



A-LEVEL MEDIA STUDIES

7572/1 Written Paper
Report on the Examination

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Introduction

Firstly we must offer congratulations to teachers and students who threw themselves enthusiastically and diligently into this A-level in Media Studies. Despite this being the first run through, very few students struggled and most had been taught something pertinent theoretically, showed some knowledge of the CSPs and indeed knew a lot and had thought about the issues involved.

This paper offers an examination of the theoretical framework; the building blocks of the subject. This will largely be done by either analysis of unseen material or responding with arguments to stated opinions. The focus is on having an answer and supporting that answer with evidence.

The paper is designed to reassure and support students who know in advance which CSPs are to be employed in each section. This settled shape should encourage teachers to see that the paper aims to be a reliable test of the foundations of the subject. The questions in this paper are a combination of ones that:

- are focused on the theoretical framework that require evidence from the CSPs in order to support the answers
- require analysis of the CSPs and/or unseen sources
- require the evaluation of academic theories
- expect students to make judgments and draw conclusions.

The paper also includes a reminder in the form of advice that the mark tariff is also a kind of time tariff. All of our judgments were mindful of time as a significant factor. It is good, therefore, to report that we saw little evidence of students missing questions or failing to finish. We take some care in allocating space to questions in a way that gives an indication of approximately how much is required for each question and students do not need to complete additional pages in order to achieve high marks on these questions.

Section A

Question 1

This is a Media Language question.

This does seem like the logical place to begin a Media Studies exam with straightforward media language analysis and a fundamental Media Studies skill, and it was handled confidently by most students. Progress is and was made here by either an approach that privileges the technical codes (composition, framing, lighting, processing) or one that explores the processes of signification (a semiotic approach worked well here, though was less common). The unseen text which will always be a print text or equivalent is chosen to be both of interest and suitable for this kind of analysis in this kind of time; it is important to help students manage their progress. The key is never to arrive at a preferred reading. Students are free to interpret as they wish as long as they have reasons. Here, opinion was split between whether the image was sexualised and objectified; lipstick, parted lips, dismemberment, clear skin, or not sexualised (lack of explicit elements). This dismemberment also led, interestingly, to the subject often being ‘mistaken’ by students for a privileged white Caucasian woman, which led to them into the path of not realising that perhaps this was part of the ambiguous image’s ‘intention’. The wording of ‘boys write love songs too’ sparked an interesting debate over gender and performance.

The phrase ‘media language’ was not always fully understood, and some limited their analysis and mark by looking only at ‘words’. Some tried to overcomplicate the task with explicit application of ‘extra’ theory and paid a little too much attention to gender representations which would have been more suited to Q2.

Question 2

This is a Media Representation question.

The emphasis here is on a couple of the explicit contexts we are now considering: cultural and political.

This is the follow up question for the paper’s unseen text which links the unseen with a CSP. This is not a comparative study but students are asked to ‘refer to’ both texts. A relatively large number of students referred only to the CSP and a small number added the *Billie Jean* CSP to the discussion.

Students are reminded that careful reading of the question is essential as these questions will be highly focused and responses need to concentrate on the elements specified in the question. In this case the challenge is to relate the issues of representation to the specified contexts. Most students showed a good knowledge of Common and *Letter To The Free*’s contexts and analysed the video’s content to make useful points about race and representation. Most focused on the political contexts of slavery, the prison system as a form of modern slavery and the Trump presidential campaign. The work on Figure One necessarily had to be speculative, raising feasible debates around gender and sexual identity, and oppression and empowerment. This was largely well done.

Question 3

This is a Media Language question.

This has to be a proportionate and practical response, putting ideas about narrative to the test via the notion of ‘being useful’. In this case, Jackson’s *Billie Jean* was approached largely through working through the application of Todorov’s equilibrium theory, Propp’s stock characters and stereotypes and binary oppositions. The video’s themes and messages regarding celebrity and press intrusion were successfully identified in this way, though there was a tendency towards the descriptive and feature spotting by less able students. The responses to *Billie Jean* were very effective, on the whole, though sometimes the ‘useful’ part of the question appeared to be an afterthought when it should have been the leading edge of any response.

Question 4

This is a Media Representation question.

This was well answered in many ways, in terms of the analysis of the two contrasting advertising representations regarding their gender cultural contexts and messages. There was some disagreement over the interpretation of Butler’s idea of repeated performance and whether the two adverts showed progression and change. Students discussed whether they broke from traditional repeated messages regarding male and female gender roles, or whether the *Maybelline* advert was just another example of advertising offering a new set of ‘on trend’ repeated messages regarding gender performance. There was almost always reference, if sometimes belatedly, of

Butler and/or ‘stylised repetition’ though few really got to grips with Butler’s idea in a way that would access the top mark band.

There was plenty of discussion of gender representation within historical contexts, implicitly understanding Butler’s notion that ‘woman’ is ‘an historical situation rather than a natural fact’, though less effective answers focused the notion that society, in the past, was less enlightened whereas nowadays gender equality has been achieved. When Butler was explored it was more often than not as a confirmor of stereotypes, which led many to think that the Score CSP supported her ideas and *Maybelline* confounded them, rather than indeed confirming Butler’s belief in the ‘possibilities of gender transformation...in the possibility of a different sort of repeating’. Most significantly there was only a partial understanding of gender as ‘performative’ where ‘performative’ itself carries the double-meaning of ‘dramatic’ and ‘non-referential’. Non-referential means there is no fact of gender to refer to; a good response given called it a ‘simulacrum’, Baudrillard’s image without an original. This is why Butler is listed separately from ‘Feminist theories’ because she is critical of Feminist reinforcement of a binary gender system that is merely contrived. For Butler, ‘Gender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy.’ In this way both CSPs offer evidence of performance and transformation.

Students seemed to successfully spend more time on these high marks questions, which is a sensible approach.

Section B

The transition to Section is marked by a couple of low tariff questions.

Question 5.1

This is a Media Industries question.

This was a low tariff knowledge question which tested knowledge of useful terms from the specification. It helped to recognise that the options were arranged as three sets of two so that knowing what kind of thing ‘diversification’ might be (a strategy rather than a company) intelligently narrowed your options. This was quite well done and the chief concern was a trend of breaking the rubric by reusing letters in multiple boxes. Once you enter a second A, for example, you cannot get a mark for A. Quite a number of papers were spoilt in this way.

Question 5.2

This is a Media Audiences question.

This was generally well answered in terms of providing a definition, but students often failed to gain marks by offering examples of media product fans e.g. Beatles fans or Star Wars fans, rather than varied examples of fan behaviour and activity such as attending Comicon, creating fan fiction, or cosplay. Some also seemingly misunderstood the need to provide a definition and just gave examples.

Question 6

This is a Media Industries question.

Film exists within Media Studies only as a limited form, restricted to issues concerning Media Industries, with the product itself not accessible for analysis. Students showed good understanding of low budget production and distribution, and sensibly made a few points about each in that order. This is a good model for work in the new dispensation where the principal tasks are to answer/address the question, show knowledge of the framework and efficiently select a few points of evidence from the CSP. Most had a good knowledge of the film's production and distribution contexts and were able to present this efficiently. Understanding the implications of 'independence'/a micro-budget was key to getting a high level 3 mark. Less effective responses tended to list learnt knowledge rather than explaining the issues; they were simply less selective.

Question 7

This is a Media Audiences question.

This was the better handled of the two high tariff questions. The question's stating of a strong opinion certainly helped students to remember to make their own judgments and draw a conclusion. Students were perhaps more comfortable with encoding/decoding than with Butler and there were some very effective responses to the question. Most students demonstrated a good understanding of the issues surrounding Wells/Welles' *War Of The Worlds* broadcast, though Orson Welles sometimes became 'Orwell'. There was a good debate over how far Welles intended to cause panic, how great the panic actually was, the influence of rising world tensions, the nature of radio as a new medium and the rivalry between radio and the newspaper industry, which may have led to some of the negative and exaggerated reporting of audience reactions to the broadcast. Many students tried, largely unsuccessfully to apply Cohen's conception of 'Moral Panic' where they just simply meant 'panic' (there is nothing 'moral' about running from aliens). It would be much more appropriate to say that, stoked by press interest, the implications of Welles' *cause celebre* constituted a kind of Moral Panic (much rehearsed and repeated) around the socially dangerous impact of mass media.

Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory was widely quoted and applied, as well as Gerbner's cultivation theory and the hypodermic needle, which also made frequent appearances. *The Surgery* was well-used as a contrasted PSB study and the reasons for the show's perceived success or failure and its move online were discussed. The appropriateness of the types of advice offered, the Radio 1 audience age group issue and show's presentational style, content and audience were all debated and contrasted with *War Of The Worlds*.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.