

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/01
Foundation Portfolio

Key messages

In order to successfully complete this coursework component, candidates need to follow one of the two set briefs as determined by the syllabus (video or print). They must keep a detailed blog showing the development of the project, their artefact, and a creative critical reflection upon their work. Each of these elements needs to be completed to a high standard, demonstrating knowledge and understanding, research and planning, and appropriate skilled use of media tools. The blog must remain online and easily accessible throughout the examination series. Expectations of evidence from each assessment objective are listed on pages 24–27 of the syllabus. Individual candidate record cards need to be completed with clear comments to show how marks have been arrived at for each assessment objective. If candidates have worked in groups comments should reflect individual contributions to projects.

General comments

The November series has a smaller entry than the June series. On the whole centres engaged with this component and candidates produced some excellent work, demonstrating detailed research into existing magazines and film openings, which fed into the planning and construction of their own media products. Many candidates demonstrated high levels of skill in the use of media tools, in both the products and in the creative critical reflections. The best work demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the conventions of all aspects of the media products, coupled with comprehensive evidence of the process undertaken by the candidate. Centres are reminded that the syllabus requires comments on the Individual Candidate Record Card which explain how the marks were awarded; some centres made minimal comments, or did not comment at all, and this makes the moderation process much more difficult.

Comments on specific questions

Blogs

Most centres in this series had set up blog hubs (a centre blog or web page with candidates' names and numbers hyperlinked to their work) which allowed for one-click access to the individual work of all the candidates entered by the centre. This helps teachers monitor candidates' work and aids the moderation process. All centres should follow this good practice and clearly transcribe the URL of the hub on the Individual Candidate Record Cards. All hyper-links in both the centre's hub and candidate blogs need to be checked carefully by centres to ensure that they are working. All elements of the project must be online, either presented on or linked within the blog. Work that is accessible only by download should not be included. Disks, USBs and printouts should not be sent to the Moderator. The finished product should be placed at the top (final post) of the candidate's blog so that it is clear to Moderators which is the final version. The most effective blogs were those produced using dedicated blogging applications (Blogger, Wordpress etc.) which use a linear format to order blog posts from most recent to earliest, with the earliest post last, and the most recent post at the top.

The best work was comprehensive, with blog posts that followed the whole process of the project from initial idea, through research into similar products, planning, production and creative critical reflection. The most effect products showed clear evidence of research into codes and conventions of the genre in which the candidate was working. On the other hand, very short blogs did not evidence enough of the process to justify marks in the higher levels. There is an expectation that there will be a significant number of blog posts from each individual to document the process.

Creative critical reflections

Candidates who fully addressed the four set questions using a range of digital applications to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding performed best in this area. There are a range of online applications which enabled really interesting and reflective work, appropriate to the task. There were some excellent detailed voiceover videos, with extracts from the finished product and from the process, and some really imaginative approaches to using presentation applications. Weaker work tended to rely heavily on text-only posts or text-heavy presentations using SlideShare or Prezi, often in very short slides with little depth and development. Such work could only meet the criteria for minimal marks.

Centres should allocate adequate time to the Creative Critical Reflection so that candidates see the importance of reflecting on their work. It should also be stressed that this element should be assessed as part of the whole production process with each question as important as the next. Candidates need to address each question in equal depth. **Questions 1 and 2** tend to be covered in more detail; **Questions 3 and 4** were frequently presented more superficially.

Products

Magazines

The syllabus requires candidates to produce the front cover, contents page and a double page spread of a new magazine, including a minimum of four original images and made up of entirely original written material. Candidates generally fulfilled the brief, with understanding of features of design, layout, font choice and size in evidence. Some candidates completed well organised and considered photo shoots resulting in some excellent original images. However, others would benefit from support in this area. Too many relied upon 'snapshots' taken with little consideration of framing or mise-en-scène. There also needs to be a wider range of appropriate images with many candidates simply presenting the minimum number of images required rather than considering what their magazine actually needed.

Some candidates would have benefited from more support in building their skills with dedicated desktop publishing (DTP) software such as InDesign or PagePlus/Affinity. Too many are relying on Photoshop to construct pages; a job that it is not designed to do.

Opportunities for interim feedback need to be built in to the task so that candidates can benefit from the critical eye of peers and teachers, particularly in relation to how far they have carried through their research into codes and conventions into their own products

Film openings

This task involves the production of the first two minutes of a new feature film, including the titles, adhering to commercial cinema conventions. This worked best when candidates had researched film openings relevant to their own genre choice and had developed a systematic understanding of the institutional conventions of opening titles. Candidates need to consider carefully what purpose an opening must serve in establishing enigma for the rest of the film to solve. In some cases, candidates produced film openings which were effectively entire short films, or trailers which gave away too much of the story. A key feature of the task is how far the finished text is 'readable' as a film opening.

Work awarded a mark from Level 4 or Level 5 should demonstrate a high level of skill, including camerawork, sound, use of mise-en-scène and editing. Interim deadlines can assist candidates with feedback on the effectiveness of their work. When candidates work in groups it is important that all members' roles are clearly identifiable and that the centre has allocated marks appropriate to those roles. Comments on Individual Candidate Record Cards should clearly identify how marks have been allocated according to candidate roles.

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/02
Key Media Concepts

Key messages

Section A is a compulsory question whereby candidates must analyse an extract from an American TV drama, and consider how meaning is constructed through the technical codes of camerawork, editing, mise-en-scene and sound. An understanding of technical codes in moving image media is essential for candidates to be able to attempt the question, which this session was based on an extract from *Mr. Robot*.

Section B requires that candidates answer one of two optional questions on one media industry they have studied, adapting and applying their knowledge; which in this session were about marketing and consumption. Candidates should support their responses using examples taken from the contemporary media landscape.

General comments

There was a good spread of marks across both sections of the paper, with many candidates showing evidence of thorough preparation, by writing at length and supporting points with examples. Candidates were often able to attain marks in the higher bands by using appropriate and well selected of examples from the text, underpinned with in depth analysis of micro-elements in order to explore meaning. However, some candidates were less confident in addressing the key terms of the question and were less secure in the way they might shape any relevant knowledge towards fully answering the question.

Section A

Question 1

Technical knowledge of micro-elements was often impressive across all four areas, and it was pleasing to see evidence of some effective teaching of all of the technical skills, with the majority of candidates able to identify a wide range of techniques accurately and with ease. As in previous series, candidates that just identified micro elements, and did not develop their answers when it came to exploring what impact these technical elements had on the creation of meaning, were unable to access the higher range of marks. Alternatively, some candidates were able to easily identify meaning, but lacked the accurate use of technical language of the conventions of moving image to underpin their analysis. A significant number of responses just narrated the text with a list of technical terms, which resulted in limited interpretation of examples. It is important that candidates understand the difference between straightforward observation of what is obvious on the screen and an analysis of connotation and the creation of meaning.

There were some excellent responses at the higher end of the range, highlighting candidates' understanding of the ways in which meaning is constructed through the use of different technical areas. There were some very sophisticated, analytical responses which demonstrated an understanding of how meaning and representation is created, coupled with an excellent use of technical terminology. The best responses synthesised construction and meaning in an organic way, and tended to analyse all areas of media language across each scene, which to synthesise the approach, rather than writing a paragraph on each technical area. Candidates were often able to link the technical codes with analysis of outsiders, duality, irony, hacking and the notion of big corporations vs individuals; in many cases this led to more nuanced and higher level responses.

Less successful responses featured occasions where candidates were able to identify technical codes but did not go one to explore how meaning is created. Some tended to rely on a narrative or descriptive approach rather than an analytical one, often repeating points throughout or reducing analysis to one word. Some candidates struggled to use terminology accurately, for example using the term 'jump cut' or 'switch'

when they meant 'cut'. It is not necessary to apply theory in response to this question (e.g. Propp, Todorov etc.), although in a very small number of cases where theory was included accurately, arguments were enhanced.

Section B

Question 2 – How far is marketing important in the media area you have studied?

The vast majority of candidates elected to answer this question, and it was pleasing to see many well informed and thoroughly prepared answers. The best answers were able to provide detailed case study material, and explored the impact of marketing by conglomerates and independents on audiences. The advantages and disadvantages of synergy, cross media convergence and horizontal/vertical integration on the part of conglomerates and the accessibility to more democratised platforms such as viral marketing and social media and other creative methods of marketing from independents were discussed at the top end, often citing Disney/Marvel/Lucasfilm as a case study. Most candidates chose to discuss film as their chosen area. Many candidates used very current case studies and it was clear that centres are engaging in more relevant and contemporary examples; this allowed greater accessibility to top marks as it enabled candidates to employ a wider range of strategies and terminologies.

Question 3 – How far is your own experience of media consumption typical of contemporary media audiences? Refer to the media area you have studied.

Despite this being a very accessible question, it was less successfully answered compared with **Question 1**. Often candidates were able to write about their own media consumption habits but failed to relate that as being typical/atypical of wider audience consumption and patterns. Very few offered any specific case studies or analysis of examples in order to support their argument, and technical terminology in many cases was not extensively used. Responses to this type of question must be beyond that which a layman could write about their own media usage; candidates should explore and analyse their own experiences against the backdrop of the current media landscape.

Questions 4–11.

No responses were submitted for these questions.

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/03
Advanced Portfolio

Key messages

Successful candidates should:

- complete one of the four set briefs
- keep a detailed blog that documents all of their own research and the production process
- reflect upon their work in the creative critical reflection.

Each of these elements needs to be completed to a high standard, with a substantial amount of evidence demonstrating knowledge and understanding, targeted research, planning, and appropriate use of media language and techniques. Expectations of evidence from each assessment objective are listed on pages 27–30 of the syllabus. Coursework Assessment Summary Forms must be completed by the centre, and should give clear comments for each learner explaining why the marks have been awarded for each assessment objective.

General comments

There were some strong submissions for this component with the vast majority of candidates completing all the tasks to a satisfactory level. A good number of candidates presented detailed and focused research into appropriate existing media and used the knowledge gained to effectively plan and construct their own products, demonstrating a high level of control over both video and print production tools.

In the best work, learners exhibited a clear understanding and motivated application of the relevant media conventions. The most rewarding submissions made innovative use of new technologies in both planning and production work as well as in the creative critical reflections.

The most limiting aspects for many candidates is still a lack of clear documentation of all stages of the production process, including the learner's own research, and a limited use of new technologies and innovative responses to the creative critical reflection questions.

In some cases candidates did not complete all three elements of the set brief or submitted a limited amount of evidence; it is important that both major and minor tasks are completed.

Comments on specific questions

Blogs

The number of centres submitting work on a central porthole or hub is pleasing; centres are reminded that this is best practice, as a blog hub (an online directory of all the candidates' blog links) allows moderators easy access to individual candidates' work. Links must be checked in advance to ensure that they work. Centres are once again reminded that **all** elements of the project must be online, either on or linked to the blog; disks, USB's and printouts should not be sent, and will be disregarded by moderators.

The strongest blogs were submitted by learners who documented the whole project process in detail and showed clear evidence of research in all aspects of the production, clearly documenting and justifying choices and decisions made, including the ideas at each stage that were rejected. The blog is key evidence of achievement of the assessment objectives. Effective blogs often used a linear format, organising the blog so that the earliest post is last and the most recent post is first. Other strong candidates organised the different aspects of the production process under relevant heading and on separate pages – however, within these pages, it is always most useful for moderators when posts are arranged chronologically. Either way a

substantial amount of evidence is needed to illustrate a competent understanding of the assessment objectives.

It is vital that blogs included a range of materials posted over the duration of the project, illustrating the process of production from research and initial ideas to the final production and creative critical reflection. The blog should show and explain the choices made at each stage of production: the strongest work was from learners who consistently reflected on the revisions and choices they made. Very short blogs did not provide enough evidence to justify awarding very high marks, even if the final products were strong.

The best research demonstrated a range of textual analysis with focused and annotated examples. It is vital that candidates include the exploration of similar products or with similar target audiences to those chosen for the learner's production tasks. In the strongest work the research was revisited at stages throughout the production and reflection process, for the purpose of comparison and to demonstrate how conventions were used.

Audience research was strongest when learners went beyond quantitative based questionnaires, which are rarely useful, and analysed how audiences actually engage with products. Good examples included interviews with potential audiences as well as analysis of distribution data and marketing material for similar existing media products. Centres looking to strengthen their marks for AO4 should seek to incorporate the use digital video, audio and print technology into the presentation of their research ideas.

Candidates were highly rewarded when they explored multiple ideas for their product and then documented the progression and development of those into pre-production documents. There was a range of planning and development presented; learners found it most useful when they recorded evidence that enabled them to reflect and make informed choices about the way forward for their production.

Centres seeking to improve their marks should encourage learners to include evidence such as: script readings, screen tests for actors, location pre shoots, practice shots or lighting tests, costume fittings and ideas, behind the scenes videos or photos, production vlogs (video logs) , and 'making-of' video(s). Learners should also be encouraged to take photos or video on the set and annotate them with reflection of their own roles. Work was almost always improved when candidates gained feedback on rough cuts and in many strong portfolios this was done on a number of occasions for each of the major and minor tasks.

Production work

The most successful production work built on previous experiences and was the end product of iteration and test shooting, rehearsals and detailed planning. Candidates who were rewarded high marks also needed to show strong control over software and hardware with a clear and well-documented understanding of media codes and conventions.

Centres are to be reminded that the production work is a package that needs to show a consistency in style, purpose and quality between the major and the minor tasks. Strong examples paid close attention to simulating form, style and genre characteristics across both video and print work.

It is important that production work is not presented as a finished product alone. Candidates are rewarded for plotting a journey both in terms of skill development and design and aesthetical understanding; this should include any preliminary tasks, test work and discarded ideas or media material (see section on blogs above). Centres are reminded that satisfactory evidence of planning is needed in order to access marks above Level 3, even if the submitted production work is strong. Candidates should show the choices they have made about equipment they have used as well as casting, settings and locations.

Creative critical reflections

The strongest critical reflections tended to be from candidates who had kept the most reflective records of their research, planning and production. If the work has been completed as the project unfold then many of the assets and materials needed for the critical reflection should be in place and the candidates task is to creatively present them in a way that enables them to reflect on the choices they made. Successful candidates thus answered the questions using clear examples from all stages of their project journey. The best work also tended to use a variety of digital formats. Candidates are expected to use different formats and make good use of audio and video in their creative reflections.

Examples of level 5 submission include:

Question 1

A magazine article with annotated images from the learner's own production work. A split-screen video comparison plotting the reference points the existing media texts researched in the planning stage.

Question 2

A Powtoon presentation with side by side analysis of the image, fonts, colours, layout and graphics from the learner's three production tasks, with comparable industry examples.

Question 3

A Prezi with theoretical justification of the products' audience, as well as a model of the products distribution alongside comparable real world examples. A video demonstrating the changes made to the product after audience feedback.

Question 4

A podcast show aimed at film fans that interviews the director and/or other key production staff in which all technologies used were explained for the purpose they served and on the project. Alternatively, a YouTube how to video illustrating the key technology.

Other Level 5 submissions included director's commentaries, TV and radio talk show interviews, DVD extras, SFX guides, director question and answers, advertisements for specific technologies used, technology review shows as well as marketing packs info-graphic and posters.

There was some excellent self-reflective work in which candidates gave clear motivation for the decisions they made, backed up with examples from the industry or with research they had carried out into audience and institutions.

To reach the Level 5 criteria for AO3, digital creative tools must be used to excellent effect in the creative critical reflection. This is difficult to achieve without using a range of digital presentation techniques. Learners can improve their submission by avoiding brief or text-heavy answers that only used PowerPoint or Prezi. If a range of technology is used throughout the research and planning stages, learners are able to incorporate this into their creative critical reflections, in order to reassess their application of knowledge and development of skills from each stage of their journey. It is important that learners annotate and commentate on their own video and print products, comparing their own products to relevant industry texts.

Summary

It is clear from the work submitted that this component continues to give students an exceptional learning experience. Many candidates have obviously been on a journey of discovery, building their practical skills and confidence as well as their understanding of media theory. The extent to which learners are able to generate evidence that they have reflected on their own practice and then given themselves time to go back and improve on both their technical ability and their application of relevant media conventions is a key discriminating factor in awarding higher marks.

MEDIA STUDIES

<p>Paper 9607/04 Critical Perspectives</p>
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Key messages

Success in this paper requires preparation in several areas:

- a considered reflection on the coursework undertaken and the skills the candidate developed whilst producing it
- analysis of one piece of coursework using a theoretical framework
- an extended response on one contemporary media theme
- a clear understanding of the key concepts to respond appropriately to **Question 1(b)**.

In Section B, candidates who were able to use examples from contemporary media did very well. The syllabus states that candidates should combine knowledge of two media; we therefore expect candidates to write about more than one media area. Where responses only focus on film, for example, candidates are less likely to meet the required criteria for the higher bands.

General comments

Most of the small field of candidates were able to reflect upon their own progress both as producers and critics of contemporary media. The best candidates were able to use their knowledge, analytical skills and grasp of relevant theory to structure responses which directly address the demands of the question; the less successful did not seem well enough prepared for the depth and breadth of the paper. Time management was generally good with all sections attempted.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1(a)

Candidates who wrote about how they researched conventions of specific texts in their chosen genre and how they then applied this to their own work scored highly. This question was well answered by most candidates, many of whom adopted a chronological approach, which works really well here. Poorer responses failed to mention one example of an actual media text. The best responses contained lots of detail and related it closely to the question set, ranging across both of their projects and reflecting upon the skills they had developed. They gave specific examples from real media and their own work, and showed a good understanding of the requirements of the question.

Question 1(b)

The task requires that candidates review and critique their own work in relation to key concept, which in this paper was the concept of audience. This is often the least successful question for many candidates as it requires a clear understanding of the concept, which may well be informed by theory but does not have to be. Where this question was less well answered, candidates struggled to fully analyse and critically engage with their own work. Audience was addressed well by some candidates – analysing very specific examples of how their texts worked utilising Reception Theory (Hall/Morley) and Uses and Gratifications. Most candidates were able to address the positioning of the target audience but this was mainly in generalised terms offering examples of feedback from their peers. These tended towards the simplistic: they liked this/that bit. Lengthy narrative accounts of the process of production are not appropriate or especially useful in this question.

Section B

Questions 2 and 3: Regulation

No questions were attempted in this section.

Questions 4 and 5: Global media

No questions were attempted in this section.

Questions 6 and 7: Collective Identity

The social group of young people and youth culture was used in response to this question, sometimes to good effect. Successful candidates referred to a wide range of contemporary texts and the work of theorists such as Gauntlett. A historical approach presents the risk of producing a huge volume of very detailed material which ignores 21st Century texts completely, and while context is important, centres are reminded that the focus in Section B should be on the contemporary media landscape. As with all of the topics, the requirement is to cover at least two media areas – some focussed almost exclusively on film with a cursory mention of other media areas, such as television.

Questions 8 and 9: Media in the online age

The best responses explored contemporary media, and were informed by the latest thinking, contextualising it in terms of wider cultural debates around censorship, audience and industries. Weaker responses relied upon candidates' own experience of online shopping and watching *Netflix*; while these are good starting points, the syllabus requires subject-specific knowledge to enable such reflections to move beyond banal or common sense observations, such as 'people used to go to the cinema or shops, whereas now they log on...'. Examples of successful responses are provided on School Support Hub, and might be useful in helping to demonstrate to candidates the standard.

Questions 10 and 11: Post-modern media

Several candidates tackled postmodernism, sometimes exceptionally well. Better answers offered superbly structured arguments supported by reference to apposite examples from a wide range of media. Some of these included references to the band Gorillaz, to the television programme *Black Mirror* and to *VICE* magazine.