



A-LEVEL MEDIA STUDIES

7572/1 Written
Report on the Examination

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Introduction

Once again we must offer congratulations to teachers and students. Though we must remain mindful of the possible continued disruption to some cohorts, there was plenty of evidence of sound preparation, informed by our feedback on the first two 7572/1 papers sat (and those which appeared as further examples during the pandemic). The vast majority of students have managed this paper well, attempting to answer the questions set. They have sound knowledge of the theoretical framework, have produced engaged responses to the CSPs and have things to say about most of the issues. It is pleasing to report that fewer questions were skipped and the students' ability to manage their time seems to be improving.

The focus of this paper is to assess knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework. This is largely done by either analysis of unseen material or responding with opinions and arguments to stated arguments and opinions. As we have said previously, this paper asks questions which require students to have an answer and provide some evidence in support of it.

Perhaps the biggest problem comes from overprepared CSPs and indiscriminate use of theories/theorists' names. Knowledge of the CSPs naturally provides security and reassurance but students should be actively using them rather, as in some cases, producing somewhat prepared readings. I intend to repeat some of the principles presented in 2019 because they are still relevant and appear to be addressing this issue:

- 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 are used in this paper as points of reference to provide common sources of evidence to exemplify knowledge and understanding of the subject (not knowledge of the CSPs).
- On the rare occasions when analysis of a CSP is required, it is prompted by a further source, an unseen text or an enabling idea and thus is something to be actively done during the examination.

It is also worth reiterating the following points from previous reports:

- The structure of the paper is designed to reassure and support students who know in advance which CSPs can 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 focused on specific content from the specification which means that there is no real need to address specific theories and certainly not theorists unless they are specifically addressed in the question.
- Students should continue to plan their time in the exam carefully, spending approximately 70 minutes on Section A and 50 minutes on Section B. We saw little evidence of students missing questions or failing to finish.

Section A – Question 1

This is a Media Language question.

The challenge of this question was to answer a Media Language question rather a Representation question when the two are essentially in practice ‘co-existent’. A semiotic approach helps but it is not necessary as such as long as the focus is on specific choices which construct meanings and lead inevitably to issues of representation.

This proved as ever to be a good starter question for students to apply knowledge and make relevant and meaningful, if sometimes quite generalised, comments about historical representations based on an unseen text from the 1950s. The unseen text worked very well and students were not marked on their presumptions, speculations and interpretations of which particular meanings might be created but entirely on how media language worked to create them. This is what a media language question is charged with doing and some students unwittingly rehearsed question two by spending too much time on issues of representation. In addition, this focus often drew in unnecessary amounts of theory around Feminism and gender representation. The performance overall was very good so this is fine tuning. as long as students avoid any temptation to over-complicate the question.

A few students read ‘language’ as relating to only words. However, most were able to deal with the codes and conventions at work here and identify the dominant signifiers and significant paradigms at work in the construction of the sign chain. The semiotic language was not required and most were happier with discussions regarding composition and colour.

Section A – Question 2

This is a Media Representation question.

The emphasis here is on a couple of the explicit contexts we now are asked to consider: social and cultural.

This is a question about representation and what it might reveal about social and cultural contexts: in other words how representations carry information about the world around them. The CSP and unseen are vital for this to be possible.

This question links an unseen text with a CSP. The question is always the same structurally with the variations being the CSP, the focused representation (in this case ‘gender’) and the contexts. This is not a comparative study but students are asked to ‘refer to’ both texts. In the equivalent question last year, a significant number of students failed to address the unseen text. Though the wording is always explicit in this regard we took the decision this time to embolden **Figure 1** and hopefully this, alongside support from teachers in the classroom, was responsible for a much better general response. However, despite all of this, there are possibly still up to 20% of students limiting their marks in this way.

Given the context of writing responses in exam conditions, I am always impressed by students’ ability to cover two texts, two contexts and an issue of representation. The quality of responses was impressive, with the overall average mark for this question higher than the average mark for the paper. The combination of texts and exactly the contexts in which you’d want to discuss them certainly helped but the notion of context often appears challenging.

Knowledge of the CSP was generally well demonstrated and most students successfully focused on gender and, slightly less relevantly, on ethnicity. Good evidence of knowledge gained from study was demonstrated, especially by students looking at the CSP through the lens of Judith Butler: in other words by selecting from approaches to the CSP that they had used in class a perspective that helped answer the question. Historical context was also evident.

Section A – Question 3

This is a Media Language/ Representation question.

This is firstly a question which isolates an ‘enabling idea’ in order to test familiarity with it both in and outside of a context (crudely, whether it does enable critical action). It also can be for some an invitation to explore the idea in negotiation of it and interaction with it.

This probably felt like the most challenging question on the paper, though most students rose to this challenge well enough to push the average mark about the mean for the paper as a whole. There appeared to be few students who were comfortable dealing with hyper-realism in the way required by the question. However, these theories are in themselves challenging.

The key then is to understand the CSP as an arch example not of how things were in the sixties but of a simulated reality: one composed of simulacra, representations shorn of ‘originals’ and offering a fictionalised sense of the real replete with ideological significance. Of course this might centre on issues of gender, or of colonialism in a ‘Carry on Bond’ sort of way but it holds no mirror up to nature. There were game attempts from anybody who started with what’s there to see.

Unfortunately, too many students applied a more lay reading of realism and evaluated how ‘realistic’ the advertisement’s narrative is: the notion of spraying more and getting more! Responses were largely defined by their ability to understand the concept of hyperreality accurately by showing what it might be. A firm understanding was required to reach Level 3. Those who interpreted the concept as being ‘unrealistic’ or ‘a fantasy’ were offering a simpler, lower level of interpretation usually less grounded in language.

Section A – Question 4

This is a Media Representation question

By contrast to Question Three this is a very open question with a soft theoretical focus. We can expect a lean into Gauntlett’s work (as specified) and his ‘pick and mix’ approach but the question is open to everyone whether Gauntlett features or not (he doesn’t need to). This leaves the field open for a speculation around how audiences might use the CSP which will inevitably open up questions about the audience itself. This should offer a genuine opportunity for an ‘extended response’ at least in terms of room for a little development of argument.

This was probably the most convincingly answered of the seven questions, although some students made a semiotic reading of the video rather than considering issues of identity. That said, this question demonstrated that students were able to marshal evidence from the CSP effectively to make their points.

This question was generally well done and a strength for most students who seemed well prepared for this. Work on Gilroy was helpful and successfully supplemented the students’ responses to Gauntlett’s ideas on identity and media. Though there was no need to specifically reference the details of Gauntlett’s theories, those who did, particularly with reference to ‘collective identity’,

invariably made progress. The key though was the CSP's power in seeming to allow a range of students to identify a range of exemplifying details. Most of these extended responses seemed to be well fitted to the contexts of time and space.

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 Industries question which assesses knowledge of key terms from the specification. Here the 'issue' was the implications of a neo-liberal approach to media industries as a multiple-choice question which offered six statement options: three representing the approach and three opposing it. A considerable number of students recognised that there were two coherent sets of three statements, one correct and one incorrect. Unfortunately, slightly more students chose the incorrect set than the correct set.

Section B – Question 5.2

This is a Media Industries question.

Here, two or three sentences are required to describe vertical integration. Four possible points are described in the mark scheme.

The term 'vertical integration' worked well here since the majority of students had a good or better grasp of it and, even more, recognised the general context. Inevitably some seemed to mix up vertical and horizontal integration in their response but still managed to get a mark. It was more difficult to reward those students who confused vertical integration and conglomeration. Though examples were not required they usually helped more than they hindered.

Section B – Question 6

This is a Media Industries question.

Responses to this question offered well-prepared, broad, factual answers. Students who could identify and discuss the reasons - economic and otherwise - for using traditional film marketing techniques scored well and it was often legitimate to put traditional techniques in the context of the internet. Clearly where 'posters' are posted online there is no infringement of the spirit here of 'traditional' but even for these 'digital natives' for whom putting out Tweets is now a tradition, it seems, there is room for misinterpretation. Given the job is to use the CSP as a case study through which to explore, in this case, 'marketing', there clearly is a need to recognise that trailers and festivals and star 'power' are more established forms of promotion than Facebook.

Section B – Question 7

This is a Media Industries question.

This was the question that students struggled with the most though there was clearly knowledge and engagement with the two CSPs and an awareness of the relationship between them.

Many students did not appear to have fully grasped the question and the debate it suggested. Some students interpreted the term 'free press' to mean free (as in 'free of charge') newspapers. Some students saw it as a question about removing all legal regulation of the press, or about making the press free from government controls and other outside interference. Regardless, many students had difficulty engaging in what is a fundamental discussion around media and democracy. Many did make good use of case studies to discuss press bias, regulation and freedom, which was still a legitimate approach. Weaker students misread the question as suggesting that news and news sources should be free of charge to allow news to be accessed and consumed freely by all.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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