
GCSE **MEDIA STUDIES**

8572/2 Written
Report on the Examination

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Overview

Many of the improvements noted in last year's report have been consolidated. Students continue to show improved understanding of the demands of this paper and this was reflected by an improved average mark, with the mean rising to just over 40. Students are well-prepared and have a better understanding of how to approach the questions and tasks of the Media Two paper. Fewer students are misinterpreting the questions or skipping questions completely.

This was the first examination to deal with a newly introduced set of Close Study Products (CSPs) and it appears that all the new CSPs that featured here were well received. I saw no evidence that any of the now-defunct CSPs were being taught. It was really gratifying to see so many responses drawing on a very thorough knowledge of City of Magpies, Blackpink's How You Like That and the Kiss FM Breakfast Show.

Needless to say, there are still many areas ripe for improvement. The mean is still below half marks. Many students appear to be unfamiliar with the language of Media Studies; the 'Subject Specific Terminology', as we call it in the mark scheme. Examples of such terms in this year's paper were genre, niche audience, CGI and mise-en-scène. It would be unrealistic to expect students to learn the glossary of terms off by heart, but this is clearly an area in which they could improve. A course in Media Studies should also be an immersion in the language of the subject.

Many answers reflected the improved knowledge and understanding of the CSPs noted above. This is certainly a cause for celebration, however Media Studies is not a course in study of the CSPs. Rather, it is a subject that uses CSPs to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the ideas in the Theoretical Framework including the contexts of the media, the ability to analyse and evaluate media products and debates. This aspect was often overlooked by students who spent far too much time explaining 'what happens' in CSPs or evaluating them in their own terms as, for example, 'exciting', 'boring' or 'eye-catching'.

Q 1.1 and 1.2

Briefly define the term 'CGI'.

Give **one** example of CGI in the extract.

Computer Generated Imagery was an acceptable definition as was any other definition with a reference to the role of computers or IT or editing software in the creation of special effects. However, answers that referred only to effects or editing without some attempt to acknowledge the role of computers or technology or software were not regarded as sufficiently specific to earn a mark.

With only two marks at stake, students are advised to be very brief in answering these two questions.

The only clear-cut example of CGI in the extract is Lyra's daemon, Pantalaimon or Pan in the form of a magpie. A one word reference to any of these was acceptable, as was 'bird' or any reasonably close approximation to a magpie such as crow, raven or blackbird. Some misidentifications such as 'the chicken' were considered a little too wide of the mark.

70% of students scored 1 mark for Q 1.1 and slightly more scored one mark for 1.2.

Q 1.3

How is 'mise-en-scène' used to create meanings in the extract? (8 marks)

Evidence from responses to Q 1.3 suggests that mise-en-scène is a fairly well understood concept. Just under 40% of responses scored marks in the top two levels. Those students with a thorough grasp were inevitably able to find examples and associate meanings and were thus able to gain marks in Level 4. Three (or more) contrasting and effective examples, such as the following, normally secured marks in the top level:

- Set dressing. The run-down nature of the town, articles (fruit, packages) strewn about suggest a sense of abandonment, the absence of adults or of eeriness.
- Costume. The contrasting costumes worn by Will (contemporary), Lyra and the two girls (strange, old-fashioned) reinforces the strangeness of Cittagazza or the different worlds of the characters.
- Performance/NVC. Paola's halting speech and wide, unblinking eyes communicate the horror of the Spectres.

Many over-extended the idea of mise-en-scène to include, for example, camera movement or non-diegetic music. Although there were no penalties for including such examples, it did mean that students often penalised themselves by focusing too much time and attention on material of limited relevance.

Weaker responses often resorted to guessing the meaning of mise-en-scène or to analysing the extract in very general terms. Others simply described the extract with little or no attempt to associate meanings with components of the text.

Q 1.4

'The City of Magpies' is aimed at a niche audience of Science Fiction/ Science Fantasy genre fans.'

How far does an analysis of the extract show this to be true? (12 marks)

Rather more so than with 1.3, this question played to the strengths of many students, with just under half scoring marks in the top two levels. Rather worryingly, though, about 13 % of students secured only 2 or fewer marks, suggesting that more than one in ten of those entered have no real knowledge or understanding of one of the most basic of media studies concepts: genre.

Good answers were able to identify many SF/SF genre characteristics in the extract. Some, to their credit, made an attempt to distinguish between science fiction and science fantasy rather than treating them as a unified hybrid genre. Many excellent responses also dealt with the implications of the word 'niche' in the question. On occasions, this meant a flat-out disagreement with the title by arguing that the extract containing no discernible evidence of SF/SF and was much better seen as an example of other genres such as Action/Adventure or Teen Drama. More nuanced responses acknowledged the SF/SF elements in the extract, but argued that these were supplemented by other familiar genre tropes in order to appeal to a mainstream audience as well as a 'niche audience of Science Fiction/ Science Fantasy genre fans.' Others took these 'fans' to mean those that had been drawn to the product from the books or from the first series, bringing with them their own particular set of genre expectations. All of these approaches carried the potential to form excellent, well-argued responses.

Weaker answers often identified valid evidence such as the presence of Spectres or the daemon. However, they were unable to proceed much beyond a list of these in order to explain why or to what extent these would appeal to genre fans.

A few answers incorporated examples from elsewhere in the episode, sometimes ignoring the extract completely. Examiners were unable to reward these examples.

Q 2

'Social and cultural contexts always influence the representation of gender in television drama.'
How far do you agree with this statement?

This was the first and best answered of the three 20 mark questions. Over a third of answers scored marks in the top two levels and over 10% scored marks in Level 4.

Students clearly enjoy writing about the two television CSPs and most were able to recognise the contrasting representations of gender in the two products. It is gratifying to see that the idea of contexts of the media is well understood and proficiently handled by most.

There were a number of equally legitimate approaches to Q2, but most opted for a linear approach dealing first with An Unearthly Child and then with A City of Magpies. Whilst some characterised 1963's first Dr. Who as a straightforward representation of a sexist and patriarchal society, others offered a more nuanced response by pointing out some relatively progressive aspects of Susan and, to a lesser extent, Barbara as characters. Good knowledge was exhibited of the early sixties' context with useful observations about the dominant ideological expectations of men's and women's roles. It was rather more difficult to establish the relevance of the Space Race or the Cold War, but many answers referred to them anyway.

Good answers discussed representations of both masculinity and femininity in the two products. Many argued that 'traditional' stereotypes of gender were subverted in City of Magpies. There were some particularly good arguments about Will's character as someone who exhibits a caring and compassionate side to his nature, often deferring to Lyra. Mrs. Coulter also featured prominently, with some arguing that she, too, subverted traditional stereotypes as a quintessential villain, whilst others suggested that she merely reinforced the negative aspects of a femme fatale.

Surprisingly, fewer responses dealt in detail with contemporary social and cultural contexts than with those of the sixties. However, a number referred to the BBC's commitments to diversity and its role in promoting rather than merely reflecting changed values in the representation of gender.

Weaker answers often overlooked the critical 'make judgements and form conclusions' aspect of the question by simply describing the two products with only limited consideration of gender. Others included evaluative comments, but extended the scope of the question to include other aspects of representation as well as or, in the worst cases, instead of keeping the focus on gender.

Q 3

Give **two** different examples of audience categories that newspapers may use.

This question was answered significantly better than its 2022 equivalent. On that occasion, the key term was 'convergence', so we now know that many more students are familiar with audience categories than with media convergence. This year, over 60% scored 1 mark and about 75% scored one or two marks. Most of the 0 mark group offered either no response or suggested categories that would not be used by newspapers, for example 'passive audience' or 'newspaper fans'.

Q 4

'Newspapers don't tell readers what to think. Readers make up their own minds about what newspaper stories mean to them.'

How far does an analysis of the two newspaper items (**Figure 1** and **Figure 2**) support this point of view?

Answer with reference to:

- passive and active audiences.
- codes and conventions of newspapers. (20 marks)

Last year's Q4 focused on news values and this proved to be a concept unfamiliar to the majority of students. Happily, the switch of focus to the audience was much better received and the mean mark rose substantially from 6 marks to 10. About 20% of students received Level 4 marks and around 45% achieved Level 3 or 4. The two 'answer with reference to ...' prompts were addressed by most answers and it is clear that audience theory is well taught and widely understood. It has been a criticism of some recent papers that the stimulus material was confusing or not sufficiently easy to read. That problem seems to have been addressed on this occasion and there was no evidence of misunderstanding.

Given that students do not, by and large, read print newspapers as a matter of choice, the institutional knowledge and understanding of The Times and the Daily Mirror was impressive. The great majority of responses were able to recognise the distinctly contrasting elements of the two pieces and align these with the different target readerships. The uses and gratification theory or reception theories were used successfully to develop discussions of active and passive audiences.

Weaker answers appeared unfamiliar with the two CSPs, as if encountering them for the first time and often resorting to lengthy direct quotation with only limited analysis of the two products.

Q 5

‘With so much ‘fake news’, propaganda and bias in the media, newspapers should simply report the truth.’

How far do you agree with this statement?

Answer with reference to:

- The Times and the Daily Mirror (Close Study Products) (20 marks)

Q5 is the last question in the final piece of assessment, the conclusion of the GCSE Media Studies course. In many ways, we should like to see students ‘signing off’ by advancing some of the ideas they have developed in response to the specification. Answers that did this effortlessly met the synoptic requirement to ‘draw together knowledge and understanding from across the full course of study’. By posing an apparently simple dichotomy between ‘fake news, propaganda and biases on the one hand, and ‘the truth’ on the other, this year’s Q5 could not have engaged with a debate more central to the mission of media studies. It was an opportunity for students to show what they think about the need for critical self-defences as they enjoy the benefits of instant, mass and largely unregulated communications.

Those students achieving Level 4 certainly rose to this challenge with sophisticated discussions of issues raised by the question. These answers often wrestled with the difficulties in differentiating between fact, opinion and fiction; pointing out that our expectations are very often determined by the context and genre of a media product. Many more, including the one in three who achieved Level 3 or above, made relevant and well-informed points about the ownership, political orientation and editorial direction of the two newspaper CSPs, often linking these to conclusions about the statement in the question.

Not all judgements and conclusions, though, were guided by the need for critical awareness. Many offered versions of the argument that ‘newspapers cannot afford to tell the truth, because that would make them boring and unprofitable’ or, in another popular conclusion, ‘all newspapers would be the same’ if they reported truthfully. Others argued that there is no real distinction to be made between news and fake news; it’s all a matter of perception.

These judgements and conclusions were often rewarded because evidence and argument were produced in support of them. However, they seem to express a certain pessimism in relation to the media, especially the news and information media. There seems, then, to be a widespread view that news media are not entirely to be trusted, and this fits in with the sort of ‘critical self-defence’ outlined above.

Nevertheless, there is a great deal of pleasure in reading answers that express the fulfilment and enjoyment that so many students, thanks entirely to their teachers, have derived from their GCSE media courses.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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