



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

MEDIA STUDIES

SUMMER 2015

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MEDIA STUDIES

General Certificate of Secondary Education

Summer 2015

Unit 1 – Thinking About the Media: Investigating and Planning

Principal Examiner: John Ashton

This was a successful examination session in terms of the quality of the candidates' scripts and the overall performance of the cohort. Once again there was much evidence of outstanding performance by candidates in response to the questions set. The examination paper was challenging and demanding but proved accessible to candidates of all ability levels, enabling them to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills.

Section A

Question 1

Question 1 proved somewhat challenging for a small but significant number of candidates who struggled to identify the two settings in the advertisement for *Pepe Jeans*: an upmarket city centre location featuring Georgian buildings and a more fashionable area with cobbled streets, cafes and small shops. These could be identified through the visual codes in the photographic images. It is somewhat disheartening that some candidates struggled to identify a basic element when reading the examination resource material and this demonstrates that candidates do need to be thoroughly prepared to identify a range of basic symbolic codes in media texts.

However the vast majority of candidates did indeed read the texts in a detailed way and identified the two settings in the photographic images. Most candidates also explained how the setting was important in terms of appealing to audiences and building a brand image for the product.

Candidates gave a range of responses, and some identified London specifically through the anchorage of the text in the brand image logo. Some candidates explored the use of exterior settings in the print advertisement or identified a seasonal aspect of the setting such as a summer and winter setting.

Stronger candidates explored the settings in relation to narrative, storyline or character and related them to the brand image established by *Pepe Jeans* or, in some cases, the genre issues relating to fashion advertising in general. It was most impressive to see the strongest candidates explain the use of settings in detailed ways and offer sophisticated responses which explored each setting, linked to the brand image, and demonstrated an understanding of how advertisers build a brand image through the symbolic codes of setting to appeal to audiences.

Question 2

This question was answered very effectively by the vast majority of candidates and there was evidence of some very sophisticated readings of the resource material in the *Apple* advertisement. Answers focused on a wide range of narrative elements, identifying road trips and themes of freedom, linked to detailed readings of the symbolic codes used. These included setting, the object codes of the car interior and the creation of the *mise en scène*, the use of pathetic fallacy and the rain on the car windows, to the body language and gesture of the model.

Many candidates focused on the use of language in the poem, which was also a key feature of the advertisement, and used lexical analysis to analyse how this developed a brand image for *Apple* and its products.

More sophisticated answers at Level 4 explored the *mise en scène* of the old style car interior with the Californian setting or background and linked this to audience appeal through the lifestyle choices of *Apple* and its consumers.

Many candidates also explained the print advertisement's appeal through representations of young people, their thirst for freedom through travel, and the lifestyle of the West coast of America, all linked to the technologies developed by *Apple* and the appeal of its products to young people.

Question 3

The question focused on the representations of gender in print advertisements and candidates were asked to explain these representations in examples they had studied. This was a challenging question and most candidates performed well, offering appropriate and valid examples to support their discussions of stereotyping and the positive and negative aspects of gender representation. Examples included a wide range drawn from both genders and often in comparative ways, which was wholly appropriate. Effective examples included the *Dolce and Gabbana* advertisements, which raised debates about representations of women in very controversial circumstances, or representations of males, often using David Beckham as an example, linked to a number of products.

Many candidates drew on historical examples from the 1950s and explained how gender representations had changed over the years, then compared these with more contemporary examples often based around the promotion of household products, perfume and cosmetics targeting females.

A small number of candidates failed to offer any specific advertisements and referred only in general terms to products. This limited their response to level 2. Where candidates offered no specific examples or products, but did engage in some ways with issues of gender representation, this restricted their achievement to level 1.

There were some impressive upper level 4 responses, characterised by sophisticated discussion of the complexities of gender representation in print advertisements and how polysemic readings of media texts challenge and subvert preferred readings or reinforce traditional stereotypes.

Question 4

Again this challenging question, based on the wider organisational issues of advertising in print media, produced a highly effective range of responses from candidates and allowed them to explore a range of reasons why magazines contain print advertisements. The vast majority of candidates could explain the link between the funding of magazines through advertising and then progress to the wider appeals of print adverts in magazines, such as the glossy aesthetics, interesting narratives and use of humour related to particular products. Most candidates made the link between products and genres of magazines and how specific audiences were targeted. Higher level responses often focused on organisational synergies and how magazines, advertisers and producers of products all benefit from print advertising in magazines.

Section B

Candidates were asked to create a television advertisement for a new brand of jeans or mobile phone.

Task 1

Most candidates offered a name and a basic explanation, with stronger candidates explaining their highly effective name characterised by, for example, alliteration to create a real sense of the product and brand.

Task 2

Candidates were asked to suggest a storyline for their television advertisement and the vast majority of candidates offered an appropriate storyline with a structure of a beginning, middle and end. Higher level responses demonstrated a clear structure for the storyline and clear sense of the product, with level 4 answers awarded marks for a storyline that showed a confident sense of the product, often demonstrating real imagination and creativity in their writing.

Task 3

This task required candidates to create a storyboard of between six to twelve frames and this question was answered very well, with many creative and imaginative responses in evidence based on the stories developed in Task 2. The vast majority of candidates offered a range of camera shots, with candidates at the higher levels demonstrating real flair in the range of shots chosen and the use of technical terminology to explain their ideas. Most candidates identified appropriate use of sound in the storyboard, often giving a sense of the product through slogans and stings at the end of the sequence. Candidates achieving lower level marks often did not match the camera shot drawn in the frame with the written explanation, not adhering to the conventions of storyboarding.

Task 4

Candidates were expected to explain how their advertisement would attract audiences and, in the main, this was completed in a satisfactory manner. However there were many candidates who concentrated far too much on the product rather than the technical, symbolic and narrative features of the advertisement. This made it difficult for them to be awarded marks above level 2. Stronger responses did explain how the advertisement used a range of genre conventions linked to wider representational issues, such as star appeals and celebrity endorsements, to attract audiences. There was evidence of sophisticated use of media terminology by those candidates awarded the higher levels.

Task 5

This question asked candidates to explain how a television advertisement that they had studied promotes the product, and candidate performance was strong. Candidates chose to write about a wide range of ways in which the product was promoted, drawing on their knowledge and understanding of the key codes and conventions of television advertising, and explaining these through appropriate examples from contemporary television advertising. There were some impressive explanations of the links between the products and the use of codes and conventions. Popular examples included the use of celebrity endorsement such as Sylvester Stallone and the *Warburton's* advertisement, exploring issues of intertextuality with the Action film genre, Beyonce and perfume advertising, or David Beckham in a range of products. Other examples included *Coca-Cola* advertisements, considering the use of colour codes and representations of families and how these appealed to particular audiences. The *John Lewis* advertisements were particularly popular and it was clear that candidates had studied a range of television advertisements that allowed them to explain how the product was promoted in detailed ways. Higher level answers demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of intertextuality, narrative and representation.

Overall, the evidence from the examination scripts suggests that this was a successful paper and there were few examples of incomplete scripts. Once again, it is tremendously encouraging to see performance at the highest levels and the range of skills demonstrated, including thinking and analytical skills combined with the outstanding use of literacy skills in detailed and thoughtful explanations of how texts make meanings for audiences. Knowledge of contemporary issues of gender representation was at times outstanding, with candidates clearly articulating how these representations had changed with reference to historical and contemporary examples in their answers. Candidates also demonstrated a thorough understanding of organisational issues through the links between advertising and media products and how these synergies are being challenged in the digital media environment.

The standard of candidates' creative thinking also continues to be most impressive in Section B of the paper, with imaginative ideas for products, storylines and storyboards created under examination conditions, a most impressive example of how candidates can use their creative and imaginative skills to demonstrate the development of ideas under such constraints.

Advice to Centres:

- Encourage candidates to analyse media texts in thorough, detailed ways and address all the technical and symbolic codes used to create meanings for audiences.
- Ensure candidates have studied a range of examples from the examination topics upon which they can draw in both Section A and Section B of the examination paper.
- Prepare candidates for Section B of the paper by engaging them in a variety of planning activities and creative tasks linked to the examination topic.

MEDIA STUDIES

General Certificate of Secondary Education

Summer 2015

Unit 2: – Creating for the Media: Investigating and Producing

Principal Examiner: Carol-Jane Jennings

Unit 2 continues to offer challenge, rigour and wide-ranging opportunities to candidates across the ability range. The vast majority of centres successfully interpreted the three controlled assessment tasks, enabling learners to meet the rigorous assessment criteria with positive outcomes.

The specification requires candidates to explore at least three topics and three different media forms, including the statutory print-based textual investigation and one audio-visual form. In the main this requirement was adhered to, with centres offering an appropriate range of topics to study in different forms. As was the case in previous years, centres made good use of the examination topic, Print and Television Advertising, and consequently candidates would have gained valuable knowledge as well as planning, creating and thinking skills to apply to their unit 1 examination responses. A wide range of advertising campaigns in all forms were investigated, with the strongest candidates making appropriate connections between the different forms and their codes and conventions. Representations of gender, issues and nation were popular choices. Knowledge of narrative structures, audience address and reach, the role of the advertising agency, control and regulation was well evidenced. Many candidates made good use of Advertising Standards Agency case studies to underpin their wider appreciation of the organisational factors which influenced some campaigns.

Previous exam topics such as Crime Drama were also well represented in textual investigations. Most centres' sample portfolios included the requisite combination for investigations: one print-based investigation, and the compulsory genre investigation.

It was rewarding for moderators to witness centres making good use of rich texts in the compulsory genre investigation and in the narrative or representation investigations. Print texts in the form of magazine front covers, newspapers both local and national, DVD covers, computer game covers, film posters and print-based adverts were much in evidence. Well selected audio-visual texts for investigation included short extracts from films and opening titles from Television Dramas. Other forms included the exam topic, television advertisements, film trailers, Sitcoms and Teen Dramas. Reality Television show extracts such as *Educating Yorkshire* also featured as core investigation texts. Whilst some centres did attempt audio and interactive media for the textual investigations, these forms were less evident, although they were well represented in the production tasks.

Presentation of textual investigations was generally appropriate. Moderators commented that most centres adhered to the statutory titles prescribed in the specification. However, a number of issues continue to cause concern: some candidates did not apply the same set titles on the ME2/3 forms and their work, and there was some mis-matching of the information recorded on the forms and the candidate's own work. This is an area that could be addressed at centres; it would aid the moderation process and, more importantly, support candidates to present their portfolio of investigations evidence in a coherent, organised manner.

A small but significant number of centres continue to allow candidates to use their own titles rather than those set out in the specification. It is vital that this highest level of control is followed, as it not only helps candidates ensure they have access to the assessment criteria from the outset, but also enables them to focus explicitly on the study area of their investigation and avoids confusion about which area they are actually investigating. In such cases it was often difficult to differentiate between the areas of study chosen.

The marking criteria for textual investigations require candidates to use wider examples from level 2 upwards; this was in the main well evidenced by candidates. Best practice was seen in centres that support candidates to independently select well-chosen wider examples in the same form of text. Unfortunately, moderators continue to report a small minority of candidates who present different genres or different forms in their choice of wider examples. This is an important consideration for centres to review when task setting, especially when ambiguous or irrelevant texts are selected. While the specification requires that the 'convergent' nature of the media is covered, it would be more effectively achieved through production research and planning. Some centres continue to set tasks that only reference one other text. As has been stated in previous reports, this approach inevitably leads to a comparative outcome and is not advised.

Many centres continue to guide candidates towards a narrow selection of wider examples in textual investigations. In some instances the centre has complete control over this evidence, resulting in entire cohorts using the same evidence, and restricting independent responses. Whilst it is acknowledged that, for some centres, this pragmatic approach ensures effective delivery of the specification for particular groups of learners, it is not suggested as best practice. A further area of development for some centres would be the withdrawal of heavily structured and scaffolded responses. This approach also inhibits individual, unique responses from candidates, making it difficult to differentiate outcomes and accurately apply assessment criteria.

Centres are strongly advised to explicitly apply the Media Studies assessment criteria in their annotations when marking and internally standardising candidates' work. This would identify where candidates have not achieved the requirements of the marking criteria, such as those listed, and task setting could be amended appropriately.

Candidates in the main dealt well with the concept of audience address; however a small number of teachers generously rewarded candidates who 'soundly' referenced how texts are constructed to appeal to audiences or applied 'confident' commentary rather than the 'excellent' and 'sophisticated' analytical responses expected at the highest levels.

In all three areas of study (genre, representation and narrative) the vast majority of centres awarded marks appropriately to candidates who demonstrated an excellent knowledge and understanding of organisational issues such as distribution, viral advertising, or controls and regulations that influence content or scheduling. It was frustrating, therefore, when candidates who demonstrated excellent and indeed sophisticated investigations in all other areas, did not include any discussion of organisational issues, as required by the mark scheme for level 4 responses.

The application of media theories continues to be an increasingly popular approach used in some centres to support and underpin candidates' ability to investigate texts. Popular as ever were Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Todorov and Propp. This year, the Hypodermic Needle and Male Gaze theories were also common. When applied to investigations selectively and appropriately, such theory is able to both support and enhance candidates' responses. However, this is not always the case. Moderators continue to report that some reference to media theories is clearly not understood by candidates. Centres are advised that it is more beneficial for candidates to secure basic media language and concepts, than to include inaccurate or inappropriate reference to media theorists.

The recommended word count of between 400-850 words was helpful to the vast majority of candidates and most centres ensured that candidates used it well. Too few or too many words were in the main reflected in the marks awarded; since no penalty or reduction of marks can be applied through the assessment criteria, candidates' outcomes themselves determine how marks should be awarded.

Moderators commented on the range and general appropriateness of presentational styles adopted for textual investigations. The vast majority were well considered and centres had effectively supported candidates through the specification requirements. Formal essays, illustrated essays, reports, PowerPoint presentations and annotated examples were used to great effect across all three controlled assessment elements.

The quality and range of productions undertaken was impressive in many centres. Moderators commented on the quality of print productions, such as magazine front covers and their related contents pages or double page spreads. DVD covers and inserts, video game covers and inside sleeves, website home pages and related pages were also popular options. Newspaper front pages and related pages were also quite popular this year but, as in previous years, this form does often prove problematic. Moderators noted that some candidates relied too heavily on pre-populated templates that did not always help candidates make the best choices about layout and important typographical features. The use of A3 portrait layout, which then used zoom tools, also created editing issues with regard to font size and excessive white space. This prevented candidates from generating high production values. The production of comics was also problematic in this respect. Successful candidates, who accessed level 4 marks, demonstrated highly appropriate research and planning which clearly and directly informed their final productions. Many candidates were able to generate imaginative, well-considered and skilful original images, and apply appropriate genre codes to appeal to the intended target audience. However, they did not go on to use technology to produce the final productions, which was a pity. There are a number of free apps and commercially available websites which are easily accessible to centres and allow candidates to upload original hand drawn images and present them in comic format. Even the use of simple scanning and printing would prevent this problem since using technology is required from Level 1 in the marking criteria.

Incomplete production work inevitably means that, despite the production values, candidates cannot be award full marks for the level demonstrated. Centres are advised to adjust marks to reflect the work completed as well as the quality of the production.

Candidates obviously enjoyed their assignments and the vast majority engaged fully with the study areas. Extensive textual research at its best was used to inform planning. Text marking was often very effective to this end. When centres limited the analysis of, for example, magazine pages to the same genre as the planned production, outcomes were more effective. Thorough planning activities provide a link between research and production, enabling candidates to demonstrate an assured sense of form and to organise textual features thoughtfully. The use of original images and creative editing was seen by many moderators and high production values had clearly been encouraged, allowing candidates across the ability range to demonstrate secure understanding of generic codes and conventions. At their best, evaluations also addressed audience and organisational issues very well, explaining in detail the choice and organisation of generic features.

In the main, centres showed appreciation and awareness of the restrictions for 2015 and 2016. As the unit 1 topic is 'Advertising and Marketing', so music video, adverts, film or television trailers; film/television/music posters or campaigns are not permitted. This proved problematic in only a small number of centres. If centres need further clarification to ensure that their planned task setting does not infringe the conditions set in the specification, they are advised to contact the Subject Officer at WJEC.

Radio news was more popular than in previous years as one of the audio options, as centres are perhaps preparing for the forthcoming examination topic. Moderators commented on some excellent outcomes, although research and planning activities could be more clearly linked to the media framework. Centres are advised to guide candidates to consider scheduling, narrative and technical codes, news values, representational language codes and the growing impact of technology on audience address and reach.

Individual research into relevant issues and wider examples of the form the production will take, including related planning activities, is even more important if the final production is undertaken as a group piece. Group work is demanding and by its very nature needs to be collaborative during both production and post-production editing phases. Centres should stress the need for individual research, planning and evaluation, and the individual's role in the production. This is most important and should be apparent by explicitly referencing candidates' editing, camera work or sound recording role, not performance. This is an important point to consider when planning the course.

It is important to refer to the specification, which highlights the need to research into other examples of the text to be produced. However, this must be well judged and appropriate. For example, research into the history of the Horror genre, although useful in preparatory work, would not be appropriate to include as one of the four pieces of research for an audio drama extract or DVD sleeve and insert. Research into specific texts from the same form and genre would be more relevant and useful. Candidates also need to identify codes and conventions, the ways in which the audience will be attracted and, to achieve the higher levels within the assessment criteria, identify issues related to organisations, such as regulation and distribution.

By far the most popular print productions were magazine front covers, with their associated content pages or double page spreads. Some truly professional outcomes were submitted, created by some talented candidates in this area. Such quality production artefacts reflect the work that centres put into supporting their candidates. The use of original images to reflect genre, narrative and representational codes, at the higher levels, is often remarkable. Likewise, the best candidates' ability to engage their intended audiences and utilise technical and language codes is also most effective. Moderators were also privileged to watch a wide range of audio-visual productions ranging from news broadcasts, animations, drama extracts and documentaries.

The vast majority of centres' assessment of candidates' work was considered fair and consistent, with rank order being upheld. In a small number of centres, marks were not agreed for a number of reasons. In some cases assessment criteria were not used to ensure task-setting enabled candidates to access the marks available. This was particularly evident with regard to textual investigations for marks from upper level 2 onwards, where the requirement to include wider examples is necessary, and the level 4 requirement to analyse and respond to the concepts of audience/user and organisation.

Level descriptors are quite explicit for production work. In order to achieve upper level 4 marks, candidates must demonstrate a sophisticated level of creativity and control that engages users and audiences and, most importantly, generates high production values. Candidates should not rely on found images at this highest level, including found moving images. The generous application of marks, notably at both lower level and upper level thresholds, was evident across all elements, but continues to be more common in the production work. Centre reports identify where there are specific issues relating to task setting, rank order or assessment, and centres are strongly advised to read their individual report in conjunction with this Examiners' Report in order to follow the advice on offer and address any pertinent issues.

The responsibility of the centre to ensure all work is that of the candidate is, as always, critical. More and more textual investigations are reliant upon individual internet research and therefore it is even more imperative that centres screen candidates' use of sources and teach them to include appropriate referencing where appropriate, bringing to their attention the implications of not following this important requirement.

Most centres presented their samples by the deadline, which was much appreciated. Whenever centres anticipate problems such as being unable to meet the published deadline, it is very important they make direct contact with the Subject Officer who will endeavour to offer support to centres. Unfortunately, a number of centres failed to do this and some moderators were receiving samples for moderation well beyond the published deadline. This causes severe delays in the moderation process.

Most moderation samples were well prepared, although not all were easily accessible. Some had not been placed in rank order, while others were placed in overall folders that required organisation into individual units. This further complicates the process and is more time consuming than necessary. WJEC do not wish to inhibit centres from continuing to embrace technology to showcase candidates' work, but a pragmatic approach is needed. Digital platforms are not always transferable and host websites sometimes time out or are inaccessible. If centres wish to submit candidates' work in this way, please first seek permission from WJEC. Please be aware that the sample will still be required in hard copy format. Centres are also asked not to place candidates' investigations into separate folders on DVDs or on websites which have to be individually downloaded and compiled. It is very helpful to moderators if the sample is sent in rank order and each piece of work clearly labelled.

Moderators enjoyed the range and varying styles of presentation of both investigations and production elements, but please package the moderation sample for ease of access. This includes using legible font and slide colours in PowerPoint presentations, clearly labelling each section stating the candidate's name/number and the centre name/number to ensure the work is easily identifiable once the ME2 and ME3 forms are removed and compiling work into easily handled lightweight folders, again clearly labeled.

Assessment commentaries on ME forms and the work itself are really informative and a requirement of the specification. Most centres did complete these but problems arose, and marks were often less likely to be upheld, when these forms were incomplete. Other minor problems witnessed by moderators included candidates' totals being submitted inaccurately because of the erroneous aggregation of marks. Centres are therefore politely requested to double check candidates' marks at all stages.

In summary, 2015 once more produced some controlled assessments of outstanding quality that are a result of the hard work and commitment of candidates, teachers and centres alike. This report commends such achievements, as do the vast majority of individual centres' reports.



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