



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

Media Studies

MEST3

(Specification 2570)

Unit 3: Media: Critical Perspectives

Report on the Examination

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General

This was the second examination of MEST3 Critical Perspectives.

Section A

Two products based on the appearance of Nick Griffin, the leader of the far right British National Party on BBC1's current affairs programme Question Time.

- A video extract from www.guardian.co.uk of demonstrations outside the BBC.
- An extract from Sky news reporting on Nick Griffin appearance on Question Time.

Section B

4 questions on the two pre set topics - Representation and The Impact of New and Digital media. Candidates were asked to answer one question using their individual case study.

SECTION A

The focus of the 3 questions are:

1. Media concepts

Use the unseen products to answer a question on forms, representations, institutions, audiences or values. This paper and the sample papers have been on representation as an introduction to the new paper, but Question 1 can be on any of the concepts.

2. Media issues and debates

Use the unseen products to answer a question on media issues and debates. Candidates may refer to other media products to support their answer.

The 'may' is intended to encourage candidates to move beyond the two unseen exam products, they will get more marks if they do, but they can still get a pass level if they don't.

3. Wider contexts

Use the unseen products to answer a question on wider contexts.

Candidates should move beyond the texts, referring to other media products to support their answer.

The 'should' is intended to tell candidates they will be expected to move beyond the two unseen products and include other examples.

For question 2 and 3 candidates can include examples from either of their individual case studies, class work they have done in AS and A Level and from their own media use.

There were lots of good answers in Section A. The questions encouraged candidates to critically analyse the texts and in Questions 2 and 3 to address the more complex ideas of media, issues, debates, theories and wider contexts.

Candidates should be reminded to use the marks awarded to questions as a guide to how long to spend on each answer – Question 1 (8 marks), Question 2 (12 marks) and Question 3 (12 marks).

They should read the introductions to the two media products carefully to provide useful background that can help answer the questions. For example the different ownership and political values of The Guardian and Sky news could lead to media issues and wider contexts points. However they should not just repeat long extracts from the introductions as this does not show understanding.

Candidates should also be reminded to answer the particular question that has been asked. They need to make sure they make a number different points and for higher levels a range of different points, in each of the three questions. They will not achieve a high level if they only include one point in an answer, even if that one point is answered well.

Candidates should make detailed references to the two media products, especially in Question 1 to illustrate the points they make, for example particular use of camera, lighting, mise en scene, sound. Candidates in this exam were rewarded for detailed references to the media language in the two products. However remember this is to support the points they are making on the concept the question is based on, in this exam, representation. Question 1 answers must answer the question, not just complete a media language analysis.

Higher level answers included candidates own opinions, especially for Questions 2 and 3, which they supported with media debates, issues and theories and examples from other media products. Higher level answers in Question 2 and particularly in Question 3 discussed different sides of the argument and showed a sense of debate.

1. Evaluate how the people who are against Nick Griffin and the BNP are represented in each media product.

Good answers included, for example:

- Understanding of representation as a concept, discussing dominant and alternative representations and stereotypes. For example, how the positive representation of the demonstrators in Product 1 challenged the dominant representation of demonstrators as dangerous, anarchic law breakers.
- That in both products those against the BNP were represented as united, supported by detailed media language references, for example the use of a pan shot in Sky news when the audience were clapping, contrasting this with the 1 shots of Griffin.
- Comments on the representation of the demonstrators and audience as a range of cultural backgrounds to show the range of people against the BNP. Higher level answers argued that this represented those against the BNP as the majority and positioned the audience with them, especially in product 2. Weaker answers just stated that those against the BNP were from different cultural backgrounds, but didn't then explain how this represented them.
- Comments on the positive and alternative representations of black and ethnic minority men as articulate and intelligent, the hero rather than the villain, who in this case was the white man.
- That product two was very male dominated, seen in the two men that spoke from the audience, most of the panel and the presenter, this could reflect the dominance of men in British politics. Was the sole woman on the panel tokenistic? In contrast some of Product 1's chants were led by a young woman.
- That in both products those against the BNP were represented as passionate and angry. Some candidates argued that this was a positive representation in Product 1 as they were shown to be standing up for what they believed in and it reflected their strong views. Other candidates argued it was more negative and they were shown to be aggressive. Both arguments were valid based on the short extracts that were seen, as long as they were explained and supported.

2. Why does the media rely so much on conflict?

You may also refer to other media texts to support your answer.

Good answers included for example:

- Arguments that conflict was used by media institutions to attract audiences, it was exciting, entertaining and promised drama.
- Arguments that conflict also kept stories going and discussed narrative pleasures that encouraged audiences to continue watching to see who would 'win' the conflict.
- That conflict creates villains that the audience enjoy being against. This positions the audience to take sides.
- Comments on how media institutions exaggerated or manipulated conflict. Controversy could damage an institutions brand image, but could also be very useful, gaining publicity and promising the audience drama.
- Arguments that this has an ideological bias, positioning audiences on the side that was in the interests of those in power, supporting hegemonic values or creating moral panics about particular groups.
- That conflict can encourage audiences to become more involved and engaged. Higher level answers used their new and digital media knowledge to argue that changes in technology allowed audiences to become more involved and be more active, either commenting on existing media stories or finding opposing points of view.

There were lots of good up to date and topical examples to support points, a real improvement from the June 2010 exam. For example, the recent student demonstrations, Andy Gray's sexist comments on Sky TV, manufactured conflict in the X Factor between judges and contestants, current soap stories, for example the cot death story in Eastenders. There were general examples such as the Iraq war, which are rewarded to some extent, but candidates gain higher levels by using detailed examples of and from particular media products.

3. Multiplatform media can allow access to a wider range of views, including extreme ones. Should the internet be more regulated?

You should refer to other media products to support your answer.

Candidates were rewarded for showing a sense of debate and including both sides of the argument, although this doesn't necessarily have to be balanced. Candidates should be encouraged to express their own opinions, as long as it is backed up with relevant contexts.

Arguments against regulation included:

- Freedom of speech. Higher level answers discussed how this was meant to be part of the founding principals of the internet.
- There is some regulation already, with examples to illustrate. Higher level answers discussed the weaknesses of current regulation.
- Other platforms are regulated, so the internet should be the last bastion of freedom.
- The internet is so vast it is impossible to regulate.
- Multiplatform media allows access to a really wide range of views so people can have access to alternative views or ones aimed at niche audiences. Access can be easier and quicker.
- Who would decide what was regulated? Would it just be those in power? Different individuals, cultures and countries would have different opinions on what should be regulated.
- Regulation suits those in power, with examples of countries where regulation has tried to stifle political debate or opposition.

Arguments in favour of regulation included:

- The possible negative effects of lack of regulation, especially on vulnerable audiences such as young children.
- Invasion of privacy with examples of how this is happening already.
- Other platforms are regulated, with examples of successful regulation, so the internet should be too.
- There is some regulation already, but internet regulation doesn't work so needs to be more effective.

Again there were lots of good up to date and topical examples to support points. Examples of other media products included to support Question 3 included:

Wikileaks, pro anorexic and pro suicide websites, events in Tunisia, China and Google, Saddam Hussien's hanging on YouTube, Roal Moat's Facebook support group, Justin Beiber.

Theories that were used to support and explain points in Question 2 and 3 included: Different news values theories. Gramsci's Hegemony, arguments for and against. Various narrative theories including Strauss's Binary Oppositions, Barthes enigmas. Cohen's Moral Panic. A range of audience theories such as watercooler, Uses and Gratifications, Cultivation theory. Baudrillard Hyperreality. David Gauntlett Web 2.0, Anderson Long Tail, Lister on new media, Del Sola Pool.

SECTION B

Candidates were asked to choose one out of four possible questions, two from each of the two pre set topics. They were reminded that they would be rewarded for references from their own individual case study.

There was a real improvement in Section B from June 2010, with better individual case studies and more focus on the question.

There was a huge range of case studies. For Representation, the popular social groups were women, people with disabilities and gay men. Places was less popular, but did include for example New York and Newcastle. Quite a number of candidates had chosen groups that had a personal meaning to them, for example young Afro Caribbean men, young women, British Indians, travellers and as long as they focused on the question, this made their essays engaged and they were able to include a wide range of detailed examples and argue strongly about media debates and issues.

The Impact of New and Digital Media case studies included particular institutions, the BBC and Channel 4 were the most popular, social networking sites with Facebook still the most popular choice, news in general with a good focus on big international events, the music industry with a focus on a record company or genre of music.

There were lots of good case studies, with candidates being rewarded in the exam for the hard work they had done during the year.

The best case studies included:

- a range of different media products from the three platforms,
- detailed examples from particular media products
- evidence of research into media debates and issues and relevant wider contexts
- theory used to explain and support
- a real interest in the case study they had chosen to do, evidenced by engagement with the products and issues and their own opinions.

Candidates achieved higher level marks by:

- Having their own individual case study to answer the question. Candidates from one centre shouldn't all have the same case study. This does not allow candidates to show evidence of independent study, which excludes them from the higher levels. For example a centre all writing answers on the representation of youth, with the same or very similar media products is disadvantaging their candidates. In addition, candidates who had their own case study were more engaged and more willing to focus on the question, rather than repeat a pre learned answer of descriptive points. All or at least most of the media products candidates use to support and illustrate their answer should also be individual. Centres can start the pre set topics with a class overview on Representation and New/Digital Media to introduces the topic and may want to do a mini class case study as an example, but then candidates should do their own individual case study, with their own choice of media products.
- Answering the particular question, not writing 'everything I know about my case study'. This was a real improvement from June 2010. For example, candidates should focus on stereotypes for Question 5, not write a very general essays just on representation or for Question 6 they should focus on the key words of how and why and different, rather than producing lists of news products or technical developments.
- Including detailed references to particular media products, rather than just general examples. For example not just 'YouTube', but an example of a particular video and particular shots from the video or not just the name of the magazine but an example from a particular article with examples of particular headlines, photos etc.
- Answering the why as well as the how. 'How' answers tended to become a list of examples, whereas as 'why' answers answered the question, evaluated and used relevant media debates, issues, theories and wider contexts to explain the points they made. 'Whys' will get candidates into the higher levels.
- Showing range in their answers. For example referring to a wide range of platforms, preferably all three, but at least two. Candidates were also rewarded for referring to a range of media products to support their answer, answers couldn't achieve the higher levels if they only used one or two.
- Having a clear focus. Very wide ranging topics covering different social groups and places or lots of new and digital media areas in one answer meant their answers lacked focus and tended to become a list of descriptive points. It is possible to write a good New/Digital Media essay with a disparate range of examples, but it is harder to focus on the question and include evaluation. Candidates produced better answers when they had a clear and specific focus. For example, for Representation, one social group or one place with detailed examples from particular media products and for New and Digital Media one industry and one institution, again with detailed examples from particular media products. Candidates can then bring in a wide range of examples aswell that support this focused topic, but would refer to them more briefly.
- Applying media issues and debates. What does their case study suggest are the current issues in the media? Candidates need to apply relevant media theories to their case study and media products throughout their answers, using the theory to answer the question and support the point they are making, not just describing a theory. Weaker answers tended to list pre learned theories often all in one paragraph at the end, that although relevant were not clearly applied to media products or used to answer the question.

- Including relevant wider contexts and again applying them to their own case study. Weaker answers tended to include lists of facts and statistics or the history of a particular topic with no evaluation or link to the question

4. A negative representation is better than no representation at all. Discuss this statement with reference to the group or place you have studied.

Candidates should avoid lengthy descriptions of the history of the representation of a group or place, that may show sound knowledge, but only demonstrates limited understanding and poor focus on the question.

Higher level answers:

- Focused on the question, rather than just a very general essay about representation
- Included arguments for and against
- Explained why a negative representation was better or not, using media debates, issues, theories and wider contexts to support their points
- Came to their own conclusion for their particular group or place, which for some higher level answers wasn't necessarily a clear yes or no.

5. Part of stereotyping is the attitude that all members of a particular group are the same, or else fall into a very small number of types. How and why is the group or place you have studied stereotyped?

Candidates should avoid very general essays on representation and focus on stereotypes for this question.

Higher level answers:

- Discussed a number of different stereotypes of their group or place.
- Discussed representations that challenged stereotypes.
- Explained the reasons for the stereotypes, the 'why' of the question, using media debates, issues, theories and wider contexts to support their points.

6. New and digital media offers media institutions different ways of reaching audiences. Consider how and why media institutions are using these techniques?

Weaker answers ended up being descriptive lists of examples with little evaluation. Candidates should avoid fact based overviews of New/Digital Media, which lack a specific individual case study and often used candidates general knowledge as media users rather than detailed study. This was particularly true for candidates that chose a new media product, such as the iPhone or a very narrow technical development like the BBC iPlayer for their case study. It is possible to write a good answer using these as a case study, but is much harder. Stronger answers focused on a media institution or industry, which could also then add extra briefer examples from other sources.

Higher level answers:

- Included a range of different ways institutions have of reaching audiences
- Stayed focused on the institution, rather than just lists of techniques
- Really focused on the word different
- Evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of the techniques
- Explained the reasons for using new and digital media, the ‘why’ of the question, using media debates, issues, theories and wider contexts to support their points. Some weaker answers only had one why, to reach a wider audience which showed limited evaluation
- Used particular media products to illustrate their points with detailed examples.

7. “To connect, to create, to share creativity or thought, to discuss, to collaborate, to form groups or to combine with others in mutual interests or passions. If you can't see the point of any of those things, you will not see the point of Facebook” (www.guardian.co.uk).

What opportunities and/or disadvantages do new and digital media have for audiences?

Higher level answers:

- Included a range of different opportunities and disadvantages for audiences
- Evaluated the advantages and disadvantages, explaining how and why
- Explained the reasons for using new and digital media, the ‘why’ of the question, using media debates, issues, theories and wider contexts to support their points
- Used particular media products to illustrate their points with detailed examples
- Came to an overall conclusion.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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