

GCE Examiners' Report

Media Studies
GCE
Summer 2025

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Introduction

Our Principal Examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each unit.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

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¹ Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Executive Summary

The 2025 Media Studies assessments demonstrated strong engagement and preparation across units, reflecting effective teaching and planning by centres.

In Unit 1, candidates approached the paper confidently, showing familiarity with question formats and assessment objectives. Most managed their time well and produced appropriately detailed responses. A range of critical perspectives were applied effectively, and candidates demonstrated secure knowledge of set products in Sections B and C. Their understanding of the media framework was evident throughout. For future improvement, centres are advised to emphasize identifying key words in questions, regularly updating news stories studied, and practicing full papers under timed conditions.

In Unit 2, most centres submitted complete work, with Briefs 1 and 3 being the most popular. There was a noticeable increase in audio-visual submissions, and many centres offered candidates a choice of brief, aligning with best practices. However, some candidates exceeded word limits in their Research and Reflective Analysis, which must be penalized as per the specification. Centres are reminded to ensure briefs are current and that all work—research, planning, and production—follows a logical sequence. Original images must be used in production, and any use of AI must be declared. The Reflective Analysis must refer to all three research texts and follow the bullet points outlined in the specification.

Unit 3 presented a range of questions aligned with the A2 specification, focusing on representation, audience, and critical perspectives. Candidates responded well, showing strong understanding and application of media theories. They effectively used media language to analyse how meaning is created in products. Centres are reminded that they must teach online magazine formats with attention to digital distribution and to continue fostering evaluative skills in candidates. Recognizing the polysemic nature of questions and adapting responses accordingly remains a key area for development.

In Unit 4, candidates had opportunities to apply their understanding of media concepts through independent research and creative production. Most showed strong engagement with their chosen briefs, producing high-quality work. The quality of submissions suggests that teachers have provided effective guidance to candidates, though some candidates failed to meet word count or image requirements. A rise in submissions using texts from platforms like Netflix or Amazon Prime for the TV brief was noted and centres are reminded that these do not meet the institutional requirements of BBC1 or E4 as prescribed in the brief. The magazine brief remained the most popular, but there was growth in television brief submissions, including some impressive audio-visual pieces. Centres are encouraged to submit outstanding projects to the WJEC Moving Image Awards. Additionally, exemplar materials available on the WJEC Secure Website should be used to support internal standardisation and ensure alignment with national standards.

MEDIA STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 1: INVESTIGATING THE MEDIA

Overview of the Unit

This year's Unit 1 examination was engaged with confidently as learners were familiar with the expectations and demands of each question. From this it may be discerned that learners were well prepared for the paper by centres. The majority of candidates managed their time effectively across the three sections and wrote responses of an appropriate length. It was pleasing to see that a range of appropriate critical perspectives, in line with those that are specified, were applied purposefully and appropriately by learners to support their responses. Candidates were confident in their understanding of the assessment objectives where AO1 expects them to demonstrate knowledge and understanding and AO2 requires that they apply that knowledge and understanding. It was clear that most candidates were secure in their knowledge of the set products in both section B and section C and references to these set products were used effectively. The paper was engaged with positively and candidates were able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the key concepts of the media framework across each of the sections. There follows notes and observations in relation to each of the questions that can be taken into account for future planning, teaching and exam unit preparation.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Explore how social and cultural groups are represented in the campaign advertisement. [40]

In your answer you should consider:

- the audio, visual and technical codes
- how media language constructs representations
- how messages are communicated

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and critical perspectives of media.

AO2: Apply knowledge and understanding of the key concepts of media studies to analyse media products.

The audio-visual resource proved to be a rich and highly accessible resource for this question. The focus of the question was the representation of social and cultural groups and the ways in which they are represented in the campaign advertisement.

The bullet points served to direct candidates to the areas that should be focused on namely the areas of media language that were used to construct the representations and the messages communicated. The majority of responses were of appropriate length for a 40-mark question and addressed the key aspects of the question the representation of social and cultural groups. Responses in the higher bands were able to explore the representation of the range of groups in the advert confidently and often perceptively, using sophisticated subject specific language which helped them to articulate their knowledge of an interesting area of representation that could potentially explore gender, ethnicity, race, disability and age. Best responses made links between the audio and visual codes to address how these social and cultural groups were represented and the surrounding issues of underrepresentation and misrepresentation of groups of people in the media which the advertisement sought to address.

Some responses focused primarily on the representation of 'women' at the expense of widening to explore aspects of black women or Muslim women or women with a disability but across all responses there was a confident understanding of the purpose of the campaign and the meanings and messages communicated. This understanding provided a framework within which the representations could be explored.

There was also a considerable range of relevant critical perspectives referred to and applied in order to enhance the audio-visual analysis. While this was not specifically required by the question candidates had clearly been taught the range of critical perspectives outlined in the specification as well as additional critical perspectives the most frequently used were: Gauntlett, Barthes, Hall (audience and representation theories), Alvarado, van Zoonen and bell hooks. The best answers showed knowledge and understanding of the critical perspectives through application rather than just referring to them. Stronger responses also used the bullet points to focus the analysis as they explored both the stem of the question and each of the suggested areas. For future teaching, it is important that learners are practised in identifying the key words in the stem of the question to ensure that answers come back to the area of focus to sharpen responses further.

Section B: News in the Online Age

Q.2 (a) Explain the impact of social media on the consumption of news. **[10]**

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and critical perspectives of media.

This question required candidates to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and critical perspectives of media, in this case aspects of media industries and audiences.

The focus of this question was the impact of social media on the *consumption* of news. The majority of responses were of an appropriate length for a ten-mark question with a wide range of relevant points made supported by explanation. Most responses did engage with the focus of news *consumption* as requested with specific consideration of the impact of *social media* rather than general digitalisation. There was overlap to news distribution, but most responses engaged with the question asked. References to Shirkey's 'End of Audience' theory were frequent and aided the exploration of the ways in which the increased role of social media in news consumption has contributed to the shift in the audience's ability to become active and interactive in their engagement with news content. Reference to critical perspectives were not an explicit requirement of this question and at times this theory was the prime focus of responses at the expense of a wide range or other possible points, but all valid points were credited. Also, although the reference to set products is not required for this AO1 only question responses often usefully referred to set news products in order to support the explanation of points made. Some responses were self-penalising if they were too brief and did not offer enough of a detailed explanation as required. Overall however, it is evident that candidates had been well prepared for this question and knew how to approach the question appropriately.

(b) Explore how media language incorporates values and points of view. Refer to one set news product and the hard news item you have studied in your answer. **[20]**

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and critical perspectives of media.

AO2: Apply knowledge and understanding of the key concepts of media studies to analyse media products.

For this question, candidates were expected to have studied products set by the WJEC. The AO1 and AO2 assessment objectives are equally weighted with ten marks for knowledge and understanding and ten marks for application of knowledge and understanding through analysis of their set product. The focus of the question asked was media language and how media language incorporated points of views and values. In order to do this successfully candidates were directed to refer to one set news product and a hard news item studied. The most common news products referred to were: *The Daily Mirror* and *The Guardian* from option 1, and *BBC News Online* and *HuffPost* from option 2. It was also good to see many responses featuring radio news options where there was really detailed referencing of many aspects of radio news as a medium. There were a wide range of appropriate hard news items studied such as: Trump's re-election, the assassination attempt on Trump, the Ukraine and Russian war, the Zelensky and Trump exchange and specific knife crime stories. Best answers benefitted strong knowledge of the set product in terms of the ethos, ideologies and political stance of the news product as this knowledge informed the focus of the media language used and the views and values communicated.

There were some older news stories in evidence still such as Brexit, Theresa May and related news stories and Partygate. But for the most part, there were more recent stories studied which was pleasing as contemporary relevance is more in keeping with the essence of news in the online age. A few rubrics appeared where responses referred to a news product that was not set by the WJEC and some responses referred to more than one product and this tended to detract from a detailed exploration of one set product as specified in the question. Again, on the whole candidates have clearly been well taught in all aspects of the specification for this section with only some points as mentioned for future consideration.

Q.3 (a) Explain the challenges that independent film companies face. Refer to the film made in Wales you have studied to support your points. [10]

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and critical perspectives of media.

Responses were required to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the independent film industry through points related to the film made in Wales studied to support points made as indicated in the question. It was anticipated that knowledge and understanding of industry could be linked to areas such as production, promotion, marketing, distribution and exhibition but not necessarily all of these areas.

Candidate approached this question confidently as most responses showed understanding of the nature of challenges faced by independent film makers. Best responses made a wide range of points in relation to industry the constraints of budget; the benefits of coproduction to independent film production; how budget might influence content and style and so on (refer to the published mark schemes for cross reference). Candidates also knew their set products very well and used this knowledge to explain the challenges faced with specific detail. Some responses used knowledge of the Hollywood industry as a point of contrast, and this proved helpful for some candidates to aid their explanation. There were a range of ways in which this question was approached as some candidates explored the challenges of budget and the production phase, some considered the challenges of reaching audiences and some the importance of innovative marketing approaches. Many candidates explored the full range of challenges and demonstrated a strong overview of the film industries. Less successful answers were limited by brevity and/or cited inaccurate information about their set products. Overall, this question proved to be straightforward and accessible to nearly all candidates with very few exceptions.

- (b) Explore how the film industry attracts audiences through the content of films. Refer to the Hollywood film you have studied to support your points. [20]

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and critical perspectives of media.

AO2: Apply knowledge and understanding of the key concepts of media studies to analyse media products.

This question required candidates to consider the ways in which the film industry attracts audiences through the content of films. The word 'content' is a key aspect of this question as it encouraged candidates to focus on the content of the Hollywood film studied. Best responses focussed on their studied film and explored a wide range of points supported by direct analysis of the film, focusing in on key scenes. It was clear that candidates knew their set film very well and were able to support their points with detailed analysis. Responses explored genre, narrative, stylistics and cinematography the use of media language to hold and engage audiences as all valid points were rewarded. Some candidates responded with a focus on marketing materials and while relevant points relating to the focus 'attracts audiences' were rewarded this approach was at the cost of detailed analysis of the film itself. Critical perspectives were also used to inform responses such as Neale and Todorov. The best answers demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of both their film and industry context. While most responses were the appropriate length for a 20-mark question there was some evidence that time became an issue for the final question on the paper.

Summary of key points:

- Key words in question stems should be identified to provide a strong focus for each response across sections
- Reflect on news stories studied and update where possible
- For exam preparation the practice of answering whole questions and whole papers in timed conditions would be beneficial.

MEDIA STUDIES

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UNIT 2: CREATING A MEDIA PRODUCTION

Overview of the Unit

Moderators reported seeing some excellent work this year, with most centres opting for Brief 1 or 3. Few centres submitted incomplete work for moderation. There were more audio-visual options submitted which was lovely to see. Many centres appeared to give candidates a choice of brief, in keeping with recommended practice. There remain a minority of candidates who exceeded the word limits for their Research and Reflective Analysis. Centres must adhere to the requirements on page 54 of the Specification and be mindful that work that falls outside the word limit cannot be assessed.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Administration

Most work was uploaded by the deadline and was easily accessible to moderators. It would help enormously if centres could label folders clearly with the candidate's surname and what it is, for example: surname, research; surname, planning etc. Also, please ensure that correct files are uploaded.

Cover sheets were generally accurately completed, making it easier to see how assessment had been applied. However, there were several centres who had submitted cover sheets for moderation with signatures missing, which delayed the moderation process. There were some instances where missing marks were evident and, in a few cases, marks on IAMIS were different to those on the cover sheet. It is imperative that all administration is checked. Detailed summative comments would be helpful to the moderation process so that moderators can better understand how centres have awarded marks.

Care must be taken when uploading Production tasks. The quality of scanning for some print tasks made it very difficult to moderate. Where possible, please export digital copies to upload rather than scan hard copies. Centres must also upload the work using the correct file format.

Research

Many candidates submitted relevant and detailed research which adhered to the requirements outlined on page 23 of the Specification. Research is a key element of the NEA, as it is this that should inform candidates' Planning and Production. Consequently, the materials selected by candidates for their research must be relevant to the brief – there were few examples of candidates researching texts unrelated to their Production. There were a minority of centres where only two texts were researched, rather than the required three.

As mentioned above, there were several examples of candidates who had far exceeded the upper word limit. Work that falls outside the specified word limit cannot be assessed.

It should be remembered that this is not a piece of textual analysis, but a piece of research to inform the rest of the NEA. In some centres, this area of the unit was descriptive. When applied, theory must be relevant and well anchored, and assessment must take into consideration the relevance and application of it.

Planning

Overall, the planning seen by moderators was relevant, appropriate and of a good quality. However, there were some issues at a minority of centres. Centres are reminded that only storyboards can be assessed for the AV briefs; nothing else. Storyboards are pre-production tasks and should not contain stills from the Production, as this suggests that the work has been completed after the production.

Some centres had included extraneous information (e.g. mood boards, plot outlines, etc.) which cannot be assessed. Several centres uploaded mind maps, font styles and logo ideas; again, these cannot be assessed. For print and online briefs, only draft versions of each page can be assessed. Centres should not assess any other material when awarding marks for Planning such as annotations. There were many candidates who provided detailed annotations with their draft plan; while this may be a useful activity for the candidate to undertake, this must not be considered in the assessment of the work and should not be submitted as part of the NEA folder.

Most centres had presented well-developed planning that reflected the research findings of their candidates. Draft pages should comprise of images and text but should be more developed than basic diagrams showing elements such as 'Title', 'Credit block' etc. They should bear a resemblance to the finished production. It is also important to note that all four draft pages need to be completed.

Production

Many candidates produced some imaginative and professional texts – for example, some excellent knowledge of understanding of media language and representation was shown in music videos and some extremely well thought out TV drama texts were seen by moderators. In some centres, technical skills were generously awarded in some cases, particularly where pixelated and blurred images were used. Moderators also noticed that AV productions were slightly generous in their marking.

Centres are reminded that candidates must use original photographs in their print work (five or six as a minimum, depending on the brief); as is stated in the specification, 'Candidates who do not use original footage, images or text for the majority of the production may only be awarded marks up to the top of band 1 of the marking criteria.' Centres are also reminded of the importance of adhering to the industry and audience requirements of their brief, and of producing campaigns that show consistency in line with the developed brand.

Centres are also reminded that the use of AI must be declared and used appropriately, in keeping with the guidance that is available on the qualification webpage under 'Key Information'. AI generated content that forms part of the production cannot be considered as candidates' own work and should be assessed as non-original material.

Reflective Analysis

Candidates must analyse and evaluate their production work in relation to the three texts used in their research. They should focus on the key genre conventions incorporated into their productions, the representation issues raised by the production and how media language (and other conventions) has been used to target the specified audience. In some centres, the analysis seemed to be more descriptive and seemed to just describe the process of the creation of their production. Candidates who simply evaluate their own Production work with no reference to these elements are not adhering to the specification requirements and assessment here was often too generous as a result.

If candidates haven't selected comparable products for their Research, then this element of the Reflective Analysis becomes difficult for them in terms of genre and representation issues.

Summary of key points

- Candidates must adhere to the requirements of their selected brief and centres should check that briefs used are current.
- Research, Planning and Production should clearly link, and work should develop in a logical sequence.
- Word limits must be adhered to for the Research and Reflective Analysis. Candidates who exceed the word limits (+/-10%) should be penalised by centres as outlined on page 54 of the specification.
- Production: original images must be used. Any use of AI must be declared and assessed appropriately.
- The Reflective Analysis must adhere to the requirements outlined on page 29 of the specification. Candidates must refer to all three texts selected for their research and refer to the bullet points outlined.

MEDIA STUDIES

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UNIT 3: MEDIA IN THE GLOBAL AGE

Overview of the Unit

The 2025 Unit 3 paper provided a range of questions which encompassed the A2 Media Studies specification. Candidates were required to engage with questions which entailed knowledge of representation, audience and critical perspectives. Centres appear to have understood the fundamental requirements of the specification and candidates found the paper accessible, with strong responses across the cohort. Furthermore, candidates had a secure understanding of critical perspectives and were able to use these theories across the paper in a variety of interesting and purposeful ways to support and develop responses. There was also a keen application of the unique media language used within each product to create meaning.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Television

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and critical perspectives of media

AO2: Apply knowledge and understanding of the key concepts of media studies to analyse media products

Q.1.1 'All narratives share a basic structure that involves a movement from one state of equilibrium to another' (Todorov).

Discuss this idea with reference to *Hinterland* and the European crime drama you have studied [30]

This question required that candidates used the case study *Hinterland* along with their chosen European drama in reference to the specification requirement that learners 'must study... narrative construction, structures, techniques and conventions', 'how meanings are created in the interaction of media language and audience response' and be equipped to 'analyse and apply critical perspectives to media products'. The question was predicated upon candidates having an understanding of how narratives function along with the critical perspective of Todorov. Most candidates were able to display these understandings to varying degrees of success. More basic responses entailed repeating the critical perspective with attempts to generally apply it to the products. More satisfactory responses relied on locating Todorov's 'period of imbalance or disequilibrium' within the products and explaining how disequilibrium motivated the narrative. More successful responses applied specific detail to the concept, with some candidates elucidating how the idiosyncratic use of media language emphasised these structures (for example, *Hinterland's* opening shot of Mathias on the cliff top expresses harmony: a state of equilibrium). Sophisticated candidates challenged what was argued as a simplified approach to structure, with interesting readings of *The Bridge* and its looser causal sequence. Higher band responses also engaged with the ideological resonance of how the narratives ended, as authority triumphed at moral cost in *Hinterland*. *The Bridge* was the most popular European product, with *The Killing* a far second.

Q.1.2 'The way in which binary oppositions are resolved can have particular ideological significance' (Levi-Strauss).

Discuss this idea with reference to *Hinterland* and the historical crime drama you have studied. [30]

This question required that candidates used the case study *Hinterland* along with their chosen historical drama in reference to the specification requirement that learners 'must study... narrative construction, structures, techniques and conventions', 'how meanings are created in the interaction of media language and audience response' and be equipped to 'analyse and apply critical perspectives to media products'. The question was predicated upon candidates having an understanding of how narratives function and also the critical perspective of Levi-Strauss. Again, most candidates were able to display understanding of both narrative and the critical perspective to varying degrees of success. More basic responses entailed repeating the critical perspective with attempts to generally apply it to the products. More satisfactory responses relied on locating 'pairs of oppositions' within the narratives, explaining how meaning was 'dependent upon (and produced through)' these oppositions. More successful responses applied specific detail to the concept, with some candidates demonstrating how the products' characteristic use of media language emphasises these structures (for example, the elevator scene in *Prime Suspect* visually connoting the split between Tennison and her male colleagues). As was the case last year, when candidates chose a historical crime drama to compare with *Hinterland*, *Prime Suspect* was the most selected. A lot of candidates gained access to the question via the visible gender politics of the products, an approach which extended across all programmes (following *Prime Suspect*, *Cracker* was the close second choice, with *Touching Evil* and *Morse* trailing behind). More ambitious responses engaged with oppositions of class, and authority juxtaposed with criminality leading into discussion of *Hinterland's* morally murky situation, wherein candidates examined Catrin's position as both victim and villain.

Section B: Magazines

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and critical perspectives of media

AO2: Apply knowledge and understanding of the key concepts of media studies to analyse media products

Q.2.1 In what ways can stereotypes be used positively and negatively by magazines? Explore examples from the mainstream magazine online and the historical magazine you have studied. [30]

This question asked candidates to explore the mainstream magazine and the historical magazine studied in reference to the specification requirement that learners will understand 'how and why stereotypes can be used positively and negatively' and 'how the selection and combination of aspects of media language construct representations' within magazines. *Cosmopolitan* and *Men's Health* were the principal choices for the mainstream magazine, while the historical choice was evenly represented. Within the open parameters of the question, candidates provided a range of subjective responses, successfully identifying what was understood to be positive and negative stereotypes within magazines via applied detail and considered approaches. Candidates often built responses around the more obvious historical stereotyping of the set products, while suggesting that modern magazines inculcate more diverse and challenging representations. More ambitious responses developed arguments which suggested that the stereotypes in modern products were potentially damaging (for example, *Men's Health* prioritises looking a particular way, which in itself has become a limiting stereotype). Furthermore, there was pleasing evaluation of the historic products having more polysemic potential (e.g., the 'Money' section in *Vogue* suggesting financial emancipation for its female readers). Again, higher banded responses were characterised by more specifically chosen detail, with candidates engaging in deeper media analysis of the texts and applying critical perspectives to support their answers. Occasionally, there were analytical references to print iterations of the products wherein candidates deconstructed front covers. Centres are reminded that the contemporary magazines studied should be online versions, as is stated on page 36 of the specification.

Q.2.2 In what ways can representations in magazines embody values and ideologies?
Explore examples from the mainstream magazine online and the non-mainstream magazine online you have studied. [30]

This question asked candidates to explore the mainstream magazine and the non-mainstream magazine studied in reference to the specification requirement that learners will be taught 'how representations embody values, attitudes, beliefs, ideologies and discourses, which may be reinforced across a range of media' and 'how the selection and combination of aspects of media language construct representations' within magazines. *Cosmopolitan* and *Men's Health* were again the principal choices for the mainstream magazine, while the alternative choice was most often *Pride*, closely followed by *Attitude*, with *Huck* a far third.

Candidates provided a range of subjective responses across the bands, identifying the particular ideological properties of each magazine and how these ideologies influenced the content and how audiences were positioning by the magazine. A popular approach was to juxtapose what was felt to be the more commercially motivated ideologies of the mainstream magazines with the alternative values and beliefs offered by the non-mainstream magazines, which, especially in the instances of *Pride* and *Attitude*, are often constructed around identity pleasures and aimed at marginalised groups. Nonetheless, some responses developed arguments which suggested that the ideologies in the non-mainstream products were also commercially driven (several responses reiterated how adverts in *Pride* specific targets its niche readership). Again, higher banded responses were characterised by more specifically chosen detail, with candidates engaging in deeper media analysis of the texts and using critical perspectives to support their answers. As with Q2.1, there was a problem with the use of print magazine exemplar, rather than online press, to answer the question.

Section C: Video Games

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and critical perspectives of media

AO2: Apply knowledge and understanding of the key concepts of media studies to analyse media products

Q.3.1 How important are specialised audiences, such as fans, to the video game industry?

Discuss with reference to one action-led franchise game and the one game in another genre you have studied. [30]

The bond between video games products and audiences are especially profound, and this question was constructed to allow candidates to explore this dynamic with respect to the specification bullet point, 'the role and significance of specialised audiences, including fan, to the video games industry'. Candidates approached the question from a variety of angles. A popular approach was to examine gaming communities, especially in the case of the game in another genre (*Minecraft* and *The Sims* were equally popular choices, with fair representation of both *Cooking Mama* and *Wii Sports*). Candidates opened their discussion to include well-taught application of Twitch communities and DIY modification, along with the fan mobilised distribution of user generated content. As now seems customary, *GTA* and *Tomb Raider* were the more popular action game choices, with lively and informed responses examining the different meanings Lara Croft has had to audiences. Answers which referred to *Assassin's Creed* and *Mass Effect* were enlivened by an appreciation of both those games' highly motivated fan bases. Occasionally, candidates did challenge the question per the exegesis that audiences were only valued by the industry in their role as passive consumers, with the success of this argument relying on how far the response could provide application in support of the rhetoric. Exploration and application of how games use media language, along with subject specific terminology, almost always proved to support and bolster responses.

Q.3.2 How important is marketing in attracting audiences to video games?

Discuss with reference to one action-led franchise game and the one game in another genre you have studied. [30]

This question was secure with candidates providing a selection of successful responses. Honouring the specification's stipulation that candidates must study 'how the video games industry targets audiences through the content and appeal of video games and through the ways in which they are marketed' and 'how audiences can be reached, both on a national and global scale, through different media technologies and platforms', responses could choose to discuss the marketing of games via reference to traditional materials such as posters and trailers, while there was also opportunity to examine how the video games industry mobilises fan power to create viral campaigns (there were interestingly thorough references to stunts such as the *Tomb Raider* endurance billboard and *The Sims* dating app tie in). There was a healthy application of relevant theory across all bands, with fruitful reference to Gauntlett and Jenkins. Candidates who applied the idiosyncratic use of media language within products and explored the multi-platform nature (social media, playthroughs) of video games were successful when answering this question. In general candidates answered Section 3 last, which occasionally resulted in truncated responses due to unsuccessful time management.

Summary of key points:

- In Section B, the online versions of modern magazines should be taught with acknowledgement of their digital distribution and format.
- Candidates should continue to be encouraged to apply considered evaluation of how media products use media language to create meaning.
- Candidates should continue to be encouraged to evaluate questions and recognise their polysemic nature, before adapting their understanding accordingly.

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UNIT 4: CREATING A CROSS-MEDIA PRODUCTION

Overview of the Unit

It is encouraging to note that Unit 4 continues to offer candidates valuable opportunities to apply their understanding of key Media Studies Framework concepts through independent research and creative production. This year again, most candidates showed strong engagement with the different aspects of their chosen briefs, resulting in some truly impressive work. The quality of submissions suggests that teachers are providing effective guidance to help candidates meet the brief requirements.

In the majority of cases, candidates successfully fulfilled the criteria. Where there were shortfalls, these included exceeding or falling short of specified word counts or not including the required number of images or words for articles. There was a notable rise this year in some candidates selecting research texts produced by institutions other than BBC1 or E4 for the TV brief such as Netflix or Amazon Prime; in these cases, it was not possible to fully meet the brief requirements as genre choice should apply institutional understanding of either E4/BBC1 and its products.

While the magazine brief remains the most popular choice, there was a further increase in candidates selecting the television brief, and several excellent audio-visual pieces were submitted.

Centres are encouraged to consider entering high-quality audio-visual projects into the WJEC Moving Image Awards—an ideal platform to showcase emerging filmmaking talent. Finally, centres are reminded that a wide range of exemplar material for Unit 4 is available on the WJEC Secure Website, which can be used to support internal standardisation and ensure alignment with national assessment standards.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Administration

There continued to be strong evidence of effective administrative practice across centres once again this year. This was reflected in clearly labelled files, well-organised candidate folders, comprehensive cover sheets, and personalised assessor comments that appropriately justified the marks awarded. The majority of centres met the submission deadline of May 15th; where this was not feasible, formal extensions were sought through WJEC but there were exceptions where a minority of centres had still not uploaded work more than a month past the deadline, which did hinder moderation.

Most centres successfully uploaded all candidate work in acceptable file formats, resulting in fewer instances of missing work being reported by moderators. However, a minority of centres did not upload all elements of the unit which disrupted the moderation process. While annotating individual pieces of work is no longer mandatory—though still valued by moderators when offering justification for the marks awarded—it remains essential that cover sheet summative comments clearly reference the assessment grid and provide a clear and detailed rationale for marks awarded. Comments should demonstrate how marks have been allocated, ideally including brief examples from the work itself. In the absence of such detail, it becomes difficult for moderators to discern how the assessment criteria have been applied. In some instances, centres provided minimal commentary when justifying marks, a practice that fails to clearly link candidate outcomes to the assessment objectives. Although the use of generic comments copied directly from the specification without candidate-specific adaptation was still observed, their frequency has decreased further this year. This was much appreciated by moderators.

It is a requirement that coversheets are completed in full by both the assessor and candidate. Nevertheless, some centres did not comply, resulting in incomplete documentation. Additionally, there was still evidence of candidates neglecting to complete the 'Completion of Cross-Media Production' section, which should detail the products created—including duration and, where applicable, a website URL. This information is vital for contextualising the NEA work.

Centres must ensure candidates complete Section C of the coversheet, which pertains to GDPR. WJEC is grateful to all candidates who grant permission for their work to be used in exemplar materials and Professional Learning events, as this supports ongoing teacher development in the assessment of NEA. Candidates who opt not to give permission for their work to be used as exemplar are not required to complete the participant details section. Any NEA work lost due to technical issues within a centre must be formally reported to WJEC using the appropriate JCQ documentation (Form 15), as marks that are not substantiated by submitted work cannot be accepted for moderation. While most affected centres complied with this requirement, a small number did not.

Investigative Research

The Investigative Research provides candidates with an opportunity to develop and apply their understanding of a specific media concept—such as genre, narrative, or representation—within a magazine or television product of their choice. Candidates are expected to apply the genre conventions of their selected media form, as outlined in the brief, in the creation of their own production. The most successful investigations fully utilised the word count of 1,250–1,500 words, maintained a clear focus on a single concept, incorporated at least two relevant critical perspectives, and included a bibliography with a minimum of five sources. This year, moderators again encountered numerous examples of purposeful, well-engaged research that were both academically robust and enjoyable to assess.

Consistent features were identified across the most effective submissions. Typically, candidates concentrated on one product that closely aligned with their own production and conformed to the publisher or broadcaster requirements specified in the brief. The investigation centred on a single edition of a magazine or an episode of a television programme and was subject to thorough analysis.

Strong submissions focused on a single key concept—genre, narrative, or representation—as stipulated in the Specification. Candidates cited academically credible sources such as textbooks, journals, essays, and reliable websites in bibliographies comprising at least five entries. Many opted for formal referencing styles such as Harvard, often including footnotes. Critical perspectives were applied with relevance and insight, drawing upon a wide range of academic research and original theorists' contributions. There was a marked reduction in the use of inappropriate sources such as Wikipedia, SlideShare, or informal blogs. The best investigations reflected ambitious research, demonstrated perceptive argumentation and insightful conclusions, founded on extended academic engagement and a clear grasp of the selected media concept.

However, moderators noted several recurring issues that hindered the quality and impact of some candidates' work, occasionally affecting multiple elements of their submissions, which included:

- Investigations that emphasised industry contexts at the expense of close textual analysis.
- Semiotic analysis that offered generalised commentary rather than exploring the chosen concept in depth—for example, lacking examination of how meaning in representation is constructed through dress codes, expression codes, or gesture and pose.
- Attempts to explore multiple concepts, leading to a lack of clarity and depth.
- Use of several texts for research instead of focusing on a single product.
- Referring to a TV series, analysing extracts from several episodes rather than one specific episode, leading to a very generalised analysis.
- Descriptive accounts of visual codes or plot points rather than analytical discussion of technical features.
- Superficial application of critical perspectives, insufficiently developed to reach higher assessment bands.
- Investigations that were too brief to allow meaningful exploration of the chosen concept.
- Submissions that exceeded the maximum word count; assessment can only be applied to work within the 1,250–1,500-word range.

Development Outline

Development Outlines generally demonstrated adherence to the Specification requirements and were, overall, well-articulated. Instances of generous assessment were most evident where candidates submitted summaries of their research findings rather than focusing on production planning. It remains essential that the Development Outline centres on candidates' intended plans for their cross-media production, explicitly informed by their Investigative Research. It was encouraging to note that centres are continuing to respond to guidance issued in previous moderator reports, treating the Development Outline and Investigative Research as separate tasks. Notably, there was no evidence of integration between the two elements, an issue previously observed in a minority of submissions. Assessment was, in the main, appropriately applied, with most candidates placed within the correct mark bands.

The strongest Development Outlines clearly articulated the key findings emerging from the Investigative Research and demonstrated a robust understanding of how these findings would inform and shape the intended production. Work that achieved the highest marks was characterised by specificity and detail in linking research to production planning. These submissions consistently adhered to word count guidelines, resulting in focused and purposeful outlines.

A number of factors were identified as limiting the overall effectiveness of some Development Outlines:

- The absence of a rationale explaining how research findings would inform production decisions, reducing clarity around creative choices.
- The inclusion of planning artefacts—such as scripts, storyboards, mock-ups, and mood boards—creating unnecessary complexity and detracting from the purpose of the Development Outline. There are no marks available for these additions to the written 500-word development outline and as such are not required for moderation purposes. Instances of planning submissions were greatly reduced this year which was pleasing.
- Presentation of research summaries without a clear demonstration of how they would contribute to the development of the cross-media production or articulate the candidate's creative vision.
- Inclusion of additional research not explored within the Investigative Research, which compromised consistency across the NEA components.

Cross-Media Production

A range of impressive production work was once again evident this year across both the magazine and television briefs. In those instances, the standard of each component within the cross-media production was consistently high, demonstrating technical proficiency and creative flair, while fully adhering to the specifications of the brief. Submissions awarded Band 5 typically reflected a sophisticated grasp of media language, underpinned by highly relevant research, and clearly showed how intentions outlined in the Development Outline were realised in the final artefacts.

The Production component remains the most frequently over-rewarded area, particularly where the use of genre conventions and expected elements of the Form do not meet the standard required by the marks awarded. Many centres are correctly identifying the appropriate assessment band but are placing candidates too highly within that band relative to WJEC national standards.

The most effective productions showed a thorough and competent interpretation of the brief, with each element completed to an equally high standard and informed by a detailed engagement with research findings. These submissions demonstrated confident use of genre-specific conventions and an awareness of media form and industry context. Clearly articulated intentions in the Development Outline contributed to purposeful representation, sustained use of media language, and a creative synthesis of research. In higher band work, the productions conveyed a strong sense of personal investment, with technical competencies—such as editing, shot selection, layout, and design—consistently supporting the quality of the outcomes.

In the strongest audio-visual productions, genre conventions were effectively constructed through *mise-en-scène*, character portrayal, and audience address, employing appropriate narrative and production techniques. These included highly suitable imaginative use of locations, convincing *mise-en-scène*, crisp dialogue and constructed representations. Print-based work that achieved success included the required amount of original imagery and footage, further contributing to the validity of the submissions.

Several recurring issues were found to limit the effectiveness of productions:

- Research findings and conclusions were only loosely applied, particularly where candidates had failed to analyse a suitable comparable product or relied on more than one, resulting in work not reflective of the genre or form explored during research.
- Non-adherence to the relevant codes and conventions of media forms, most frequently in print-based productions, where omissions such as page numbers, pricing, or edition details were evident—often due to insufficient analysis in the Investigative Research.
- Technical proficiency did not always meet the standards set out in the Specification.
- Submissions sometimes lacked the required number of original images or footage.
- Incomplete fulfilment of the brief, or inconsistent quality across production elements.
- Limited linkage between research and final production artefacts, undermining coherence and intent.
- Representations of people which were not “constructed” for purpose. Mostly prominent in the print work where the images had clearly been lifted from personal holiday photos, nights out, and social media accounts.

Critical Analysis

The Critical Analysis requires candidates to examine how the media concept explored in their Investigative Research is demonstrated within their Cross-Media Production, supported by reference to relevant critical perspectives. This task serves a distinct function and should not be conflated with an evaluation of the production process or the final artefacts. The emphasis must be placed on the application of the chosen key concept throughout the production, the rationale underpinning each creative decision, and justification of how the production aligns with the industry and audience requirements stated in the brief.

Submissions which focused solely on evaluating the production without addressing these elements did not meet Specification requirements. In such cases, assessment tended to be generous, although overall, this component was marked with relative accuracy. Where marks were generous, candidates were generally placed within the correct bands.

The strongest Critical Analyses displayed a focused and insightful application of media language and reflected knowledge and understanding of representation, industry contexts, and audience engagement. Work achieving the highest marks often included thoughtful application of theoretical perspectives to the selected concept. These submissions demonstrated sustained use of appropriate media language, coherent articulation of ideas, and well-chosen critical theories. Candidates evaluated how the chosen concept was embedded within their production work and justified the creative decisions made in relation to the research findings. This was evident, for example, in layout and design choices within magazine pages or in the construction of representations within audio-visual content.

Less effective Critical Analyses were marked by the following issues:

- Introduction of new texts or research not featured in the Investigative Research.
- Divergence from the original research focus or minimal reference to research findings.
- Absence of explicit reference to the researched concept, leading to insufficient analysis.
- Inconsistent or brief discussion of key concepts and critical perspectives.
- Limited reference to the Cross-Media Production itself.
- Inclusion of production process details (e.g. image selection, mise-en-scène decisions, technical challenges) rather than conceptual analysis—although encouragingly, such instances declined this year.
- Evaluation focused on areas for improvement or commentary on strengths and weaknesses, which detracted from the analytical purpose of the task. Again, this tendency was reported to be less prevalent compared to previous series.

Summary of Key Points

- To fully meet the requirements of Unit 4, candidates must strictly adhere to the specifications of their selected brief, ensuring compliance with both the overarching Specification and associated assessment criteria.
- A consistent feature observed in work achieving higher assessment bands was the sustained and precise use of media language, including appropriate terminology across all written components of Unit 4.
- As in previous series, the areas most frequently over-rewarded were the Investigative Research and the Production components.
- Most samples reviewed during moderation respected the required word count of 1,250–1,500 words. Where candidates exceeded this range, a tolerance of up to 10% was permitted; however, marks were awarded only for content falling within the prescribed limits for time and length.
- A very small number of candidates omitted the bibliography—a requirement of the Investigative Research. While footnotes are acceptable for referencing, they must not replace the bibliography, which should include a minimum of five sources.
- It is strongly advised that candidates avoid selecting research texts that are identical to those used by their peers, as this practice invariably results in highly similar outcomes across the Unit 4 folio, thereby limiting the scope for individual interpretation and originality and raising concern about failure to adhere to the requirements of the specification.
- Additional planning artefacts such as scripts, storyboards, mock-ups, and mood boards are not subject to assessment and should not be uploaded as part of the sample.
- Over-rewarding of Productions was again evident this year where work demonstrated inconsistent use of form conventions or lacked technical proficiency. Common issues included blurred or pixelated images, cropped cover lines, obscured main images due to text placement, and poor layout of images and copy images as well as not convincingly constructed for a specific purpose—particularly within print-based work.
- In audio-visual work, generosity was mostly related to protracted narratives which were not engaging, loose editing which affected pacing and camerawork which did not reflect strong enough alignment with the genre. In many such instances, the absence of genre-specific conventions stemmed from candidates failing to research a suitable comparable product.
- Some candidates did not meet requirements regarding the number of original images or the word count for articles in print work, which contributed to unjustified awarding in several cases.
- Work placed in the higher assessment bands demonstrated clear attention to the technical standards outlined in the relevant descriptors.
- An issue in a small number of centres was the submission of incomplete folders where the second part of the Cross-Media Production was not submitted but assessment had not been adjusted in line with Specification requirements. Page 72 of the Specification states that candidates who submit only one of the cross-media production tasks must not be awarded marks above band 1.
- A further issue was observed in a small number of centres where folders were uploaded with elements missing including coversheets, as well as specific required tasks e.g. Critical Analysis or the second part of the Cross-Media Production.
- Finally, centres are reminded that candidates must not base their Investigative Research on any of the set products studied for Unit 3. This restriction applies to the designated set product itself, not merely the edition examined.

Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team is on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

Tel: 029 2240 4308

Email: media@wjec.co.uk

Qualification webpage: <https://www.wjec.co.uk/en/qualifications/media-studies-asa-level>

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