

GCSE Examiners' Report

Media Studies
GCSE
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.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page

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.

<p>Grade boundary information</p>	<p>Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade.</p> <p>For unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level.</p> <p>For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.</p>	<p>For unitised specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)</p>
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Executive Summary

The 2025 WJEC GCSE Media Studies examination series demonstrated a generally strong performance across all three units, with clear evidence of effective preparation and teaching in many centres. Candidates engaged well with the assessment materials, and most were able to complete all questions, reflecting improved time management and familiarity with the exam structure.

Unit 1: Exploring the Media

Candidates responded positively to the paper, particularly in questions 1, 3, and 4. Stronger responses demonstrated analytical depth, especially in comparing representations of women in video game posters and analysing music videos using technical and visual codes. The application of media theory (e.g., Mulvey, Hall, Barthes) was a notable strength among high-performing candidates.

However, question 2 remained a challenge for many. A significant number of candidates struggled to identify the specific radio programme studied or gave vague responses about the presenter's role. Similarly, some candidates analysed inappropriate texts (e.g., non-music magazines), which limited their marks. Centres are advised to ensure students study both print and online versions of music magazines and current, relevant radio programmes.

Unit 2: Understanding Television and Film

This unit showed improved performance compared to previous years. Candidates generally performed well in questions related to marketing, audience identification, and representation in television. The most successful responses demonstrated nuanced understanding of social groups, particularly in the analysis of national identity and social class in programmes like *Gavin and Stacey*.

However, questions 2a and 2b revealed gaps in knowledge. Many candidates could not correctly identify the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) or list appropriate classification concerns. This indicates a need for greater emphasis on institutional knowledge within the film industry. In contrast, questions 3 and 4 were well answered, with candidates applying narrative theory and genre conventions effectively in their analysis of Hollywood franchise films.

Unit 3: Creating Media (NEA)

Moderators reported a wide range of creative and technically competent submissions, particularly in the print and AV options. Strong candidates demonstrated clear links between research, planning, and production, using theoretical frameworks and media concepts to inform their work. Reflective Analyses were most successful when they were evaluative, well-structured, and within the word count.

Areas for improvement include:

- Over-reliance on templates and generic planning materials.
- Submissions exceeding word limits or lacking analytical depth.
- Incomplete or misaligned production work that did not fully meet the brief.

Centres are reminded to ensure that planning and research are clearly separated and meet specification requirements. Candidates should avoid descriptive accounts and instead focus on analytical evaluation linked to their research.

Key Recommendations for Centres:

- Ensure candidates are studying specific, relevant media texts linked to the specification.
- Reinforce understanding of institutional knowledge for Unit 2, especially in film classification.
- Guide candidates in structuring longer responses and using appropriate terminology.
- Ensure NEA submissions meet all technical and content requirements, including word limits and genre conventions.

Overall, the 2025 series highlighted the enthusiasm and engagement of learners, with many demonstrating a strong grasp of contemporary media. Continued focus on specification alignment and analytical depth will further enhance candidate performance in future series.

MEDIA STUDIES

GCSE

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UNIT 1: EXPLORING THE MEDIA

Overview of the Unit

The examination paper was accessible for most candidates, and it was pleasing to see that most were able to respond to the resource material with thoughtful responses that were insightful and relayed good knowledge and understanding of key areas. Many candidates were well prepared by their centres, particularly on question 1, 3 and 4. However, question 2 still proves to be challenging to some with questions on radio, music programme and music magazine studied. A significant number of candidates were unable to access the higher mark band, as they were unable to state which radio programme they studied and were vague on the role of the presenter, with many not even stating the type of music played. With the music magazine, candidates were able to select either an online or print contemporary music magazine and then explain how it appealed to the target audience. There were many limited answers and candidates needed to refer to the magazine they actually studied and go beyond the music star on the front cover. The better responses, referred to an edition studied or an online version discussing cover, content, typography, masthead, interactivity, blogs, layout and design, colour choices, coverlines, framing of images. When studying music magazines, both print and its online version, need to be studied. However, this year it was good to see that most candidates were able to attempt all questions, and that time management continues to improve, which showed good guidance from centres.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Representations - advertising, video games and newspapers

The resource material, a video games poster for Shadow of the Tomb, Definitive Edition 2019 which focused on Lara Croft, set in a jungle like location, proved effective in enabling candidates to demonstrate their analytical skills on an unseen media text. Equally, candidates were able to compare a video game poster they had studied with the set stimulus material. It was good to see evidence of high -level comparison skills based on excellent knowledge and understanding of how representations of women are selected and constructed based on based on the style and genre of the video game. There were some outstanding responses, and these were able to apply relevant theoretical knowledge, such as Laura Mulvey's male gaze being applied well and the ability to use strong subject terminology. However, there were a minority of candidates, that self-penalised by giving short responses with limited comparisons. Some of these responses were simply describing rather than considering why the women were represented in the way they were and what meanings were being constructed. Some compared Lara Croft's representation with a male representation from Uncharted Nathan Drake's franchise.

Section B: Music

This section proved accessible in allowing candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the music industry. There was clear evidence in the candidates' responses, showing good understanding how music videos represent their artist/band, what messages and values they were imparting. There were also good explanations how an artist/band uses social media with specific examples to support views. Candidates were able to select either a contemporary or historical music video to analyse and this presented a range of different music videos studied which was good to see, with many thoughtful and well considered responses. There were some candidates that were unable to access the higher marks in question 2 as outlined in the general comments. However, the knowledge and understanding of a wide range of media products by many, including radio programmes, music magazines, social media and music video was, at times, impressive and showed clear evidence of candidates being well prepared by their centres, selecting a range of texts that need to be studied for the specification.

Comments on individual questions/sections

SECTION A: Representations – advertising, video games and newspapers

- Q.1 (a)** The vast majority of candidates were able to achieve the full two marks for this question describing how the woman was dressed in the poster. A range of answers were given from the clothes she wore, to the weapons that formed her costume recognising that her dress code showed that she was dressed in a practical way for action/adventure.
- (b)** This question proved accessible for most candidates. The question required candidates to briefly describe how colour was used to represent the woman in the video game poster. A range of interesting and well considered responses were made. These included: wearing the colour blue, which had connotations of a stereotypical masculine colour; black cargo trousers reflected how practical the woman was and ready for adventure; the green colours of nature, jungle like conditions showed that woman was strong, independent, spirit of adventure and resilient; the dark tones gave a sense of mystery about the woman, an enigma, the yellow daylight, could show new beginnings and opportunities for the woman. Many students were able to access band mark 3 upwards, although there were some that wrote very little or wrote about colours used without reflecting how these helped to represent the woman and therefore self-penalised themselves.

- (c) Candidates were asked to explore how design and layout was used to represent the woman in the video game poster. A range of answers were presented. Those candidates who were able to give a thoughtful, detailed response that focused how the design of the poster helped to create a non-stereotypical representation, that demonstrated that the woman had courage, strength and resilience in her quest for adventure, were able to access the higher mark bands, 4 and 5. Their answers included how the hazardous conditions showed her strength, how she was fearless and capable and that the weapons showed she was resourceful and ready for action. A lone adventurer, with hero like qualities and that her body language, indirect mode of address, showed she was cautious, looking around before she made the next steps. Being centralised in the poster showed she was a dominant and leading character. In addition, many discussed the lighting within the image and how this also helped to represent the woman as a strong character. Many were able to access band mark 3 -5, depending on the quality of their responses. However, there were some candidates that simply described without considering how design and layout represented Lara Croft. Some simply wrote one or two sentences with a limited analysis and were awarded band mark 1 or 2.
- (d) This question required candidates to compare the representation of women in Shadow of the Tomb Raider video game poster and with one video game poster studied. There were some excellent, detailed examples analysed that were able to compare how different video games represented women depending on the genre of the video game or the time it was created. There were several video games analysed with Grand Theft Auto V and The Last of Us proving the most popular, as well as other versions of Lara Croft video games. However, some students discussed male representation as a comparison citing Uncharted Nathan Drake or an Emergency game within the franchise that only had males on the poster and were therefore only awarded marks for the resource material analysed and many were only able to access band mark 2-3 at most. Some candidates were able to give insightful analysis and compare these well with the resource material by exploring how the style of writing, images used, impacted on how women were represented, applying strong use of subject terminology based on a wide range of technical and symbolic codes. Some were able to apply relevant theorists such as Barthes, considering symbolic and semantic values as well as cultural ones and Stuart Hall, particularly looking at the impact of stereotyping, as well as Laura Mulvey's male gaze. The best answers, in addition, often explored the complexities of how women are represented, understanding how the genre can lead to stereotypes or the ability to challenge pre-conceived ideas of women.

Weaker candidates were limited in their responses, often not comparing but just describing the video game poster studied not considering why it was represented in the way it was, and how this compared to Shadow of the Tomb. Many of these responses were short answers and many did not compare, sometimes just analysing the resource material with no mention of a video game studied in class. Some students compared a music magazine or even a music video with the video game poster and were awarded only for what they could say about the resource material as no real comparison could be made. This question was worth 20 marks and candidates need to consider the technical and visual codes used to construct meanings in chosen video game poster studied compared to resource material.

SECTION B: Music

- Q.2 (a)** Candidates were asked to name the online music magazine studied and then identify one target audience for the online music magazine. They were awarded one mark for naming a correct target audience. There were some who did not name the online magazine and therefore could not be awarded the one mark for the target audience they stated. However, there were some incorrect answers being too broad in stating target audience i.e. anyone and were not awarded a mark.
- (b)** Candidates were asked to briefly explain how one online or print contemporary music magazine studied appealed to its target audience. There were four marks for this question, and they were allocated on whether the response was excellent, four marks, good, three marks, satisfactory, two marks or basic, one mark. Those who stated a specific online or print magazine were able to give clear evidence from magazine's style and content and how these were appropriate in targeting intended audience. These were awarded full marks. However, weaker candidates struggled with this question, often just stating one way in which magazine targeted a key audience or were too generalised, in that, it was unclear which music magazine was studied, for example calling Rolling Stones magazine, Bruno Mars magazine. Sometimes, the understanding how the magazine would appeal to its target audience was vague and not specific. There were a significant number of candidates who analysed incorrect magazines. Magazine that had music artists on the front cover, but they were not music magazines, such as, Vogue, Diva, J14 (a teenage magazine for girls). These were penalised as rubric. Centres are advised to ensure that a relevant, current music magazine is studied –both print and online. There were some good explanations that clearly showed that a specific music magazine cover had been studied as these candidates were able to give thoughtful responses that considered how the use of colour, images of music artists/bands are represented to attract an audience, coverlines, promotions, typography, masthead, direct mode of address, freebies and competitions, interactivity, podcasts, blogs immersive and interactive graphics, audio and video content.

- (c) This question asked candidates to explain the role of the presenter in one music radio programme studied. Responses to this question were in the main in band marks 1-3, with some accessing good. This was one of the weakest areas for a significant number of candidates. Centres are asked to ensure their students are clear which radio programme they studied, the name of the presenter, and to ensure that they get to listen to a significant part of the broadcast as for example, many students just discussed Nick Grimshaw interviewing Harry Styles. Programmes studied need to be current – Nick Grimshaw no longer hosts having left in 2018. Candidates were not penalised for analysing Nick Grimshaw this time. Good answers discussed the presenter’s ability to relate to the target audience in the way they spoke, competitions they held, celebrity guests, phone ins, scheduling of the programme, how they researched topics before the show, prepared scripts, introduced topical light news, and that they were the voice of the station, its heart and soul, connecting well to their audience, discussing issues that would resonate with the audience as well as playing appropriate music. Good examples used were Radio 1 Greg James, Radio 2 Scott Mills, Greatest Hits, Simon Mayo Drive Time Show, Heart with Amanda Holden and Jamie Theakston. A few had not studied a radio music programme, but a radio talk show, or a radio news programme, and this was rubric, awarding zero marks.

- Q.3** They were some excellent answers where candidates had clearly studied how social media can be used to promote a music artist/band, with good supporting examples of how different social media platforms were being used as a strong marketing tool for the artist’s/band’s image but also as a platform for them to raise awareness of issues that they were closely connected to. These responses were detailed and relevant gaining the higher mark bands. Many discussed how Taylor Swift, for example, creates a sense of a community, with her fans being known as Swifties as well as discussing consistent branding, strong strategies, scheduling of posts. Popular choices of artists/band remain with Taylor Swift, Lizzo, Stormzy, Beyonce, Harry Styles, Dua Lipa. Best answers discussed different social media platforms and why the artist/band would select to use that one to promote themselves, such as Facebook, X, Snapchat, Instagram, Tik Tok. It is best for candidates to be studying up to date artists, as candidates are expected to study in detail the artist/band use, what they are posting, the impact it has. There were some artists/bands such as One Direction who disbanded in 2016. Candidates were not penalised but often they were not able to give specifics and were therefore awarded up to satisfactory marks. Some candidates did not state a specific artist/band and their answers were generalised with no specifics of social media used, which again meant at best, they could only gain a basic mark.

Q.4 This question asked for candidates to explore how technical and visual codes were used to represent the music artist or band in one music video studied. Candidates could therefore analyse a contemporary or historical music video. In general, this question was answered well. Taylor Swift music videos were a popular choice as was, Lizzo's Good as Hell, Sweet but Psycho, Dua Lipa's New Rules, Billy Eilish's What Was I Made For, Bruno Mars, Uptown Funk, This is America by Childish Gambino, Duran Duran's Rio, Michael Jackson's Thriller, as well as several music videos from Stormzy. There were some very engaging answers that considered how the technical and visual codes helped to construct meanings, such as the framing techniques that helped to position the audience as well as the symbolic codes, Barthes. Some students confidently analysed camera shots, movement and angles, as well as mise-en-scene with body language, lighting and dress codes and how these helped to further the representation of the artist/band, and the messages and values that artist/band wanted to voice.

Many candidates were able to apply appropriate media terminology for representation, discussing stereotypes, and how these were either challenged/subverted or reinforced within the video. It was good to see that some students were able to discuss what feminine dominant ideologies were, place them into context, and then analyse how far the music video conformed or subverted them. Many were able to apply theoretical perspectives, such as Laura Mulvey's male gaze, Strauss' binary oppositions. There were some candidates that struggled with the question, simply describing the music video without considering how the artist/band was being represented in the way they were and did not mention any technical codes and only limited visual codes. A minority did not state the name of the music video and artist/band and were limited in their findings. However, many candidates were able to access the higher mark bands demonstrating that good guidance and teaching was in evidence and that candidates had been prepared well for this type of question.

Summary of key points

Overall, the paper proved successful in allowing candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the key concepts within the specification for Unit 1: Exploring the Media. In most cases students were able to complete the whole paper with few questions not attempted. It is pleasing to report that the time management by candidates in the examination proved effective and manageable, with only a few candidates not completing. There were many good examples where candidates had been well prepared demonstrating excellent guidance and support from their teachers. These centres are to be highly commended, and candidates are to be congratulated for their detailed and interesting responses.

In summary, centres should:

- Remind candidates of the marks awarded for each question to ensure longer, more detailed responses are given for questions allocated higher marks, particularly for 1d, 3 and 4.
- Ensure when studying video games posters/DVDs, that male and female representation is explored.
- Study specific artists/bands, specific radio music programmes and that music magazines both print and online versions are studied for Section B reminding candidates to refer to these when answering examination questions.

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UNIT 2: UNDERSTANDING TELEVISION AND FILM

Overview of the Unit

- Overall, a very pleasing examination session given evidence of the candidate responses to the questions set.
- It was very pleasing to report that there was only little evidence of incomplete scripts with most questions proving accessible to candidates.
- There was evidence of some outstanding responses to the higher tariff mark questions set particularly on Section A question 1 d on the topic of television in Wales and on Section B questions 3 and 4 where there was much evidence of well-structured and organized responses with detailed and thoughtful analysis of the set texts studied in both television and film.
- Candidate responses to Section B questions 2 a and b in particular proved less successful with a minority of candidates unable to identify the organisation that classifies films in the UK or suggest three issues of concern when classifying a film. The study of wider organizational issues in the film industry would clearly be a focus of future teaching and learning strategies.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Overall performance was significantly improved from previous years.

- Question 1a. Most candidates were able to identify two ways in which television programmes were marketed. Answers included television adverts, trailers, social media, radio, TV talk shows or posters and billboards. Where candidates were less successful, they confused ways of marketing with a television organisation such as a streaming platform or a television organisation such as the BBC or an answer which merely stated the licence fee.
- Question 1b. Most candidates achieved 2 marks on this question in identifying two different audiences for the television programme studied. Most answered with Welsh audiences, fans of situation comedies or as identified in the mark scheme mainstream or niche audiences.
- Question 1c. There was evidence of some good, very good and in a small number of cases excellent responses where appeal to chosen audiences were explained in detail with answers awarded. Candidates in higher mark bands explored uses and gratifications linked to the appeal of the codes and conventions of situation comedy or the appeal of representations of Wales and its people.

- Question 1d. There was evidence of some high-quality responses in exploring how one social group was represented in the television programme studied. Most candidates used Gavin and Stacey as the case study and explored representation of national identity, social class and age in varying degrees of detail. Candidates awarded the higher band marks made explicit reference to stereotyping, positive and negative representations to achieve the assessment objectives of demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the concepts of media studies with well-organized responses and using accurate and appropriate subject terminology. There was evidence of some excellent and perceptive exploration of how social groups were represented supported with detailed analysis of key scenes from the television programme and a clear and detailed application of how the codes and conventions were used. Where candidates had explored social class there was at times some confusion as to which social class the main characters belonged. Examiners were instructed however to be mindful of the complexities of social class divisions where candidates were attempting to explore these representations. In several cases candidates explored more than one social group although this was done to support candidates exploration of national identity. There was much evidence of very high level performance exploring the complexities of representations and stereotyping, positive and negative representations and how different audiences interpret these representations.

Section B

Candidate performance was less successful on this section due mainly to some candidates not being able to name the organization that classifies films in the UK. An awareness of the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) and its function and key issues of concern when classifying a film is in the specification. However, for Question 2 c most candidates were able to explaining why Hollywood films are targeted at global audiences with some excellent responses.

The response to Question 3 and 4 were also most pleasing with candidates offering detailed knowledge and analysis of their chosen films.

- Question 2a. The majority of candidates could name the organization that classifies film in the UK namely the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC). Some candidates named other film and television organisations such as the BBC, Netflix, Disney, Marvel or Sony which were incorrect.
- Question 2b. Again a sizeable minority of candidates could not suggest three issues of concern when classifying a film such as violence, illegal drugs, criminal behaviour, racial hatred, sexual activity or human rights.
- Those failing to gain marks on this question instead offered incorrect responses such as budget costs, marketing or copyright.
- Question 2c. The vast majority of candidates offered satisfactory responses to this question in explaining why Hollywood films are targeted at a global audience. At the higher levels, there was evidence of some very good and indeed excellent responses based on explanations of increasing revenue and profits due to falling sales in the home market, expanding sales and distribution and growing international markets. There were also answers which explored the unique ability of Hollywood to make big budget films that appeal powerfully to popular tastes in many different cultures. Some excellent responses even explored the importance of international markets such as Asia and China.

- Question 3. Overall this question was successful in enabling candidates to explore character and narrative in their chosen Hollywood franchise film. There was much evidence of the application of appropriate theory including Propp and Todorov, with reference to heroes and villains, donors, sidekicks, princess's or damsels in distress. In many responses, candidates used the Todorovian narrative structure, exploring characters and their attempts to resolve conflicts in the story, and how the characters were used to return the narrative to an equilibrium or harmony. In some of the answers, candidates used popular films such as *Black Panther*, *Spiderman* or *Avengers* to explore some sophisticated aspects of character function. They recognised the complexity of the character roles in the film where heroes and villains had interchangeable character functions. Candidates offered some very good and perceptive insight into the character roles and the narrative of the film.
- Question 4. There was evidence of some very good responses, even though, as the last question, this can cause time management challenges. It was encouraging to see candidates engaging with the understanding of how props and costumes are used to reflect the genre of their chosen film. Again, popular choices for response included *Black Panther* and the use of both futuristic sci-fi elements combined with traditional African props and costumes to explore Afro futurism. Another popular choice was Spiderman's props of web shooters and vehicles, and how mise-en-scene combined with the iconic Spiderman costume and mask to convey the conventions of the Superhero genre.

Summary

- Overall this was a most successful examination. Most questions proved to be accessible and allowed candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of Media Studies.

Advice for Teaching and Learning.

- Ensure candidates have knowledge and understanding of how television programmes are marketed.
- Be aware of the complexities of audience composition regarding age, gender and social class demographics.
- Recognise the complexities of social class and the definitions of each class demographic of working class, middle class and upper class when exploring representations, stereotypes, Welsh people and their national identity.
- Use the bullet points linked to the question to help structure responses.
- Explore knowledge and understanding of the institutional aspects of the film industry particularly how films are classified, the organisation involved in classifying films in the UK, namely the British Board of Film Classification, and the key issues involved in the classification of film.

Centres and learners must be congratulated on their continued teaching and learning in WJEC GCSE Media Studies and of the enthusiasm displayed in the responses evidenced on their examination scripts. It is hugely encouraging to see the knowledge and understanding of the contemporary media in both television and film and their engaging involvement and analysis of the texts set. It continues to be a real privilege to see the responses provided to what continues to be a challenging and engaging examination.

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UNIT 3: CREATING MEDIA

Overview of the Unit

Moderators reviewed candidates' work from a wide range of set Production Briefs. As in previous series, the print options for **Film** and **Magazines** remained the most popular. However, there was also evidence of entries for **Music**, **Advertising**, and **Film AV** options. Fewer candidates chose the **Television** and **Online** briefs.

Most candidates produced appropriate AO3 **Research and Planning**, effectively developing their chosen brief to create media products aimed at their intended audiences. They demonstrated a range of knowledge and understanding of media concepts. In general, moderators noted successful AO2 **Reflective Analysis** reports that focused on key media concepts explored during the research phase and evaluated how these were applied in the final production artefacts.

In stronger submissions, candidates used theoretical media knowledge including Mulvey, Hall, Dyer and Maslow to support their understanding of representations and audiences. These were integrated effectively and communicated clearly, while adhering to the word count.

Candidates' performance across all four components remained broadly consistent with previous years. Assessment decisions were generally secure, and marks were awarded appropriately within the relevant bands. However, some centres included materials such as **mood boards**, **annotated flat plans**, or **scripts** as part of the Planning evidence. These elements are **not eligible for marking** and should not be submitted for moderation. Storyboards were also sometimes over-awarded when conventions such as timing, shot type, sound codes or scene drawing were not included. Moderators also saw generous marking for some production work. This was sometimes because the brief was not fully met, for example timing requirements in AV work, or insufficient pages produced in the print options.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO3 Research: Characteristics of Successful Work

As in previous series candidates who selected relevant and appropriate research texts were often the most successful, and typically being assessed in the higher bands. Strong research was used not only to inform production but also revisited in the **Reflective Analysis**, with a clear focus on aspects of **genre**, **representation**, and **audience** concepts.

Effective use of the minimum of 250 words and a maximum of 500 words which concentrated on the three required areas of were often effective in meeting the assessment criteria at the highest level. Some candidates included annotated screenshots, while others combined annotations with written commentary.

Strong examples explored **representation** through the analysis of stereotypes and their role in shaping audience understanding. Positive and/or negative representation of females/males on film poster covers and magazine covers was popular area of investigation and at the highest level, candidates' findings were often communicated in a highly effective way applying knowledge understanding and analysis with an appropriate use of high order technical language.

Some candidates successfully explored how representation in their chosen texts challenged or reinforced female/male representation, diversity and cultural impact on changing representations was also viewed in some advertising research for example. Many candidates chose to focus on the construction of representations through technical codes, visual codes, and symbolic codes (including gesture, dress, body language, setting/location, object/instruments, colour)- particularly popular in the magazine and film options. As in previous series, many candidates found success and produced good analysis of **media language** and its role in targeting specific audiences. Strong responses evaluated how language was used to address the audience—for example, through **mode of address**, choice of **formal or informal language**, and the use of **standard or non-standard English**. In the magazine option candidates often explored the impact of the title itself on the audience, though this was done less effectively in the film option.

In analysing **genre**, successful candidates identified and examined typical **codes and conventions**, communicated with an appropriate level of accurate **technical terminology** and the most effective work further analysed how and why these codes created meaning to the intended audience.

For **audiovisual (AV) research** the use of well selected scenes from a small number of well selected appropriate, relevant AV texts was a prerequisite to effective research. The most successful candidates focused either on **camerawork** analysed framing, composition, and a range of shot types (distance, length, angle, movement). Research into **editing** sometimes focused on **continuity**, **montage**, and **transitions**. Research into **sound** covered both **diegetic** and **non-diegetic** elements, including sound effects, soundtrack, dialogue, and audio quality. **Mise-en-scène** was also considered as part of a comprehensive analysis. Reports were often supported with screen captures and annotated to demonstrate knowledge and understanding. Candidates who went beyond identifying, describing and naming techniques, codes and conventions and offered insightful analysis were the most successful.

AO3 Planning: Characteristics of Successful Work

As in previous series, moderators observed a wide range of well-considered and appropriate planning drafts which met the specification requirements. Candidates effectively applied knowledge and understanding from their research to plan their productions, constructing drafts that were clearly designed to appeal to their specified audience. Successful plans carefully considered representations of people and place and incorporated a range of appropriate **genre conventions**.

For **print and online** productions, planning included a draft design for each required page. These were created using appropriate **digital software** (rather than hand-drawn) and typically incorporated well-chosen **found images**. Successful candidates demonstrated thoughtful and creative use of **layout and design**, ensuring a balanced composition of **text, images, graphics, and whitespace**, as appropriate for the chosen format and genre. **Film posters and DVD covers** (front and back) demonstrated effective use of layout and design. Strong planning was identified in candidates' work where careful consideration of language codes to represent genre, appeal to intended audience and communicate ideologies had been used. Key images, **secondary images, location shots**, and careful construction of **mise-en-scène, lighting and layering of images were seen in the most successful planning work**. In the strongest examples, planning clearly reflected a sense of cohesion as part of a wider **promotional campaign**.

The most successful magazine planning drafts constructed key features such as **mastheads, cover lines, main cover image and colour schemes** all to good effect to appeal to intended audiences. Language codes, were also given careful consideration and the best productions planned **brand identity** and underlying **ideology** consistently across the front page and additional pages constructing a strong sense of visual coherence, branding, and audience appeal.

Storyboards were most successful when they consisted of approximately **15–20 frames**, sufficient to represent the intended AV production and met the requirements of the specification and demonstrated an appropriate and wide-ranging application of media language knowledge and understanding. Successful storyboards included primarily, well drawn accurate visual representations of each frame, depicting genre conventions through mise-en-scene, camera angles, framing, lighting and representations of people and place. **Shot length** was thoughtfully planned and recorded, showing appropriate pacing for the intended sequence and transitions included within templates.

In addition, other **sound codes** were integrated to support narrative development, engage the audience, and reinforce genre conventions and representations of people and place. Where candidates were working in **pairs**, candidates' storyboards were individually constructed as required in the specification.

AO3 Production: Characteristics of Successful Work

Successful production artefacts met the requirements of the **production briefs** in full and demonstrated a high level of **creativity** and **technical competence** throughout.

Genre conventions were carefully considered—grounded in candidate’s research, planned effectively, and applied purposefully in the final production. A key strength in the most successful submissions was the clear **engagement of the candidate** to construct productions to appeal to their intended audiences with their chosen **genre, form, and content**.

In **print productions**, candidates showed strong awareness and excellent execution of technical elements such as **image composition, framing, focus, resolution, and lighting**. Choices around **font style, size, colour, and text placement** were made skilfully, enhancing both the aesthetic quality and audience appeal. Additionally, the **language used** was deliberately selected to engage the target audience and support the overall brand and message.

Similar strengths were evident in the **online** production option—although as in previous series, far fewer examples were seen during moderation, than the print and AV options. In successful work, candidates included appropriate and functional **interactive features** and used **video footage** to complement still images. These elements were expected and contributed meaningfully to the user experience.

Like print and AV productions—the most successful candidates consistently applied appropriate **original images, footage, sound, and text** to communicate meaning, engage audiences, and construct clear representations of people, places, events, and issues. In **audiovisual (AV) productions**, candidates produced engaging content with excellent **production values** from the most successful candidates. These pieces often showcased a strong sense of creativity, technical excellence, and a well-executed visual style.

Moderators saw some excellent and very good music videos which used a wide variety of **camera shots** effectively, supported by thoughtful **lighting** and an appropriate **editing** that aligned with the genre and narrative.

Sound codes—including dialogue, music, and effects—were securely handled across successful AV productions. Sound was used not only to support the narrative but also to synchronize creatively and technically with the footage, enhancing the overall impact of the production.

AO2 Reflective Analysis: Characteristics of Successful Work

Candidates who performed well in the **Reflective Analysis** component produced thoughtful reports and used media concepts to focus an evaluation of their production work. These responses demonstrated a clear communication of their understanding and consistently linked their production choices back to research findings and theoretical frameworks. Strong Reflective Analyses were clearly structured, stayed within the word count (500-750 words), effectively explaining and analysing creative and technical decisions. Good reflective analysis reports indicated concisely how production choices were influenced by research products and demonstrated a critical understanding of how media language was used to construct meaning and target audiences

Successful candidates provided insightful commentary on how **genre conventions** were applied or subverted, and how representations of people, places, and issues were constructed with intention.

Candidates often discussed how aspects such as **editing techniques**, **sound design**, **mise-en-scène**, or **camera work** were employed to support genre expectations and narrative coherence and construct representations to appeal to their audiences. These candidates also showed awareness of **audience positioning**, explaining how their texts engaged specific demographics through language, visuals, and content choices. The most successful Reflective Analyses went beyond a description of the production process—they evaluated it. Appropriate use of **technical terminology** was accurate, and any theoretical references added to the candidates' evaluations.

AO3 Research: Common Candidate Misconceptions and Areas for Improvement

Moderators noted several recurring misconceptions in candidate research submissions that limited achievement. It is important to emphasise that the inclusion of **secondary research**—such as **film synopses, reviews, or questionnaires**—is **not a requirement** of this specification and **cannot be awarded any marks**. The research requirements are clearly outlined on **page 21** of the specification and should be closely adhered to by centres.

While most research reports presented for moderation were appropriate, the message remains consistent: **task setting must be reviewed carefully** to ensure that candidates are guided towards meeting the criteria within the assessment grid.

AV, Print and Online research candidates should analyse two products comparable with their chosen production. Candidates who do not demonstrate this aspect of the specification requirements will be self-penalising.

Research that merely offers **generic background information** about chosen texts is **self-limiting**.

High-quality research is **individualised**, with candidates selecting their own texts to explore and demonstrate their understanding of **form, genre, and intended audience** in relation to the brief they are producing. This is particularly important when whole cohorts opt for the same brief for example, in the case of film all candidates develop film posters and DVD covers from the horror genre. Candidates **selecting the same film or DVD posters for research invariably** restricts their ability to show independent research.

Word Count Considerations: If the research report exceeds the word count, candidates should **synthesise findings** using the key media concepts, ensuring the final submission stays within the required word limit of **250-500 words**. According to the specification, where a submission **exceeds the word limit by more than 10%**, assessors **must not mark** the additional content. Only material falling within the limit (i.e., up to 550 words) can be credited. This was raised in previous Principal examiner's reports.

For AV Briefs: research should focus on **camerawork** or **editing** (depending on the candidate's production role in paired submissions). If a candidate is completing an **individual production**, both **camerawork and editing** can be researched and analysed. AV, Print and Online research candidates should analyse two products comparable with their chosen production. Candidates who do not demonstrate this aspect of the specification requirements will be self-penalising.

Research submissions are typically limited to **Band 1 or 2** when they rely on:

- Superficial, incomplete or basic textual identification
- Rely on descriptive accounts of media language without analysis
- Simple labelling of representation with no explicit reference to **genre codes, audience, or media concepts**

AO3 Planning: Common Candidate Misconceptions and Areas for Improvement

Key guidance for planning requirements can be found on page 21 of the specification. As in previous years Moderators identified several recurring issues in the planning component that limited candidates' access to higher bands. Centres are reminded planning requirements are outlined in the specification, and only these can be assessed. The inclusion of extraneous planning materials—such as montages, scripts, character costume designs, or photo edits—is not required by the specification and cannot be awarded marks. Outline flat plans with descriptive content and annotated draft plans, were generally limited to Band 2. Such approaches may demonstrate candidate's decision-making, but they do not meet the criteria set out in the mark scheme and therefore cannot be credited.

A small number of candidates continue to include planning explanations within the research component, rather than submitting planning evidence as a distinct and separate part of the NEA portfolio. This practice compromises assessment in both components, as candidates cannot be fully credited for either if the evidence is not clearly separated and relevant. Planning that is incomplete, partially developed, or inappropriately presented cannot be awarded above Band 2, and where such evidence received higher marks, this was considered overgenerous.

AO3 Production: Common Candidate Misconceptions and Areas for Improvement

Work that is incomplete or does not meet the brief cannot be awarded beyond Band 2. Candidates who do not give consideration and **apply a range of appropriate and relevant genre conventions to their production were less successful:**

This includes consideration of elements such as:

- Layout and spacing
- Typography and colour scheme
- Representation of people, places and issues that reflects planning and research findings

Creative and Technical Execution: Common weaknesses of **creative and technical execution** that affect marks include:

- Excessive dead space
- Poor cropping
- Low-resolution or pixelated images
- Layering
- Poor lighting level

For **AV Productions**, candidates may work **individually or in pairs**: In **paired productions**, one candidate is assessed for **camerawork** and the other for **editing**. In **individual productions**, the candidate is assessed on **both camerawork and editing**. It is essential that candidates declare the role they have undertaken on the accompanying declaration forms. Candidates are advised to carefully plan and execute these elements to fully realise their creative intent and address the brief effectively.

In **AV productions**, marks were often restricted to Band 2 or 3 due to:

- Limited use of varied **shot types**
- Lack of **transitions** or effective editing
- Poor **sound quality**, including issues with synchronisation, clarity, or mixing

Notable this year was a **reliance on software templates** (in both print/online and AV productions) This can result in work that lacks originality and impacts the candidate's ability to demonstrate individual creativity or technical proficiency. All software used must be declared on the Teacher/ Candidate form.

AO2 Reflective Analysis: Common Candidate Misconceptions and Areas for Improvement

This element of the NEA must demonstrate a clear evaluation of the production in relation to the two media texts researched. It is not an account of the production process or a list of improvements for future work.

Candidates are less successful if in their Reflective Analysis they do not focus on the most **relevant and impactful** elements of their production. Reports were self-limiting if they did not meet the allocated word count of 500 to 750 words. Under length reports often lack the depth needed to meet higher band descriptors and are self-penalising. Over length submissions that exceed the word count by more than 10% (i.e., over 825 words) will be capped. In accordance with the specification, any content beyond the word limit must not be marked.

Common Issues That Limit Marks

- Descriptive writing focused on how the production was made,
- General suggestions for improvement that lack critical analysis or relevance to assessment criteria
- Limited or vague reference to research texts, or superficial connections between research and production decision

These shortcomings prevent candidates from demonstrating the analytical insight and understanding required for Bands 3 and 4. Where candidates fail to reference their research effectively or do not demonstrate how it informed their work, are unlikely to achieve beyond Band 2 or 3. A focused, analytical approach that integrates understanding of the media concepts with production choices is essential to secure higher marks.

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-gcse>

See other useful contacts here: [Useful Contacts | WJEC](#)

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