examples of the same text to support their analysis. Some candidates' Representation and Narrative Textual Investigations were very general and lacked focus. An investigation of one episode of a television series, the opening titles of a film, a film trailer, or one television advert would be more appropriate than a whole series or a whole film. The study of one or two well-chosen print adverts supplemented by a small number of wider examples for the same brand or product is far more appropriate than the study of the representation of women in advertising, which is clearly far too broad and does not use any of the set titles from page 16 of the specification. Not using the set titles limits candidates' ability to access the assessment criteria.

Many candidates took the opportunity to refer to concepts of the convergent media in their investigations; however, in a small minority of cases, this was less than helpful to candidates. For example, although it is appropriate to include a website as part of the investigation into a print product when investigating film posters, it should not form a major part of the word count, rather be used to reinforce the investigation of the conventions of the genre in the print text first and then refer to the website in relation to the convergent nature of the media. Candidates should be encouraged to include a small number of other print products from the same genre. By investigating a website in too much detail, many candidates then failed to explore the print text in sufficient depth and self-penalised.

Candidates presented investigations in a range of appropriate styles, including formal essays, illustrated reports, PowerPoint presentations, annotated textual evidence and a few examples in an audio-visual documentary style. The overwhelming majority of candidates wrote in detail, using media terminology to good effect, whilst addressing the media framework elements of audience appeal and organisational issues, sometimes at the most sophisticated level and importantly, within the word count advice. However, this year there was an increasing number of candidates who exceeded the recommended word requirements for the controlled assessment tasks. Centres should be mindful of these word limits, as candidates are only required to write between 450 and 850 words in Textual Investigations.

Productions

The variety of productions was very impressive and it was evident that candidates were encouraged to use technical skills and their knowledge of codes and conventions creatively. It was encouraging to see so many candidates undertaking audio-visual production tasks, which clearly engaged candidates across the ability range. At the highest level there were some outstanding productions.

Fewer centres presented impermissible productions based on the same topic as the Unit 1 exam, which was indeed pleasing to note. Impressive audio-visual texts included music videos, animations, adverts, ever popular film trailers and film extracts, and a small number of well-constructed news programmes. Those candidates who were less successful generally had not developed appropriate editing skills, or sufficient knowledge of generic codes and conventions of the texts they were aiming to produce. More effective research and planning activities, directly linked to the production, and more pragmatic, less ambitious projects would be beneficial in these cases.

Centres should support candidates to ensure research activities really inform the production artefacts. Likewise, planning should take into account conventions, audience needs and organisational issues such as distribution and marketing, rather than the more passive approach taken by less successful candidates to simply describe planning processes. More worrying was evidence in a small number of centres of allowing candidates to research and plan in groups. This is unacceptable and an infringement of the specification. Research, planning and evaluations must have individual outcomes, although group production work is of course allowed within the specification framework, when protocols are followed.

Planning activities including storyboards were popular and appropriate. At best, candidates included shot descriptions, transitions, timings, settings and lighting codes. Additionally, careful narrative constructions were evident through planning activities such as scripts, which helped to clarify narrative issues.

Interactive media productions are becoming more popular with centres; this year an increased number of webpages were produced. It is timely to remind centres that digital platforms are not always transferable and host websites not always accessible. With that in mind, centres are advised to continue to take advantage of available technology to support and enhance candidate outcomes, but should be aware that when sending sample portfolios to moderators, hard copies of websites must also be included. It is both time consuming and frustrating for the moderator, as well as the centre, when requests need to be made during the moderation process in order to access candidates' work.

Print productions remain the most popular, with magazine front covers and double page spread or contents pages much in evidence. Film posters, DVD sleeves and print websites were also very popular. Again, there were an increasing number of candidates using original photography, which is most rewarding to see. One of the main areas of consideration in this area of production is the quality of editing, in particular the use of codes and conventions for creative purposes and high production values. Moderators witnessed weaknesses in final productions, such as pixellated stretched images, poor composition, typographical mismatches and grammatical and spelling errors in copy. Incomplete productions should also be avoided; pages 17 and 18 of the specification contain detailed explanation of what is to be completed for each production option. By ignoring this information, candidates are disadvantaged.

Research tended to be supportive and instructive. The best research informed final productions, but some candidates did not offer evidence of any connection between the research tasks undertaken and the final artefacts produced. Planning activities generally were well presented and better candidates effectively demonstrated how other examples relevant to the final production had been used to inform planning. Media terminology at best was used effectively to present findings in terms of textual organisation (genre, narrative, representations). Centres are reminded that candidates are required to present between two and four pieces of research and between two and four pieces of planning. Only in a small number of centres was this not evident.

Evaluations of productions were often succinct, explaining how candidates had met their aims and purpose. Successful candidates detailed the way generic conventions had been applied; the use of representations in their productions were evaluated, as was narrative. Candidates also included evaluations of the way audiences and users were addressed and, for marks awarded from Upper Level 3, there was a confident awareness and knowledge demonstrated on issues which arose from the distribution of the production. Less successful candidates relied too heavily on centre generated worksheets, which often did not provide opportunities for candidates to evaluate their productions in light of their codes and appeal, therefore disadvantaging candidates from the outset. Centres are advised, therefore, to develop evaluative skills with their candidates that can be independently applied to their own work.

Assessment

The majority of centres are to be congratulated on the highly professional and accurate application of the assessment criteria. Centres' assessment of candidates' work was generally considered fair and consistent. In the vast majority of cases, moderators agreed with the rank order of candidates. On the whole, centres accurately applied the assessment criteria to their candidates' work, using upper and lower level descriptors to aid judgements. In larger centres, it was good to note evidence of internal moderation having been undertaken. When this was the case, assessment across the centre was often more secure than in centres where this essential internal moderation had not taken place.

However, it is worrying that despite advice to centres in last year's reports, a significant number of centres continue to be generous when applying assessment criteria to candidates' work, notably at lower level and upper level thresholds. This tendency to positively inflate marks was also notable at all levels for production work. It is imperative that where centre reports indicate that this is an issue, full use is made of exemplar material on the secure website. Lower and Upper Level 3 assessment criteria also need to be applied with greater accuracy in some centres.

Assessment of productions is still an area for development in many centres. Level descriptors are quite explicit. When centres are awarding marks in Upper Level 4, they need to be secure that their candidates are demonstrating a sophisticated level of creativity and control, which engages users and audiences, and most importantly generates high production values. It is highly unlikely that candidates will be relying on found images at this highest level, including found moving images. When centres have been generous in their marking, moderators will have offered advice on centre reports highlighting the issue. Centres are once again very strongly advised to apply more rigorously the assessment criteria, particularly with regards to the high production values required for performance at Level 4 in the production.

Finally, centres are reminded of their responsibility to validate candidates' work. As controlled assessment, all work submitted must be verified as the candidates' own. The awarding body requests centres are vigilant in their appraisal of all work submitted and bring to candidates' attention the content of the declaration signed on ME2 and ME3 forms, which states that the work has been produced, '...without assistance other than that which my teacher has explained is acceptable within the specification'. Likewise, teachers too need to be reminded that they must be satisfied that the work produced is, '...solely that of the candidate', before signing. Several cases of plagiarism were detected by moderators this year. Should any evidence of plagiarism be uncovered, centres must be aware of the consequences for their candidates.

Administration

Centres are now more familiar with WJEC's online system used to upload candidates' marks and for selection of the moderation sample. In the vast majority of cases, the system worked smoothly. A small number of centres found they were unable to provide moderators with the stated sample; when this was the case, the awarding body agreed with centres that the work of appropriate alternative candidates be forwarded. Issues arose only when centres failed to inform the awarding body and consequently a minority of centres presented moderators with issues which could have been avoided had communication between centres and WJEC been maintained.

The deadline for the sample to be sent to moderators was well published and highlighted on the WJEC's website and is a standard date. It is therefore disappointing when a small but significant number of centres miss the deadline, adding pressure to the tight timescale for the moderation process to be completed. Nonetheless, the vast majority of centres did adhere to the published deadline, and this was much appreciated. As always, if there are extenuating circumstances, the awarding body is happy to discuss ways to resolve any issues.

Administrative requirements were mostly met, detailing information on the ME2 and ME3 forms, such as helpful descriptions of task setting, key texts studied, wider related examples, research and preparation undertaken. ME2 and ME3 forms, which accompany candidates' work, must, however, be signed. Once again, in the vast majority of cases, this administrative procedure was carried out appropriately, but unfortunately, moderators this year found they had to contact some centres requesting that statutory forms were signed and forwarded to the moderator; clearly this makes the moderation process more complex than necessary and is an area for centres to include in their quality control of sample preparation, before submission to the moderator.

Other issues which impact upon the moderation process are sample identification; it is imperative that all pieces of work can be identified by candidate name and centre number. Centres should ensure candidates' work is clearly organised and labelled, through headers or footers on each piece of work. As mentioned in previous reports, the sample forwarded to the moderator may be seen by several people, and ME2 and ME3 forms detached from candidates' original work.

Packaging of candidate portfolios is also important. There is no need for work to be presented in bulky format. It needs to be easily accessible, identifiable and well organised to allow moderators to differentiate between pieces of work. Research and planning should be separated and labelled clearly, preferably with each research and planning task numbered to support the candidate and moderator.

Centres are reminded of the need to ensure the final copy of any moving image production is playable during the moderation process. Work should also be labelled with the candidate's name and number. It is far easier and less time consuming too, if all candidates' work is on one disk, and not individual disks.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is pleasing to note that the overwhelming number of candidates have been prepared well by their teachers to meet the challenges of the course and in so doing have produced some outstanding quality controlled assessments, which are a credit to all, candidates, teachers and centres alike. There remain some areas for development. Centres are advised to read this report closely and recognise where they can work with their candidates in the future to support them further, targeting areas for improvement.



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