



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

MEDIA STUDIES

SUMMER 2014

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GCSE Media Studies

General Certificate of Secondary Education

Summer 2014

Unit 1 – Thinking About the Media: Investigating and Planning

Principal Examiner: John Ashton

General Remarks

It is very pleasing to report on a successful examination session, with all examiners commenting on the smooth running of this intense marking period and the quality of responses in the scripts. This was due to an accessible paper which was clearly well received by candidates given the evidence from the examination scripts. There were very few incomplete papers, with candidates of all levels of ability producing responses to the questions set and being able to demonstrate their Media Studies knowledge, understanding and skills in thoughtful, creative and imaginative ways.

The stimulus material on the topic of Crime Drama, namely an extract from *Lewis*, was generally well received and enabled candidates to respond to the questions set in meaningful ways. Overall, centres are to be congratulated on the high quality of teaching evidenced through the responses given by candidates on the topic of Crime Drama for Section A and TV magazines for Section B. It was obvious that in many centres, teachers and candidates had thoroughly enjoyed exploring the topic, even when some candidates may have found it somewhat challenging. It was clear from Section A, question 3, for example, that the range of examples of Crime Dramas studied in class was most impressive, covering the full range of the genre and its sub-genres, including examples of British, European and American productions.

Questions 1 and 2 were generally completed well by candidates, although it was somewhat of a surprise that many candidates struggled in trying to identify 'objects' in the extract for question 1. A significant number of candidates provided incorrect responses for this question and centres are reminded that questions may focus on the full range of genre conventions evident in the extract. This includes technical and symbolic codes, narrative codes, language and sound codes and candidates must be prepared for the full range. As object codes are absolutely central to all Crime Drama, whether as clues to the crimes committed or as part of the *mise en scene*, it was therefore baffling as to why candidates could not identify them in the extract.

The concept of Representation, addressed by question 3 and identified as an area of concern in last year's report, was handled much better by candidates this year. In exploring representations of the police or detectives, candidates were able to draw on a wide range of case studies and better candidates took the opportunity to explore wider representations of gender, ethnicity and age. There were some outstanding answers to this question.

Media organisations were also addressed much better this year, with many candidates offering valid reasons for the importance of Crime Drama to these organisations, although many continue to find issues of organisations hugely challenging and confuse these issues with those of audiences. Many candidates continue to offer answers which attempt to use often outdated or irrelevant psychological theory, which has little or no relevance to Media Studies, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs being the most inappropriately used theory.

Question 1

As mentioned previously, it was very surprising that a significant number of candidates found the question of 'objects' somewhat difficult. Many candidates used examples of detectives, narratives, people, places and even communities. Many failed to identify very simple and obvious objects such as the phial, teapot, invitation card, small 'keepsake' box, crime scene tape or shovel. Many other candidates, however, explored these objects in detail, explaining their use in the extract in answers which were often outstanding. Popular responses explored these objects as important to the narrative or as key genre elements and considered how audiences used them. At the highest level, answers often explored objects as essential to the iconography of the Crime genre, exploring issues of dramatic irony or the centrality of objects to creating the *mise en scene* of the crime scene.

Question 2

The question of identifying and explaining how two different types of sound were used in the extract was answered particularly well. Common responses clearly identified diegetic and non-diegetic sound, or identified particular sounds such as music, bird song or dialogue. Some of the explanations were outstanding for this question. Candidates often explained the use of the two different types of sound in detail and linked these sounds to wider issues of narrative, such as providing an equilibrium or sense of harmony through styles, pace and tempo of music, or the use of diegetic sound such as birdsong to suggest tranquillity and pastoral settings which are then broken by other types of sound. At their very best, some candidates explored the issues using musical detail such as pace, tempo and crescendo effectively and discussed sophisticated issues of using different music and sound as a bridge between parts of a narrative, ambient sound, links to contrapuntal music, synchronous and asynchronous sound. Unfortunately, a small number of candidates confused diegetic and non-diegetic sound and many still spell the terms incorrectly.

Question 3

There were many outstanding answers to this question which focussed on representations of the police or detectives. The vast majority of candidates were able to offer at least one example of a television Crime Drama. Some used the exam extract, which was acceptable on this occasion, but in most cases an impressive range of examples was used, such as *Sherlock*, *Luther*, *Vera*, *Law and Order UK*, *Poirot*, *Midsummer Murders*, as well as examples from the USA such as *CSI*, *Elementary* and *Dexter* and the recent Welsh production, *Hinterland*. In most cases candidates were able to use the case studies to identify the main attributes of a detective or police officer. The answers often focussed on the qualities in each case such as them being smart or clever, often mentioning their place in the hierarchy of police officers and as being superior to uniformed officers.

Candidates awarded higher level marks used carefully chosen examples effectively to explore wider issues of gender, ethnicity and age. There was often effective linking of the attributes of police and detectives to wider narrative themes and character roles such as hero, helper, sidekick, and how these appeal to audiences. Better responses often explored the personal lives of detectives as being dysfunctional and how the representations and character roles challenged the stereotypes of the police and detectives, leading to some truly outstanding answers. Indeed, many senior examiners commented on the sheer enjoyment of reading some of the responses to this question.

Question 4

The question explored the importance of Crime Drama to television organisations and whilst organisational issues often challenge many candidates, there was evidence of some excellent responses. Most candidates could offer ways in which they were important and explain these in at least simple terms. The reasons focussed on the popularity of Crime Drama with audiences and by inference therefore their importance to organisations. Better answers explored the issues of ratings and made some reference to advertising revenues for TV companies. Few candidates could grasp the difference between the BBC and ITV, although in a number of excellent examples some candidates did mention the issue of the licence fee and having to provide a balanced schedule of programmes.

Many candidates explored the issue of the Crime genre being one of many provided by television organisations to create a diversity and range of programming. Many candidates referred to issues of scheduling and the importance of Crime Drama for a wide variety of mostly audience related issues, such as prime time scheduling, the use of the genre for 'hammocking' and daytime viewing for older audiences with re-runs, repeats and themed schedules. Sophisticated responses at the top of level 4 explored issues of branding television channels with high quality Crime Drama and high production values, with top class actors and stars attracting quality writers.

Unfortunately, as was evidenced last year, too many candidates used outdated or irrelevant psychological theories such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to discuss the importance of Crime Drama to media organisations. This misinterpretation of the question shows no sense of wider organisational issues. Where candidates used appropriate audience effects theory and discussed the popularity of Crime Drama with audiences and therefore with organisations, then these responses were indeed outstanding.

Section B

Candidates were asked to respond to a series of tasks concerned with the planning of a television magazine. Overall, there was evidence of some excellent planning of TV magazines, with some very effective designs for task 3 demonstrating a real sense of the codes and conventions of this type of media product.

Task 1

The vast majority of candidates offered a name for a new Crime Drama on television, with higher level answers explaining the reasons for the title, often based around detailed explanation of the main character, programme or setting. Media language was evident in the higher level marks often based around the codes and conventions of Crime Drama on television, the genre issues raised or the setting used for the new programme.

Task 2

Candidates were required to identify and explain the elements on the cover of the magazine. The vast majority of candidates offered three appropriate elements and explained them in some detail, with higher level marks awarded for effective use of media language when explaining the codes and conventions used such as title blocks, main image, typography, cover-lines, graphics and composition.

Most candidates achieved at least 4 marks, many achieved 5 marks and a very good number achieved the full 6 marks.

Task 3

As in previous years, examiners continue to express their admiration for the quality, imagination and creativity displayed by candidates on this question in designing the layout for a television magazine front cover. Some candidates used the title of the new Crime Drama identified in task 1 as the title of the magazine. This was deemed appropriate, as it could be read as a new promotional style magazine directly linked to the new Crime Drama. There was evidence of some outstanding designs, where candidates awarded higher marks showed excellence or sophistication in the control of the design through effective and imaginative use of typography, image, design features and layout. Many presented designs in colour which often proved very effective, but is not mandatory. Occasionally, candidates did not complete the design in sufficient detail with the designs being rather general and lacking a title for the magazine, showing a limited sense of the size of the photographic image used on the cover and little sense of the typographic style used.

Task 4

The task requiring candidates to explain their designs for the magazine cover was completed very successfully by the vast majority of candidates. Many examiners commented on the high quality of the writing for this task. Often completed in great detail with very effective use of media language and terminology, candidates explained the use of a range of codes and conventions and how these would appeal to audiences.

Task 5

This was a challenging final question in asking candidates to explain two ways in which magazines promote television Crime Drama. Most candidates achieved at least two marks for part (a) of the question, with two appropriate ways identified. Better answers offered more detail.

For part (b), candidates were required to explain the ways in which magazines promote television Crime Drama and answers were often detailed in explaining the use of the cover page and the stars and characters. Other ways offered included special features and stories inside. The use of reviews as a promotional tool was often explained quite effectively and characterised performance by candidates awarded higher marks.

Many candidates explained the use of advertising and editorial in magazines through stories about the stars, characters or storylines, often linked to double page spreads. Another popular answer was the inclusion of TV listings with dates and times of the television schedules, although in a small number of cases candidates confused listings or schedules with scheduling and struggled to explain this in the context of a magazine in the print media. Many candidates explained the use of digital and social media in promoting television Crime Drama through online magazines but many were confused in attempting to link the internet to magazines specifically.

Candidates, teachers and centres are to be commended in preparing for the GCSE Media Studies examination. The quality of answers in many cases is outstanding and it is pleasing to note that the examination paper offers the rigour and pace to engage candidates for over two hours, testing their wide-ranging knowledge, understanding and skills in Media Studies in exciting, imaginative and challenging ways.

At its very best, there is clear evidence from those candidates achieving the highest marks that the GCSE examination in Media Studies presents a series of intellectual and creative challenges for students from analysing unseen media texts, testing knowledge of key issues in contemporary society such as representations, explaining the key organisational issues raised by these texts and showing understanding of how they appeal to and are used by contemporary audiences.

The paper also enables candidates to demonstrate their creative skills in planning media products in a very short time under examination conditions, a very real challenge for candidates.

Guidance for next year

- Ensure there is full coverage of all the codes and conventions related to the topic for study for next year, namely Advertising and Marketing in print and on television. This should include the full range of technical, symbolic, narrative and language codes.
- Explore a wide range of texts when investigating the topic to be applied in the examination as case studies.
- Continue to engage with issues of representation as they apply to the texts studied.
- Explore issues of media organisation in relation to the topics of Advertising and Marketing in print and on television.
- When completing creative planning tasks, ensure that detail is used rather than generalisations in the presentation of ideas.

GCSE Media Studies
General Certificate of Secondary Education
Summer 2014
MEDIA STUDIES

Principal Examiner: Carol-Jane Jennings

Unit 2 – Creating for the Media: Investigating and Producing

Unit 2 continues to offer challenge, rigour and wide-ranging opportunities for centres to interpret the GCSE Media Studies specification, engaging learners of all abilities in the areas of study.

Print texts, audio-visual, audio and interactive media were well represented across the compulsory Genre investigation and the Narrative or Representation investigation. In successful centres, it is quite evident that a great deal of careful consideration is taken selecting rich core texts chosen for the textual investigation, enabling candidates to access the highest levels. Better candidates skilfully referenced wider examples to support their investigation findings and independently drew on evidence from appropriate texts of the same genre and media form. However, it was often evident that centres had directed candidates towards their selection of wider examples since whole cohorts used the same evidence. Whilst this does not contravene the specification requirements in itself, it does not lead to independent responses, a requirement of controlled assessment.

Candidates on the whole were able to comment effectively on the way audiences are addressed, but centres need to be alert to the impact of overly-scaffolded responses that may help less able candidates, but should also be avoided whenever possible. Centres are therefore strongly advised to steer away from this approach in textual investigations if they hope to enable candidates to demonstrate excellent or sophisticated individual responses in their work.

Excellent responses are expected to demonstrate full appreciation of organisational issues, such as distribution, the impact of viral advertising, or controls and regulations, for example, that influence the content or scheduling of media texts. In the main, moderators found that these aspects of the Media Studies framework were addressed well by many candidates. However, centres still need to be mindful when awarding marks at this level that candidates should be exhibiting understanding of the concepts and not simply including information regarding organisational features.

Most centres are fully aware of the obligation to use the set titles prescribed in the specification. Nonetheless, moderators noted some centres continue to create their own titles rather than use those set out in the specification. Where this highest level of control is not followed, it inevitably leads to a lack of cohesion, with some candidates unsure which study area is the focus of their investigation.

Although this was more prevalent in the Representation investigations, it was also evident in the Genre textual investigations. Examples were seen where candidates presented different genres or different forms in their choice of wider examples, creating a sense of confusion, especially when the other texts studied were ambiguous or worse, irrelevant. It is imperative that candidates are encouraged to explore texts of a similar genre and form, such as a range of different Horror film posters rather than a Horror film poster and a Science Fiction web site. The need to study the convergent nature of the media is better addressed in the production unit, through relevant research and planning activities.

Many moderators also noted a significant number of centres failed to encourage candidates to explore other texts at all. This inevitably resulted in candidates being unable to achieve higher level marks. Another issue which arose in relation to task setting was the comparison of one text with another. A direct comparative approach should be avoided, since it is difficult to demonstrate sufficient depth and detail when there is equal weighting afforded to the main text and the subsidiary text. This is a legacy of the old specification and is an area that requires particular attention when devising units of study.

Most centres are aware of the combination requirements for one print-based investigation of the candidates' own choice, for either the Representation or Narrative Investigations and the compulsory Genre Investigation. The inclusion of the Unit 1 topic, for 2014 Crime Drama, for one of the two investigations was more popular than in previous years and generally this aspect of the specification caused fewer issues than in the past. Only in a few centres did the requirement for not using the exam topic for the production arise. The vast majority of centres successfully presented sample portfolios with the requisite combination of textual investigations and production tasks to meet the specification requirements. Indeed, moderators commented that use of the exam topic resulted in pleasing outcomes; the most successful candidates demonstrated very secure knowledge of the genre and sub-genre conventions, selecting their main text from extensive and appropriate examples. Consequently, these candidates would have been well placed to apply their media knowledge in Unit 1 under exam conditions.

Exploration of audience appeal, media language and organisational issues all featured strongly amongst the most able candidates. Both moving image and print based texts were equally popular. Candidates opted to investigate segments, trailers, title and opening sequences, extracts from significant moments and whole episodes from mainstream terrestrial channels, including British Crime Drama series such as *Luther*, *Sherlock*, *Lewis*, *Vera*, and *Scott and Bailey*. American produced shows such as *Elementary*, *Bones*, *CSI*, *NCIS* and *Law and Order* were also evidenced. The examination topic was also used to explore the Media Studies framework through Narrative investigations, as well as the Representation investigation option.

All textual investigations require candidates to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the ways media texts are constructed to engage the intended audience or user. Where candidates approached this explicitly, using appropriate examples and media language to support their investigation, they were awarded with marks from level 3 upwards. Less able candidates often demonstrated implied understanding and frequently struggled to use media terminology. Although candidates often referenced media theorists, including the most popular: Maslow, Todorov, and Propp, it was obvious that they did not always fully understand the media concepts of audience, narrative structure, character functions or representational codes sufficiently to be awarded marks in level 3 or higher. Centres are strongly advised therefore to invest time in securing basic media concepts, which is more beneficial to candidates than the inclusion of inappropriate media theory.

A further issue, which many moderators commented upon, was the lack of focus in actual task setting. Representation tasks, for example, were sometimes very broad, and centres are encouraged to consider more appropriately focused titles which require candidates to explore one film or even a specific extract from one film, rather than all Disney animated films. This allows candidates to maintain focus and also give some consideration to technical codes. In some cases, candidates struggle to apply the Media Studies framework explicitly, and drift towards generic comments and sweeping generalisations. This approach also impacts upon the effective application of the recommended word count of between 400-850 words. There is no room for unnecessary contextual historical pre-amblings or definitions of representation, for example. Centres are reminded that the word count is there as a support to candidates and is a clear indication of what is expected. If candidates present too few or too many words then this is likely to be reflected in the marks they are awarded; there is no penalty or reduction of marks per se, but by the very nature of responses candidates are frequently self-penalising.

This year once again moderators witnessed wide-ranging presentational styles for the textual investigations, the vast majority being well considered and highly appropriate. Formal essays, illustrated essays, reports, PowerPoint presentations and annotated media examples were used to great effect across all three textual investigations. Moderators were keen to stress, however, the need to package the sample for moderation for ease of access, including font and slide colours in presentations being legible, clear labelling of each textual investigation stating the candidate's name and number and the centre name and number to ensure the work is not anonymous once the ME2 and ME3 forms are removed.

Another important point is the need for centres to provide hard copies of candidates' work, not separate folders on DVDs or memory sticks which have to be individually loaded. This last point is equally important when centres compile candidates' production tasks. A great deal of wasted moderator time was spent again this year reorganising centres' samples in order to begin the moderation process. Clear labelling of research tasks, planning tasks, production and evaluation tasks, in that order, would help moderators to understand centre marks when it is clear what piece of evidence the candidate has submitted for each separate section.

Moderators commented on the range and quality of production tasks, which continues to be impressive. Website homepages and related pages were common interactive media options, as too were magazine front covers and their related contents pages or double page spreads, DVD sleeves and inserts and the ever-popular film posters and promotional music performance posters for print. Other print examples included newspaper front pages and related pages. However, these often proved quite problematic as candidates frequently relied upon pre-populated templates that did not always help them make the best choices regarding layout and important typographical features.

The more successful candidates, who accessed level 4 marks, usually demonstrated highly appropriate research and planning, which clearly and directly informed their final productions. Other important features of effective high quality productions included imaginative, well-considered and skillfully edited original images which applied appropriate genre codes to appeal to the intended target audience. Candidates at the top of the mark range also exhibited imagination and originality in their approach in addition to control of narrative and representational codes as appropriate to the production text.

Centres need to be reminded that incomplete production work inevitably means that despite the quality of the work produced, a significant number of marks are lost. It is important therefore that centres assess work accurately and where necessary adjust marks to reflect this.

Group work is still popular, particularly for audio-visual and audio productions, which by their very nature are demanding and collaborative during the production and post-production editing phases. In the main, group productions were approached through individual research and planning as set out in the specification. Unfortunately, too many centres still fail to alert their candidates to the requirements to present individual research and planning. Evaluations should from the outset focus on the individual's role undertaken; this should be apparent by explicitly referencing their editing or camerawork. This is a major area for improvement in some centres.

This year moderators reported many highly impressive audio-visual texts, including the ever-popular film trailers and film extracts, music videos, animations, adverts and some well-constructed news programmes. Like last year, 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.

It is imperative candidates conduct appropriate research activities that truly inform their production. 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. It is useful to refer to the specification, which indicates the need to research other examples of the text to be produced, identify codes and conventions and ways in which the audience will be attracted and, to gain higher levels within the assessment criteria, identify issues related to organisations, control and distribution.

Planning activities included experimentation with language codes and typographical choices, mock-ups of layouts, storyboards, which included shot descriptions, timings, transitions, lighting codes, settings and edited original photography, planned narratives, script treatments, casting and location planning.

Interactive media productions continue to grow in popularity. As last year, centres are reminded 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 candidates' outcomes, but must be alert to the need to present the moderation sample to moderators with a hard copy of any websites. 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.

The quality of editing, and in particular the use of codes and conventions for creative purposes and high production values, remains an issue with respect to centre assessment. Moderators this year noted that whilst there has been an increase in candidates' use of technology generally, there still appears to be a lack of editing control of final productions. Centres that failed to apply assessment criteria accurately did not always assess issues arising from pixelated, stretched images, poor composition, typographical mismatches and grammatical and spelling errors in copy, appropriately. In a small but significant number of centres, candidates submitted work that used no technology at all. This does not meet the requirement of the specification, as candidates are required to demonstrate technical skills for AO4.

It is not always possible to avoid incomplete productions. Centres' attention is drawn to pages 17 and 18 of the specification, which contain detailed explanation of what is to be completed for each production option. By ignoring this information, candidates are disadvantaged. Centres are also 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, although there does appear to be an increasing problem in centres in their support of candidates to differentiate between what constitutes research activities and planning activities.

In the main, evaluations of productions have improved with less evidence of descriptive commentary of processes undertaken, and more effective evaluation of candidates' aims, appropriate use of codes and conventions, effectiveness of the media texts' construction and its appeal to its intended audience or the way the production was constructed to enable the user to interact. Less successful in some centres was the ability to evaluate narrative, although many candidates discussed representation choices confidently and applied media terminology well. For marks from Upper Level 3, there was a confident awareness and knowledge demonstrated around issues which arose from the distribution of the production. Less successful candidates still rely too heavily on centre-generated worksheets, which too often inhibit candidates from evaluating their productions in light of their codes and appeal, therefore disadvantaging candidates from the outset. Centres are again advised to support candidates towards conducting an independent evaluation process.

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, with centres accurately applying assessment criteria to their candidates' work, using upper and lower level descriptors to aid judgments. In larger centres, it is even more important to ensure internal standardisation is undertaken to secure consistency across the centre. Unfortunately, this was not always the case this year and is an area which needs to be given greater attention at the small number of centres to which it applies.

Some centres continue to be too generous when applying assessment criteria to candidates' work, notably at lower level and upper level thresholds. This tendency to positively inflate marks was evident across all units of work but perhaps most evident in the production work. Centres will receive reports which clearly indicate whether they have been overly generous in their assessments. Where this is the case, it is imperative the centre proactively addresses the issues highlighted and uses exemplar materials available via the secure website.

It is the responsibility of the centre to ensure all work is that of the candidate. Textual investigations which are heavily reliant upon internet research need to be referenced appropriately and wholesale cutting and pasting evidence from other sources is plagiarism and therefore totally unacceptable. Centres are strongly advised to bring to the attention of their candidates the implications of this. This also applies to any images found and used in production work. It is imperative that any found sources used by the candidate are appropriately referenced wherever and however they are used. Centres accurately applying the assessment criteria that are set out in the specification establish secure assessment; level descriptors are quite explicit. In production work, to award Upper Level 4 marks, candidates must demonstrate a sophisticated level of creativity and control that engages users and audiences, and most importantly generate high production values. It is most unlikely that candidates will be relying on found images at this highest level, including found moving images.

The administration of moderation samples on the whole was helpful. Centres are more used to the online mark input system, which has aided selection of the sample to be sent for moderation. If there are issues arising from this, centres are reminded that they must contact WJEC directly before amending any aspect of the sample request; this includes anticipated late arrival of the moderation sample or individual portfolios that cannot be submitted. Likewise, if tasks have been amended, these too need to have permission sought before proceeding further.

ME2 and ME3 forms generally were completed accurately, although addition errors still slip through. Centres are politely requested to double check candidates' marks at all stages. Finally, moderators urge centres to take care packaging their sample. Keep it lightweight and avoid weighty binders and books; they are totally unacceptable, make handling difficult and are expensive to courier. If centres adopt a pragmatic, sensible approach to the organisation of their folders, then that will aid the moderation process, and would be most appreciated.

In conclusion, 2014 has produced some outstanding quality controlled assessment work, which is a credit to all, candidates, teachers and centres alike. Of course there remain some areas for development. Centres are therefore advised to read this report and their own centre report closely to prepare for an even more successful future cohort of Media Studies candidates.



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