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Examiners' Report/  
Lead Examiner Feedback  
Summer 2017

BTEC Level 3 Nationals in Creative Digital  
Media Production  
Unit 3: Digital Media Skills (31670H)



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## Grade Boundaries

### What is a grade boundary?

A grade boundary is where we set the level of achievement required to obtain a certain grade for the externally assessed unit. We set grade boundaries for each grade, at Distinction, Merit, Pass and Near Pass.

### Setting grade boundaries

When we set grade boundaries, we look at the performance of every learner who took the external assessment. When we can see the full picture of performance, our experts are then able to decide where best to place the grade boundaries – this means that they decide what the lowest possible mark is for a particular grade.

When our experts set the grade boundaries, they make sure that learners receive grades which reflect their ability. Awarding grade boundaries is conducted to ensure learners achieve the grade they deserve to achieve, irrespective of variation in the external assessment.

### Variations in external assessments

Each external assessment we set asks different questions and may assess different parts of the unit content outlined in the specification. It would be unfair to learners if we set the same grade boundaries for each assessment, because then it would not take accessibility into account.

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, are on the website via this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

## Unit 3: Digital Media Skills

Grade	Unclassified	Level 3			
		N	P	M	D
Boundary Mark	0	15	26	37	49

# Introduction

Unit 3: Digital Media Skills is mandatory for all Tech Level Extended Certificate and Diploma qualifications and the Applied General Extended Diploma qualification. It is a synoptic unit that provides learners with an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to construct a media product for a specified brief and within a chosen medium. Learners are given a period of twelve weeks to complete a practical task in response to a vocational brief, which is provided by Pearson at the beginning of the twelve-week period. The assessment period includes the preparatory stage undertaken under informal supervision prior to a period of supervised assessment where learners will create or build a digital media product in response to the brief.

There is one assessment opportunity each year and May 2017 was the first external assessment opportunity for this unit. The 2017 set task brief required learners to create a media product to puzzle, challenge or intrigue the intended audience of 16 to 19 year olds to form part of *Project Enigma* - the client's new range of original and thought-provoking media products. Learners were required to create or build a digital media product from one of five options: video, audio, website, e-magazine or digital game.

Digital media skills underpin most of the vocational projects that learners will be routinely undertaking throughout their qualification. Learners are expected to draw on their understanding of media production processes and skills from across the qualification and apply transferable and specialist knowledge and skills to complete the externally assessed practical task. However, learners need to be made aware of the requirements of the external assessment and the differences between the Unit 3 externally assessed practical task and internally assessed practical projects. It is also essential that learners cover all the specified content relating to their chosen sector before they sit the assessment.

# Introduction to the Overall Performance of the Unit

The Unit 3 externally assessed task takes the form of a client brief, which means that learners need to understand how to read a brief to extract key information about the intentions of the client, the target audience and the purpose of the required media product. The client brief for this examination paper required students to create an original and thought-provoking media product for Kamouflage Productions' *Enigma Project*. The most effective work used the information in the brief to base their media product around a question, mystery, ambiguous character of hidden meaning.

Media products were submitted in response to all five of the briefs. Those learners who were confident with using the equipment and software tools available to them and who understood the process of developing a media product in their chosen medium, were in the best position to synthesise their ideas to produce a creative media product that met the specific requirements of the brief.

Most learners submitted their evidence for assessment within three folders, one for each activity. Although learners have a choice about the format of the evidence of attainment that they need to submit to the examiner, those learners who were clear about the evidence that was required for submission produced the most coherent and focused submissions. For example, although learners should be encouraged to engage with the pre-production processes they have learnt through their qualification, as it will help them to produce an effective final product, learners should not submit any pre-production documentation.

The most effective work combined self-generated assets and/or material with assets and/or material from secondary sources, as specified in the brief for their chosen medium. Although learners must create their own individual product in response to one of the five briefs and cannot work as part of a group, many learners successfully enlisted the help of others to create material, such as actors, presenters and models. If learners are going to be able to effectively demonstrate their ability to create, source, organise, prepare, edit and manipulate assets and/or material during the preparatory period, then they need to be the creative force behind the project and in control of the use of equipment and software tools.

Some learners did not provide sufficient evidence of the process of selecting assets and/or material from secondary sources based on the requirements of the brief and this is an area of development for many learners.

# Individual Questions

## **Activity 1: Creating, sourcing and organising assets/material**

To fully meet the assessment criteria, learners must demonstrate comprehensive skill, knowledge and understanding when creating assets/material for their product.

### **Brief 1: Video product**

In response to the video brief, learners were awarded marks in the highest mark band where highly imaginative original footage was shot by learners that made effective use of suitable locations for filming and deliberate use of elements of mise-en-scène, such as costume and props. Some of the most effective footage shot by learners did not rely on natural lighting or the audio from cameras but involved three-point lighting techniques and external sound sources.

Learners who were awarded marks in bands 2 and 3, made appropriate use of camera framing and shot suitable cutaways, however, learners who achieved marks in band 4 typically shot scenes for matching action, eyeline matching or shot reverse shot. Camera movement is an area for development for many learners. Marks in band 4 were awarded where learners shot footage with well-executed camera movements that deliberately changed the viewer's perspective. However, where there was a lot of unnecessary camera movement, learners only achieved marks in the lower mark bands. More judicious use of camera movement techniques, together with effective use of video stabilisation equipment, would help to improve the effectiveness of learners' footage.

### **Brief 2: Audio product**

In response to the audio brief, those learners who created clean recordings were generally awarded marks in bands 2 and 3. Learners who achieved the highest marks not only made clean audio recordings but also provided evidence of the audio recording techniques they adopted. For example, the steps taken to reduce background noise when recording on location, the use of windscreen or pop filters to reduce plosives, the use of reflection filters to mitigate the effect of room ambience, setting input levels for microphones, microphone placement and a consideration of acoustics were some of the recording techniques and considerations evidenced by the highest achieving learners.

Most learners did not provide any evidence of the recording techniques they adopted. However, learners who achieved marks in bands 3 and 4 mainly provided annotated photographs of their recording set ups to accompany their audio recordings. Other ways for learners to provide evidence of how they used recording skills, processes and techniques to good effect include narrated video recordings, comparisons of test recordings and audio recordings to explain the recording set ups, outcomes, revisions and improvements.

### **Brief 3: Website**

One of the requirements of the website brief was to produce original graphics. Learners who achieved marks in band 1 did not provide any appropriate evidence of the graphics they created, such as screen shots or screen recordings of the development process or annotated copies of the graphics created. Some learners who were awarded marks in the middle mark bands provided appropriate evidence of the development of original graphics, such as a logo for the site, buttons and shapes.

Learners who achieved marks in band 4 showed how they developed different types of graphics, such as image sprites for the site navigation, icons for a form and graphic shapes to enhance the page layout.

Learners should be encouraged to create scalable vector graphics (SVG) to add to their web pages because the SVG format is now widely used within contemporary web design, as it's more powerful than other image formats because SVG images can be manipulated through the code.

#### **Brief 4: Digital e-magazine**

In response to the digital publishing brief, learners who were awarded marks in band 1 did not provide sufficient evidence of creating original assets. Learners who achieved marks in bands 2 and 3 provided evidence of writing original copy and taking original images mainly by including the final articles and photographs within their Activity 1 folder.

Learners who achieved marks in band 4 provided evidence of experimenting with photographic techniques to produce effective images, such as composition techniques, depth of field and various angles. Typically, learners who achieved marks in band 4 created a range of original graphics for their e-magazine pages, such as a masthead, running head, graphic elements for a pull quote, folio and graphic shapes.

#### **Brief 5: Digital game**

In response to the digital games brief, learners who achieved the highest marks produced some imaginative original assets, including game objects, character sprite sheets and backgrounds for each level of the game. For example, one learner who achieved marks in band 4 provided appropriate evidence of the 3D modeling and UV mapping for a 3D game object, while other learners provided evidence of the imaginative use of vector tools to create a 2D game background. In each example the learner met the assessment criteria for band 4 because they demonstrated comprehensive understanding of appropriate skills and techniques used to create game assets.

Although the balance between the number of self-generated assets and assets from secondary sources varied depending on the nature of digital game, learners who only achieved marks in band 1, either didn't produce sufficient original assets or didn't include sufficient evidence of the creation of their own assets.

## **Sourcing assets**

Although learners who were awarded marks in bands 1 and 2 found assets from secondary sources, they did not provide sufficient evidence of the process of sourcing the assets and did not justify their selections in relation to the brief. The highest achieving learners justified their reasons for selecting each asset from a secondary source in relation to the requirements of the brief and explained their reasons for using that source.

When sourcing assets and/or material, learners are expected to comply with copyright. Some learners demonstrated an awareness of copyright restrictions, by indicating that they would require permission to use certain assets and/or material. However, only a minority of learners demonstrated a complete understanding of the process of sourcing assets by recognising that their media products are going to be made commercially available by the client Kamouflage Productions and adapted their choices accordingly. For example, by selecting assets/material from royalty-free sources, choosing assets and/or material in the public domain or by complying with the requirements of using assets and/or material covered by a Creative Commons licence.

## **Organising assets/material**

Learners who achieved marks in band 4 provided evidence of the logical storage of their assets and/or material, which included logging or naming assets/material with appropriate file names and saving them in an appropriate file format into an organised folder structure. Those learners who logged footage for video or audio productions as part of the digital workflow or organised their assets into an appropriate folder structure as part of the workflow for producing a website, e-magazine or digital game, only had to take screen shots of these internalised processes as evidence of the clear and logical organisation of their assets. However, centres are reminded that learners need to understand how to label and log video footage and audio recordings with appropriate file names and save their assets with appropriate names, in appropriate formats and organise them into a suitable directory structure.

Learners who only achieved marks in bands 1 and 2 did not create an appropriate folder structure within their user area, which often meant that their media products did not function correctly. Where learners included inappropriate paths, links did not function and assets did not appear as intended.



## **Activity 2: Prepare, edit and manipulate assets/material**

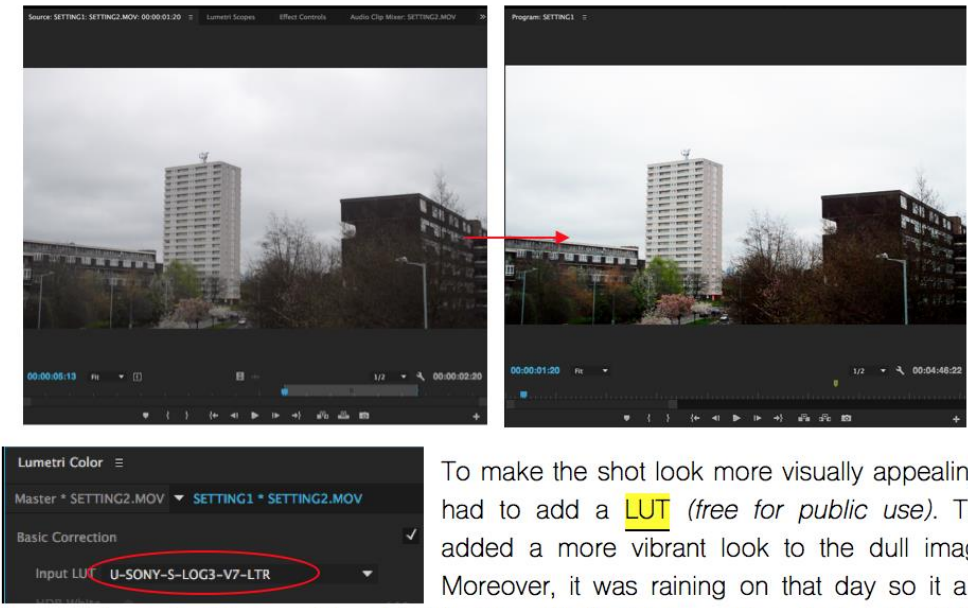
Learners generally provided suitable evidence of the preparation, editing and manipulation of their assets and/or material. Annotated screen shots from the chosen software was the most common method of providing evidence of attainment in relation to the assessment criteria for Activity 2. Alternatives to annotated screen shots include narrated screen recordings, a director's commentary and audio recordings to explain the process of preparing, editing and manipulating assets/material.

There was some highly skillful editing and manipulation of assets and/or material that secured marks in bands 3 and 4, which included colour correcting video footage, equalization and compression of audio recordings, adding an image slider to a web page, creating composite images for an e-magazine and adding sound effects to a game that were triggered by game events.

The mark scheme requires learners to provide evidence of the decision-making process and learners who achieved marks in bands 3 and 4 provided an explanation of the preparation, editing and manipulation techniques they used, what they were trying to achieve and why they had made these decisions in relation to their aims. Although the band 4 criteria in the mark scheme requires learners to provide comprehensive evidence of the decision-making process, clear and concise explanations of the different skills and techniques used enabled learners to achieve maximum marks for this strand.


Learners who were awarded marks in bands 1 and 2 did not provide suitable evidence of either their skills in preparing, editing and manipulating their assets/material or the decision-making process. Although examiners could credit the skills and techniques evident in the final media product, the only way to ensure that the examiners are aware of the full range of skills and techniques that the learners have adopted is if the learners provide evidence of those skills and techniques.

The example below is taken from a band 3 response where the learner has provided before and after images to illustrate the use of a colour grading effect and explained how it helped to establish the tone for the rest of the video. This demonstrates effective, rather than sophisticated, application of editing skills:



To make the shot look more visually appealing I had to add a **LUT** (free for public use). This added a more vibrant look to the dull image. Moreover, it was raining on that day so it also emphasized the rain drops, which added to the pathetic fallacy and created a mood that set the scene and tone for the rest of the video product.

In the example below the learner was awarded a mark in band 4 because they provided comprehensive evidence of the rationale behind their editing decisions in relation to the preferred audience interpretations and demonstrated a high level of practical skill in editing the material together:

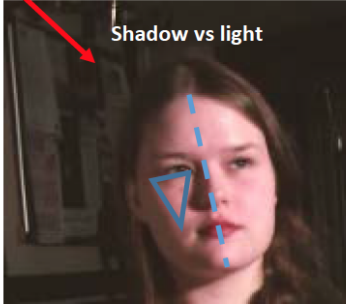


Harsh contrast between light and dark

In terms of choosing which shots to use, one of the main factors was the lighting. For the first scene I decided to open with this shot as there was a clear contrast in light and dark, with both the character and the flowers brightly lit. I felt that this lighting established this character to audiences well, as Ms Adams is supposedly Mr Augustine's only hope/support, so should be portrayed in the light. The Rembrandt lighting technique is also shown here, with one

side of the character's face in shadow but with a triangle of light under the eye. Contrast in light and dark is a common film noir convention, so displaying this helped to establish the tone of this film to audiences, as well as show that this character is more than one-dimensional, as she is portrayed in the light, but there is an underlying darkness about her. In these terms, the lighting technique helps to subtly foreshadow later events, in which it is found that Ms Adams is actually aiding the assassination of the protagonist.

The harsh contrast in this first shot is also useful in establishing the setting of this film, which is supposed to be a very quiet and run down pub. The lighting gives the impression that this is a very dark and isolated place in which few choose to go. It also helps to show to audiences that this is mainly a character driven storyline, so the lighting should draw all attention to Ms Adams as the setting isn't necessarily important.



Shadow vs light

### **Activity 3: Build/create a media product that meets the requirements of the chosen brief.**

Those learners who were awarded full marks against the Activity 3 assessment criteria demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of production processes and techniques and used sophisticated technical skills to create a media product that met the *Project Enigma* brief and sustained the interest of the audience of 16 to 19 year olds.

It was encouraging to see how many learners were able to demonstrate creativity in meeting the requirements of the brief. For example, products were submitted in response to each of the briefs with intriguing narrative structures, imaginative concepts and interesting content, which were rewarded with marks in bands 3 and 4.

However, there were also many learners who did not create a media product with the originality and aesthetic qualities required to meet the requirements of the brief and these products only met the assessment criteria for bands 1 and 2. To be successful in this external assessment, learners must develop a media product that is suitable for the specified audience and purpose.

The sophisticated technical skills referred to in Band 4 of the assessment criteria were seen in responses to each of the briefs; for example the seamless incorporation of sound effects into video products, the use of layered audio to add depth and light and shade for the listener of audio products, the use of alternate text and strong contrasts between foreground and background colours to create accessible web pages, the use of a visual hierarchy in digital publications, and games with sufficient challenge and reward for the intended audience.

Although most learners met the technical requirements of the video, audio, website and digital game briefs, many learners responding to the digital e-magazine brief did not link the pages together. To be fully prepared for this external assessment, learners need to be able to save, export or publish their media product in an appropriate file format and undertake functionality, usability and accessibility testing as appropriate.

Finally, centres are reminded that the final product must not be submitted in a file format native to specific software applications, as these files cannot be opened without access to that software.

# Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, learners should:

- use different sector specific skills and techniques when creating assets and/or material (as published in the [specification](#)), rather than repeating the same processes to create similar assets and/or material
- combine self-generated assets and/or material with assets and/or material from secondary sources, as specified in the brief for their chosen medium
- justify their selection process in relation to the requirements of the brief when sourcing assets from secondary sources
- organise their assets and/or material into a clear and logical folder structure
- provide suitable evidence of the digital media skills and techniques used within all three activities, such as annotated screen shots and photographs, narrated screen recordings, director's commentaries, video and audio recordings
- develop a media product that is tailored to the specific audience and purpose established in the brief
- save, export or publish their final media product in an appropriate file format.

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