



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2012**

Media Studies

48101

(Specification 4810)

Unit 1: Investigating the Media

Report on the Examination

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Television Crime Drama

Overview

This series saw the third examination of Unit 1 and by now the format of the paper is well established. Team leaders and examiners once again commented on how much they had enjoyed marking the paper which continued in its tradition of enabling students of all ability levels to respond. As to be expected with single tier entry, there was a great variety in the range of responses seen. However, this year there was a greater contrast in centres who had prepared their students well and those whose entries demonstrated that not all students were ready to take the examination.

The topic of Television Crime Drama proved challenging for some students as it took them out of their natural comfort zone. That said, most had clearly enjoyed the topic as there were a lot of engaged and enthusiastic responses across the paper. Television crime drama is a genre which provides lots of opportunity to work with a variety of media concepts and issues and as a Unit 1 topic proved to be very successful. However, examiners described some responses which whilst well written, did not evidence even a basic media vocabulary. The ability to use a specialist discourse is rewarded in the mark scheme and centres are urged to develop their work in this area as this will continue to be tested in Unit 1.

It is vital that throughout their GCSE course, students are provided with opportunity to develop skills in responding to a brief. Their ability to work independently and closely with the pre-release material during the four weeks preparation time has a marked impact on examination performance. Centres are also reminded that whilst they are advised to go through the material with their students to clarify understanding, whole class teaching should then cease. Part of the demand of responding to a brief is an understanding of both the context and the audience for the responses to the tasks. Students are rewarded for responding in role. This is addressed on the front page of the preliminary material under **Notes to Students**. There were some examples of excellent practice where students had clearly been prepared to do this, but it needs to become more widespread across centres. Finally, examiners were pleased to report that the majority of students succeeded in completing the paper. Those who didn't had struggled with the notion of being responsible for their own time management by spending too long on a particular task.

Task 1

This was a test of knowledge and understanding of the generic conventions of television crime drama and their appeal. The use of three bullet points to help shape and focus responses is now an established format. However, it is important that these are used as prompts from which to develop argument. The vast majority of students succeeded in addressing each of the three bullet points and it was clear that most were well versed in discussing their appeal. Many students were conversant with the Uses and Gratifications theory and some understood that crime drama appeals to audiences for different reasons. Best responses were seen where students had been exposed to a range of crime dramas, both in class and through independent research. This enabled them to develop a more confident understanding of the genre. In contrast, examiners reported on responses from some centres where students had all worked with the same limited range. It is an important requirement that students provide examples from television crime dramas to support their argument. This was clearly flagged up in the pre-release brief and stated again in the question itself. However, examiners commented on their disappointment in reading responses which failed to mention any crime drama titles or to explain how an example used illustrated a particular point. The ability to exemplify is a crucial requirement in order to achieve high marks.

In terms of the bullet points themselves, the role of characters was best explored and the vast majority of students were able to identify the range of stock characters found in crime drama and to discuss their appeal. Examiners enjoyed reading about pairings of contrasting detectives and/or the flawed maverick. Poirot was contrasted with Sherlock and procedural dramas were not forgotten either with characters from CSI and The Bill often being cited. Students were less confident with storylines. Most focused on the appeal of suspense but fewer were as confident in showing how that suspense was created through the storyline. Better responses clearly understood the role of narrative structure here with work on closed and open narratives. Often these centres had looked at a number of theorists to help explain narrative structure and there was some excellent application of Todorov, Propp and sometimes Levi-Strauss. However, it is worth remembering that the key concept of representation is also crucial when exploring character and this was often under used. The final bullet point of realistic settings was frequently dealt with in terms of city or rural locations and their appeal to different types of audiences. Better responses moved beyond this to consider the nature of realistic, sometimes flagging up the use of authentic indoor settings such as police stations or pathology labs to create a sense of realism for the audience.

Task 2

This task had been clearly flagged up in the pre-release material and the vast majority of students had prepared for it. One of the key challenges was in working closely with the criteria given in the brief, particularly that of suitability for a family audience. Crime drama can deal with very unpleasant material and it is not surprising that an examination taken by sixteen year olds and younger should seek to avoid this terrain. Whilst students should have felt well prepared for this task, many responses were disappointing. Most students, aided by the bullet points, managed to compile a generally appropriate and clear 'pitch'. However, many suggestions were either derivative or fairly pedestrian. Crucially a use of crime drama codes and conventions was not always secure and was accompanied by an absence of media language. Some were not confident with the meaning of a *pilot* episode even though a definition of the term was provided in the glossary. Best responses were short, pithy and answered the bullet points and were clearly intended as a pre watershed production. In addition, those students who responded in role remembered their target audience and often succeeded in creating a sense of 'sell' by producing a very persuasive pitch to Regan Carter. Centres are urged to spend some time on how to pitch successfully during their work on Unit 2.

In addressing the individual bullet points, again work on character proved to be most successful and examiners commented on reading fascinating back stories which gave characters depth and interest. A minority of students are still confusing characters with the actors/actresses that they would hire to appear in the pilot episode. This was not a requirement of the task and students would have been better advised to have spent more time on their characters as opposed to attempting to explain to examiners the appeal of Justin Bieber, Simon Cowell, and Cheryl Cole as would be stars of a new crime drama. Many students struggled handling storylines opting instead to tell the 'story' of their crime drama. Often these were far too long, occupying up to four sides of an answer booklet. Not only did this impact on time management, but it made for very dull reading. Examiners commented that at times it felt as if they were reading a piece of creative writing instead of a Media pitch. Better responses understood what a storyline meant and offered sharp and succinct outlines of plots which sometimes tantalised with possible endings. There was also lovely work on multiple narratives which offered an ongoing storyline to do with the main characters' home lives running parallel with the crimes to be investigated. Most students were able to handle settings, some opting for a city location which suited their fast paced crime drama whilst others opted for rural locations. Better responses went beyond merely identifying locality and cited particular backdrops or indoor settings that would be used.

Disappointingly, there were instances of responses from centres where every student had used the same setting for their crime drama, their own home town in one instance.

Task 3

The focus on e-media in the pre-release material should have prepared students for a possible task involving web page design, however this proved to be a clear differentiator. The mark scheme rewarded knowledge and understanding of the codes and conventions of web page design and student responses were divided between those who were clearly comfortable with these and those who lacked confidence in working with even the most basic elements of a web page, such as a menu bar. Examiners reported that such work often had the appearance of posters instead of web pages. Even some high performing students fell short on this task which was not solely an issue of time management. In addition to using codes and conventions of web page design, responses were rewarded for links made to the pilot episode set out in Task 2 and attention to detail gleaned from the brief. For example, some responses overlooked that the purpose of the web page was to launch the pilot episode and some responses made references to previous and later episodes in the series. Some overlooked that the pilot episode was for The Crime Channel and made references to the BBC. In contrast to this there were some excellent examples of a pilot homepage which showed design integrity and real flair. For example, Crime Channel logos were in evidence along with excellent use of conventions such as character blogs, social networking and behind the scenes. Amongst these were those which demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of how users interact with web pages.

Task 4

The need for promotional materials as part of a marketing strategy was clearly flagged up in the pre-release material. The inclusion of new and e-media was an important discriminator between responses to this task as was an accompanying explanation of the advantages of each promotional method offered. Students who had not managed their time well had difficulty in completing a response but for others it gave them an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and enthusiasm for e-media. Although only one example of e-media was a mandatory requirement for the task, many provided more. In addition to offering appropriate promotional methods, responses were highly rewarded for suggesting how they could be applied to the promotion of a particular crime drama as part of their accompanying explanation. For example, there was interesting usage of 'game apps' along with Facebook postings and Twitter feeds. Traditional methods were amongst those used too with TV trailers and posters frequently cited. Best responses clearly thought about the wider audience and demonstrated a thorough understanding of the advantages of each of their three suggestions. However, like any examination task, it is crucial that students pay attention to the instructions given. Unfortunately there was a minority of responses that failed to address e-media at all.

Conclusion

Centres should be congratulated for their hard work in preparing their students for this paper and it is hoped that the comments in this report will help teachers develop their preparation for the 2013 Unit 1 topic, The Music Press: Print and Online. In addition, AQA are continuing to offer Unit 1 Teacher Support meetings, details of which will be made available on the AQA website.