



A-LEVEL MEDIA STUDIES

7572/2 Written Paper
Report on the Examination

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Overview

Students and centres are to be congratulated on their preparation for this assessment, which is clearly the culmination of a great deal of hard and focused work. This was particularly impressive given that the first time through, a specification is always likely to bring challenges.

On the evidence of the responses to the paper, the reformed A-level in Media Studies has provided a clear framework for the study of the principal theoretical approaches of the subject, with many students having a sound understanding of key concepts and ideas. Across the questions, students demonstrated an appropriate balance of knowledge and understanding of the theoretical frameworks (which used to be known as the key concepts), specific theorists and ideas, and were able to use the Close Study Products (CSPs) to demonstrate this understanding.

Students appeared to cope well with the demands of the questions in terms of the instructions relating to how many CSPs to use, which theories or frameworks to address as well as noting command words. It was very positive to see that, on the whole, students avoided just regurgitating 'facts' about the CSPs, using them instead to provide evaluations and arguments about the frameworks, which are the focus of the assessment.

It is important that students are able to develop arguments and to make judgements about theoretical approaches and concepts, something that is required in achieving the higher levels. In their studies and in preparing for the exam, students should note that in extended response questions they are rewarded for the ability to construct and develop a sustained line of reasoning which is coherent, relevant, substantiated and logically structured.

Students should be reassured that there is enough space provided in the answer booklet to produce a very successful response. Students should make sure their work is focused on the question and that it is analytical rather than descriptive.

The following provides information on the responses to each question. Please note that there is also detailed indicative content for each question included in the mark scheme available on the secure area of the AQA website.

Question 1

The question assessed AO2. Students needed to:

- apply knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework of media studies to analyse media products through the use of academic theories (9 marks).

In this question, students were tested on their knowledge and understanding of the framework of Media Language through their ability to analyse an unseen media product, using semiotic terms and approaches. The contextual information is deliberately kept to a minimum and no prior knowledge of the product is required.

Students demonstrated very good skills of analysis. They were particularly confident in the discussion of denotation and connotation, slightly less so with the discussion of how myth could be constructed in the image. Students did not need to provide definitions of the terms, but rather to show their understanding through the analysis and application.

Students engaged well with the image and discussed a range of connotations around genre, masculinity and patriotism. This provided a solid foundation from which to analyse how myths (particularly around gender and nationalism) are created through the normalisation of particular worldviews. Some students read the image as a comment on contemporary US political contexts while others pointed to the mixture of time periods constructed. The most successful work was concise and focused, utilising subject specific terminology in a relevant way.

Question 2

This question assessed AO1 1b, AO2 2 and AO2 3. Students needed to:

- demonstrate understanding of the theoretical framework of media (10 marks)
- apply knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework of media to:
- evaluate academic theories (10 marks)
- make judgements and draw conclusions (5 marks).

This meant that students needed to make explicit reference to the effects theory (identified in the question) and evaluate its validity within the wider theoretical framework of audience. There was also the instruction to refer to two out of the three video game CSPs. Where students discussed only one or all three this tended to be self-penalising as they were unable to address all the requirements of the question. Students tended to follow the instruction to ‘refer’ to (rather than to analyse) the CSPs and used them to give evidence for their arguments around the validity – or otherwise – of effects theory.

Students were clearly comfortable with this area of the theoretical framework – and with the CSPs – providing thoughtful, perceptive responses to the question. The focus of the question was to assess students’ knowledge and understanding of the effects theory and, through reference to their CSPs, draw judgements and conclusions as to how valid the claims made by the theories are. No specific theorists were specified in the question (and it was possible for students to demonstrate understanding without referencing specific theorists) but students tended to focus on the work of Bandura and Gerbner as a foundation for these ideas about audience.

Successful answers tended to show how a proponent of effects theories would apply the ideas to the CSPs and then to evaluate this model through considering limitations to the theories and proposing other ways of considering the audience. The concept of repetition (as suggested by cultivation theory) and the reinforcement of ideological readings was effectively used with reference to *The Sims*. Ideas about social learning and hypodermic syringe models were used to consider the effects of violence in *Tomb Raider* and *Metroid*.

Successful responses were astute in pointing out that effects theories rely on seeing the audience as a mass, behaving in a passive way, while later audience research would suggest a more active, differentiated audience. Several answers referred to effects theories as being outmoded and out of date. It was entirely appropriate to refer to other audience theories – such as reception – as part of the process of drawing judgments and conclusions.

To access the higher levels, students needed to integrate the theoretical approach into their answers, rather than setting out the theory and then providing a discussion (sometimes only partially linked to the framework) of the CSPs.

It was important for students to address the question of the validity of the theory. There was no 'right' answer to this but students needed to make a convincing case for whichever argument they chose. There were instances of students outlining all the theoretical approaches used for the study of video games, rather than being more discerning.

While issues of representation were relevant in some cases for analysing audience effects, there was a danger of answers becoming too focused on representation issues, which left little room for exploration of effects theories. Lack of question focus was also evident in answers that speculated on possible audience responses without putting these in the context of the specified theory.

One area of concern was how real life case studies were being utilised, nearly always as evidence for the validity of effects theories. It is clear that these case studies, such as high school shootings in the US and the murder of James Bulger, can be relevant in teaching this part of the framework – particularly through studying the media coverage of the events. However, too often students were repeating as fact what are actually highly contentious and often unproven claims about the role of the media in these cases.

Question 3

This question assessed AO2 1 and AO2 3. Students needed to:

- apply knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework of media to analyse media products, including in relation to their contexts (15 marks)
- apply knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework of media to make judgements and draw conclusions (10 marks).

This meant that students needed to draw on their knowledge of the relationship between media products and the social and cultural contexts that produced them. They also needed to evaluate the extent to which they agreed with the statement. Students recognised the need to demonstrate their understanding through an analysis of the CSPs and showed very good skills of close reading, drawing on their work in media language.

The question required a focus on the theoretical framework of representation within social and cultural contexts. The dominant approach to this was to draw on issues of gender expectations and standards of beauty within society, with, broadly, students arguing for *Men's Health* as conforming to social and cultural contexts and *Oh Comely* subverting them. Evidence for these arguments was found in the analysis of Vin Diesel's body language, physique and mode of address, along with useful references to his *Fast and Furious* persona. *Oh Comely's* diverse representation of women (which was sometimes perceptively linked to bell hooks's theory of intersectionality) on the cover and within specific story examples (transgender, body image, FGM etc) was convincingly used as evidence for its subversion of context.

Students could of course make different arguments about the relationship of the CSPs to the statement. Some answers very successfully linked the argument to industry, showing how Hearst as a mainstream conglomerate had a very different relationship to contexts than the independent Iceberg. At times, this was linked to the argument that profits are made for conglomerates through reinforcing rather than questioning contexts.

Many students also challenged the dominant argument around *Men's Health*, seeing it instead as challenging social and cultural contexts. Evidence for this was found in the representation of the male body as spectacle, which had previously been associated with women, and in the emphasis

on mental as well as physical health. Some students referred to Vin Diesel as a challenge to mainstream representations of celebrity due to his ethnicity.

Less frequent but particularly thoughtful were the responses that questioned *Oh Comely's* role in subverting social and cultural contexts. Here, students noted the focus on traditionally female topics of beauty and fashion, the way in which the imagery often followed the conventions of mainstream women's magazines to construct a different kind of unobtainable beauty. Some commented on the upper middle class nature of the magazine – and those producing it – suggesting it was for a niche audience that had limited connection to wider society.

While it was clearly relevant to focus on gender issues there was a danger at times that answers only made implicit reference to social and cultural contexts and this needed to be discussed more explicitly in places. It was appropriate to analyse the CSPs in the context of other magazines (this was often done with the discussion of *Oh Comely*) but in some cases, this became the dominant approach, leading to a very narrow definition of contexts that became more about industry than wider social and cultural issues.

Question 4

This question assessed AO1 1a, AO1 1b and AO2 3. Students needed to:

- demonstrate knowledge of the theoretical framework of media (5 marks)
- demonstrate understanding of the theoretical framework of media (10 marks)
- apply knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework of media to make judgements and draw conclusions (10 marks).

Question 4 is identified on the front cover of the exam paper as the synoptic question, this means that students are rewarded for their ability to draw together different areas of knowledge and understanding from across the full course of study. This includes the four theoretical frameworks and the social, political and cultural contexts. There is no requirement (and it would be impossible!) to cover all these areas but students should consider how their answers draw on work from across their course. Media Studies is, by its nature, a synoptic subject so lends itself to this approach.

In response to the question on the way in which industries target audiences nationally and globally, synopticity was evident in the way in which students used the CSPs to discuss subject matter through genre, narrative and representations. This was also linked to the industry framework with students examining the institutional contexts. There was no requirement to cover both areas (subject matter and distribution) equally but students could not achieve the higher levels if they only referred to one area.

There seemed to be a good spread of TV CSPs studied across centres, with no pairing dominating. All the choices allowed students to engage productively with the question. As with the other questions on the paper there was no 'right' answer to the question and responses ranged from seeing the contemporary TV industry as targeting both or one or other of the designated audiences. Evidence tended to focus on seeing the use of recognisable genres and 'universal' themes of family and loss, as ways of targeting audiences across borders. Within this, the most effective responses evaluated the reasons for this approach, astutely linking subject matter to industry. These examples included strategies of transnational co-productions developed in order to maximise audience, ideas which were often integrated with discussion of theories of the culture industry.

Responses also argued that some products made a more deliberate attempt to focus on national audiences, in the case of *Capital* this was demonstrated through the analysis of the construction of a diverse representation of London. *No Offence* was used very thoughtfully as an example of an auteur production, with Paul Abbott attempting to work outside of the pressures of contemporary media conglomerates and their need to address global audiences. While students routinely argued that audiences are targeted by the familiar, some very perceptive responses challenged this, suggesting that the appeal of *No Offence* to audiences beyond the national was its very focus on regional representations; making it a source of exoticism to non-national audiences.

This was probably the question where there was the most risk that students would slip into the retelling of 'facts' about the TV programmes they had studied – particularly in terms of industry context. This could be avoided by an evaluative approach which considered the reasons for industries targeting national and global audiences, discussing how this might be part of the contemporary development of the media as a global industry.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.