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# A-LEVEL

# MEDIA STUDIES

7572/1: Paper 1 - Media 1  
Report on the Examination

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## Introduction

Once again we must offer congratulations to teachers and students who threw themselves enthusiastically and diligently into this still very unfamiliar paper. Despite the step away from exams in recent years there was plenty of evidence of sound preparation, informed by our detailed feedback to the first run in 2019. None of the further advice and guidance offered here takes away from the fact that the vast majority of candidates managed this paper well, have sound knowledge of the theoretical framework, produced engaged responses to the CSPs and had relevant things to say about the issues.

This paper places a number of demands on students within the space of the two hours allowed. Therefore it is vital to approach this demanding test in a disciplined fashion and most candidates were able to do this. It is good therefore to report that examiners saw little evidence of candidates missing questions or failing to finish. The amount of space allocated to each question gives an indication of approximately how much is required for each question. Candidates should be reminded that the mark tariff gives an indication of the time that should sensibly be allocated to each section: pro rata Section A might sensibly need 70 minutes and Section B, 50 minutes.

This is a reliable paper which is mainly concerned to explore knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework: those building blocks of the subject that used to be known as ‘key concepts’. This is largely done either by analysis of unseen material or by responding with opinions and arguments to stated arguments and opinions. The focus is on having an answer and providing an appropriate amount of selected evidence. This has implications for our collective understanding of the CSPs on this paper; CSPs that might be better described as *Case Study Products* since their principal use is to act selectively as evidence of knowledge of the theoretical framework. Paper 2 requires in-depth study of CSPs. Here, a much lighter touch is required as is the ability to be selective. The CSPs provide security and reassurance because they support practically every question on Paper 1 but *how* they are employed depends always on the question and nothing is more important than answering the precise question set. The best answers were invariably those that selected from their CSP knowledge base rather than simply presenting all of it and this was a double advantage since these candidates were also more efficient and in this case efficiency is extremely valuable.

All of the above reinforces three useful principles used in the setting of this exam:

- There are no questions on the CSPs. The questions in Section A are on Media Language and/or Media Representation. The questions in Section B are on Media Industries and/ or Media Audiences.
- Chiefly CSPs in this paper are mainly used as points of reference to provide sources of evidence to exemplify knowledge and understanding of the question’s subject. not knowledge of the CSPs.
- On the rare occasions when analysis of a CSP is required, the task includes a further source such as a previously unseen text or an enabling idea. In these analysis tasks we are looking for something to be actively done in the moment rather than the reproduction of learnt information.

The structure of the paper is designed to reassure and support students who know in advance which CSPs are to be employed in each section. This settled shape should encourage teachers to see that the paper aims to be a reliable test of the foundations of the subject. The paper is also a fairly precise test of specific content which means that there is no real need to address specific theories and certainly not theorists unless the question explicitly asks for this.

### Section A – Question 1

This is a Media Language question.

This is essentially a semiotics question but it is not necessary to read it as such as long as the focus was on non-verbal elements acting together to create meanings. It's the ideal way to begin a Media Studies exam with straightforward media language analysis, responding to a manageable text. It was handled confidently by most students. The key here is that answers can analyse the unseen text from any perspective they like as long as the focus is on the non-verbal 'elements' and how meaning is made. Some students dealt in specifically semiotic terms about 'codes' whilst others wrote about what was going on in this text with regard to colour, body language, appearance, props and design. We hope that the unseen text (which will always be a print text or equivalent) will always offer an engaging and proportionate challenge, as 'WOW' certainly did.

There were no problems at all with this question, indeed there was an awful lot of 'good' work. Even here, though, theorists were often name-checked, although there's clearly not time (let alone need).

### Section A – Question 2

This is a Media Representation question.

The emphasis here is on a couple of the contexts of the media we now are asked to explicitly consider: social and historical. The question is about representation and what it might reveal about social and historical contexts; in other words how representations carry information about the world around them.

This is the follow up question for the paper's unseen text which links the unseen with a CSP. The question always conforms to the same basic pattern, with the variations being the chosen CSP, the focused representation (in this case 'stereotypes') and the contexts. This is not a comparative study but students are asked to 'refer to' both texts. Disappointingly a relatively large number of students referred only to the CSP, *Score* and not to the unseen text. This reinforces the need for students to read the question carefully and to be familiar with the consistent paper structure.

Aside from the occasional failure to cover both texts, this question was well done. Students offered a critical commentary on historical developments (known and implied) in social attitudes towards gender (principally) as revealed through stereotypes (and countertypes). A largely efficient focus on the contexts and content ensured good marks though inevitably in limited time this was often a case of 'less is more'. With *Score* specifically knowledge of context worked best when it was selected for this case rather than for 'all seasons'. This is not a matter of indicative content but rather of informed critical response. A good example might be the decriminalisation of homosexuality which many students informed us was contemporary with *Score*'s release. However, only some made this point in relation to the issue of representation in this question, arguing that the advert's strident presentation of the heterosexual alpha male might have been a response to the Sexual Offences Act. This piece of information was not required by the question but was valuable only when effectively used in an active interpretation.

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The readings of 'WOW' and the eighties were pretty straightforward, the only difference being that students had neither 'studied' this period nor indeed lived through it. Given that the question asks for a consideration of two texts and two contexts in little more than fifteen minutes (pro rata), modest expectations are both appropriate and realistic.

### **Section A – Question 3**

This is a Media Language question.

This is formally the Structuralism question, but there's no need for the student to even know that as long as they're tracking the stories of our culture through and in the text (syntagmatically and paradigmatically). This is most likely to be ideologically focused on gender, sexuality, consumerism or even celebrity! The CSP is a common source of evidence.

This was another question done very well partly, perhaps, because the question fitted so well with this CSP as a source of evidence. Students were particular good at engaging in the discussion about 'society's values', often because they clearly cared about these issues. They were equally good at reading these in the iconography of this slick contemporary text, reading cultural meanings in these dynamic performances through their grammatical structures. Mostly, the focus was on genre and sexuality, though there were also clever readings based around consumerism and celebrity. Some even explored the status of reality itself by exploring the simulated and hyper-real character of the mythological New York.

### **Section A – Question 4**

This is a Media Representation question

This is a very focused question which asks for the detailed interrogation of a theoretical concept while exploring a CSP that also deals with exploring this concept. This is a very safe question so it's a case of who goes deeper and gets properly involved. The key is to evaluate the usefulness of these ideas when applied to a familiar text.

Given again an obviously productive relationship between the issue of the question and the chosen CSP, students were mostly able to give Gilroy's ideas a decent airing, though specific knowledge and understanding of 'Double Consciousness' naturally varied. All knew the CSP and most used it with discrimination; this has been a rich text for so many students, and the proof is that it is very rarely reduced to obviously prepared notes. The fact that the question allowed most students to address issues of ethnic identity intelligently using both Gilroy and the CSP while still allowing clear discrimination across a range of positive responses, made this a successful question.

I think it's fair to say that the students who made most headway with the theoretical challenge offered by Paul Gilroy in the question were those who saw 'Double Consciousness' (a term derived from Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk*) in the context of Gilroy's specific arguments about the Black Atlantic and the diaspora, which sees Black identity as problematically multinational and transient but also dynamic, restless and vital. These elements are very easy to find in Common's sophisticated polemic as realised in the monochrome prison-set video that demands 'no excessive noise'. Given the importance of music to Black experience, expression and community, the CSP both encapsulates and demonstrates his argument.

Wisely, students seemed to successfully spend more time on these high marks questions.

## Section B

The transition to Section B is marked by a couple of low tariff questions.

### Section B – Question 5.1

This is a Media Audiences question.

It is a low tariff knowledge-based question which checks knowledge of useful terms from the specification. Here the 'issue' was interactivity and a little judgment was needed to evaluate the difference between 'terrestrial TV' and 'Video console games' in this respect. The rest seems pretty straightforward. On this occasion there was gratifyingly fewer examples of the 'wild guess' strategy.

### Section B – Question 5.2

This is a Media Industries question.

Two or three sentences were required here to describe cultural imperialism and identify an example.

A working definition of cultural imperialism is as follows: *the exercise of domination through media in cultural relationships in which the values, practices, and meanings of a powerful foreign culture are imposed upon one or more native cultures.*

Remarkably few students were able to give a sufficient definition. Though the knowledge-based questions are to some extent 'lucky dips' taken from the lists of enabling ideas relating to industries and audiences, it has always been the intention to focus on 'mainstream' rather than marginal content (fandom and PSB come to mind).

Unfortunately, cultural imperialism did not meet these expectations and few students scored marks here.

### Section B – Question 6

This is a Media Industries question.

The most straightforward question possible: explain how this film you were asked to study for its marketing, was marketed.

I think it would be useful to use this question to emphasise a general point about the scope of this paper. The film CSP *Blinded by the Light* is not to be consumed as a film text but rather used to exemplify the issues surrounding Media Industries. This means that students will require information about the production and distribution: a collection largely of 'facts' (budget, appearance at Sundance, bidding war, promotion on social media, box office performance etc).

Having this information about the CSP should ensure that students are able to progress beyond the 'Basic Response' band (1-3 marks) so the question is how to best progress across the 4-9 mark range (levels 2 & 3). Of course one way to make some progress is to flood your response with as much of this CSP information as possible but this likely to be a very inefficient way to

accumulate marks and one unlikely to allow access to the top level. Time would be much better spent on selecting information about the CSP which can be best employed addressing the specific requirements of the question which on this occasion stressed two elements: the fact of the CSP being a low-budget British film and the need to appeal to global audiences.

Students showed good understanding of how this low budget British film sought a world-wide audience via Sundance and Springsteen, New Jersey and Luton. This was an object lesson in how this paper works: answer the question and provide a little evidence selected from all you know.

### **Section B – Question 7**

This is a Media Audiences question.

This question was about the changing media landscape and its impact on producers audiences using extremely 'amenable' CSPs operating an age apart. The idea is to make a judgement having tested out the proposition against the two CSPs.

This question discriminated less well than A4 which is probably about its positioning as the final question most students do, and therefore the most likely to be against the clock. It's also a less challenging question than A4 partly because dealing with two CSPs takes up much of the students' time and the time pressure tended to make the use of knowledge about the CSPs more indiscriminate. This was, and from previous experience usually is, particularly the case with *The War of the Worlds*, a CSP that arrives with a rich array of contextual information about this media event, irrespective of the question context. Here it tended to lead to a straightforward account of an historical development from audience passivity to audience activity or from no particular producer-audience relationship in 1938 to a fully functioning one in 2022's Newsbeat, with its highly interactive audience. These were perfectly feasible positions to take on the issue but what made 'good' answers 'excellent' was their willingness to really argue through, around and sometimes against these assumptions.

The fact there were very few missing answers speaks volume for the success of students in negotiating the paper and the amount of extra paper used even in this final question once again reinforces their resilience under pressure of time.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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