

MEDIA STUDIES

<p>Paper 9607/01 Foundation Portfolio</p>

Key messages

In order to successfully complete this coursework component, candidates should:

- keep a detailed blog showing the development of the project, their final artefact meeting the requirements of their chosen brief, and a creative critical reflection upon their work
- aim to complete these elements to a high standard, demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, research and planning, and appropriate skilled use of media tools
- ensure the blog remains online and easily accessible throughout the examination series.

Individual Candidate Record Cards must be completed with clear comments to show how marks have been arrived at for each assessment objective and strand. If candidates have worked in groups, comments must reflect individual contributions to projects.

General comments

On the whole centres continue to engage well with this component and candidates produced some commendable work, demonstrating detailed research into existing magazines and film openings, which fed into the planning and construction of their own media products. Many candidates demonstrated high levels of skill in the use of media tools, in both the products and in the creative critical reflections. In the best work, knowledge and understanding of conventions of all aspects of the media products was coupled with comprehensive evidence of the process.

Comments on specific tasks

Blogs

A range of applications continue to be used for presenting candidate work for assessment. Most candidates organised their work effectively, using appropriate menu items, titles, tags etc. The most effective blogs are organised so that they read in a clear chronological order, using date stamps if possible. The finished product (film opening or magazine pages) should be the first thing seen as the blog is opened so that it is clear to moderators which is the final version. Some final products remain difficult to find, with some candidates embedding the work in posts labelled 'Production' or 'Filming', some way into the blog. All elements should be clearly labelled. The best blogs are comprehensive, with candidates posting meaningful posts on a regular basis. Some candidates produced upwards of fifty meaningful posts. The most effective blogs demonstrated the whole process of the portfolio from the initial idea, through research into similar products, planning, production and creative critical reflection. The least effective blogs were those presented on poorly organised websites with often descriptive posts which lacked reflection and evaluation of the process of production.

If centres password-protect candidate work, passwords must be made available to the moderator. Centres should also ensure that all links and embedded materials are functioning before submitting for moderation.

Some centres continue to use files that need to be downloaded from Google Drive. Centres are requested not to allow candidates to do this as it requires moderators to use their own personal Google accounts to access materials. Moderators have been instructed not to do this, so moderation will be delayed if candidates do not make files accessible.

Creative Critical Reflections

Centres are reminded that the assessment of the Creative Critical Reflection (CCR) is in both the content and the skills evidenced in the creation. Therefore, candidates need to fully address the four set questions using a range of digital applications creatively to demonstrate their skill, knowledge, and understanding. Assessment Objective (AO) 2 calls upon candidates to analyse and evaluate their own work. The criteria explicitly refer to engaging with the set questions; if candidates do not engage with all of the questions it is difficult to move beyond level 2. Assessment Objective (AO) 3 strand 4 awards marks for the technical and creative skills used to communicate ideas through the CCR. Therefore, centres should award high level marks for this strand to candidates who produce CCRs that do not employ creative approaches to presenting this element.

The most successful candidates used a range of appropriate creative applications to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. Some centres are still giving very high marks to candidates who only employ one application across all four questions. The mark criteria for AO3.4 level 2 states, '... often only one creative approach is used ...', whilst for level 3 it states, '... with more than one creative approach used ...'. It is clear that centres should not be giving marks outside of level 2 for CCRs that only employ one approach.

There continues to be some excellent use of multi-media applications making use of a range of sources taken from the production process to fully explore the four set questions. The most successful candidates have allocated adequate time to the CCR and considered it an integral part of their portfolio; the least successful have rushed it and/or considered it a necessary chore following their production.

Centres should encourage candidates to give equal value to each of the four questions. Some candidates continue to start with a comprehensive and creative response to question 1 and regress to finish with a thin response to question 4.

Research and Planning

The third strand of AO3 relates directly to the candidate's research and planning, and how this has led to the construction of the final product. Therefore, all research and planning materials should be posted to candidate blogs and made accessible to the moderator.

The most effective research is that completed by the candidate either individually or as part of a group but independently from a teacher; it is clearly relevant to the final product and the candidate is able to articulate how their research models have informed their production. The least effective is class work, where the whole class has analysed the same text, which often bears little or no relevance to the final product. Some candidates presented research into magazines when following the video brief and vice versa. This is relevant if presented as demonstrating the candidate's choice of brief but not as preparation for construction of the opposite brief.

There is no prescribed list of planning materials but candidates should clearly demonstrate the process of production via their blog. The process should reflect professional practice where possible, so should include those documents associated with magazine or film production. The most successful candidates presented a wide range of materials which clearly show the development of the project. The least successful tended towards generalised descriptive comments about what they did, often in a diary-like format.

Products

Products are assessed across the first two strands of AO3. Marks should be awarded for the application of technical skills and how these are used to communicate meaning. Products should demonstrate clear knowledge and understanding of media language and key concepts.

Print

Candidates who followed the Print brief generally fulfilled the requirements, with understanding of features of design, layout, font choice and size in evidence. Some candidates completed well organised and considered photo shoots resulting in some excellent original images. However, others would still benefit from support in this area. There still needs to be a wider range of appropriate images produced with some candidates simply presenting the minimum number of images required rather than considering what their magazine actually needed. It is recommended that candidates compare their products to real magazine pages. Double page spreads require candidates to have had some training in journalistic technique. Copy was often poorly

proofread and, in some instances, meaning was not clearly communicated. Some candidates did not produce enough copy to fill the space available and chose to leave too much white space.

Whilst some centres continue to invest in appropriate technical tools for construction of media products, some candidates still need more support in building their skills with dedicated DTP software such as InDesign, Quark Xpress, Affinity Publisher etc. Photoshop is not appropriate for producing the internal pages of the magazine, nor is Publisher.

Opportunities for interim feedback need to be built into the task so that candidates can benefit from the critical eye of peers and teachers, particularly in relation to how far they have carried through their research into codes and conventions into their own products. Analysis and evaluation of candidates' own work is an important element of the mark scheme. Weaker productions often appear to be based on little or inappropriate research into existing products, sometimes taken from genres other than those of the proposed product.

Video

The video brief continues to be the most popular for this series, with the most effective products being carefully researched and planned. For the best film openings candidates had researched professional work relevant to their own genre choice and had developed a systematic understanding of the institutional conventions of opening titles.

It is pleasing to see centres giving their candidates more opportunities to use appropriate technology. Many are showing the development of skills by producing and presenting well-constructed preliminary exercises which not only focus on camerawork but also some lighting and sound recording techniques. However, some well-constructed openings are still being let down by a lack of consideration of the importance of light and an effective soundscape.

When candidates work in groups, as permitted by the syllabus, it is important that all members' roles are clearly identifiable and that the centre has allocated marks appropriate to those roles. Comments on Individual Candidate Record Cards should clearly identify how marks have been allocated according to candidate roles.

MEDIA STUDIES

<p>Paper 9607/02 Media Texts and Contexts</p>

Key messages

Section A is a compulsory question, in which candidates must analyse an extract from a TV drama and consider how meaning is constructed, as well as the specific representations of individuals, groups, events, or places through the technical codes of camerawork, editing, mise-en-scene and sound. An understanding of technical codes in moving image media is essential for candidates to answer the question, which was based on an extract from *Severance* (2022).

Section B requires candidates to answer one of two optional questions on one media industry they have studied, adapting, and applying their knowledge. Candidates should support their responses using examples taken from contemporary media.

General comments

There was a good spread of marks across both sections of the paper, with most of the candidates showing evidence of preparation, writing at length and supporting points with examples and accurate use of terminology.

Film and television were the most prominent industries, followed by video games, then music. Very few candidates focused on newspapers and magazines.

Overall, this paper performed well. Candidates were able to respond to the questions. There is evidence that they responded slightly more effectively to **Section A**, but performance was equal whether they chose to respond to **Question 2**, or **Question 3 (Section B)**. A very small number of candidates either spent less time on **Section B** or did not respond to this section, indicating a lack of awareness that a response was required, or that they ran out of time to answer two questions. In **Section A**, candidates were able to respond to assessment criteria 1 slightly more effectively than 2. In **Section B**, candidates were able to respond to assessment criteria 1 slightly more effectively than assessment criteria 2, indicating their strengths (knowledge and understanding of media concepts, contexts and critical debates, using terminology), and weaknesses (analysis of media products, textual evidence).

Section A

Question 1

Analyse how the extract from *Severance* constructs meaning, including the specific representations of individuals, groups, events or places, through the following technical elements:

- camera shots, angles, movement and composition
- sound
- mise-en-scene
- editing.

There was evidence of understanding of technical skills, with some candidates able to identify a wide range of elements accurately. Technical knowledge was generally clear across camera shots, angles, movement, and composition, as well as mise-en-scene. Stronger candidates were able to use media terminology in a sophisticated way; weaker candidates were not able to use precise or accurate technical terms. Some candidates did not develop their answers when it came to exploring the impact technical elements might have upon the viewer. This did not allow for opportunity to explore meaning and representation, and

subsequently these candidates were unable to achieve higher marks. Alternatively, some candidates could easily identify meaning but lacked the accurate use of technical language of the conventions of moving image to underpin their analysis. At times, candidates merely narrated what is seen on screen, leading to limited responses, rather than providing a deeper exploration of the connotations of micro elements employed. Centres should focus on the demands of all strands of the mark scheme, ensuring that candidates are aware of how to analyse texts and can use media terminology appropriately and accurately.

Candidates who responded well to this question evidenced a thorough understanding of, and effective reference to, the key concepts of language and representation. They demonstrated an effective understanding of the social significances explored within the extract through making effective points using a range of media terminology accurately. Relevant media theories were used effectively, in response to the question. Stronger candidates were able to analyse the way that meaning was created within the extract from 'Severance'. Many candidates were able to link media theory to their analysis, and used terms such as connotation/denotation, j-cut, insert shot, focus pull, synchronous, mode of address, contrapuntal, key light, and static shot fluently. Often, candidates were able to link the technical codes with analysis and were successful at making comments about the representation of people and places. There were some clear discussions, and the key themes were: how the clip created mystery (low key lighting, the voice asking: 'who are you?', tense music, the woman having no memory of her mother), fear (close-up shots of the woman's emotions), vulnerability, and power dynamics (birds eye view shot of the woman, panning and tracking shots of the woman, a high angle shot of the woman, and a low angle shot of the man, the villain) stereotypical representations of femininity (woman's costume, and behaviour, man's costume and tone of voice, woman as damsel in distress, the princess), tension (fast cuts, high pitched sounds, tight framing), and office technology (props). Most candidates were able to cover content throughout the extract, however some weaker candidates only focused on the opening of clip for their points of analysis.

Weaker candidates frequently simply re-told the narrative of the extract, or described/identified the camera shots, angles, movement, composition, sound and editing techniques used within the extract, often following the chronological order of the extract. Candidates who did this generally failed to explain how shot types created meaning, and so they were weaker. Points were repeated throughout, or analysis reduced to simple points. There was also inaccurate use of terminology (for example over the head shot, eye contact view, crane shot, jump cut, 'stablishing', and 'vibes'). Weaker responses tended to take each micro element and address it separately, whereas more sophisticated responses usually employed a more synthesized and holistic approach to the analysis of individuals/groups, themes, or meanings.

Some candidates managed to successfully apply theory in their responses (e.g., Mulvey, Butler, Hall, Barthes, Propp), which was very encouraging when employed appropriately. Some candidates would explain terminology, or theories, rather than applying them to an analysis of the extract. Whilst the use of theory is not necessarily required to access the higher marks, stronger candidates tend to have a better grasp of theory, and use it appropriately to explore the extract.

Section B

To do well in this section candidates are required to demonstrate a thorough understanding of, and effective reference to, the key concepts of audience and industry. They would show their understanding of the wider issues, contexts, and debates, and link this to the question. They would also refer to texts from multiple effective and appropriate case studies, using these to explore their chosen media area. Relevant media theories might be used effectively, in response to the question.

Many candidates provided acclaimed and successful blockbuster, or tent pole products, as case studies (such as Disney/Marvel's films, or Barbie). There is evidence that some centres have reconsidered their approach in teaching case studies. Candidates demonstrated more freedom and evidence of building up their own resources and case studies from each area (and perhaps even across various industries), which better equipped them to engage more meaningfully with **Section B**.

Some responses did not fully address the question, providing a generalised, or statistical overview of the case studies, rather than addressing the stem of the question. Rarely, responses were not credit-worthy, given that the focus is on recent (within the last five years), and relevant examples. A handful of responses were without any case study material at all, evidencing little more than a layman's understanding of the key concepts of audiences and institutions. Candidates should be encouraged to practice how they might use their case study material to respond directly to questions. Candidates who were able to respond to the question, and discussions prompted were able to respond more effectively.

Question 2

Evaluate the challenges and opportunities of digital distribution in the media area you have studied.

Candidates were able to use some relevant knowledge of distribution, such as formats and ownership. They were also able to use their case studies to answer the question and provided examples of how larger companies were able to benefit from vertical integration, and efficiencies of cross-promotion. The most common discussions focused on consumer choice and preference in relation to access, including global audiences, in relation to online platforms, and theatrical release.

In good answers, candidates were able to develop a critical engagement and point of comparison between their case studies, often forming a counter argument. Terminology was used fluently, demonstrating a good understanding. When used, key theories strengthened candidates' responses. Weaker candidates chose less relevant case studies, which were limited, and terminology was not used fluently. They focused on facts, without providing any analysis, or demonstrating an understanding of wider implications. Often providing a historical overview, limited to facts such as box office revenue, and marketing products/plans (often limited to social media). They did not engage with any theories. Some case studies were neither recent nor relevant. There was a lack of focus on responding to the question. A certain number of candidates who responded to this question were unclear and appeared to confuse marketing (including social media) with digital distribution. This demonstrated a weak understanding of terms and concepts.

Question 3

To what extent are consumers audiences more powerful than institutions in the media area you have studied?

Most candidates had some knowledge and understanding to answer the question. Candidate responses tended to provide points for and against the statement question. They identified changes in consumer demand, opportunities for audiences to feedback to institutions, consumer choice, and user generated content (Shirky, prosumerism). Responses also outlined the power of conglomerates, and monopolies in relation to market saturation and domination. They provided some examples of audience responses to media products. When used, key theories strengthened candidates' responses. Many candidates were able to effectively communicate their understanding of the industry in relation to audiences. Weaker candidates focused on facts, without providing any analysis, or demonstrating an understanding of wider implications. They did not engage with any theories, or misunderstood theories (the hypodermic needle model theory and the concepts of active/passive audiences are often used incorrectly or superficially, indicating a lack of understanding). There was a lack of focus on responding to the question. They may have evidenced a weak understanding of terms and concepts.

MEDIA STUDIES

<p>Paper 9607/03 Advanced Portfolio</p>

Key messages

In order to successfully complete this coursework component, candidates should:

- complete one of the four set briefs
- keep a detailed blog showing the development of the project, their final three artefacts meeting the requirements of their chosen brief, and a critical reflection essay
- aim to complete these elements to a high standard, demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, research and planning, and appropriate skilled use of media tools
- reflect upon their work both in blog posts and the critical reflection essay
- ensure the blog remains online and easily accessible throughout the examination series.

Individual Candidate Record Cards must be completed with clear comments to show how marks have been arrived at for each assessment objective and strand. If candidates have worked in groups, comments must reflect individual contributions to projects.

General comments

Many candidates presented detailed and focused research into appropriate existing media, using skills, knowledge and understanding gained over the complete course to effectively plan and construct their own products. Most demonstrated good levels of skill in the use of media tools in video, print and online production. Critical reflections demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the subject and the most effective were able to clearly reflect upon their own work.

Comments on specific tasks

Blogs

If centres are entering more than one candidate, they are reminded that it is good practice to hyperlink all their candidates' blogs to a single blog post or webpage to create a single point of access, or hub. The url of the blog hub should be transcribed to the candidate ICRCs, thus allowing moderators easy access to individual candidates' work. Many centres are still only supplying individual candidate urls, which are time consuming to type into browsers, especially if there are transcription errors or the centre has not used the digital pdf forms provided.

It is important that centres check that within candidate blogs all links work and that the moderator is given access to all documents. Some centres submitted files that need to be downloaded from Google Drive. Centres are requested not to allow candidates to do this, as it requires moderators using their own personal Google accounts to access materials, which moderators will not do, thus delaying the moderation process.

The most effective blogs used a linear format, organising the content so that the earliest post is last and the most recent post is first. The package of products (major and two minor) and the critical reflection should be the first thing seen when opening up the blog. All elements should be clearly labelled, whether through the use of menus, tags, or headers. Candidates who documented the whole process of production in detail tended to be most successful. They showed clear evidence of research in all aspects of the production, clearly documenting and justifying the choices and decisions they made – including the ideas at each stage that they rejected.

At this level a substantial amount of evidence, in a variety of forms (photos, video, articles, audio, presentation, surveys, comparisons, annotations, text, mock ups, tests, drafts and roughs), is needed to illustrate an effective understanding of the core concepts. Some candidates present in excess of fifty meaningful blog posts.

Critical reflections

When marking the Advanced Portfolio, centres should note that Assessment Objective (AO) 2 draws heavily upon evidence presented in the candidate's Critical Reflection. Therefore, candidates need to fully address the four set questions. The mark scheme clearly states across all levels that there should be a degree of engagement with **all** questions; a candidate which fails to do so has effectively self-penalised, and this should be reflected in the centre's marking.

The syllabus requires that candidates produce an 'evaluative essay' therefore centres should prepare candidates for this and discourage simple responses to the four questions set out as four paragraphs under the question heading. Weaker candidates tend to present their responses to the four questions as four paragraphs with the question as a header/title, but this is not the most appropriate way to complete the task. The reflection should be structured as an essay with clear reference to the candidate's production package. Centres should continue to advise candidates that the 1000-word count should be seen as an advisory minimum. Candidates who write fewer than 1000 words are liable to lack the depth of reflection required to go much beyond the lowest bands. Candidates who write considerably more than 1000 words (in excess of 1500) tend to self-penalise through lack of focus. Candidates should, therefore, focus on presenting a well-structured and argued reflective and analytical essay, rather than worrying too much about the word count.

There is not a requirement for the critical reflection to use a creative approach to presentation, as for the Foundation Portfolio. However, some candidates continue to make good use of captioned images from their work to support the content of their essays. This is good practice and to be encouraged.

The strongest critical reflections tended to be from candidates who had kept the most reflective records of their research, planning and production. Successful candidates thus answered the questions using clear examples from all stages of their production.

Research and planning

The third strand of AO3 relates directly to the candidate's research and planning, and how this has led to the construction of the final products. Therefore, all research and planning materials should be posted to candidate blogs and made accessible to the moderator.

Candidate blogs should include a range of research and planning materials, posted over the duration of the project, which illustrate the process of production from research and initial ideas to the final production packages and critical reflection. The best research materials demonstrated a range of textual analysis with focused and annotated examples. It is important that candidates include the exploration of similar products aimed at similar audiences to those chosen for their production tasks. In the strongest work, the research was revisited at stages throughout the production and reflection process, for the purpose of comparison and to demonstrate how conventions were used or deliberately broken. Audience research was strongest when learners went beyond quantitative based questionnaires and analysed how target audiences actually engage with products. Candidates were rewarded when they explored multiple ideas for their product and then documented the progression and development of those into pre-production documents.

There was a range of excellent planning and development presented, especially where candidates had recorded evidence that enabled them to reflect and make informed choices about the way forward for their productions. Centres could continue to encourage learners to include evidence such as: script readings, screen tests for actors, location pre shoots, practice shots or lighting tests, costume fittings and ideas, behind the scenes videos or photos, production vlogs (video logs), and 'making-of' video(s). Candidates could also be encouraged to take photos or video on the set and annotate them with reflection of their own roles. Work was almost always improved when candidates gained feedback on rough cuts and in many strong portfolios this was done on a number of occasions for each of the major and minor tasks.

Centres are reminded that research and planning should not just reflect the process of production of the major task. The briefs are to produce a package of work; therefore, candidates should research and plan the major task, the two minor tasks, and branding across the products.

Production

Products are assessed across the first two strands of AO3. Marks should be awarded for the application of technical skills and how these are used to communicate meaning. Products should demonstrate clear knowledge and understanding of media language and key concepts.

The most successful production work built on previous skills, knowledge and understanding. Candidates produced packages of products demonstrating consistency in style, purpose and quality between the major and the minor tasks. Strong examples paid close attention to simulating form, style and generic conventions across video, print, and online work as well as identifying a clear branding strategy.

Of the four briefs (Music Promotion Package, Film Promotion Package, Documentary Package, and Short Film Package) the most popular was the Short Film Package closely followed by the Music Promotion package.

Major video products

All briefs contain a major video product. These are a music video, two film trailers, an extract from an original TV documentary, or a complete short film

There were some creative approaches to music videos, and many were of a professional standard. These employed a range of forms with the most popular being a mixture of narrative and performance. Weaker productions tended to be simple narratives accompanied by music. The most successful had the star persona/s to the fore and were able to carry this 'branding' across to their minor products.

Film trailers tended to be well considered with most candidates choosing to produce a teaser trailer plus a theatre trailer. Codes and conventions were often researched and applied consistently with this brief lending itself well to the promotional package format. Candidates working on this brief tended to have a clear idea of the narrative of the entire film they were promoting and were able to select and film appropriate extracts. Weaker productions tended to present too much narrative or focus for too long on one part of the film. Some candidates produced only one trailer, thus not meeting the requirements of the brief.

TV Documentary extracts continue to be of mixed quality. The most successful were conscious of the fact that they were extracts and candidates often contextualised these in their blogs. Codes and conventions were adhered to and it was often clear that research into theories of documentary production had been explored and applied. Weaker examples tended to attempt too much and started to resemble full short documentaries. They were often poorly researched and edited with long shots of rambling and/or repetitive information.

There continues to be some powerful short film entries with thoughtful narratives, conscious choices of mise-en-scene, and well considered casting. Weaker products tended to try to produce a short feature film rather than treating the product as a distinct genre in its own right.

Some centres where English is not the first language are choosing to present products in their first language. This is acceptable for video products as long as English subtitles are used and the rest of the portfolio is completed in English.

Minor print products

Whilst there were some excellent minor print products conforming to appropriate conventions and continuing the branding of the major product, many seemed to be an after-thought. Candidates should view the minor products as an integral part of the brief and centres should award marks based on the whole package not just the major task.

The most effective digi-packs (Music Promotion) had clearly been well researched and employed an appropriate number of panels. Images had been produced specifically for the product and usually promoted the star persona/s of the major task. Weaker products often resembled vinyl LP covers with just two panels and limited imagery, often lifted directly from the major product.

Film posters (Film Promotion) continue to be the most effective of the minor tasks with candidates demonstrating a clear understanding of their role in the promotion of the film. The main weakness with some posters was the production of original photographs with some candidates relying on screen grabs from their major products.

Magazine articles (Documentary) were often well written and clearly a product of effective research. However, if centres choose to offer this brief, they should offer candidates some instruction in journalistic technique. Copy should be carefully proofed and formatted appropriately. The most effective products were presented as articles from existing professional magazines or online journals. Articles should contain some original photography as well as clear copy and effective design.

The short film festival postcards (Short Film) tended not to reflect the quality of the films they were promoting. Often candidates would lift an image from their film and place text over it along with the film festival logo. Postcards were presented as single sided and often lacked in detail. Some candidates confused postcards with posters and ended up producing a mixed brief which is not allowed by the syllabus. The most successful products again demonstrated a clear link to detailed research, employed some original imagery, and considered both sides of the card.

Social Media pages

All briefs require the production of a social media page as part of the promotional package. This page should reflect the overall branding of the main product and be used to demonstrate an understanding of how products target their audiences.

Social media pages may be 'live' online or produced within templates and embedded in the candidate's blog. Centres should ensure the online and personal safety of their candidates when using live social media pages and adhere to any local guidelines.

The most popular format continues to be Instagram. This is acceptable, but many candidates continue to treat this as an 'easy option'. Weaker products contained 3–6 images from the main product, or candidate blog, placed into the Instagram format. Some candidates used the Instagram template to replicate what looked like personal pages. This is not surprising as they are familiar with this format. However, centres should encourage a more careful consideration of the use of Instagram as a promotional tool. Images should be made for a purpose, not simply lifted from other components of the portfolio. Candidates could be encouraged to look beyond the images and think about the 'comments' attached to them. Bands/artists, for example, very often use written comments to interact with their fans and promote their personas and work. A range of written interactions linked to well-constructed images can, therefore, illustrate the depth of a candidate's knowledge and understanding.

The most effective social media products were clearly promotional and reflected the branding of the main product, the weaker products simply posted images from the main product with little or no sense of purpose.

MEDIA STUDIES

<p>Paper 9607/04 Critical Perspectives</p>
--

Key messages

This paper asks candidates to choose two questions from a choice of three in **Section A**; each question is marked out of 15. **Section B** is a compulsory question on Media Ecology which is worth up to 30 marks. The syllabus states that case studies should feature a majority of contemporary texts, although any text may be used to give historical context. The term contemporary is used to mean a text which was first published no more than approximately five years before the examination year, in this case 2019.

General comments

Many candidates seemed to have significant problems managing their time throughout the exam – examiners frequently saw very lengthy **Section A** answers sometimes followed by really short Media Ecology responses, despite this compulsory question being worth double the marks. Regular timed exam practice is highly recommended as one method of addressing this; many candidates attempted Ecology first which also works. While there is no direct correlation between volume and outcome one would expect a longer response for Media Ecology given the potential marks available are double the other questions.

A significant number of candidates clearly had learnt a great deal but did not address the set question which made it difficult for them to access the higher levels. In general there was too much listing of irrelevant data about box office receipts or technical aspects of production, too little analysis, too much unquestioning acceptance of the company line e.g. X is free speech.

Candidates should avoid using the same content for every answer including repeating the same sentences. While there are connections between topics, to see BLM included in each individual question might suggest the candidate has not embraced the breadth of learning one would hope to see at this level.

There were some excellent responses from candidates who achieved very high marks by addressing the set question. These offered detailed case studies which exemplified the relevant features of their chosen topic area – a result of guided independent study which leads to a greater level of engagement with the topic than centre taught case studies of specific episodes of TV dramas/music videos. For guidance, the case study should be a collection of associated texts, linked thematically or in another way, which the candidate clearly knows well – including the processes through which the texts were made, how they were intended to be distributed and consumed, and their intended audience.

When citing Media theorists there is a marked tendency for candidates from some centres to refer to them by first name only (e.g. George for Gerbner) which confuses rather than clarifies. The ability to apply the critical approach is the key to achieving credit; the name is far less important.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Explain how media regulators are influenced by wider social issues.

This topic is informed by a legacy of study around audience reception of texts and ensuing debates. Broadly, the early development of this field made many simplistic assumptions which most media specialists would now regard as problematic given the complexity of the inter relationship between reader and text. A working definition of regulation offered was the application of agreed standards and rules on our behalf whereas censorship was generally done without our consent – North Korea, China and Russia were often cited,

frequently without detailed examples from actual case studies. One exceptional response offered a detailed case study of how Tenet Media had broken a US law by receiving funding from sanctioned Russia Today. This was contrasted to the reaction to Netflix's *Cuties* which was regarded as offending public decency as it was accused of hypersexualisation of its youthful cast. A recurring motif was the assertion that social media companies have introduced regulations followed by a list of some of them then simply moving on without questioning whether they had the desired impact (if any). The most common approach offered was that of Censorship vs Freedom of Speech which led on to a debate around the self regulation of social media too often referred to in generalised terms rather than specific, detailed examples. There is still a tendency for candidates to simply list texts and explain why they got the rating they did without referring to the question at all. Livingston and Lunt's work is a good choice for this topic but all too often it was not applied to the arguments or was unanchored from specific case studies. Media effects is one of the most widely studied areas in the subject, yet the only theorist studied appears to be Bandura – a much-criticised research project from the early 1960s. Frustratingly, this has now become something of a persistent default, despite its inappropriateness and lack of relevancy. There is a substantial body of subject-specific, accessible, specialist academic work in the field of Media Effects including (but not limited to) the work of Barker, Livingstone, Petley, Gauntlett, Kermode, Byron. Among the huge volume of work in this field David Gauntlett's *Ten things wrong with the media 'effects' model* is an excellent resource. Popular texts referred to were *Joker/Barbie/Oppenheimer*.

Question 2

'All contemporary media texts rely on the codes and conventions of postmodernism.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

This topic examines debates around how one might define postmodernism in media texts. Most candidates were able to refer to key terminology for postmodernism and many took the approach of applying them one by one to texts, e.g. bricolage, intertextuality. The best responses offered critical reflection clearly informed by study of key theorists Baudrillard and Lyotard and these answered were confident in their use of terminology and understanding of theory. In less assured responses there was little understanding that it is *how* stories are told which is key rather than just the content. One response featured a very sophisticated argument around how individual readers of texts rely upon their reading of established codes and conventions to recognise when they are being challenged. The case study of *Gravity Falls* analysing its development from an animated comedy series heavily reliant upon intertextuality, simulacra etc. into an Alternative Reality Game. More than other questions, this topic is regularly hindered by the use of very old examples which is still more common than one would expect given the clear guidance in the syllabus. Whenever one reads such responses it is disappointing given the obvious critical insight and engagement on display; centres must exercise responsibility in ensuring such candidates are not hampered by relying on texts which are out of scope of the 5 year rule.

Question 3

Assess the extent to which public discourse is controlled by the media.

This question demands an informed critique of the power structures present in the Media within the context of wider Society, with reference to key texts to support viewpoints. These need to be beyond superficial comments around gender, ethnicity, LGBTQ+ etc. The theories of Gramsci and Hegemony were explored in better answers. Candidates who were strong on examples often struggled to connect these to media scholarship and debates, and those who abounded in personal opinions and sort of 'person on the street' viewpoints also struggled with the examples. Clearer delineation of which debates and scholarship to mobilise when they make their arguments would be useful. Some candidates regurgitated previous essays on representations without reference to media control power or ownership – candidates must always focus their response on the specific demands of the question if they are to be successful. For this question, candidates could have explored: notions of the 'public sphere'; Twitter and Musk; Metoo/BLM; Key examples of 'people power' e.g. Jenkins participatory culture; debates around 'cancel/accountability' culture and limits of such power; Curran and Seaton's work on influence of the press – Power Without Responsibility; concentration of ownership limits pluralistic voices; democratisation offered by web – cyber utopians vs dystopian views; how the online reflects/amplifies inequalities in society; Mark Fisher's work *Capitalist Realism*.

Question 4

‘Digital technology should make everyone’s access to media content equal; in fact, nothing could be further from the truth.’ To what extent do you agree with this statement?

This section involves considerations around how media technology and society affect each other. The specific focus here is on if and how technology has enabled equal access to content. Generally, candidates did not address this question directly – those that did focused on key aspects e.g. ownership and control, with more than one candidate citing Starlink. Successful arguments about access included aspects of the ‘Digital Divide’ in terms of access to finance for streaming platforms etc., the differing level of national digital infrastructure and particularly media literacy/skills which might enable prosumerism. All of which point to the advantages the majority of the population of the First World has over the global majority. This was supported by detailed reference to how Netflix targets certain territories as a way of marketing exclusive offers, building hype by limiting access. Clearly McLuhan’s Global Village has relevance too and good responses analysed this theory. At the other end of the spectrum many candidates would provide a quote from Marshall or Postman – one sentence (often ‘the medium is the message’) and then just move on without demonstrating its relevance to the question.

As is so often the case, the greater the level of detail in the examples the more such points were rewarded. Debates around Net Neutrality and *Section 230* featured significantly in several excellent responses. The role of Government and ISPs/Big Tech is clearly worthy of detailed consideration. The most cited theories were those of Shirky and Kelly in particular the debate around prosumers. The best responses interrogated such arguments rather than merely accepting that the platforms offered by Big Tech have removed all gatekeepers, despite the obvious contradictions within such a statement. Such creators labelled prosumers were used to illustrate how diverse, minority/niche voices are empowered by social media. It would be interesting to explore whether such creators as Mr Beast might now be considered part of the mainstream.