



General Certificate of Secondary Education

Media Studies

48101 Investigating the Media

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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Introduction

At the end of the first year of this new specification, it is important that we reflect upon the performance of candidates and to support its future development. The departure of the popular legacy specification 3571 was a significant moment for AQA GCSE Media Studies. The last five years had seen a growth in candidature and confidence amongst a wide range of centres in its delivery. So unsurprisingly, both experienced and new teachers of Media Studies began planning for 4810 Single Award with some trepidation, expressing the following concerns:

- the reduction in time for the Unit 1 External Assessment
- the nature of the unseen tasks for Unit 1
- the impact of the collapse of tiering, particularly on weaker candidates
- the perceived restrictive nature of the Unit 2 Assignment Banks
- the perceived restrictive nature of word limits in Unit 2

However, in contrast to this, the move to a modular qualification, with the opportunity to complete a Double Award in Media Studies was warmly welcomed and whilst there have been questions about how this will function, centres welcomed the broader range of opportunities offered by it. Since the launch of the specification in 2009 we have had lots of opportunity to meet teachers at AQA training events held across the country and at their centres and in most instances we have been able to answer very legitimate questions and to allay concerns. What is clear is that many teachers like the flexibility of this new qualification, and how it fits into different curriculum pathways. After just one year we are now seeing a growth in new centres with implementation planning for the Single Award, the Double Award and co-delivery with GCSE English. During this time we have been constantly reminded of the enthusiasm and expertise of teachers who constantly strive for what is best for their students. In doing so there is ample evidence that the course is continuing in the tradition of 3571 in that it is enjoyable, interesting and challenging for the students concerned, who should always remain at the heart of whatever we do.

Overview

The selection of the topic Reality Television for the first year of External Assessment proved to be a success. It was a great pleasure to see that the vast majority of candidates had been well taught and had been well prepared for this new assessment. The examination demanded the completion of 4 tasks in 1 hour 30 minutes. Candidates (and their teachers) have responded positively to this time constraint and markers have seen a very good range of engaged and often engaging work. Most candidates finished all the paper, with even responses spread over all four tasks. There was also ample evidence of a wide experience of learning about Reality Television. All centres had obviously covered the codes and conventions and audience enjoyment of Reality Television and had used a variety of examples with their students. Most candidates had made good use of the 6 weeks of pre-release time to unpick the demands of the brief and to complete additional research and preparation. Close engagement with the brief is vital to inform decision making in response to the unseen tasks. Teachers are reminded that there is an expectation that they will go through the demands of the brief with their candidates once the pre-release material becomes available.

Key findings from the paper were as follows:

- There is some exemplary and impressive work where there is a combination of knowledge which is supported with examples, solid reference to theory which is integrated into argument, well organised responses which demonstrate highly secure use and application of media terminology, good evaluative thinking and skilled and imaginative pre-production work.
- There is also lots of satisfactory work where candidates are able to demonstrate personal response showing what they know and understand. The topic of Reality Television was one that all candidates could engage with and many did so with enthusiasm.
- Markers found a real range of marks and it proved relatively easy to differentiate between the levels.

Task 1(A) 01

Most candidates coped well with this task, almost all using the three bullet points which helped them to frame their answer. Higher ability candidates were able to write cogently and intelligently in debating the popularity of Reality Television. At the very top there was evidence of responses moving beyond and challenging the assertions made in the bullet points. Exemplification was also used well with clear and detailed examples provided to illustrate points made in order to argue the validity of the claims made in the question. Almost all candidates were able to draw on at least one example, most often *Big Brother* or *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here!* but a wide range of other shows were also cited. Many candidates were aware of the potential sub genres of Reality Television and were able to discuss how enjoyment of these varied with the format. Indeed, centres had clearly studied the area of appeal and whilst responding to bullet points candidates were often eager to offer alternative theories to explain the success of the genre with audiences. For example, in referring to the claims made, some candidates were able to discuss the Uses and Gratifications Theory and how this could be applied to Reality Television shows and their audiences. Others made reference to *voyeurism*, although whilst some candidates knew the term it was clear that they did not really understand its meaning. To conclude, the best responses were characterised by an excellent understanding of the bullet points, a clear debate about the extent of appeal and a wide range of exemplification.

Task 1(B) 02

Most candidates coped well with this task and entered into the pitch with real enthusiasm. The demands of the pitch had been clearly flagged up in the pre-release materials and many responses demonstrated careful, thorough and independent preparation. The best responses were seen in work which provided not only the subject of their Reality Television show but the format too. In this they demonstrated understanding of a range of codes and conventions of Reality Television which were integrated with skill and imagination, enabling an effective pitch to Ray Lite. In comparison, other pitches were vague and did not address the bullet points which should have helped candidates to structure their response. As always, it is vital that candidates pay close attention to both the guidance in the pre-release material and instructions on the examination paper itself. The theme of *Second Chances* worked well and many candidates worked with the angle of turning your life around in some way.

Pitches included the following:

1. Troubled teenagers
2. Fragmented families
3. Adults going back to school
4. Adults having suffering from redundancy given a chance to start again.
5. Failed businesses

In comparison other responses were mere rehashes of *Britain's Got Talent* or *The X Factor* and lacked an educational slant or were not really suitable for family viewing. Very few responses seemed to acknowledge the documentary elements of Reality Television and most seemed to involve some form of competition, voting and tasks. In this, weaker responses strayed too close to the game show format, or omitted some of the bullet points asked for in the task, making their responses less secure.

Task 2(A) 03

Whilst the issue of marketing was flagged up in the brief, this task clearly challenged candidates the most and saw the greatest variety in responses. Centres are reminded that Units 1 and 2 are connected and that it is good practice to prepare candidates for Unit 1 through the Controlled Assessment tasks of Unit 2. Cross-media promotion is at the heart of Assignment Bank 2 but some candidates were clearly under prepared for this task. Best performance saw responses which were confident in handling synergy, some even using the term unprompted and effectively in their discussion. Many candidates were able to demonstrate understanding of how different marketing and promotional techniques were used to target different audiences. There were some excellent references to real examples of cross-media promotion. For example, the promotional effect of the Jade Goody versus Shilpa Shetty racism row was discussed by a number of candidates from different centres, citing how this dominated the popular press, leading to higher viewing figures. Other examples of good practice were seen where candidates were able to develop beyond identification of cross-media promotional methods, to discuss the advantages of each, sometimes commenting on the 'cycle' of promotion, that allowed, for instance, the press to profit from covering popular Reality Television shows, which in turn benefitted from the coverage. In contrast, weaker responses were seen in work which was very short and underdeveloped, demonstrating lack of preparation or an inability to relate their learning to the demands of the task.

Task 2(B) 04 and 05

Pre-production tasks will be a regular feature of External Assessment and it is important that candidates have the opportunity to develop skills in a range of these through their Controlled Assessments. Whilst the assessment criteria did not demand a high quality of finish, candidates did need to be able to communicate confidence in their ability to use the codes and conventions of either web page or trailer design. That said, many candidates produced work which demonstrated flair and creativity in the time allocated which was very impressive. The majority of candidates opted for the web design task, perhaps thinking of the demands of time. It was clear that some centres had taught website conventions well with all candidates able to offer a convincing home page design. Many employed web conventions of banners, links, scroll bars, etc. with great success. However, these did not always pay much attention to the show itself, without much thought to engaging a specific audience or promoting a brand for the show. Weaker responses were also seen in poster-like designs with limited interactivity. In contrast, those who did create a storyboard trailer often presented a secure design, suggesting that they were more confident in storyboard and trailer conventions. The narrative within the storyboards

was often very strong, with a clear sense of trying to hook an audience. Sadly, there was a small minority of candidates who attempted both tasks.

Conclusion

As we look forward to the 2011 topic of Action Adventure Films, it is hoped that these comments will help teachers take their work forward. In addition, in order to build on this successful first year, AQA will continue to offer Teacher Support meetings for the External Assessment topic. These meetings are designed to build on the Unit 1 Teacher Guidance on Action Adventure Films which can be found on the AQA website.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the **Results statistics** page of the AQA Website.