



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2012**

Media Studies

48102

(Specification 4810)

Unit 2: Understanding the Media

Report on the Examination

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Overview

An extremely high standard of work was seen by moderators this year. In Media Studies, students are asked to analyse a wide range of media products, engaging with sophisticated theories and concepts while demonstrating creativity and flair in their own skillfully presented practical work. That so many achieve such high standards is testimony to the expert guidance of their teachers, the challenge and validity of the subject and the students' own enthusiasm.

Assignment 1

Analyse and Respond

This introductory assignment continues to be most successful in encouraging students to use media terminology and often theory to approach media products in a concise and analytical way.

The majority of responses, particularly for the popular print based options such as magazine and DVD covers, were presented as annotations and this aided many in keeping to the very tight word limits. The difficulty here is ensuring that students avoid simple labelling or superficial responses. Increasingly, centres and students are realising that there is no need to include everything but instead to focus on some aspects of media language and of audience appeal and in doing so offer a detailed analysis of particular features. Where two products are analysed it is necessary to avoid repetition (for instance; not considering the effect of direct address on *both* magazine covers analysed).

Offering both annotation and essay-type response should be avoided.

A good range of media terms were used but of all of them the most helpful to students was possibly 'connotation' as it ensured that students considered the effect of a particular feature and avoided a simple explanation of what was there.

Explanation

Where they were offered (and they are a requirement) students' explanations of their own work were generally much more effective this year in briefly identifying aspects of audience appeal and use of media language in the students' creative work, helping to reinforce their AR mark. These explanations should be brief, perhaps a hundred words, and are not intended to offer the detailed reflection required by the Evaluation which is part of Assignment 3. However, they are, as befits an introductory assignment, a useful starting point. The more effective explanations are usually presented as annotations or as bullet points.

Autonomy

Where students chose at least one of the products themselves they were able to demonstrate their analytical skills much more effectively than those in groups where all had analysed the same product. This applies mostly to higher marked students but affected all in that giving students the responsibility to find their own product was good practice for Assignment 3.

Analysis of common products, whether as a class or in small groups, is obviously vital but students should then work independently. It can be difficult for Moderators to agree that a student's work is 'convincing' (Level 6) or 'good-quality' (Level 5) if they submit a response very similar to that of their peers and presumably dependent on their teacher. For centres who enter a very large number of students and where some 'non-specialists' may be teaching the subject this may provide some difficulty. However, marks of 7 or above should distinguish students who show real confidence or a sound understanding, rather than the ability to rephrase or repeat.

Research and Planning

Only five marks are available for Research, Planning and Presentation in view of the high standard of work that was seen. There is still a tendency to submit preparatory work for this assignment. This is not necessary. Obviously students will benefit from research and preparation but the artefact itself will determine the award of the five marks.

Many excellent Level 6 responses were completed using original photography and DTP. However, there were a great many more which were successfully hand-drawn. Work which relied on found images was something of a poor relation in many, though not all, cases.

Magazines, Comics, Newspapers, Film Posters and DVD covers were popular and generally successful as students can gain marks either by replicating codes and conventions or by showing creativity or preferably a combination of both.

Advertisements were rather mixed. The format does not offer the security of codes and conventions so is more dependent on the image. Where a found image is used there usually seems very little to reward. Not all students have the visual perception or creativity to be successful in creating their own image and many depend on a rather hard sell approach which seems to deny all that they have learned.

Moving Image mostly meant storyboarding. Many centres are not taking advantage of the standardised storyboard template available on the AQA website. The use of centre or student designed ones means that students often miss out crucial technical information.

Storyboarding was uneven in quality. Students need to be educated in the finer points. As a preparatory activity, simply asking students to draw still shots from a television screen (or projected screen perhaps) can reveal a great deal of misunderstanding on the part of many students as to what is or isn't a long shot or a close up. The only issue with the AQA template might be the aspect ratio and this could be adapted if you are using a projector in the classroom.

Some storyboards were rather thin in terms of the number of shots submitted. Ten drawings should really be sufficient in order to represent whatever Moving Image text is attempted. It isn't necessary to offer any more than this unless the student has ideas that they feel an urgent need to express.

Assignment 2

The most popular choices from the Assignment Banks were Promotion of Music, Film Promotion and Advertising. The first of these must be avoided by those sitting the External paper in 2013.

Analyse and Respond

The relative complexity of this assignment still provides some students and centres with difficulties but there were far fewer problems than last year (the first full series of the new specification). The most successful responses tended to be from centres where the requirements of the Assignment Bank topic had been interpreted for students by means of an assignment brief or plan. For instance, the following template could be slightly adapted to suit any of the three most popular topics. Choice of artist, film or product is for illustrative purposes. Other campaigns are available.

We at AQA Media want you to work as part of our creative team. Firstly, we need you to investigate the recent campaign to promote one of:

- a) the new JLS album and tour (Promotion of Music)*
- b) the release of the film Prometheus (Film Promotion)*
- c) the launch of Paco Rabane's new perfume, Lady Millions (Advertising and Marketing)*

*Choose **two** platforms from either television, radio, magazines or the internet.*

You will need to consider:

- the codes and conventions used in each platform*
- how each appeals to its target audience and meets their needs*
- how people, places or events are represented by the campaign*
- how the campaign is regulated and funded*
- how the campaign adapts to each platform*
- the effectiveness of the campaign.*

Your report should be roughly 800 words and should be presented effectively – so bullet points and headings would be a good idea.

Hopefully, such a method would help to avoid some of the more common pitfalls of this assignment, which are:

- students analyse the two chosen products but make no connection or comparison between them, ignoring the cross-media aspect of the assignment
- institutions are addressed but in a bolt-on fashion with little relevance to the rest of the response
- representation is considered but not in any wider sense, only in terms of the role of a particular character.

As with Assignment 1, the issue of autonomy requires some attention. As an illustration, it was common for moderators to find that a group of students had analysed and annotated screen shots from a particular moving image product. This was appropriate and helpful but it was disappointing when all of the students in a class had used the very same screen shots.

There are some logistical difficulties in ensuring that students choose products for analysis but students seeking the higher grades should not expect to have a film poster and trailer or a music video and a magazine article specially chosen for them. For some students the teacher will have to provide products but all should certainly be encouraged to find their own material. This may not be an explicit requirement of the mark scheme or specification but in terms of the spirit of inquiry and investigation that the subject seeks to foster it should be considered essential.

Film Promotion

Some of the weaker responses here tended to discuss characterisation rather than representation. In these instances, students might be advised to consider wider representations – of masculinity & femininity, a particular region or society, violence, technology, etc. This might be a case of adopting a ‘values and ideology’ approach to representation.

Analysis of the representation of a leading actor as a star and the resulting box office impact would seem to offer the potential to tackle both key concepts in one go. Some investigation of Richard Dyer’s Star Theory might be useful.

It is also important to ensure that students are able to identify *how* representation is constructed, rather than just asserting what the representation is. This can be achieved by focusing on micro elements such as camerawork, lighting, sound, mise en scene and editing.

For Institutions, students made some references to film companies and certification. Some took the opportunity to consider the impact of synergy, convergence, vast promotional budgets, and star appeal in promoting blockbusters.

Students will benefit from some class/preparatory work on the impact of budget on marketing and distribution. A comparison of the marketing of two contemporary films, one British (likely to be quite low budget) and one US (by contrast awash with promotional dollars), should prove revealing. In this series students might have made some comparison of, for instance, the promotion of Attack the Block and The Hangover Part 2. This work would not be presented for assessment but it would certainly inform that which is submitted.

Music Promotion

Representation is usually tackled with some thoroughness for this topic. Students use media language, such as denotation and connotation, to unpick products and then consider image and representation. As with film, some investigation of Dyer’s Star Theory might prove fruitful. It is likely to be productive if students can be persuaded to see the artists as ‘commodities’ or ‘constructions’ rather than real people who just happen to be singers.

The study of Institutions was sometimes bolted on with students urged to consider the role of a record company. As with film, students might want to look at budget as a key factor. A class/preparatory activity which compares the promotional campaign for a major US star with that of even a reasonably well known British act such as Rizzle Kicks would ensure that students recognise the implications of budget while appreciating the cross-media aspect of promotional campaigns. This might also lead to some comparison of promotional methods and recognition of the effect of Web 2.0; the erosion of

barriers between producers and consumers; the effect of social networking and other more recent developments.

Advertising and Marketing was also a popular choice. See comments under Assignment 3.

Research, Planning and Presentation

Some of the production work in this assignment was excellent. Most offered hand drawn products that were clearly intended as part of a consistent campaign (and therefore, 'complemented each other'). These were often carefully crafted pieces that usually displayed far more creativity than products where found images were employed. The use of original photographs for magazine pages, advertisements and film posters was often commendable.

Both here and for Assignment 1, it is encouraging to note that most students had been appropriately informed of the need to present their RPP work effectively. In some instances, this was combined with a pitch, which served as a most effective explanation. Such an explanation is even more necessary here for Assignment 2. Even the most gifted media student might struggle to convey a sense of campaign, imply representation and demonstrate an awareness of institutional aspects purely through their creative work and without being able to offer any commentary.

There were cases where work was presented in a rather rough or slap-dash fashion. This seemed acceptable in a few centres. In most it wasn't tolerated or was marked punitively when it was seen – as it should be.

Many students choosing to do the television or radio interview task offered quite a weak response. It was rare to see students provide a context for the interviews or suggest who the interviewer would be. There were few suggestions for costume, setting, clips or performance. The crux of the problem was that students hadn't analysed chat shows so were ill-equipped to compose their own. Perhaps this was considered an easy task for lower ability students or maybe an alternative to another storyboard. Whatever the reason, it is as difficult as any other task to do well and like other tasks it needs to be informed by research.

A great many storyboards were offered for this task. In most cases these were vibrant, colourful and ten frames in length (see also Assignment 1 Research and Planning).

Several students offered effective websites for Promotion of Music. These were usually hand drawn but were visually appealing and employed relevant codes and conventions.

Some students were encouraged to create a cross-media campaign for already existing films or artists and simply recycle found images. This severely inhibited responses in terms of creativity. Provided they can shed their school uniforms or find other suitable subjects and/or locations, students are much better off creating their own film or artiste(s).

Assignment 3

Research, Planning and Presentation

As in the previous series, many students submitted far too much material for RPP - much of it unfocused. The inclusion of copious amounts of source material. In some instances whole magazines, led moderators to assume that this material had not been vetted by teachers and that students had not received sufficient guidance. In several cases it was difficult to see how this work impacted on the production.

A **limit of twelve pages** has been set by the specification and this should be sufficient for students to demonstrate the quality of their work. The amount of work is not being measured here and if it was, the submission of multiple copies of the same questionnaire would not offer students any advantage. Nor would huge folders and extensive notes that would take days to read.

Fortunately, in most centres, the organisation of this work was appropriate, covering a range of activities and with a sense of purpose. Some centres encouraged their students to write a short statement of intent at the beginning of the process. This pitch enabled them to identify a customer or target audience and made their research more purposeful.

In some cases a booklet of templates was provided for the research and planning. While this provides students with support and guidance it is important that students, particularly those wishing to access the higher grades, be able to demonstrate autonomy and an ability to research 'independently' (Level 6 descriptor).

Questionnaires tend to be the go-to method of market research for most students. These sometimes enable students to meet the needs of their intended audience but all too often the collection of quantitative data is the end product. Qualitative research, in the form of small focus groups, might prove more informative. These will rely on a structure similar to that of a questionnaire but will be likely to elicit more thoughtful responses and explanations. Students can easily record such conversations, transcribe some of the more interesting contributions and draw some conclusions from the exercise which may then inform their production.

There were a few centres that made the significant error of allowing a group of students to submit their RPP collectively. This is not permissible. There may be a little overlap between students working in a group but each student is required to submit their own evidence of research and planning.

Overall, there was much more planning offered than research. Rough drafts, storyboards, scripts and sketches tended to provide evidence of the careful crafting of the final piece (although in some cases these seemed suspiciously retrospective). A shift toward research in some centres would be beneficial. When Constructions were less successful this was often due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the format. For instance, often magazine productions tended to decline in quality after effective front pages (informed by research of extant products). Subsequent contents pages and articles lacked columns and employed inappropriately large fonts because these pages had not been researched sufficiently.

Construct and Evaluate

Most centres applied the correct marks to the two elements here; 20 marks for Construct and 10 for Evaluation. However, the Candidate Record Forms don't remind teachers of this division and not all appear to be aware of it. The more recent version of the specification found on the AQA website makes this clear.

Found original images in print work?

Students who use their own images have to consider the framing, angle and distance of their shots and various aspects of mise en scene, such as, lighting, pose, props, colouration and choice of model. Most of the students who use found images simply select what they think is the 'best' picture. It is possible to achieve high marks for Assignment 3, print, Construction work using found images – but it is much more difficult to demonstrate real technical proficiency and/or creativity.

Where original photography is used it is essential that this be made clear to the moderator. The most effective way of doing this is to include principal photography as part of the RPP work, perhaps with some indication of choices made. Cover sheet comment or annotation of the work would suffice. If original photography is mistaken for found imagery it is possible that students' achievements may go cruelly unrewarded.

Advertising and Marketing

This was a popular choice with many centres capitalising on the multi-disciplinary aspect and dipping their toes in the Moving Image pond while having print as insurance. Many offered radio advertisements in the same manner. These campaigns were often extremely effective. A consistent style, slogan and mode of address were achieved. Work was highly original and relied heavily on ITC to ensure a convincing final piece.

It was encouraging that far fewer students fell into the trap of devoting an inordinate amount of time to the creation of a brand and its packaging. This assignment should focus on the construction of an advertising campaign – not the creation of a new product. One way of avoiding this is to have students promote an existing product but one that isn't widely marketed. This allows them to create a campaign with a client in mind while not having to create the product itself.

As mentioned in Assignment 1, it is even more important that students offer their own images for Advertising and Marketing campaigns than for other topics as there are usually few codes and conventions to fall back on.

It is also wise to insist on a person appearing in all advertisements either studied or created. This avoids some of the rudimentary advertisements which only feature the packet and a grand claim.

Moving Image

Most film making was thoughtful and imaginative. Openings to films or television programmes were carefully planned and often enigmatic. Music videos drew on students artistic tendencies at best and at least applied codes and conventions.

There was an encouraging move away from over-use of 'shaky cam' in film trailers. Trailers were usually very effective as they encourage tight editing and rely on a number of recognisable conventions. There were, however, still too many instances of students running around corridors in school uniform pretending to be murderers. As difficult as it might often be, there are enormous advantages of filming outside school, in appropriate locations and wearing suitable clothing, rather than in school and in uniform.

Of even more importance is for students to become familiar with the equipment. All students should have some experience of editing their own film before embarking on their assessed piece.

Sound is often a key discriminator. Many students are unable to manipulate sound effectively, perhaps hampered by their equipment, and rely on a continuous backing track. Level 5 and 6 Moving Image work is often characterised by a range of sound conventions such as dialogue, voice over, stings and sound effects as well as backing music.

Magazines

Magazines were the most popular Assignment 3 choice by far. There was good use, by and large, of original images. Availability of digital cameras and Photoshop put some centres or students at a distinct advantage. There were still some projects relying heavily on found images, for instance, celebrity/fashion magazines for girls or car and gaming magazines for boys. This resulted in very derivative work – often in terms of copy and image. Magazine production may often appear the easiest option but if students are unable to envisage a magazine wherein they can create original material they might be advised to choose something else.

Should students wish to produce a film, television or celebrity magazine they should be encouraged to create their own 'stars' – just as they might do for Assignment 1 and 2 practical pieces. Typically, boys may struggle to create convincing images for a sports magazine using images of their peers but they would at least be rewarded for initiative and effort were they to take photographs of adult participants at a local sports club. With prior consent, of course.

Most students managed the required amount of pages but some did far more. This usually meant a decline in quality.

There was often a discrepancy between the quality of front covers (carefully constructed with precise application of codes and conventions) and inside pages (fonts too large, lack of columns, little more than image and text). The root of this was usually found in the research and planning where covers had been annotated but inside pages ignored.

Websites

There was a significant increase in the number of websites offered and many of these were lively and impressive. The use of web building programmes such as Wix and Weebly can help students a great deal but there is a danger that these can drive the content and limit creativity. Students need to own their sites and not just rely on templates.

It is important that websites should have working links. The twenty marks available here for Construction are intended to emphasize the need for a 'finished' product and websites submitted on paper do not really qualify.

Having embarked on a new media topic there is tendency to assume that website work is invariably fresh and innovative. This is not the case. Some are submitted with quite mundane content and frequently moderators are unable to support marking where centres have attached a halo to anything as modern as a website. On websites, as much as any other topic, images need to be carefully framed, lit and posed. Copy needs to be lively and interesting. The lay-out or presentation of the pages needs to appeal. Backgrounds, scrolling text, rollovers and animation might be expected for those requiring higher marks. Technical competence hasn't been demonstrated if the site does not have working links. Websites are not just a medium for the static, dull presentation of basic information.

There are also concerns sometimes regarding the submission of websites. Advice is offered for the submission of all Construction work on the AQA Media Studies website, under Key Materials/Teacher Resource Bank. The section on submitting websites is particularly useful.
<http://store.aqa.org.uk/qual/newgcse/pdf/AQA-4810-W-TRB-U02-U04-ITRESCONTASS.PDF>

Radio

This tended to appear as part of Advertising and Marketing. Students constructed adverts using voice, sound effects and bedding music and carefully considered the potential impact on their target audience. All within thirty seconds.

This was sometimes the case where radio shows were produced but generally the shows lacked variety and pace. Audacity, Garageband and other programmes have taken some of the fear out of radio production and if students research the codes and conventions of the medium and plan carefully there are opportunities for groups of up to four students to produce lively and entertaining radio shows. However, it is fair to say that usually this didn't quite work out so well in practice.

Evaluation

Evaluations were generally sound. They were mostly detailed, evaluative, addressed the key concepts and relatively few were limited to descriptions of the process.

It is probably fair to say that students cope well here as they might have written two explanations already and know what is required. Many centres supported students by offering headings or questions, some following the guidance on page 16 of the specification. Most Evaluations adhered to the word limit. Many were enlivened by screen shots and annotations.

Administration

The majority of centres presented a Moderator friendly sample with students' work treasury tagged and with assignments separated by a cover sheet of some sort and stored in a wallet folder. DVDs were used to store Moving Image or Audio work – preferably a single one which carried a clear menu. Detailed comments on the Candidate Record Form explained the marking with reference to the assessment criteria which was interpreted in line with the students' work. Marks were correctly added and transferred to the Centre Mark Sheet and the marks and work were with the Moderator by early May.

This was not always the case. Moderators flagged up the following concerns:

- marks and/or work arriving considerably late
- occasional centres directing moderators to digital archives that included no teacher annotation, and could be added to after the CA deadline
- plastic wallets. These are fine for individual sheets but having to remove and replace bunches of sheets can be very awkward and time consuming. Treasury tags please
- not being able to tell where one assignment ended and another began
- DVDs and their cases crushed in transit
- work being presented on A3 card – or larger. Totally unnecessary. Nothing larger than A4 (or A3 folded) need be submitted

- inclusion of copy for magazines or websites that was ‘found’ and had to be investigated for plagiarism. (In one instance a video found on Youtube was passed off as the student’s own)
- failure to send or properly complete the Centre Declaration Sheet (much less of a problem this year)
- clerical errors such as incorrect addition of marks or incorrect transfer of marks from work to mark sheet
- the use of couriers where a signature is required on delivery. Almost all of the moderators are full time teachers and it is unlikely that they will be home when the courier calls.

Large Entry Centres

In cases where more than fifty students are entered it is really useful if a rank order is submitted and if different teaching groups can be identified. The most important factor is the internal standardisation of the work and in a few large centres there appeared to be insufficient time invested in this process. As a result marking was inconsistent. Invariably this involved some teachers marking fairly and accurately while others over-rewarded. It is crucial that centres arrive at the correct rank order of students with a consistent standard of marking shared and applied by all media teachers.

Marking

Generally speaking, the marking of work was fair and accurate. Once again, where over-marking did occur it was likely to involve Assignment 3, AO4 Construct or Assignment 2, AO2 Analyse and Respond. These are the higher tariff tasks. For Construction there seemed to be a reluctance to use the full range of marks in some centres with 10/20 awarded to what was very basic work. Similarly for Assignment 2 there seemed reluctance in some centres to award less than half marks. To achieve 10 out of 20 on the AR task students should be able to demonstrate more than a basic understanding of representation and of institutions. This wasn’t always the case and awarding too high here often led to inflated marks throughout a particular cohort.

The information given to moderators by teachers was variable. There were a few who simply ticked work at best and left it to the moderator’s imagination to unravel how marks had been awarded. However, the vast majority of teachers were annotating work, using descriptors, AOs, KCs and making relevant comments on the AQA forms or on centre designed assignment sheets. It was always heartening for moderators when these comments engaged with the work produced and interpreted the assessment criteria. There is very little value in simply copying out phrases from the assessment criteria. One area that continues to cause a good deal of concern is the marking of group work for Assignment 3 Constructions. It is essential that teachers comment on the contributions of particular group members and offer an explanation of how this has affected the respective marks awarded.

Final Thoughts

The general feeling among moderators was that centres and students had coped confidently with the demands of the specification. While marking was mostly sound, there was also evidence of continuing pressure on centres to award higher marks which left moderators increasingly anxious when determining whether marking could be accepted as within tolerance.

However, all were impressed by the high standard of work submitted which demonstrated the enthusiasm and commitment of staff and students and proved, not that it were needed by those who work in schools, colleges and academies, the true value of the subject.