



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

Media Studies

MEST1

(Specification 2570)

Unit 1: Investigating Media

Report on the Examination

Further copies of this Report on the Examination are available from: aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2011 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

Copyright

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334).
Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

This was the sixth examination on Unit 1 Investigating Media (MEST1) for the AQA GCE Media Studies specification which has been running since September 2008. There were 10404 candidates who took the examination this series.

Section A: Texts, Concepts and Contexts

The vast majority of centres and their candidates have now clearly acclimatised themselves to the demands of Section A. Most responses were appropriately succinct and focused. Many were able to achieve a high hit-rate of ideas and close reference to the unseen text thus ensuring a level three or above. Stamina remains an issue for some candidates although there was far less evidence of responses collapsing completely by question four. Far fewer responses were theory-lead and if/when media theories were used they were often applied well to the question at hand. One key concern though for many candidates was to ensure that they took note of the key concept heading of each question and that their answer was actually relevant to this area. Many either repeated ideas from other question/concept areas or produced irrelevant responses because of an inappropriate concept being explored. A valuable lesson to be learnt for many is to make certain that during the note-taking stage of the exam, ideas are generated for each question in relation to the specific key concept heading.

Question 1: Media Forms

This was once again the best answered question, with well over a third of candidates achieving a level three or above. Many responses showed sound understanding of media techniques such as lighting, transitions, camerawork, sound and mise-en-scene. Slightly less secure, however, was use of media terminology. Candidates on the whole seem comfortable with the difference between diegetic and non-diegetic sound but less assured when describing shot types and editing.

Unfortunately less successful candidates, although showing sound understanding of media language were unable to focus on how techniques were used to compress time. Narrative theory was a useful aid here, with some applying theories such as Todorov to consider the narrative closure of the advertisement.

Many candidates unfortunately decided not to focus on media forms at all, instead using a range of other concepts (often representation or audience) to analyse the text in a general way rather than answering the question at hand. The best example of this was the ever-popular reference to the colour red (as worn by the lead character throughout). Rather than relating this to how it aided the audience's understanding of the compression of time, many just linked it to representation through its connotations of passion and love. An interesting observation but largely irrelevant in this case.

Question 2: Media Institutions

This question was also fairly well-answered by candidates with just under a third achieving level three or above. The majority of responses were secure in their knowledge of what brand image stood for (most commenting on family values) but many had difficulties with commenting on how these values were communicated through the textual construction of the advertisement (in order to achieve a level three). Less successful answers tended to focus purely on the appearance of the products sold by *John Lewis* rather than the values promoted.

Question 3: Media Representations

Again this was a fairly well-answered question with over a third of responses achieving a level three or above. Successful responses were able to show how the representation of femininity was constructed in the advertisement. Weaker responses though, tended to just describe the life of the actual woman in the advertisement rather than showing a wider understanding of how media texts construct gender representations.

There was less evidence of textual detail in many responses (as perhaps candidates who had not made detailed notes during the viewings had by now forgotten key moments). Such responses in turn tended to latch desperately onto the examination paper's introduction merely repeating ideas and sometimes actual quotations from *BlogSpot* and *Mumsnet*. However, many level four responses used the information provided well. They were able to successfully navigate between the conflicting interpretations of the advertisement and the contradictory representations on offer. Stereotyping was in turn alluded to (particularly the 1950s housewife) and wider discussions of feminism developed. Analyses of how female representation was strongly linked to age and class within the advertisement were also effectively produced.

Question 4: Media Audiences

This was unfortunately the least well-answered question with only just over a quarter of candidates achieving a level three or above. The defining characteristic of successful responses was their ability to consider the pleasures provided by the advertisement itself rather than the brand. Many candidates developed ideas more in keeping with question two, identifying *John Lewis*' values (most often related to family) and linking this to audience response. Another common approach was to merely focus on the loyalty that *John Lewis* provided the consumer, apparently shown through the range of products (particularly clothing) featured in the text.

More successful responses were able to isolate pleasures that the advertisement provided such as nostalgia, aspiration, high emotion and narrative compression. Theories were also applied well, most notably Uses and Gratifications, Altman's Genre Pleasures and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Less useful were the Hypodermic Needle Effect and JICNARS scale which tended to take responses away from the focus of the actual question.

Section B: The Cross-Media Study

There was much positive evidence this year that centres and their candidates have truly embraced the Cross-Media Study.

There was far less regurgitated description (of box office, directors, studio names etc.) at the beginning of responses. The three platforms were prevalent in the vast majority of responses (most now being structured around the platforms; aiding clarity and question focus). There was also very little evidence of no cross-media study having been prepared and MEST 2 coursework (or even the unseen Section A text) being used instead. Overall there seems to be a pleasing range of cross-media studies being developed by centres from Music, News, TV Fiction, Film Fiction, Documentary and Hybrid Forms and the increasingly popular area of Lifestyle.

However, some issues remain. Many centres seem to be playing it safe and teaching the cross-media study in a very rigid and controlled way. In these cases responses lacked individuality and most importantly any critical autonomy, running against the spirit of the

specification. At its worst this resulted in rote learning and regurgitation with all candidates using exactly the same media products, examples and ideas.

Older texts were often used in this instance (*Indiana Jones, Batman Begins, Bowling For Columbine, Hotel Rwanda, Cloverfield, 9/11* news broadcasts, a potted history of documentary, for example) making it very difficult for candidates to individually research related contemporary cross-media products.

Some centres seem to also be encouraging their candidates to opt for just one very safe central product (e.g. *The Dark Knight* or *Avatar*). A range of contrasting products (in terms of audience and institution) should instead be encouraged across the platforms thus fostering a greater understanding of the topic area at hand. It should once again be noted that a cross-media study does not constitute the study of just one core text and one linked product in each platform. This is far too limited in scope for an AS course and will not provide students with a wider understanding of the whole topic area.

Indeed many cross-media studies had little sense of the topic they linked to. For example, there were many Royal Wedding responses which showed very little understanding of News as a cross-media topic and instead just merely described the products across the platforms. Where candidates had this topic knowledge and understanding they were more likely to be able to evaluate the reasons why media products are the way they are and in turn achieve much better question focus through the application of the conceptual framework.

Incorrect question choice was also an issue for some. Unfortunately many candidates chose the institution-focused question five but wrote about audience interaction. They would of course have fared far better with question six. A key lesson for many is therefore to remember to spend ample time choosing the correct question and planning appropriately.

Although most candidates agreed with the questions' quotations, unfortunately many just described their cross-media study rather than really addressing the question and applying their knowledge and understanding of both topic and cross-media study to it. A popular approach was to give an overview of a film's marketing campaign without really addressing the advantages of using each platform for the film institutions (in this case the institution referred to was just the film distributor).

Indeed, many candidates would do well to properly research the institutions involved in their cross-media study and consider the institutions' aims, roles and functions in relation to the media products studied. Instead many responses just saw the core product itself as the institution.

Music was a fertile area of study with strong question five responses on the branding of such acts as *Lady Gaga* and *Radiohead*. However, often candidates were also obviously fans of the artist addressed and in turn found it very difficult to objectively analyse and just offered a vague descriptive tribute. TV Fiction such as *Dr Who, Heroes, Glee, Waterloo Road* and *Skins* also worked well for this question as well as Documentary and Hybrid Forms such as *The Only Way is Essex, My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding, X Factor* and *Jamie's Dream School*.

Top level responses took the question's premise on, analysing what success actually meant and in some cases redefining it away from purely financial success to factors such as ideological transmission. Some high level responses also debated whether some products (often from Lifestyle cross-media studies) even needed to use three platforms; two often being enough to ensure success with a particular audience segment.

Another issue in responses was an over-emphasis on e-media which was often seen as the only platform to really influence audience response and be beneficial to institutions. Candidates and centres would do well to critically interrogate e-media and not take it at face

value. Its interactive features were seen to be advantageous for consumers and responses often provided a list of interactive features rather than fully evaluating them (and weighing them against the potential of other platforms for audience response).

Generalisations were also a problem in some question six responses. Examples of e-media lacked detail and precision at times and in turn failed to fully support arguments (e.g. blogs, *Twitter* exchanges, homepages etc. which could have exemplified any cross-media study). Candidates also seemed to use sweeping generalisations in their claims that the young use the e-media platform, the middle-aged the broadcast platform and only the old the apparently dying platform of print.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion