



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
June 2012**

**Media Studies**

**MEST1**

**(Specification 2570)**

**Unit 1: Investigating Media**

***Report on the Examination***

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## **General**

This was the eighth examination on Unit 1 Investigating Media (MEST1) for the AQA GCE Media Studies specification which has been running since September 2008. There were 9066 candidates from 530 centres who took the examination this series.

### **Section A: Texts, Concepts and Contexts**

The Simpsons sequence worked well for the vast majority of candidates. Most were able to distance themselves appropriately from what is a familiar product to many and apply the key concepts effectively and with confidence.

Candidates from across the ability range were able to access all four questions and there seemed to be no stand-out problem question or major issues with stamina this series. The product worked on a number of levels which allowed the more able to delve into its deeper aspects.

The main problem for some candidates was in not reading the questions set closely enough. A few are still adopting the old MIGRAIN approach, ignoring (or even rephrasing) the question to just apply the concepts in a straightforward manner. Some made assumptions about what the question was really asking, missing key words at times. Candidates should be encouraged to use the full two minutes before the extract is shown to read the questions properly and in turn make relevant, organised notes during the viewing stage. Centres will want to make sure that invigilators are fully aware of this important part of the examination.

Candidates who did best knew that even if the question did not explicitly ask for media language analysis that it was important to show how meaning was created for all of the questions.

### **Question 1: Media Forms**

This was the second best answered question, with well over a third of candidates achieving a level three or above.

There was some confusion over what constituted the opening of the sequence (despite the introductory blurb explaining this). Although examiners were asked to mark such responses positively, many candidates self-penalised by not focusing fully on how the initial part of the sequence drew the audience in.

Surprisingly, use of media terminology seemed less confident this series. Less successful candidates wanted to discuss other aspects of the sequence (e.g. narrative techniques, use of humour) rather than its form. Successful responses on the other hand really got to grips with how editing, sound, mise-en-scene and camera were used to pull in and hook the audience (sophisticated responses even managing to discuss how a range of audiences would respond).

Some candidates still feel the need to bolt on audience theory even when it is not really appropriate (e.g. Hypodermic Needle). Others decided to discuss other key concepts in the opening question, in turn using additional sheets and wasting time for no extra reward.

## **Question 2: Media Representations**

Pleasingly this was the best answered question in Section A, with over half of all candidates achieving a level three or above.

Successful responses provided a range of ways the workplace was represented focusing well on how this meaning was constructed through use of sound, lighting, editing and mise-en-scene. Close textual reference and terminology was in turn used well.

Many decided to also refer to Homer's workplace (the nuclear power plant) from the opening of the sequence but this worked effectively, especially when used as a contrast and/or comparison between western and stereotypical eastern workplace practices.

Less able candidates seemed to lack confidence with exploring the representation of the workplace. They seemed programmed into a response about the tried and tested areas of gender, race and class. Sometimes this was linked successfully to the workplace but often it just hindered question focus.

The key for candidates to move into level three and beyond was to not just list the ways the work place was represented (often through a series of adjectives) but also to develop their ideas to show how this representation was constructed through Banksy's carefully chosen media language.

## **Question 3: Media Institutions**

Unfortunately this was the least well-answered question in Section A with only just under a quarter of candidates achieving a level three or above.

Many seemed confused by the roles played by the institutions involved in the sequence, some not understanding why Twentieth Century Fox would allow such criticism and others seeing Channel Four as the source of the product's rebellion (rather than Banksy or Groening). Many were too enthralled by the wider contexts of News International, phone-hacking and the Leveson Inquiry and in turn avoided direct question focus.

Less successful candidates tended to extend their answers from question two mainly commenting on how Twentieth Century Fox was represented negatively, often citing the use of the prison-like logo at the very end of the sequence.

Better responses did well to understand the irony and satire of the sequence but very few were able to fully deconstruct how this was achieved through media language. There were some outstanding responses, however, that really got to grips with the humour and over-exaggerated tongue-in-cheek nature of the sequence (for example, seeing the dilapidated unicorn as a key signifier of media institutions' destruction of children's innocent dreams). They were in turn able to show their understanding of how comedy was used to make the attack on the parent institution acceptable.

## **Question 4: Media Audiences**

Disappointingly, only just over a third of candidates achieved a level three or above in this question. Pleasingly though, there was far less evidence of candidates running out of steam by this stage in Section A or managing their time poorly.

The main issue was that unfortunately many ignored the YouTube aspect of the question, preferring to discuss the general appeal of the programme and sequence rather than why exactly it would be popular online.

Successful responses picked up on the specific nature and qualities of the sequence and linked this with why it would in turn be popular online (through sharing, discussion, repeated viewing etc.).

Some candidates wanted to discuss who the audience were rather than what features of the sequence would attract them. Audience theory also remains problematic for many. Whilst successful responses were able to apply theory effectively (notions of the active audience, oppositional readings, Uses & Gratifications being used well in many instances), often theory was unfortunately just bolted on and regurgitated.

### **Section B: The Cross-Media Study**

The vast majority of centres appear to be preparing their candidates well for Section B and the Cross-Media Study. However, some issues remain.

Question focus again seems to be the main problem for candidates not achieving level three or above. Many just want to write everything they know about their cross-media study in a very descriptive way rather than addressing the question set and applying their knowledge and understanding. At worst, a few candidates are indeed rehashing rehearsed answers based on past-paper questions.

There is also much evidence of centres still misinterpreting the cross-media study as a case study of one core product with just one linked product in each platform. In order for candidates to reach level three they need to use a range of examples and exhibit breadth as well as depth. In turn contrast and comparisons across and between products and platforms can be made, enhancing question focus (and the potential to adapt to the task set).

Many of these limited approaches to the cross-media study seem to be very centre-lead. Again, the spirit of Section B requires critical autonomy and engagement with media products, which is much more likely to be fostered by teaching approaches which allow students to choose and research their own cross-media study products.

Some centres should also be reminded that cross-media products should be as contemporary as possible. *Nanook of the North*, *Bowling for Columbine*, *The Blair Witch Project*, and *Cloverfield* are still being used by some centres and clearly prohibit candidates from finding topical cross-media links and fully understanding the contemporary media landscape.

Most candidates are very comfortable with the three media platforms and the presence of media products across them. However, generalisations regarding audience consumption still dominate responses. Apparently the old use print exclusively, the young e-media and the middle-aged broadcast.

### **Question 5**

Pleasingly just over a half of candidates who opted for this question achieved a level three or above.

The most successful responses were able to isolate the imaginative techniques used in their cross-media study and clearly link these to audience. New technologies were often used as effective examples. Broad cross-media studies worked well here, enabling candidates to compare and contrast the use of techniques by different institutions for different audiences. Less successful responses tended just to list techniques, which could really only loosely be defined as imaginative. Such responses were in turn very descriptive and lacked a

developed understanding of why the institutions concerned had used specific techniques for their particular audiences.

### **Question 6**

Pleasingly just over a half of all candidates who opted for this question also achieved a level three or above.

Really successful responses challenged the orthodoxy of the question and queried whether the use of synergy had actually had much impact at all on audience reception and response. Many though found the notion of synergy challenging (despite the definition offered in the question). In this case the sense of synergy working across the platforms was missed, instead a series of isolated (yet related) products being analysed from different platforms with no real sense of the links between them. Some responses often became descriptive with no real sense of why synergy was used by the institutions concerned.

Better responses took an institutional point of view and got to grips with both how and why synergy was used. Weaker responses instead often used examples which were more audience than institution-lead (e.g. online forums) and thus failed to fully consider why. The same was also true of print examples such as film reviews, which again are out of control of the main institution and not an example of synergy.

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

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