GCSE

Media Studies

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J526**

Examiners' Reports

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General Certificate of Secondary Education

Media Studies (J526)

EXAMINERS' REPORTS

B322 Textual Analysis and Media Topic (Moving Image)

Extract:

0.05.36 – 0.09.58 ***Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World***
From
'Two points off the starboard bow, in the fog bank'
To
'And for God's sake don't drop anything' - then the two men are blown to the floor

This was a small entry. Most candidates showed the ability to distinguish generic conventions in the extract from *Master and Commander* and to discuss how media language was used to produce effects, but fewer could successfully analyse representation elements within the extract. Moreover, a significant proportion of the candidates failed to gain marks in the textual topic by not displaying a sure grasp of the scheduling details for the two texts they had studied. There were, however, some very good responses, and most candidates seemed to find the extract a rich source for analysis.

Many candidates wrote a great deal for question 2 on media language and very little for question 3 on representation, especially where they seemed unsure about issues of social stereotyping. Most candidates answered sequentially, sometimes running out of time for question 4.

Question 1 – generic conventions

This question was, on the whole, answered competently.   Candidates appeared well prepared and pointed out a large number of generic features. Better answers clearly established how the extract met generic conventions, referred to textual exemplification and used terminology such as 'generic conventions', 'protagonists and antagonists' and 'generic hybridity'.

Many noted the presence of a hero and villain; this enabled candidates to provide appropriate exemplification so was usually successful. Other commonly noted elements were the 'preparing for action' sequence and the violence of the extract. A number of candidates commented on the lack of a female 'damsel in distress'. Some thoughtful candidates assigned this role to the younger members of the crew and pointed out how the hero captain looked after them.

Some candidates listed 4 or 5 generic conventions but without the necessary detail required to reach the higher bands. However, examiners credit the whole of the answer so do not penalise candidates who list more than two conventions.

For some weaker candidates the generic conventions were sometimes a little vague and candidates did not always demonstrate securely how these fitted the action adventure genre.

Some candidates spent much time referencing other films which, although usually relevant, sometimes left little time for the detailed exemplification from the extract needed for the highest marks.

Question 2 – media language

This question was usually answered quite well. Very few candidates this year failed to respond to all four bullet points (this is required for the top two mark bands). Some, however, wrote

lengthy opening paragraphs discussing the importance of media language in general, or wasted time repeatedly paraphrasing the question, when they may have been better advised to dive straight into analysis of specific examples.

Some candidates spent a lot of time on the generic conventions of action adventure films, which they had already covered in question 1.

Advice to teachers
Advise candidates that the instruction to analyse 'effects that fit the action adventure genre' should imply an emphasis on the effects rather than repetition of generic conventions.

Some answers failed to separate out their responses to each bullet point – these were often self-penalising, as examiners need clear evidence that the candidates understand the difference between editing and camerawork, for example.

Stronger answers generally listed several uses of media language for each bullet point and were precise about connotative effect.

Soundtrack

Some candidates seemed confused by the lack of music in the extract, some claiming 'there is no soundtrack' and others describing non-existent music (possibly applying pre-rehearsed points about music), suggesting that more careful note-making was needed. Many more successful candidates addressed the absence of sound in specific parts of the extract and how this contributed to the sense of tension. Many students commented on the effects of the drumming, the sounds of the sea, and the very loud sounds of cannon balls hitting the ship.

The distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic sound, though useful for earning terminology credit for candidates who deploy it correctly, seems to confuse many candidates – and not only the less successful ones.

Advice to teachers
Consider whether to avoid using the terms 'diegetic sound' and 'non-diegetic sound', with less skilled candidates, as they are so commonly misused.

Camerawork

Camerawork was well answered. The most common shots for commenting on were: the shot-reverse shot two shot of the conversation at the start of the clip, the point of view shot through the telescope, the tracking following the Captain and the low angle shot of him.

Media terminology was often used extensively and appropriately, but a number of candidates referred to a cut to a close up as the camera 'zooming in'. Some candidates mistook obvious tracking and crane shots as 'panning'. Often this is overlooked in marking, as it might be hard to distinguish between the two in an examination extract, but in this case the type of camera movement was so clear in the examples usually given (eg tracking the Captain as he strides across the ship, tracking down the length of the ship) that candidates should have been able to make a correct identification.

Advice to teachers
Encourage the candidates to learn to distinguish between panning and tracking camera movements.

Editing

Many candidates were not able to address editing confidently. Some were not able to distinguish editing from camerawork or even mise-en-scène (discussing the fog, for example). Some correct but rather weak answers simply stated that the extract used cuts rather than dissolves or fades. Others demonstrated a thorough knowledge of editing and were able to analyse its use and function, particularly noting the increase in editing pace at moments of high action and the juxtaposing of various shots of the crew preparing for action.

There were many responses erroneously using the term 'jump cuts', which were not present in the extract. The term 'straight cuts' is also often used by candidates who appear to be floundering for a response on editing. Candidates should also be warned that 'fast cuts' is a rather ambiguous term and probably best avoided in favour of 'fast paced editing' (but not 'fast paste' editing, or any of its variants).

Advice to teachers
Consider whether to avoid using the term 'jump cuts', especially with less skilled candidates, as it is so commonly misused.

Mise-en-scène

Mise-en-scène was occasionally the weakest area of response with some students making rather generalised comments about hat shapes and sizes and their link to the action adventure genre – some were clearly struggling to analyse mise-en-scène from a period piece. Setting and lighting typically caught the attention of more successful candidates. There were many detailed descriptions of the setting and the majority were able to explain how this created an effect to fit the genre.

Question 3 – representation

This was usually the weakest response of the textual analysis questions, and the question that otherwise able candidates were most likely to do badly.

The main weakness was restricting the answer to general comments about characterisation, including rather a lot of discussion around hat size, long hair, filthy slaves and the Captain's fine clothes. Many answers dealt with characterisation in a more detailed manner, but this still limited their response to level 2 of the mark scheme which covers '*descriptions* of aspects of representation'. Many answers tried, as instructed, to use the concept of 'stereotyping' but restricted this to hastily invented stereotypes of 'the Captain' or 'the second in command'. Some candidates commented on the lack of women in the extract, but failed to link this to gender stereotypes. However, only a very few candidates appeared to have no idea of what was required – these mostly produced a simple description of some of the content of the extract.

Candidates covered a range of representation issues successfully: the absence of women, the lack of disabled characters, the token Black character ('who was bossed about by a peasant'), the difference in class and age between the officers and the crew, and the celebration of teamwork and patriotism.
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The lack of a 'visible' enemy didn't seem to pose too many problems and many students were able to make concise comments about the hero.

A large proportion, possibly a majority, of candidates thought that the crew were 'pirates'.

A number of candidates were clearly unimpressed by Russell Crowe and found him to be atypical of the genre, as the hero is usually 'attractive', 'masculine', and 'well-built'.

Some weak answers relied on Propp's character types.

Media Topic

4(a) – scheduling of two comedies

This question was often answered poorly. Candidates are expected to know the time, day and channel for each text and many answers were marked down for lack of this basic scheduling information. The format of this question may change slightly in future to remind candidates to give this information. The evidence suggests, however, that this failure was due to poor revision or exam technique as there were always some candidates who could state and evaluate the scheduling of two comedies.

Advice to teachers
Instruct the candidates to write out the key details for each programme – name, day, time, channel – at the top of the answer. 'Every weekday' is an adequate description of day for stripped programmes (but it is often missed out).

Very few candidates misread the question and only discussed one programme. Only a handful discussed programmes that are not comedies (such as *EastEnders*).

Some candidates who wrote about old programmes got bogged down in historical detail: some candidates who wrote about programmes such as classic BBC sitcoms no longer on the BBC (eg *Only Fools and Horses*, *Fawlty Towers*) wrote well about how the programme was originally on the BBC but had now moved to GOLD – but by doing this they ran out of time and failed to discuss the ethos and identity of the current channels.

Some candidates compared an E4 programme with a C4 programme – weaker candidates couldn't draw out any differences between the two and got rather muddled. There were, however, strong responses comparing BBC1 programmes with C4 programmes – this seemed to allow students the ability to make interesting comparisons around funding, ethos and programme make-up.

Advice to teachers
Pick texts with clearly contrasting channel ethos and target audience – and consider making one of these a channel aimed specifically at their age group?

Some candidates simply cited 'the BBC' or 'SKY' for the channel without further clarification. Some candidates gave all the details for one programme but then left out some required information for the other.

Audience demographics in whatever form ('A, B C' or 'middle/working class') were, as usual, more often than not a source of confusion for candidates. Many candidates thought that 'adults' or 'people over 25' constituted a niche audience.

Advice to teachers
Consider whether to approach audience statistics from a demographic categorisation standpoint or psycho-graphically.

Many candidates were able to discuss their chosen channels in relation to PSB. The more able could discuss how these regulations shaped the content and scheduling of their chosen programmes to some extent. Many referred to the watershed, usually accurately. Some sweeping statements were made but it was clear that candidates were grappling with relevant issues. A few very successful candidates began to question the notion of PSB in the current climate.

Scheduling terminology, such as 'hammocking', 'stacking', or 'tentpoling' was used productively in many responses.

Many successful answers used texts that allowed a discussion of niche and mass audiences.

Many successful responses used details of the programmes preceding and following the text to explain scheduling decisions, and some argued that a particular time slot was to win back audiences after a competitor channel's flagship programme.

The most popular programme was *Friends*. Some candidates claimed that it is scheduled on C4 on a Friday at 9pm.

Where candidates appeared to have been given almost total free rein with the case study it seemed this had not been very helpful to the less successful candidates.

4b – audience pleasures

Many chose to use the same programmes as for part (a).

Successful candidates gave a wide range of pleasures offered by their chosen texts and made sound textual reference to support their points. The more successful responses tended to be those where there was a clear identifiable difference between the chosen texts – such as situation comedies and quiz based comedies – which allowed candidates to develop an argument and cover a wider range of pleasures.

Some very weak answers concentrated on the different target audiences for their two programmes, with little or no reference to pleasures. Such candidates often made rather generalised comments about 'upper class people' being the target audience for *Outnumbered* because it's about an upper class family in London, or 'old people over 25' liking *Have I Got New For You* because 'it's boring'.

A few answers were very unbalanced between the two programmes covered.

In several responses, audience pleasures were identified as something that would simply 'make you laugh' and there was little development beyond this. However, there were often textual references cited to support this.

Some answers that did discuss a range of pleasures did not have specific textual examples in their answer, instead writing generally about pleasures.

Some candidates made reference to the uses and gratifications theory to support their responses. This was successful at times, but did not guarantee success.

Candidates who chose very similar texts tended to limit their scope for discussion. In these instances, responses tended to be repetitive.

Advice to teachers
- **Consider choosing two different comedies for question 4(b) to those for 4(a)**
- **Ensure that candidates are amused by the two programmes they study for question 4(b)**
- **Encourage candidates to give examples from more than one episode of a programmes**
- **Encourage more able candidates to each give different textual examples to suggest a higher level of critical autonomy.**

B323 Textual Analysis and Media Topic (Print)

Extract:

Marie Claire, September 2009, front cover, editor's letter and two contents pages.

This was a very small entry. Most candidates showed the ability to distinguish generic conventions in the extract from Marie Claire, to discuss how it used media language to produce effects, and to analyse representation elements within the extract. However, a significant proportion of the candidates failed to gain marks in the textual topic by not displaying a sure grasp of the scheduling details for the two texts they had studied. There were, however, some very good responses, and most candidates seemed to find the extract a rich source for analysis.

Question 1 – generic conventions

Candidates appeared well prepared for this question, but a number of candidates included a lot of detailed material more suited to questions 2 and 3 in their answers to question 1. These candidates often ran out of time and did not finish, or in some cases even start, question 4. A few candidates wrote about the conventions of women's lifestyle magazines rather than more general lifestyle magazine conventions ('all lifestyle magazines contain women's fashion', for example) – not many men's lifestyle magazines cover women's fashion in much detail. Some candidates reeled off a list of several conventions but did not explain any of them.

Successful candidates confidently commented on the layout of the front cover, the direct address, the false friendliness of the Editor's Letter and the mixture of topics in the contents. Most focused on the textual example and did not refer to other magazines they had studied. Stronger candidates pointed out the hybrid nature of the magazine.

Question 2 – media language

This question was generally answered well, though there were some incidents of students leaving out a bullet point, usually layout.

Layout

This section caused candidates the most problems. Many comments on layout were rather generalised; about neatness appealing to women, for example. Better answers commented on the mix of the dominant formal organisation and order with a few more informal elements such as the text wrapping in the editor's letter.

Language

Candidates were confident when talking about language. Most cited the creation of a false friendship in the Editor's Letter (which works just as well with or without the ubiquitous jargon of 'synthetic personalisation') and cited the aspirational language used on the cover lines, and gave focused examples of direct address.

Typography

Typography was generally dealt with successfully, with some thoughtful comments on gender. However, many candidates could not spell 'sans serif' accurately and less successful candidates often confused serif and sans serif fonts or made comments such as 'the fonts are serif' when there was clearly a mix on all pages.

Colour

Candidates commented on colour with confidence, but most focused only in its use in the typography rather than the look of the magazine as a whole; hardly anyone noted that the limited palette connoted a level of sophistication, for example.

Question 3 – representation

This was the question that seemed to cause the most difficulty, as with B322, but the weaker answers were better than their equivalents for B322 as they discussed issues of gender representation more than characterisation.

Many candidates focused on ambiguity in the representation of Women. They highlighted the use of imagery and subject matter in the magazine to debate and discuss representations and evidence from the text was used to highlight each point. There was a mixture of opinions regarding if the representation was positive or negative. Some felt the body language of the front cover was negative, in terms of the woman being seen as an object, others felt her stance was positive, confident and assured. Weaker candidates still managed to identify that the extract represented femininity as an ongoing pressure to look perfect and stay fashionable.

Some candidates seemed to have memorised the bullet points from last year's report, which was still relevant to this year, but regurgitated them in a list without linking them to exam text at all.

Some candidates didn't spot the ethnically mixed representation so wrote about how the extract wasn't ethnically diverse.

Media Topic

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