

## **OCR Report to Centres**

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**June 2012**

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA) is a leading UK awarding body, providing a wide range of qualifications to meet the needs of candidates of all ages and abilities. OCR qualifications include AS/A Levels, Diplomas, GCSEs, OCR Nationals, Functional Skills, Key Skills, Entry Level qualifications, NVQs and vocational qualifications in areas such as IT, business, languages, teaching/training, administration and secretarial skills.

It is also responsible for developing new specifications to meet national requirements and the needs of students and teachers. OCR is a not-for-profit organisation; any surplus made is invested back into the establishment to help towards the development of qualifications and support, which keep pace with the changing needs of today's society.

This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

OCR will not enter into any discussion or correspondence in connection with this report.

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## General Certificate of Secondary Education

### Media Studies (J526)

#### OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

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# B321 The Individual Media Studies Portfolio

## General comments

This was the second year of entry for this unit for the majority of centres. The work submitted was generally of a good standard; some portfolios were exceptional in detail and accomplishment.

This year it was particularly apparent that centres and candidates succeeded where the choices of topic, texts and production exercise engaged the candidates' interests and enabled them to meet the assessment criteria. A successful approach was where one or two texts were selected by the centre, and candidates were then allowed to select one other text of their own choice. With this approach, the candidates demonstrated an excellent level of understanding and engagement and produced very impressive portfolios.

Examples of successful tasks are given below, in order to help centres ensure that they make the best choices for their candidates.

Centres are reminded that a minimum of two existing media texts must be studied for the analytical assignment. The element of comparison is essential for candidates to achieve the higher levels.

Many centres relied on the exemplar tasks suggested in the specification, or in the OCR textbook, but there were also many examples of excellent tasks devised by the centres. Advertising, Film Genres and Popular Music were the most popular topics this year.

## The contents of the portfolio

Three distinct sections are required for the portfolio and should be presented in the following order:

- the analytical assignment
- the production exercise
- the evaluative commentary, together with evidence of research and planning material.

**Each of these sections should focus on media language and representation, the two concept areas that are being tested in this unit.** Best practice was demonstrated where there was a coherent approach to the portfolio, which meant that all three tasks were linked and candidates were able to refer back to the analytical task in their evaluation of the production exercise.

## Organisation and the recording of marks

The majority of centres submitted portfolios which were well organised and accurately presented, with clear labelling of each section of the portfolio. However, there were still some centres which sent work that was disorganised, making the centre very time consuming to moderate.

Centres are reminded that it is essential that cover sheets are correctly filled in, with candidate numbers and a detailed breakdown of the marks awarded. Marks should be checked, as should transcription from the back of the cover sheet to the front. It is also vital to check that the total mark on the cover sheet matches the mark on the MS1 before sending the work to the moderator.

The topic and tasks must be clearly set out in detail on the cover sheets. In a few cases the stated task on the cover sheet did not match the actual task submitted by candidates; this is clearly unhelpful to the moderators.

### **Presentation of the portfolios**

Moderators experienced difficulty when centres sent everything electronically and failed to submit a cover sheet with the candidates' details and the teacher summative comments. It is essential that hard copies of the cover sheets are sent to the moderator, and it is expected that hard copies of the work, together with detailed teacher annotations, are also sent. Moderators cannot fully appreciate the work involved when looking only at a computer screen.

The work should be presented in the correct order: the analytical assignment; the production exercise; the evaluative commentary, together with evidence of research and planning material. The final production exercise should be clearly labelled for the moderator, to distinguish it from the drafts.

**Centres are reminded that the use of three sided plastic wallets is not permitted and hinders the moderation process (see p.14 of the online specification).**

### **Teacher comments and annotations**

The best centres included detailed, thorough teacher summative comments, making the reasons for the allocation of marks clear, and making reference to the assessment criteria. They also offered detailed, helpful annotations on the work itself; it is very difficult for moderators to uphold centre marking where there is a complete absence of any sort of annotation.

Centres are strongly encouraged to make it clear when original photography has been used, as moderators find it helpful to have teacher confirmation of this. They are also encouraged to use the teacher summative boxes on the cover sheets to give any additional information that will help the moderator understand how the marks have been arrived at.

### **Assessment**

The majority of centres applied the assessment criteria accurately to their candidates' work. There were some adjustments made, although this was more likely to be the case where this was the first year of entry for the centre. Most adjustments were made where marking was over-generous.

Some centres overmarked the planning and evaluative commentary, even when there was little or no evidence of planning submitted. Evidence of research and planning needs to be included in order to achieve Levels 3 and 4.

### **General comments on tasks**

More centres used the exemplar tasks suggested in the specification, or in the OCR textbook this year. Whilst these often produced successful work, other centres developed their own interesting analytical assignments and production exercises, effectively matching the tasks set to the abilities and interests of their candidates. A few centres gave their candidates the independence to choose their own texts entirely and the work produced was both interesting and varied.

It is recommended that centres include hard copies of print texts analysed and links to videos/advertisements on YouTube; this is clearly very helpful to moderators.

### **The analytical assignment**

The majority of the analytical assignments were well organised and very detailed, the candidates having been taught very well. In the best candidates' work there was a strong focus on media language and representation, the two concept areas that are being tested in this unit, together with an ability to use technical terms and medium-specific terminology accurately.

Successful responses combined a study of representation with a study of media language, with candidates analysing and comparing texts but focusing on particular aspects. For film and television this meant looking at particular scenes rather than the whole text; this helped avoid a narrative response which can be a characteristic of middle and lower level candidates.

Paying attention to media language meant that candidates could consider how representation had been achieved rather than a summary of what that representation was – enabling access to Level 4 in most instances.

Successful approaches were those which looked at material from the past and compared it to current representations, such as those which compared contemporary advertisements with 50s advertisements for domestic products demonstrating obvious stereotyping. The changes in societal values could then be traced across the decades. This type of response was almost always successful but was particularly effective where candidates analysed the technical elements of sound, camerawork, mise-en-scène and editing and where candidates were able to show some autonomy, perhaps in their choice of contemporary texts.

The majority of the analytical assignments were submitted in essay form, although a few centres chose to offer PowerPoint presentations, with varying results. In some cases, candidates used images and symbols very effectively in their PowerPoint presentations. Where centres sent the print version of the PowerPoint, together with the electronic one, this was very helpful to the moderator.

**Centres are reminded that the specification states that the analytical assignment should be word processed (see p.9 of the online specification).**

### **The Production Exercise**

Again this year there were many examples of creative, imaginative work, with excellent use of technology. The majority of centres had structured their courses carefully so that the production exercise was a coherent part of the portfolio, and reinforced their candidates' knowledge and understanding of media language and representation.

However, in some cases production exercises were marked up or down because of the quality of the production in technical terms, without really considering whether they had demonstrated the candidates' understanding of representation. In these cases, marks were likely to be adjusted.

Best practice was seen where there was a co-ordinated approach to the portfolio, so that the production exercise reinforced the knowledge and understanding demonstrated in the analytical assignment. For example, candidates struggled if they were asked to produce an analytical assignment on the representation of gender in two films and then to produce magazine covers aimed at a niche audience for their Production Exercise.

Far more candidates used original photography this year and manipulated it very well, enabling them to demonstrate "excellent presentation skills" and "a sense of creativity and stimulation employed in targeting a specific audience" (p.47 of the online specification). The use of original images for magazine covers or articles, photostories and moving image advertisements were among the best responses and resulted in a much higher standard of presentation and a greater sense of engagement. Again this year a number of centres submitted very successful mixture of original and found images.

This contrasted with those centres which used found images exclusively for very simple material. CD covers, film posters and print advertisements using found images alone give little scope for candidates to demonstrate Level 4 skills convincingly.

A small number of centres submitted drawn advertisements or storyboards, rather than using technology. Clearly the outcomes were less realistic and less likely to demonstrate careful planning, making it harder for candidates to emulate the forms and conventions and demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of forms and conventions and of the concept of representation.

Some centres encouraged a degree of autonomy in the production exercise, resulting in impressive work. If sufficient effort is placed on research and planning, there is no reason why groups or individuals cannot work on different production exercises according to their own interests and enthusiasm.

### **The evaluative commentary**

The majority of candidates wrote about their use of research and codes and conventions and analysed the ways in which they had constructed specific representations in their production exercises. Reflection on the success of the exercise was sometimes very well tackled, but in other instances only touched on very briefly, if at all. Some centres had devised a check list for their candidates, based on the assessment criteria in the specification (p.13 of the online specification). This offered candidates guidance through this element of the portfolio, leading to some thoughtful evaluations, without being too restricting.

Most centres rewarded the evaluative commentary appropriately. Occasionally, a centre described what work had been undertaken on the cover sheet rather than including evidence of some of the work within the portfolio. In one or two cases, centres failed to award any marks for this element purely because a formal essay had not been completed, despite there being some evidence of research, planning or drafting.

Many centres used print outs of PowerPoint presentations for the evaluative commentary. This allowed for the inclusion of interesting images and screen grabs, used to illustrate decisions made or to account for research conducted. There was a strong sense of enjoyment and engagement in these PowerPoint presentations.

### **Evidence of research and planning**

Many centres presented just the appropriate amount of research evidence, together with sufficient planning and drafting evidence to support the marks awarded. In examples where good research and planning took place the standard of the production and the planning and evaluative commentary were impressive.

However, there were a few centres where evidence of research and drafting was not present in the portfolios. This absence of evidence made it harder for moderators to agree the marks awarded to the production exercise and the evaluative commentary.

Centres are again requested to distinguish between the final product and earlier drafts, by using labels, dividers or an index to separate the work. It is good practice to encourage candidates to annotate drafts of work, explaining decisions and revisions. Careful, detailed annotation of drafts and the final outcome of front covers, film posters, DVD cases and CD covers was a feature in the more successful centres.

## Conclusion

There was an excellent variety of analytical and creative work seen for this unit. Candidates had engaged well with the texts and the challenging concept of representation. The majority of centres supported the assessment criteria and ensured that their candidates successfully fulfilled the requirements of the three sections of the portfolio. Centres are to be congratulated for the successful planning, delivery and assessment of this unit.

## Summary of best practice

- Work in the portfolio is presented in the correct order
- There is detailed annotation on the analytical assignments, production exercises and evaluative commentaries, in order to make it clear to the moderator how the marks have been allocated.
- Clear evidence of the research and planning processes is included in the portfolio
- There are good levels of skill in the production exercise, using technology and original photography
- The assessment criteria are related to the specific candidate's achievements in the summative comments.
- Additional information to help support the marks is given, such as whether the candidate used original photography or found images.

## Examples of successful tasks 2012

### Topic 1: Documentaries

- Compare and contrast the techniques used to represent the topic of gun crime in 'Bowling for Columbine' and Dispatches: 'Gun Nation'. Create two DVD covers that show different representations of one issue.
- Compare the way class is represented in two 'fish out of water' documentaries: 'Wife Swap' and '7 Days on the Breadline'. Produce a script and an advertisement for a new radio documentary on class.
- How is youth represented in 'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding' and 'American Teen'? Produce two DVD covers for new documentaries that show different representations of young people.

### Topic 2: Film Genres

- Compare the representations of male and female roles in the Disney films you have studied: 'Cinderella'/'Sleeping Beauty'/'Beauty and the Beast'/'The Little Mermaid'. Produce two posters for two new Disney films with contrasting representations.
- Compare the representations of gender and social class in two social realist films: 'Fish Tank' and 'Precious'. Produce a poster for a new social realist film. (This is a challenging task, which may not be appropriate for all candidates.)
- Discuss the representation of young people in two films: 'Clueless' and 'Son of Rambow'. Produce two posters for two new youth films, offering contrasting representations.
- Compare how men and women are represented in the romantic comedy genre: 'Sleepless in Seattle', 'Four Weddings and a Funeral' and 'Bridget Jones' Diary'. Produce two film posters for a rom-com, one to be an alternative rom-com.
- Analyse how teens and/or adults are represented in the teen movie genre: 'Rebel without a Cause', 'Breakfast Club', 'La Haine'. Produce a DVD cover and a film poster aimed at teens.
- Compare the representations of childhood in 'Spy Kids' and 'Pan's Labyrinth'. Produce two posters with different representations of childhood.



### Topic 3: Popular Music

- Compare the representation of gender in two different music videos: 'Ayo Technology' by 50 Cent and 'Irreplaceable' by Beyonce. Produce a CD cover with a specific focus on representation.
- Compare the representation of political views in two music videos: Lupe Fiasco's 'Words I Never Said' and Eminem's 'Mosh'. Produce a CD front and back cover.
- Compare how women are represented in two music videos: 'Beautiful' by Christina Aguilera and 'Stupid Girl' by Pink or 'Bad Romance' by Lady Gaga and 'The Only Exception' by Paramore. Produce a CD front and back cover.
- Compare how race is represented in two music videos: 'Hate me Now' by Nas and '99 Problems' by Jay-Z. Produce a CD front and back cover.

### Topic 4: Celebrity

- Compare the representation of Andy Murray in a range of different media.
- Compare the representation of a celebrity of your choice in two types of media text. Produce the front cover and contents page for a new celebrity magazine.

### Topic 6: Soap Opera

- Compare the representation of young people in 'Eastenders', 'Emmerdale' or 'Hollyoaks'. Produce a magazine article on a new character in a soap of your choice.

### Topic 9: Advertising

- How has gender representation changed in Ariel and Persil television advertisements? Produce a billboard to advertise a detergent that is specifically aimed at men.
- Discuss the representation of men and women in beer advertisements from the 1950s and 2000s: Budweiser 1958 print advertisement; Schlitz beer print advertisement 1958; TV Boddingtons advertisement 1996; Carling beer advertisement 2003. Produce a print advertising campaign to sell Guinness to women.
- How has the way that men are represented in Levi's advertisements changed over time? Produce an advertisement for a new clothing campaign.
- Compare the representation of men in print and television advertising ranging from the 1960s to the present day: Cotler's Pants 60s (print); Dove shower gel for men 2000s (print); Noxzema television advertisement 60s; Avon for men 60s print; Lynx television advertisement 1980s; Nivea print 2000s. Produce a print advertisement for a new or existing male grooming product.

### Topic 10: Video games

- Compare how women are represented in video games: 'Tomb Raider', 'Mario Brothers', 'Mirror's Edge'. Produce a design a new female video game character for a platform game and provide a design for the first three screens.

## **B322 Textual Analysis and Media Studies Topic (Moving Image)**

### **General**

This was the first summer examination using the new answer booklet, which appeared to aid the candidates in allocating their time:

- fewer candidates wrote too much for question one; the space provided is easily enough to earn full marks for this question – some answers did so using only half the space;
- most candidates wrote shorter question two answers than in previous years, giving them more time for the other questions
- most candidates wrote longer question three answers than in previous years
- most candidates attempted all questions
- there were only a few examples of rubric infringement.

Better answers used the note-taking period to organise their thoughts around the questions asked. Some take this as an opportunity to note down all the events in the extract and fail to consider the key concepts.

### **Changes to the format**

Many candidates still appeared confused about which key concepts are tested by which questions. Many discussed generic conventions in questions two and three, for example. Thus a number of small changes are proposed for future examinations to focus candidates on genre for question 1, media language for question two, and representation for question 3.

In question one the reference to ‘characters and events’ is to be phased out, as it often leads candidates to cover ‘events’ in one explanation and ‘characters’ in another. It will be replaced by the key concept ‘narrative’, which is what the ‘characters and events’ formulation was originally designed to suggest.

In question one the space for ‘explanation 1’ and ‘explanation 2’ is to be merged into one answer space, as the present split format does not seem to aid candidates.

In question two the requirement for effects ‘that fit the action adventure genre’ too often leads candidates into irrelevant discussion of generic conventions, so this requirement will be lost.

In question three there will be a list of suggested social groups and institutions whose representation and stereotyping the candidates might usefully analyse. This is designed to steer candidates away from what is essentially descriptive characterisation analysis (e.g. ‘the hero is big and strong’) or reproduction of generic conventions from question one (e.g. ‘there is a sidekick’). This list may be quite long as better answers usually explore the representation of a range of groups, but candidates will not be required or expected to cover every item in the list. Some items will be more challenging than others. The list for the current examination might have included, for example: ‘gender’, ‘nationality’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘class’, ‘the US army’, and ‘Iraq’. Sophisticated (level 4) answers might have explored the stereotyping of Iraq as exotic and threatening to an implied western audience. The majority of answers might not have explored much beyond gender and nationality.

Candidates will be expected to make notes on separate sheets of paper. These are to be destroyed at the end of the examination and are not to be sent off with the scripts.

## Section A

### Question 1

This was generally well answered with most candidates able to identify two conventions, such as the 'race against time', the 'hero and villain', the 'violence and danger', the 'teamwork among the heroes'.

Level four answers were characterised by accurate use of terminology, such as 'protagonist', 'antagonist' and 'generic conventions'. Some usefully mentioned how the war film is a sub-genre of action adventure. Theory is not required and can sometimes distract a candidate from answering the question.

Less successful answers often consisted of a long description of the extract which, in the case of level two and three answers, occasionally mentioned elements that happened to be generic. These answers appeared to cry out for the application of a 'genre toolkit'. Candidates who had learned a set of generic conventions that they could apply to any extract appeared to be at a significant advantage over those who started from the fine detail of the extract and then, in the more successful version of these answers, tried to explain how this created action and/or adventure.

### Question 2

Better answers discussed at least two or three examples for each bullet point, taking care to make these specific examples, and to discuss the connotative effect for each example (e.g. 'the camera is hand held as Sanborn runs up the stairs connoting the rush he is in', 'there is fast paced editing after the car explodes connoting the panic caused'). Some less successful answers might discuss a media language element in general terms without quoting a specific example (e.g. 'there is hand held camera', 'there is fast paced editing'). Other less successful answers might give a long list of specific examples but fail to discuss the connotative effect for any example.

Soundtrack was generally answered well, apart from much confusion over the difference between 'diegetic' and 'non-diegetic' sound (these concepts cause so much error that weaker answers might be better off without them). Many candidates discussed the use of music, the emphasis on gunshots, the fire and the shouting, James's breathing, and the effect of the siren. Some less successful answers applied pre-learned ideas (e.g. that the music climaxes with the action) which did not apply in this case.

Editing was answered well, with many answers contrasting the slower pace of editing in the early part of the extract to the faster pace during the action. Many candidates noted the use of shot reverse shot in the bathroom scene and the use of cross-cutting as Sanborn runs up the building. The terms 'eyeline match' and 'jump cut', however, were very commonly misapplied and, like 'diegetic sound', might be concepts that typically lead to more confusion than clarity. Unusually, there was one small jump cut in the extract (two shots on Sanborn from the same angle), but it was very seldom spotted by candidates. Better answers showed a clear awareness of the distinction between camerawork and editing and were not distracted by analysing camera shots such as tracking under editing.

Mise en scene caused more difficulties than usual, perhaps because of the naturalistic setting and lighting. Many candidates listed props and costumes but fewer effectively discussed connotations, leading to often quite descriptive answers. Better answers linked the mise en scene to connotations of danger, realism and masculinity.

Camerawork was very often the strongest part of a candidate's answer. There were many references to specific uses of hand held camera, point of view shots (surprisingly accurately, as this is often a very misapplied term), tracking, low angle and high angle shots, close ups, establishing shots, and zooms (again this is a term often misapplied but zooms were present in this extract). Better answers showed a clear awareness of the distinction between camerawork and editing and were not distracted by analysing editing techniques such as cross cutting under camerawork.

### **Question 3**

This is the most challenging question on the paper. There were many good answers that discussed such representation issues as the stereotypical masculinity of the protagonists, the stereotypical vulnerability of the women running from the UN offices, the stereotypical equation of Arab with terrorist, the stereotypical representation of the US army as the men in charge and of the Iraqi police as inadequate, the positioning of the audience as American and thus the representation of Iraq and Iraqis as 'foreign', and the value placed on self-sacrifice and teamwork. Better answers often noted the contradictory and slightly difficult representation of Colonel Reed as a smug and heartless American.

Many weaker responses seemed very short, often less than a page. Some were very descriptive responses focusing on characterisation and/or generic conventions (what makes James a typical 'hero', Sanborn a 'sidekick', or the civilians the typical 'damsel in distress') with no attempt to consider the representation of social groups.

Some answers made no reference to the term 'stereotype'. This restricted their mark to level two even for those demonstrating understanding of the concept.

Again, candidates who had appeared to have learned to apply a 'representation toolkit' were usually at a significant advantage. Doggedly working through a list of social groups did not always succeed – many candidates struggled with sexuality in this extract, and to only analyse groups that were absent (such as people with disabilities) was a limited exercise – but at demonstrated some understanding of representation issues.

Candidates should always demonstrate that they are discussing media stereotypes, not matters of fact. There were some discussions of the army's masculinity that failed to make this distinction (e.g. 'the army are all male as women wouldn't be able to fight') or for whom the distinction was unclear (e.g. 'we wouldn't expect women to fight'). Some of the comments on Sanborn's anger may have been discussing racial stereotyping, or may just have been racial stereotypes themselves.

## **Section B**

### **Question 4(a)**

This question was generally well answered – however some candidates still forgot to mention each programme's day, time and channel, despite being asked for this information in the question, and this cost marks. The day was the most likely to be missed, even when the candidate had given a date of first transmission (which is not asked for, but is commonly supplied). Good answers avoided vague formulations such as 'on ITV' or 'every day'.

Better answers used terminology accurately – watershed, inheritance, stripping, channel ethos, PSB – applied to well chosen contrasting case studies.

Effective combinations included:

*The Inbetweeners* (E4) compared to *My Family* (BBC1)  
*Russell Howard's Good News* (BBC3) compared to *The Simpsons* (C4)  
*Harry Hill's TV Burp* (ITV1) compared to anything on BBC3 or E4  
*Gavin and Stacey* (originally BBC3) compared to *Friends* (C4)  
*Outnumbered* (BBC1) compared to *How I Met Your Mother* (C4)

There were many good answers with comments on BBC3's and Channel 4's ethos. Candidates sometimes, but not always, struggled to fit a comedy programme into the BBC's 'educate, inform, and entertain'.

Responses using channels like DAVE or GOLD often had less to say, with a lot of marks lost by candidates being vague about day of broadcast ('daily') and time of broadcast ('all day').

The choice of programme disadvantaged some candidates – especially *Friends*, and very old comedies such as *Only Fools and Horses* or *Fawlty Towers*. Responses that chronicled a programme's broadcast history sometimes gave any one channel of broadcast insufficient consideration because there were three or four channels to consider, and sometimes failed to supply all three of time, day and channel for any one scheduling decision.

Candidates who choose two very different texts on very different channels found more to discuss.

The specification requires that the programmes studied must be scheduled on British television stations or radio channels, so candidates should not discuss the scheduling of programmes in the USA, for example.

#### **Question 4(b)**

This answer was sometimes rushed, but nearly all candidates attempted it with some success. The best answers revealed the candidate's detailed knowledge of the text with a wealth of examples backing up a range of audience pleasures moving beyond the comedic such as: familiarity; the positioning of the audience as superior to the characters; the relevance of the setting, characters and narrative; escapism (explaining how the text offers this); narrative disruption and resolution. Better answers briefly explained how a pleasure worked then concentrated on explaining and exemplifying how the text offered it.

The question placed greater emphasis on the choice of text as it only asked for one text, so candidates needed enough information to fill a whole answer. For this reason answers on sitcoms worked better than panel shows, which in their turn worked better than sketch shows.

There were some very good answers on sitcoms that do not appeal specifically to a teenage audience, such as *Extras* (more successful than *The Office*), *Miranda* or *Outnumbered*. Answers on *The Inbetweeners* or *The Big Bang Theory* were often more limited, despite the candidate's enthusiasm for the text. *Friends* and *The Simpsons* were productive where well-loved by the candidate, but could produce rather generalised answers dominated by lists of characters.

Similarly, answers on *Celebrity Juice* and *Harry Hill's TV Burp* were generally less successful than *QI* and *Have I Got News For You*.

Answers on *Come Fly with Me* and *Little Britain* often failed to develop pleasures beyond comic pleasures or exemplification beyond character description.

Nearly all candidates wrote on texts that are clearly comedies, with only occasional reference to texts such as *The Only Way is Essex* or *Glee*.

## **B323 Textual Analysis and Media Studies Topic (Print)**

### **General**

This was the first summer examination using the new answer booklet, which appeared to aid the candidates in allocating their time:

- fewer candidates wrote too much for question one; the space provided is easily enough to earn full marks for this question – some answers did so using only half the space;
- most candidates wrote shorter question two answers than in previous years, giving them more time for the other questions
- most candidates wrote longer question three answers than in previous years
- most candidates attempted all questions
- there were only a few examples of rubric infringement.

### **Changes to the format**

In question one the space for 'explanation 1' and 'explanation 2' is to be merged into one answer space, as the present split format does not seem to aid candidates.

### **Section A**

#### **Question 1**

This question was answered well this year. Better answers discussed and exemplified two conventions of the lifestyle magazine genre as a whole, such as: the direct address to the audience; the use of a cover model dominating the front page; the sense of addressing the implied audience's lifestyle; the chatty editor's letter; an aspirational tone.

Weaker answers were descriptive or discussed the conventions of the women's lifestyle magazine. These latter answers cited supposed conventions such as 'fashion and beauty' contents that do not qualify as conventions of the lifestyle genre as a whole.

#### **Question 2**

Most candidates were clear about what constitutes layout, but fewer could explicitly discuss intended effects. Most discussed the balanced layout on the front cover, suggesting that this created a sense of order, and contrasted this to the more cluttered layout on the 'Your Space' page. The section on layout was the most likely of the four bullet points to lack exemplification. Many of the examples given were taken from the front cover only.

The use of sans serif fonts was picked up by the better answers for the typography section and linked to notions of modernity and youthfulness. Many candidates analysed the font used for the titlepiece. Weaker answers tended to generalisations or misidentified serif fonts (usually when analysing the 'handwriting' style fonts) or discussed colour or even language.

Most candidates could discuss the use of colour. Fewer managed this effectively. Better answers moved beyond identifying pink as a feminine colour and discussed the house style's use of a range of similar colours. Some less successful answers tried to analyse each colour, seeing the use of blue, for example, as an attempt to appeal to a male audience or symbolising the blue skies of summer.

Most could exemplify language use such as direct address, alliteration and imperatives and this was the strongest part of many answers.

### Question 3

Better answers analysed stereotypes of femininity and masculinity present in the extract, identified consumerist ideologies, noted the heterosexist stance of the magazine and the equation of youth and able-bodiedness with beauty, but also noted the positive representation of 'tomboys' and the range of ethnicities that created a slightly more modern and open representation. Most successful answers adopted a critical stance towards the representation in the extract.

Many candidates discussed the implied aspirational teenage lifestyle in Bliss magazine. When done well this produced effective representational analysis with clear identification of stereotyping. Weaker versions of this sort of answer failed to move beyond describing the contents of the extract and most of these answers were more limited than those that applied a 'representation toolkit' that encouraged candidates to explore the representation of a range of social groups. Some answers failed to mention the term 'stereotype' and so limited themselves to level two at best.

This was often the most successfully answered question on the paper. For this reason, there are no plans to provide lists of possible areas of representation to explore, unlike in the Moving Image option.

## Section B

### Question 4(a)

This question was generally well answered – however some candidates still forgot to mention each programme's day, time and channel, despite being asked for this information in the question, and this cost marks. The day was the most likely to be missed, even when the candidate had given a date of first transmission (which is not asked for, but is commonly supplied). Good answers avoided vague formulations such as 'on ITV' or 'every day'.

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Candidates who choose two very different texts on very different channels found more to discuss.

The specification insists that the programmes studied must be scheduled on British television stations or radio channels, so candidates should not discuss the scheduling of programmes in the USA, for example.

#### **Question 4(b)**

This answer was sometimes rushed, but nearly all candidates attempted it with some success. The best answers revealed the candidate's detailed knowledge of the text with a wealth of examples backing up a range of audience pleasures moving beyond the comedic such as: familiarity; the positioning of the audience as superior to the characters; the relevance of the setting, characters and narrative; escapism (explaining how the text offers this); narrative disruption and resolution. Better answers briefly explained how a pleasure worked then concentrated on explaining and exemplifying how the text offered it.

The question placed greater emphasis on the choice of text as it only asked for one text, so candidates needed enough information to fill a whole answer. For this reason answers on sitcoms worked better than panel shows, which in their turn worked better than sketch shows.

There were some very good answers on sitcoms that do not appeal specifically to a teenage audience, such as *Extras* (more successful than *The Office*), *Miranda* or *Outnumbered*. Answers on *The Inbetweeners* or *The Big Bang Theory* were often more limited, despite the candidate's enthusiasm for the text. *Friends* and *The Simpsons* were productive where well-loved by the candidate, but could produce rather generalised answers dominated by lists of characters.

Similarly, answers on *Celebrity Juice* and *Harry Hill's TV Burp* were generally less successful than *QI* and *Have I Got News For You*.

Answers on *Come Fly with Me* and *Little Britain* often failed to develop pleasures beyond comic pleasures or exemplification beyond character description.

Nearly all candidates wrote on texts that are clearly comedies, with only occasional reference to texts such as *The Only Way is Essex* or *Glee*.



## B324 Production Portfolio in Media Studies

### Introduction

There was once again a significant number of centre entries.

Unit B324 represents 30% of the final GCSE qualification. This Unit offers candidates the opportunities to demonstrate their skills in Research and Planning, Production, and Evaluation and their understanding of the key concepts of audience, institution, media language and genre. It is often seen as a synoptic Unit bringing together elements first seen in the other Units. It is expected that centres will 'play to their strengths' and choose tasks for which they have the resources and expertise to deliver and which also appeal to their candidates. (Ref Spec P17, also P27 5.3.2e)

All of the set briefs were attempted by candidates this series. There was a clear range of work with examples of excellent work including:

- Print magazine extracts where candidates had researched and written personal material for an identified audience, used appropriate original imagery, used appropriate software to manipulate the images, and suitable DTP software to assemble the page layouts.
- Imaginative print advertising campaigns where candidates had demonstrated photographic flair, manipulated the images using appropriate software, and laid out the advertisements using the relevant conventions (for billboards a 40cm x 20cm aspect ratio worked well).
- Music videos that moved beyond simple miming alone, and explored aspects of style and narrative to engage their audience.
- A variety of approaches to the television productions which included - TV documentary, and children's programme.
- Some film openings showed a creative flair on the part of candidates, and were presented in a variety of genres – subjects included suspense, supernatural, crime, thriller, war and horror.
- Radio work included magazine extracts which were well produced, and included topics such as general lifestyle, sport, health, celebrity and local events, also there was some scripted radio drama with sound effects.
- It was pleasing to see working websites submitted on disk, with all the individual components appearing in the upload folder. Subjects for the entertainment website included a 'what's on' approach, and music artist with background, image gallery and future events.
- The cross media brief also gave candidates the opportunity to bring together a number of media as part of a coherent promotion package, including examples of CD covers, websites, posters and video adverts.

Notable good practice was seen this year in centres where candidates had been instructed to prepare a research summary (in some cases a 'pitch'). The discipline provided by this approach proved useful in informing subsequent planning and improving the quality of the finished production.

There were, in some instances, a disproportionately high number of 'found images' used in print based briefs – with no original images offered at all in some submissions. There needs to be sufficient use of original images to allow candidates to demonstrate their achievement as a number of the Assessment Criteria depend on this (P50-51 of the online specification). Evidence provided should include the original shots, selection of the shots to be used, evidence of digital processing of the selected shots and the images in their final form.

The 12 set briefs in the Specification were successful in offering a range of viable choices for most centres. Some centres made changes to the briefs in such a way that they became difficult to moderate in terms of the Specification assessment criteria. It must be remembered that for Unit B324 centres must follow one of the set briefs as described in the specification (p18, 19 of the online specification). **The briefs offered in this unit are not 'exemplar topics' like those available in Unit B321 and must be followed exactly as they are set out in the specification.**

### Portfolio Evidence

Where candidates had provided their 'Research and Planning' and their 'Evaluation' in separate sections of their portfolios they were able to demonstrate that they had met the requirements of the specification clearly. In the best instances candidates also provided a 'Contents' list with page numbers, which brought discipline to their approach, as well as helping the process of moderation.

Centres need to ensure that candidates **separate** the presentation of 'Research and Planning' from the 'Evaluation' in their candidate portfolios (pages 20-21 of the online specification). These elements occur at different times, and each has its own particular concerns. For instance, audience research would be expected to feature in both Research and Planning, and the Evaluation; however preliminary research and planning work would concentrate on identifying a target audience and their issues; whereas post production evaluative research would use audience feedback to inform candidate interpretations. The 'Research and Planning' element and the 'Evaluation' element are assessed separately, and each has its own specific assessment criteria (Research and Planning page 58, also Evaluation page 59-60 of the online specification).

In some centres candidates had completed thorough primary audience research as part of their research and planning, using questionnaires, interviews or focus groups which were then collated, processed and interpreted so as to inform the planning of their own projects. In other cases candidates had confined themselves to secondary research in a theoretical sense, leading more to assumptions rather than convincing conclusions.

Teachers need to refer to specific pieces of evidence in a candidate's portfolio when completing the Controlled Assessment Cover Sheets (CCS339), making sure they have referred to the appropriate Assessment Criteria (pages 50-60 of the online specification). For example, to attain the higher mark levels in the Evaluation there is an expectation that candidates will be able to move beyond simple over prescriptive 'question and answer' formats determined by their centre and demonstrate analytical skills and a degree of articulate personal reflection.

Some centres had made assessment judgements appropriately, applying the Assessment Criteria as intended. However a significant majority have inflated the marks submitted, particularly in the Production element with little justification. It would be wise for centres to review the exemplar portfolios on the OCR website in order to better gauge the national standards expected for this Unit:

[http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/type/gcse/amlw/media\\_studies/documents/index.aspx](http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/type/gcse/amlw/media_studies/documents/index.aspx)

For some candidates the use of a template had helped them to organise their ideas; however it must be born in mind that sometimes prompt sheets, templates or writing frames can be seen as restricting and can inhibit and hinder candidate achievement.

The portfolio itself needs to be presented in **three sections** for each candidate:

- Research & Planning (plus an optional Appendix)
- Production itself
- Evaluation

The Appendix can contain items such as drafts, research sources, and shared materials.

For 'Research and Planning' and the 'Evaluation' centres are advised to check the specification carefully for the list of criteria that illustrate each of the mark levels for these two different elements (pages 58–60 of the online specification).

### **Authentication and Group Work**

Clear teacher comments / candidate descriptions provide essential background information about the process of assessment, as well as making it easier for the moderators to verify the centres' submitted marks. In the best instances comments were clear, related to the evidence submitted, the Assessment Criteria, **and importantly were personal to the individual candidate**. In other cases comments were either omitted completely, or were mere copies from the Assessment Criteria and did not advance the moderation process at all.

#### **The only shared element in this unit is the production itself.**

It is equally important for candidates and centres to identify, where appropriate, the individual's contribution when working in a group. Each candidate is assessed upon their own individual contribution even when working in a group. Teachers need to use the Controlled Assessment Cover Sheet boxes to help differentiate an individual's contributions to the moderator (ref page 58 of the online specification). If individual contributions aren't outlined it can make it more difficult for a moderator to support centre assessment decisions.

Centres must be able to authenticate candidates' work. Centres that do not complete the required centre authentication form for this unit will have their results held until tOCR has received the required documentation. (page 30 s5.4.4 and P28 s5.3.4 and s5.3.5). Candidates must identify and credit their sources in all cases and not claim found work as their own.

Centres are also reminded that the maximum size for a group is 5. Group sizes any larger than this **are not allowed**.

Evidence of research, planning and the evaluation should be individual to each candidate. Each candidate needs to present their work in a separate portfolio for moderation.

Centres need to instruct candidates clearly about the individuality of their portfolios, AND the need to identify their sources.

This series some centres submitted group portfolios for 'Research and Planning', and/or 'Evaluation'. This is in contravention of the clear instructions in the Specification (pages 17–18 of the online specification), and is impossible to moderate. As stated above, evidence of research, planning and the evaluation should be individual to each candidate. Each candidate needs to present their work in a separate portfolio for moderation. Moderators need to see evidence of all three assessed elements in this unit otherwise they are unable to support centre marks. Centres are reminded that the formats for Evaluation include podcast, therefore recorded oral evidence for Evaluation can be provided if required, however the Assessment Criteria remain constant.

## Formats for submission

There were some problems for moderators when they were unable to access candidate work because electronic/digital work was not offered in standard formats. Moderators will not have access to all of the many proprietary software formats which candidates may have used to create their work, such as QuarkXPress™, Adobe InDesign™ and Microsoft Publisher™. Candidate work needs to be exported to a universal format, for example print magazines should be submitted as PDF documents if submitted electronically. Audio should be playable on a domestic CD player or made available in mp3 format, and video should be playable on a domestic DVD player or if supplied on a CD/DVD-Rom it should be in a standard video file such as \*.mpg or \*.mov.

This principle also applies to portfolio work as well as production work if submitting work electronically. The variety of word processor packages and various versions of MS PowerPoint and MS Word software require centres to check that their material can be accessed on other computers than their own before submitting. One way of cutting down on problems is to make sure PowerPoint and Word documents are saved in the most compatible file type eg the \*.doc file type for MS Word – not \*.docx. There have been some problems this serie with fonts, font sizes and pagination on work supplied to moderators. Some centres have found that using OpenOffice.org is a useful, free way of checking that material will be accessible for moderation.

All documents submitted in electronic format **MUST** be in a standard universally accessible form (there is a list in the online specification pages 62–63).

The best way to offer all digital print material (production and evaluation) is PDF.

It would be good practice when submitting presentations (eg PowerPoint, Keynote, Impress), to provide an ancillary copy of the slides in PDF format.

If exotic fonts are really considered necessary, they can always be converted to images (eg JPEG) for inclusion in website assignments.

**USB memory sticks are not an acceptable way of submitting work**, they are unreliable, affected by heat, knocks, subject to electronic interference, and are a virus risk to moderators. DVD disks are easy to prepare, stable, reliable, and also cheaper.

## Resources

**Resources should be taken to include technology AND expertise.** There have been excellent examples where centres have trained their candidates in the choice and use of software prior to its application in an assessment context. However it has also been clear that in some cases, candidates have been left to find out about software with minimal support, and at times their achievement has reflected this.

Centres can obtain further support by consulting the OCR website, where exemplar material and additional advice will be available.

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