



GCE Examiners' Report

Media Studies

AS/A2

Summer 2024

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
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. 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. 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.	For unitised specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)

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.

Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.wjec.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner WJEC

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Executive Summary

Candidates engaged confidently with the Unit 1 examination as learners had been well prepared by centres. A whole 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. Candidates were secure in their knowledge of set products in section B and section C and references to these set products were used well when required. A few candidates appeared to feel the pressure of time on the final question of the paper, where responses were sometimes limited by their brevity.

In Unit 2, moderators reported seeing some excellent work. Some centres still appear unaware that there had been updates to some briefs which can be found by downloading the current version of the specification. Very few centres submitted incomplete work for moderation, and there were very few rubric infringements. Most centres opted for Brief 1 or 3, with very few opting for Brief 2. More centres appear to be offering print rather than audio visual and some centres offered their candidates a choice. A significant minority of candidates exceeded the word limits for their Research and Reflective Analysis.

Unit 3 asked candidates to engage with questions which entailed knowledge of representation, social/historical contexts, 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. Candidates demonstrated 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 bolster responses. There was also a keen application of the unique media language used within each product to create meaning. However, there are several recommendations for centres, including that the modern magazines should be taught with acknowledgement of their digital distribution and format; that it is imperative that media contexts - social, cultural and historical - are taught with fealty to their definitions on page 12 of the specification; and candidates should continue to be encouraged to evaluate questions and recognise their polysemic nature.

In Unit 4, the majority of candidates engaged well with the different elements of the briefs and some wonderfully engaging work was produced. Candidates are being well-guided by teachers to produce work that addresses the requirements of the briefs and, in most cases, candidates met the requirements of their respective briefs. Where this was not the case, it was predominantly related to word counts being significantly over or under those stipulated in the Specification as well as the required number of images or word counts for articles not being met. Whilst the magazine brief remains the most popular there was a noticeable rise in the number of candidates opting for the television brief and some excellent audio-visual work was seen.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
Understanding the requirements of the specification for each unit	AS/A Level Media Studies Specification	The Specification details the requirements for each examined and NEA unit.
Media contexts in Television	Television in the global age: European and historical crime drama - Blended Learning (d3kp6tphcrvm0s.cloudfront.net)	The Guidance for Teaching is intended to support teachers in the delivery of the new WJEC GCE AS and A level in Media Studies specification and to guide them on the requirements of the qualification and the assessment process.
Media Contexts in Magazines	Resource WJEC Educational Resources Website	An extensive resource to support the teaching of A2 Media Studies, Unit 3, Section B, including critical perspectives.
Applying critical perspectives to television	Resource WJEC Educational Resources Website	A comprehensive set of resources, including related to critical perspectives, to support the teaching of the set television crime drama produced in Wales.
Applying critical perspectives to video games	https://resource.download.wjec.co.uk/vtc/2016-17/16-17_1-34/pdf/eng/unit3/1-critical-perspectives.pdf	A student-focused worksheet focusing on critical perspectives and video games,

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UNIT 1: INVESTIGATING THE MEDIA

Overview of the Unit

It is apparent from candidate performance in papers viewed that this year's Unit 1 examination was engaged with confidently overall as learners were familiar with the expectations and demands of each question and the requirements of the assessment objectives. From this it may be discerned that on the whole learners were well prepared for the paper by centres. Most candidates managed their time effectively across the three sections although a few candidates possibly felt the pressure of time on the final question of the paper. It was pleasing to see that a whole 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 can also be stated that candidates were secure in their knowledge of set products in section B and section C and references to these set products were used well when required. The paper as a whole 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. The specific highlights to be noted for future teaching and examination preparation follow.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.1 Explore how representations of ethnicity are constructed in the music video. [40]

In your answer you should consider:

- how and why stereotypes are challenged
- the audio, visual and technical codes
- the values, attitudes and messages 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.

Question 1 proved to be highly accessible as it allowed candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of a key area of the specification: representation with a focus on ethnicity. The bullet points in the question served to direct and focus responses, in relation to how and why stereotypes are challenged and to the role of media language in this. The third bullet point supported learners in their exploration of the deeper values, attitudes and messages communicated. The music video resource proved to be highly accessible for candidates as all candidates were able to engage with the media product in a purposeful way and across the range of assessment bands.

The vast majority of responses were of appropriate length for a 40-mark question and addressed the key aspects of the question. Responses in the higher bands were able to explore the representation of ethnicity confidently and often perceptively, using sophisticated subject specific language which helped them to articulate their knowledge of a challenging area of representation. Best responses also made links between the audio and visual codes to address how the representations were constructed and how stereotypes were in fact challenged.

Candidates were confident with animation as a form and were able to explore a range of media language elements such: camera shots, movement, editing, pace and mise-en-scène (settings, locations, costume, props) combined with a consideration of sound codes. The lyrics were particularly important to the *messages communicated* and best responses made links between the lyrics and the visual representations to address this.

Responses confidently engaged with the resource as a music video, often considering the codes and conventions of this video in relation to other music videos within a similar music genre and even in relation to the creative artist's wider output. Candidates were keen to highlight the intertextual references embedded within the visuals with many responses exploring the significance of them in relation to representations of ethnicity and messages communicated.

While critical perspectives were not explicitly required from the question itself it was pleasing to see the range of critical perspectives that candidates are being taught and which were being drawn on to enhance responses. The range of critical perspectives used included: Hall, both identity theory in relation to ethnicity, and reception analysis; Barthes, Gauntlett, Gerbner, van Zoonan, Todorov, Alvarado racial stereotyping theory; Goodwin music video theory and star theory. While some of these critical perspectives were beyond those specified at AS level many candidates were adept at incorporating what they had learnt in a purposeful manner.

It is possible to infer that candidates were the most confident with this question on the paper and had studied music video thoroughly in preparation for this section.

Section B: News in the Online Age

Q.2 (a) Explain how radio news producers target and reach their audiences. [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.

There were a range of ways in which candidates responded to the question regarding *target and reach* as they included points related to technological developments, producers' increasing use of social media to reach different audiences, traditional scheduling and the move towards a podcast format. Another approach in relation to *target* was from the perspective of the content of news programmes themselves and the ways in which the presenters formed connections with the targeted audiences through trust and credibility. All valid and relevant points linked to the question could be rewarded. Many candidates anchored their responses to set products to support their explanations and, although it is not necessary to apply knowledge for the AO1 assessment objective, using examples to support points made did help candidates to show their understanding.

Weaker responses were either too generalised and/or vague or ignored the *radio news producers* element of the question leading to points being made that were not relevant to their study of news. A part of the teaching towards this question it is advisable to encourage candidates to deconstruct the question so that the particular aspects of the question are prioritised and that specific points are made supported by clear explanation.

The majority of responses were of an appropriate length for a 10-mark question and a wide range relevant points were made in the best answers showing detailed and accurate knowledge of radio news.

Q.2 (b) Explore the representation of an event in a ‘hard’ news story.
Refer to the news website you have studied in your response. [20]

In your answer, you should consider:

- the codes and conventions of online news
- how meanings are communicated
- how audiences/users may respond.

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 how a hard news story had been represented and the bullet points guided candidates to explore the codes and conventions of online news; the meanings communicated and how audiences might be positioned to respond. The set product specified came from group 2 in the specification - news websites.

There were very few rubric infringements this year which was pleasing as candidates did refer to the correct product they had studied from this group. The majority of products studied were BBC news online and HuffPost with a few Wales online. There were a range of appropriate hard news stories studied in preparation for this section including Partygate, UK care scandal, Post Office inquiry, ongoing conflicts - Ukraine and Russia, and the death of Russian opposition activist Alexi Navalny to name the most common. While the range of stories were appropriate for the hard news component of this section some stories encountered are now quite old, over seven years in some instances and should be retired. More recent stories would likely engage the learners with the evolving nature of news and its dynamic relationship with audiences which is an important part of this topic.

Best answers explored the representation of the hard news story as the focus to their response and applied their knowledge of their set product considering the ways in which features of online news contributed to the representation of the story. For the top band descriptor, a *detailed exploration* is required and in the best responses there were detailed references to the ways in which the story was constructed including the specifics of language employed; images selected, the body of the report and the audio visuals and interviews embedded within. In addition, knowledge of the product was used to inform a consideration of how the story was represented in terms of the specific values or ethos of the news organisation which in turn impacted on how audiences/users responded.

Some candidate responses were too generalised even descriptive in the analysis of the story studied as there were too many broad points being made about the website features at the expense of how these featured contributed to the ways in which the story was represented. It seems that candidates were less confident in their ability to analyse the specific aspects of a news story on a news website compared to their ability to analyse newspapers for example from previous years. Moving forward it would be beneficial for learners to transfer the analytical skills they develop in relation to traditional print news products to online news products.

There was some purposeful application of critical perspectives such as Hall, particularly with regard to audience positioning, Barthes and Clay Shirky.

Section C: Film Industries – From Wales to Hollywood

Q.3 (a) Explain the advantages of Hollywood studio funding in the film industry. Refer to the Hollywood film you have studied to support your points. [10]

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

Responses should have demonstrated knowledge and understanding of Hollywood studio funding in the film industry through points related to the film product 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.

The vast majority of responses were able to show their knowledge and understanding of the Hollywood film industry and the advantages of studio funding in a purposeful way. Successful responses made a wide range of points related to film production in particular and used relevant references to the Hollywood film they had studied to support their points in an effective way. Some responses linked film marketing into their response showing the benefits of studio funding to the ability of film producers to target, attract and reach audiences. Responses showed that candidates had a firm grasp of the ways in which economic factors shaped both the film itself and its position in a global market. It was pleasing to read so many responses where it was clear that candidates knew their set products well and were able to use specific details to support the points that they made.

Overall, this question proved to be straightforward and accessible to nearly all candidates with very few exceptions.

Q.3 (b) Todorov argues that the way in which narratives are resolved can have ideological significance. Explore this idea in relation to the ending of the film made in Wales you have studied. [20]

In your answer you should consider:

- messages and values
- audience expectations of narrative structure

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 responses to this question were more varied in terms of quality. The question required that candidates show their knowledge and understanding of narrative structure and Todorov's theory of narrative through an analysis of the ending of the set product studied. The best responses addressed Todorov's theory explicitly, focused on a detailed analysis of the film's ending and explained the ideological meanings communicated through the film's resolution. It was good to read effective responses where links were made between the film's ending and the expectations set by the framework of genre for example a horror film, or an independent coming-of-age film. In these responses there was genuinely interesting points made and comprehensive understanding of the film studied.

Responses in the middle bands tended to outline the plot of the film, linking what happens in a fairly straightforward way to each part of the five stages of Todorov with only some loose attention to the film's ending. It could be useful to refer to earlier stages of the film's narrative in order to then closely consider the significance of the ending and this was done effectively in many responses but not all. Where candidates were unsure of the phrase *ideological significance* in the stem of the question (see Appendix A, p.59 of the specification) most were still able to use the first bullet point to consider the messages and values communicated. This led responses into an exploration of essentially what is communicated to audiences through the ending of the film and also how audiences might respond to the ending.

Less successful answers failed to address Todorov explicitly, which was asked for in the question, and showed only a superficial understanding of narrative sequence. This year, more than previous years, some answers in this last question of the paper were limited by brevity for a twenty-mark question. It is advisable that candidates are rehearsed in exam paper timings across the whole of the paper. Despite this there were well developed thorough and thoughtful consideration of Todorov and the films studied across the option range.

Summary of Key Points

Overall, the areas of the paper were taught well by centres as learners knew what was expected of them in terms of assessment objectives. There was also some strong use of critical perspectives across questions as learners were keen to demonstrate what they had learned, and they were able to adeptly apply these appropriately.

- In section B question 2a, candidates need to address all of the facets of a question in their response. The exam technique of deconstructing the question before answering is a good approach to take.
- In Section B question 2b, candidates should avoid generalising and instead use specific detail from their set products to support points made and close analysis.
- For exam preparation the practice of answering whole questions and whole papers in timed conditions would be beneficial.

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UNIT 2: CREATING A MEDIA PRODUCTION

Overview of the Unit

Moderators reported seeing some excellent work again this year. It was good to see that there were very few rubric infringements with most centres meeting the requirements of the Specification by selecting the appropriate brief and option for their candidates. Some centres still seemed unaware that there had been updates to some briefs – these can be found by downloading the current version of the specification. Very few centres submitted incomplete work for moderation. Most centres opted for Brief 1 or 3, with very few opting for Brief 2. More centres appear to be offering print rather than audio visual and some centres offered their candidates a choice. A significant minority of candidates exceeded the word limits for their Research and Reflective Analysis. Centres must adhere to the requirements on page 54 of the Specification and penalise candidates who exceed the limit. 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. Tags like media work, coursework, David's work, Sarah's final draft etc. are not helpful.

Cover sheets were accurately completed in the main, making it easier to see how assessment had been applied. However, there were several centres who had submitted cover sheets for moderation with signatures for Section C (and Section D, where applicable) missing. Both of these are essential. Detailed summative comments or annotation on the work itself would be helpful to the moderation process so that moderators can better understand how centres have awarded marks.

Where more than one assessor has assessed work, there must be explicit evidence of internal moderation.

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.

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 some examples of candidates researching texts unrelated to their Production. As mentioned above, there were several examples of candidates who had far exceeded the upper word limit (4000 words plus in some cases) however centre comments and the marks awarded did not reflect this. Work that falls outside the specified word limit cannot be assessed.

Theory must be relevant and well anchored, and assessment must take into consideration the relevance and application of it.

Some candidates did not focus on all the media concepts assessed in this element – genre, representation and audience.

With reference to Brief 1, Option 2 and Brief 3, Option 2, too many candidates researched only magazine adverts or theatrical film posters, rather than researching other forms that they are required to produce (for example, digital banner posters).

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.

Planning

Overall, the Planning seen by moderators was relevant, appropriate and of a good quality, However, there were some issues at a significant minority of centres. Centres are reminded that only storyboards can be assessed for the AV briefs; nothing else. Some centres had included extraneous information (e.g. mood boards, plot outlines etc) which cannot be assessed. Storyboards are pre-production tasks and should therefore not contain stills from the Production. 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 e.g. annotations. Moderators reported seeing centre comments that seemed to suggest that inadmissible material had been considered when assessment took place. Draft pages should comprise of images and text but should be more developed than basic diagrams showing elements such as 'Title', 'Credit block' etc and bear a resemblance to the finished Production. Most centres had presented well-developed planning that reflected the research findings of their candidates.

Production

Once again, many candidates produced some wonderfully creative texts – for example some brilliant music videos and some extremely well-crafted TV drama texts were seen by Moderators. There is still a tendency amongst a significant minority of centres to over reward Production work, and centres are advised that care must be taken when applying the mark scheme. There are three distinct columns under which candidates may be awarded marks and the requirements should also be linked back to the candidate's selected brief. For example, a candidate who has produced advertisements for Brief 1, Option 2 must have applied an understanding of representations of gender and age to be awarded (good) marks under column 2. An advertising campaign with no people in it cannot achieve this. Technical skills were also generously awarded in some cases, particularly where pixelated and blurred images were used.

Centre are reminded that candidates must use original photographs in their print work (5 or 6 as a minimum, depending on the brief), and many candidates need to pay more attention to the industry and audience requirements of their brief. For example, too many horror films (Brief 3, Option 2) continue to have 18 certificates when the specified audience is ages 16 – 25 and the young professional audience for Brief 1, Option 2 was sometimes ignored. Candidates opting for Brief 2 must pay close attention to the details in column 3.

Reflective Analysis

The Reflective Analysis has a very specific purpose. Candidates must analyse and evaluate their Production work in relation to the 3 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. 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. Some candidates referenced texts not studied in their Research.

Candidates who called their Reflective Analysis a 'Reflective Analysis' tended to produce much better work than those who called it an evaluation, a write-up or even a report. They were often more focused and coherent.

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 Assessment is outlined under three separate columns in the mark scheme, but candidates do not have to be awarded within the same band for each column. Indeed, this may well not be the case.
- 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.

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UNIT 3 A2: MEDIA IN THE GLOBAL AGE

Overview of the Unit

The 2024 Unit 3 paper provided a variety of questions which encompassed the A2 Media Studies specification. Candidates were instructed to engage with questions which entailed knowledge of representation, social/historical contexts, audience and critical perspectives. Centres understood the fundamental requirements of the specification and 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 bolster 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 Explore how genre conventions are represented and/or subverted in crime drama. Refer 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 'should have an awareness' of how television 'evolves within the media and how it changes in response to industry and audience factors, as well as social, cultural and historical contexts', along with an 'understanding of television as an evolving media form'. Answers were often founded upon representations within the products, with more successful responses linking these representations to genre contexts, i.e., Saga repeating the conventions of the driven, fixated detective, while her gender challenges the patriarchal archetype. Candidates applied detailed and accurate knowledge of the Scandi-Noir sub-genre, which was successfully used to evaluate the use of conventions in both the European and Welsh Dramas, with the latter recognised as a Celtic Noir. More successful candidates referred in knowledgeable detail to media language: how the camera, sound or other technical codes were used to communicate genre. It was clear that centres had devoted teaching time to evaluation of mise-en-scene and how the idiosyncratic use of media language by each product creates meaning.

The Bridge was the favoured European product, with *The Killing* second. The female leads of each were compared to Mathias, with a general sense that the European products provided more progressive representations of authority within genre frameworks than that of *Hinterland*. Across the cohort, candidates brought in Neale to strong effect when explaining the dynamic nature of genre, and more successful responses honoured the genre aspect of the question in detail. Some candidates appropriately drew upon marketing materials to support their exploration of how the promise of genre pleasure is used to attract audiences.

Q.1.2 'Genres change over time to reflect social and cultural contexts.' Explore this statement with relevance to *Hinterland* and the historical crime drama you have studied. [30]

This question aimed to cover 'how media products are shaped or informed by particular cultural influences such as genres, styles, movements and the work of other media producers' and 'how audience responses to and interpretations of media products reflect social, cultural and historical contexts'. As was the case last year, when candidates chose a historical crime drama to compare with *Hinterland*, *Prime Suspect* was the most selected. The question was open and as such was accessible to weaker candidates, who gained access to the question via the visible gender politics of the products. More confident candidates probed further, examining how the crimes in chosen products happened to girls and women, and the ways in which this both reflected social contexts while serving genre expectations. Other areas explored within *Hinterland* were the representations of institutional abuse, with candidates tactfully acknowledging the real-life exposure of such events, along with the ostensibly middle-class lifestyle that Catrin presents ultimately proven to be a poignant untruth born of mandated aspiration. While most responses chose to discuss gender, employing a well taught understanding of hooks and Van Zoonen to do so, the products allowed for varied approaches to this question. Other candidates fashioned well-developed arguments concerning Cracker's evaluation of class, racism and the ramifications of the Hillsborough disaster. An occasional but well used selection, responses featuring *Touching Fear* referred to tabloid fears of child abduction. Again, more sophisticated answers engaged with deep analysis of media language and representation, while others approached the question applying straightforward, but suitably selected, plot details. Purposeful application of critical theory was often characteristic of a successful response.

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 Levi Strauss argues that meaning within a media product is created through oppositions. Discuss this statement with reference to the online mainstream magazine and historical magazines 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 study a range of critical perspectives to inform and support their analysis of media products and processes’ and ‘how media language, codes, conventions and techniques create meanings’ within the framework of Strauss’s axiom. Candidates applied Levi Strauss fluently, with an encouraging variety of approaches to this deliberately multifaceted question. *Cosmopolitan* and *Men’s Health* were the principal choices for the mainstream magazine, while the historical choice was evenly represented. Candidates were agile when applying theory, adapting their approach depending on their particular focus. Some responses evaluated the aspirational media of magazines and discussed the transformative ideologies of each product (readers are invited to self-actualise through the exercises regimented by *Men’s Health*, whereas *Cosmopolitan* offers similarly metamorphic fashion, sex and cosmetic features). More developed responses strove to engage with a fuller application of Levi Strauss, implicating the final bullet point of the perspective when discussing how the potential resolution of binary oppositions ‘can have particular ideological significance’. Furthermore, more successful candidates engaged in deeper media analysis of the texts and used other critical perspectives to support their answers. Occasionally, there were analytical references to print iterations of the products wherein candidates deconstructed front covers, despite page 36 of the specification clearly stating that the contemporary magazines studied should be online versions. This teaching approach is disappointing as, due to the evolving and increasingly digital nature of magazines, it does not necessarily facilitate potential examination responses.

Q.2.2 Stuart Hall states that media products are encoded by producers and decoded by audiences. Discuss this statement with reference to the mainstream and non-mainstream online magazines you have studied. [30]

Candidates approached this question either via Hall’s maxim that ‘the relationship between concepts and signs is governed by codes’ and ‘communication is a process involving encoding by producers and decoding by audiences’, or, in the case of less able candidates, a broader yet valid application of reception theory which nonetheless honoured the ‘audience’ aspect of the question. This question and Hall were suited to the mainstream and non-mainstream oppositional nature of the products, and responses appropriately acknowledged how ideologies were encoded by mainstream and non-mainstream online magazines with some more ambitious candidates using close application of theory to argue that the conceptual space between mainstream and non-mainstream is perhaps smaller than each product would ostensibly present. Responses used clear application of detail from products and developed a variety of arguments, with a focus on the coded presentation of gender within magazine products. More sophisticated candidates wrote about how media institutions exploit the idiosyncratic needs of audiences via advertising and idealised representations.

Critical perspectives beyond Hall were used judiciously to further responses, and, once again, more successful candidates engaged in deeper media analysis of the texts and the way in which media language and mode of address communicate meaning to audiences. Candidates who evaluated the characteristic use of copy within the mode of address often offered perceptive and detailed responses. There was a similar 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 Explore how stereotypes can be used positively and/or negatively within video games. In your answer refer to the one action-led franchise game and the one game in another genre you have studied. [30]

This was a straightforward question which was predicated upon the hyperbolic constructions of video game media. Candidates often reviewed the verisimilitude of graphics and gaming, with more ambitious responses linking such discussions to Baudrillard (in comparison to previous series, this critical perspective was increasingly, and agreeably, conspicuous in this year's responses). Some more able candidates drew on perspectives beyond the WJEC specified theories (Hesmondhalgh) to reinforce their ideas. *GTA* was a very popular choice here, although there were some very interesting explorations of *Tomb Raider*, too: the latter focusing on how representations of Lara Croft have evolved due to cultural contexts and technological change. Candidates were motivated by representations from the global majority and what was argued as patriarchal dominance in products ranging from *GTA* to *Cooking Mama*. Pleasingly, across the cohort candidates seemed invested in this question, and provided detailed arguments which were supported by learned terminology and an understanding of media concepts. Most candidates evaluated the negative aspects of stereotypes, with a smaller amount establishing an argument for how video games consciously use stereotypes in a satirical manner. 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 far do representations of gender reflect their social contexts? In your answer refer to the 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. Some candidates looked at media supplementary to the video game product, such as the advertising campaigns for *GTA* and *Tomb Raider*, which provided material for fruitful discussion. Across all bands, there was a prevalence of critical perspectives applied, from relevant feminist theory to other perspectives such as Gauntlett and Hall. A favoured perspective was Bandura, who candidates engaged with in order to develop arguments regarding interaction of media products and contexts. Candidates who applied the idiosyncratic use of media language within products and explored the multi-platform nature (playthroughs on social media, modification) 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:

- The modern magazines should be taught with acknowledgement of their digital distribution and format.
- It is imperative that media contexts - social, cultural and historical - are taught with fealty to their definitions on page 12 of the specification.
- 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.

MEDIA STUDIES

GCE

Summer 2024

UNIT 4 A2: CREATING A CROSS-MEDIA PRODUCTION

Overview of the Unit

It is encouraging to see that Unit 4 is continuing to allow candidates the opportunity to apply their knowledge and understanding of the key concepts underpinning the Media Studies Framework to their own independent research and production work. Once again, this year, the majority of candidates engaged well with the different elements of the briefs and some wonderfully engaging work was evident. It is clear that candidates are being well-guided by teachers to produce work that addresses the requirements of the briefs. In most cases, candidates met the requirements of their respective briefs. Where this was not the case, it was predominantly related to word counts being significantly over or under those stipulated in the Specification as well as the required number of images or word counts for articles not being met. Whilst the magazine brief remains the most popular there was a noticeable rise in the number of candidates opting for the television brief and some excellent audio-visual work was seen. Where candidates have produced engaging audio-visual work centres should be encouraged to enter this work for the WJEC Moving Image Awards, which is an excellent platform to showcase the work of budding filmmakers. Centres are also reminded that a wealth of exemplar material for Unit 4 is available on the WJEC Secure Website and can be used for internal standardisation exercises in order to maintain parity with national assessment standards.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Administration

There was plenty of evidence of good administrative practice once again this year including clearly labelled files, organised candidate folders, detailed cover sheets and personalised candidate comments which justified awarding. Most centres met the May 15th deadline, where this had not been possible, centres applied for a formal extension from the WJEC. The majority of centres successfully uploaded the work of all candidates using appropriate file formats and moderators reported far less issues with missing work this year; only a small number of centres did not upload moderation samples in the specified file formats; this led to some interruption to the moderation process and necessitated candidates' NEA portfolios to be re submitted.

Whilst it is no longer a requirement to annotate individual pieces of work (but much appreciated by the moderator), the expectation is that the comments on the cover sheets should reference the mark grid and fully reflect how marks were awarded with brief examples from the work itself. Without this, it difficult for moderators to understand how the assessment criteria have been applied. Some centres took a minimalistic approach when providing supporting commentary to justify the marks awarded; this approach does little to help direct the moderator to how individual candidate's specific outcomes have met the assessment criteria.

Generic assessor comments lifted word-for-word from the specification without any personalisation to the individual candidate were still prevalent this year but to a much lesser degree.

It is a requirement that the coversheets are completed in detail by both assessors and candidates, although not all centres complied and, in these instances, cover sheets were incomplete. There was still some evidence this year, of candidates omitting to complete the *Completion of Cross-Media Production* section which should include details of products, including their length, or the URL of a website has been produced, which is an important element of contextualising the work.

Centres should note that candidates are required to complete the GDPR Section of the Coversheet (Section C). WJEC appreciates all candidates who permit use of their work for exemplar and Professional Learning events, as this allows us to continue to support teachers in their teaching and assessment of NEA work.

Centres should note that if candidates tick the box to state that they do not give permission for the work to be used as exemplar then they do not need to complete the participant details section.

Any work lost due to technical issues at the centre must be reported to WJEC via the relevant JCQ form (Form 15) as marks unsupported by assessed work cannot be submitted for moderation. Most centres where this issue applied did this, but not all.

Investigative Research

The purpose of the Investigative Research is to allow candidates to develop and apply their knowledge and understanding of a specific media concept within a magazine or television product of their choice. Candidates should then apply the genre conventions of the media text and form they have chosen from the set brief to construct their own productions. The most effective research investigations utilized the full word count of 1,250-1,500 words to focus on either genre, narrative or representation issues, referred to at least two relevant critical perspectives and included a bibliography of at least 5 sources. Excellent research work was evidenced once again this year which showed purpose and a high level of engagement and were a pleasure to read.

There were common characteristics that were frequently observed in the most effective research work. In such work, research focused on **one** product comparable to candidates' chosen Production, the product selected for research was comparable to those produced by publishers/broadcasters stipulated in the respective briefs, and the investigation focussed on one edition of a magazine or episode of a TV programme which was analysed effectively.

The focus of the research was on one key concept of either genre, narrative, or representation as outlined in the Specification. Similarly, the use of clearly referenced sources such as textbooks, journals, essays and academically credible websites were cited in a bibliography of at least 5 items; the best work used the Harvard referencing system or similar referencing systems, including footnotes. Critical perspectives were effectively and appropriately applied to candidates' primary research, and a wide range of research was employed including the rise of original theorists' work referenced as expected in an academic investigation with very few candidates drawing research purely from inappropriate, on-line sources such as Wikipedia, Slide share and blogs.

Perceptive arguments and conclusions constructed via extended and most often, academic research which demonstrated a thorough understanding of a key media concept.

Common issues were identified through the moderation process which limited the effectiveness of the Investigative Research and, in some cases, created problems throughout all elements of candidates' work were:

- Research that focused on an overview/history of a product; this was more prominent where candidates had chosen the magazine brief.
- Placing a stronger emphasis on an overview of industry, rather than product analysis.
- Semiotic analysis of the research product as opposed to investigating the selected concept, resulting in general textual analysis. This approach often lacked a more detailed exploration e.g. not enough consideration of how representations had been constructed more specifically through dress codes, expression codes and gesture/pose.
- An exploration of more than one key concept in in Investigation.
- Using multiple texts for research.
- Description rather than analysis, for example, description of the basic visual codes or a simple narration of the plot at the expense of exploration and analysis of the technical features of the texts.
- Critical perspectives which had been applied but not explored in enough detail to reach the higher assessment bands.
- Reference to candidates' intentions for their own Production.
- Investigations that were too brief and therefore self-limiting due to a lack of exploration of the concept chosen for research.
- Investigations which were significantly over the word count; assessment is only applicable to work within 1,250-1500 words.

Development Outline

For the most part candidates Development Outlines tended to adhere to the requirements of the Specification and were fairly well written. Over-rewarding was most prominent where candidates offered a submission of research findings. The focus of the Development Outline must be on the candidates' plans for their production, informed by their research. It was pleasing to see that centres had responded to advice given in moderator reports last year and submitted the Development Outline and the Investigative Research are two discreet tasks. There was no evidence of merging these elements, as seen in previous series with a minority of centres. Assessment was, on the whole, fairly accurate with the majority placed in the correct bands.

The most effective work outlined clearly the key findings from the Investigative Research either in bullet point or continuous prose. Either was acceptable. It also showed a clear sense of how the findings would be developed into the Production. Development Outlines in the top band were very detailed and specific about how the research findings would be developed in the productions. In this work, word limits were adhered to which helped to focus candidates.

Issues which limited the effectiveness of the Development Outline included:

- The omission of a justification of the rationale behind how the research findings would be used to inform the productions to show how those decisions were reached.
- Submission of additional planning pieces such as scripts, storyboards, mock ups and mood boards. Such candidates' development outlines were jeopardised by the confusing number of artefacts submitted.
- An overview of their research findings which did not exemplify how it would develop their cross-media production in order to demonstrate their creative intentions.
- References to additional research not discussed in the Investigative Research.

Cross-Media Production

Some impressive production work was seen again this year from both the magazine and television briefs. In such instances, the standard of each element of the cross-media production were consistently excellent, both technically and creatively and adhered to all the requirements set out in the brief. Band 5 work also typically reflected sophisticated knowledge and understanding of media language derived from highly relevant research where the intentions from the Development Outline were realised. There is generally greater over-rewarding for the Production element where codes and conventions of the genre and form are not as high as the marks awarded compared to national standards. Many centres are placing candidates within the correct band but awarding marks too highly within that band.

The most effective Productions demonstrated a highly competent realisation of the brief, with all elements produced to an equal standard and a detailed development of research findings and conclusions into the production artefact/s. They were convincing in their use of the relevant genre conventions of the media forms produced, including their industry contexts. Detailed intentions in the Development Outline helped achieve this. They included representations which were purposefully constructed through sustained use of appropriate media language. There was creative application of research into the productions and some very accomplished and lively use of media language was seen in the higher assessment bands where there was a high sense of investment across each element of the production. The levels of technical competence were appropriate for the marks awarded, for example, effective editing, appropriate shot choice, effective layout and design. In the most successful audio-visual productions, the genre codes were effectively constructed through mise-en-scene, character representations and audience address using effective narrative and production codes and values. In print work, the required amount of original footage and images was included.

Common issues which limited the effectiveness of the Production included:

- Research findings and conclusions only tenuously applied; most often where candidates failed to investigate an appropriate comparable product, or more than one comparable product. In these cases, the production was not representative of the genre/form studied for research.
- Relevant codes and conventions of the media forms produced not adhered to, most commonly with the print-based productions, where there were issues such as missing page numbers, pricing or edition numbers; often due to candidates not having analysed appropriate texts in their Investigative Research.
- Lower levels of technical competence than the specification requires.
- An insufficient number of original images or footage.
- Candidates failing to produce all elements of the brief or producing them to an unequal standard.
- Research and the final productions not always clearly linked.

Critical Analysis

The Critical Analysis requires candidates to analyse how the media concept researched in their Investigative Research is reflected in their Cross-Media Production whilst providing reference to relevant critical perspectives. The Critical Analysis serves a specific purpose. It is not an evaluation of the production process and final production pieces. The focus should be on how candidates' chosen key concept has been used in the production and the reasons for the approach taken in creating each element; as well as a justification as to how key aspects of the production meet the industry and audience requirements of the brief. Candidates who evaluate their own production work with no reference to these elements are not adhering to the Specification requirements. Where this was the case, assessment was generous, though overall this element was generally accurately assessed. Where there was over-rewarding, candidates, for the most part had been placed in the correct bands.

The most effective Critical Analyses demonstrated a focussed application of knowledge and understanding of media language, representations, industries, and audiences and how they impacted the production. In the higher assessment bands this was often reflected through an analysis of how theoretical perspectives were relevant to chosen key concept. There was sustained use of Media Language, effective communication of ideas with appropriately selected and applied Critical Perspectives, and an effective ability to evaluate how the chosen concept was reflected in the production work and the reasons for the approach taken in relation to the research findings and conclusions. For example, layout and design in the magazine pages, or how and why representations have been presented in a particular way in the A/V product.

Less effective Critical Analyses were characterised by:

- The introduction and discussion of new research / texts which did not appear in the investigation.
- A shift of focus from the initial research and or a lack of explicit reference to the research undertaken.
- The lack of explicit reference to the concept researched which often led to a lack of analysis of that concept, as required by the Specification.
- A discussion of key concepts and or critical perspectives which was not sustained.
- A lack of explicit reference to the Cross-Media Production.
- Discussion of the production processes such as choice of main image, selection of mise-en-scene elements or hindrances during the creation of the print work or filming and editing in the case of audio-visual work. There was less evidence this year of referring to the production process which is encouraging.
- A consideration of areas for improvement in each element of the production, often discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the work. Again, moderators reported that these cases are in decline, compared to previous series.

Summary of Key Points

- In order to fully meet the requirements of Unit 4, candidates must adhere to the requirements of their selected brief in order to fully meet the requirements of the Specification and the assessment criteria.
- A consistent feature of all aspects of candidates' work in the higher assessment bands featured sustained and detailed use of media language, including terminology in each written element of Unit 4.
- The most frequent over-rewarding once again this year was in relation to the Investigative Research and Production.
- The word count of 1,250 – 1,500 words was adhered to in most moderated samples. Should candidates exceed this limit, there is a 10% tolerance for work that is over the specified limits for time and length and candidates can only be credited for work that falls within the stipulated limits for time and length.
- A very small minority of candidates did not include a bibliography, as required. Whilst footnotes are acceptable as a source of academic referencing, they should not replace the bibliography which features at least 5 sources.
- Additional planning pieces such as scripts, storyboards, mock ups, and mood boards should not be uploaded with the sample and should not be assessed.
- Once again, this year, Productions tended to be over-rewarded for inconsistent use of conventions of the form or for lack of technical competence and included blurred or pixilated images, cover lines cropped off the page, text covering the main image, placement of images and copy in print work. In some cases, where the codes and conventions of the form produced were not apparent, it was possibly because candidates had not investigated an appropriate comparable product. This was particular to print-based work.
- Some candidates failed to adhere to the required number of original images and / or word count for the articles in print work which also resulted in significant over-rewarding in some cases.
- Candidates who achieved the higher assessment bands had paid particular attention to the technical skill highlighted in those levels.
- Over-rewarding of audio-visual work tended to be related to candidates not adhering to the generic conventions of the comparable product analysed as part of their investigative research.
- An issue in a small number of centres was the submission of incomplete folders where the second part of the CMP 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.
- Centres are reminded that learners are not permitted to base the investigative research on any of the set products they have studied for Unit 3 as noted on page 46 of the Specification. Please note that this applies to the **set product** studied for Unit 3, not the **edition** studied.

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 4302

Email: media@wjec.co.uk

Qualification webpage: [AS/A Level Media Studies \(wjec.co.uk\)](https://www.wjec.co.uk/AS/A-Level-Media-Studies)

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

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