

MEDIA STUDIES

<p>Paper 9607/01 Foundation Portfolio</p>

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, the final version of their product, and a creative critical reflection of 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

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. In the best work, knowledge and understanding of conventions of all aspects of the media products was coupled with comprehensive evidence of the process. However, there were also some candidates who appeared not to be following the requirements of the syllabus, with incomplete products, little or no evidence of research or planning and little attempt to produce a creative critical reflection. Some centres did not include any comments on the Individual Candidate Record Cards explaining how the marks were awarded; centres are reminded that this is a requirement of the syllabus.

Comments on specific tasks

Blogs

Some centres have set up blog hubs (a centre blog or web page with candidates' names and numbers hyperlinked to their work) which allow one-click access to the individual work of candidates. 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. Individual Candidate Record Cards can be completed electronically, and this is often easier for moderators to read.

The finished product should be placed at the top (final post) of the candidate's blog, and clearly labelled so that it is clear to moderators which is the final version. The best work was comprehensive, with blog posts that followed the whole process of the project, from the initial idea, through research into similar products, planning, production and ending with the creative critical reflection. The most effective 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 meeting the criteria of the higher levels.

All elements of the project must be online, either on or linked to the blog. Disks, USBs and printouts should not be sent. There is an expectation that there will be a significant number of blog posts from each individual to document the process. 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. They included a range of materials posted over the duration of the project, illustrating the production process from research and initial ideas to final production and critical reflection.

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.

Whilst centres are investing in appropriate technical tools for construction of media products, some candidates would have benefited from more support in building their skills with dedicated DTP software such as InDesign or PagePlus. Too many candidates relied on Photoshop to construct pages; this software is ideal for manipulating images to a high standard, but it is not designed to be used in the construction of entire pages of a magazine, and as a result it can make it a much more time-consuming and difficult process than it otherwise needs to be.

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 their research into codes and conventions through 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. Expectations for work in Level 4 and 5 is that a high level of skill will be in evidence, 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 as permitted by the syllabus 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.

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 number of 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 to which adequate time had been allocated. Weaker work tended to be 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 lower levels.

MEDIA STUDIES

<p>Paper 9607/02 Key Media Concepts</p>

Key messages

Section A is a compulsory question, in which candidates 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 series was based on an extract from Boardwalk Empire.

In Section B, candidates answer one of two optional questions on a media industry they have studied, adapting and applying their knowledge. This series, the two questions focused on evaluating marketing techniques and the role of technology transforming media production. 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, writing at length and supporting points with examples. Frustratingly, in Section B many responses lacked detailed contemporary examples in order to illustrate points, and this hampered those candidates who often demonstrated a good understanding of concepts and produced sound arguments. With some candidates, the ability to address the key terms of the question and to shape relevant knowledge towards fully answering the question was not in evidence.

Section A

Question 1

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 elements accurately and with ease. However, some candidates didn't expand their responses beyond this identification, and did not develop their answers much further when it came to exploring what the impact of these technical elements would have upon the viewer; this did not give them the opportunity to explore meaning and representation, and subsequently they were unable to access the higher bands of the mark scheme. Alternatively, some candidates were able to identify the meaning but lacked the accurate use of technical language of the conventions of moving image to underpin their analysis.

At the higher end of the range there were some excellent responses, highlighting candidates' understanding of the ways in which meaning is constructed through the use of the different technical areas. There were some very sophisticated, analytical responses demonstrating an understanding of how meaning and representation is created, coupled with an excellent use of technical terminology.

Common problems in responses were identifying technical codes but not exploring how meaning is created; these tended to be more narrative or descriptive responses, rather than analytical. Some candidates didn't identify the shifts in tone of the sequence – from generosity to isolation and criminality, and the impact this had on the representation of the character. Some candidates struggled to use terminology accurately, (for example using the term 'jump cut' when they meant 'cut'), which limited the mark that could be awarded. Finally, some candidates tried to apply theory in their responses (e.g. Marxist analysis), which is not necessary and can sometimes act as a distraction for candidates, as they do not always link this to meaning. Credit will be given if meaning is considered when applying theory, and in this case where candidates considered a criticism of capitalistic 'gangsterism' in the construction of meaning this was deemed to be acceptable.

Of the four technical areas, editing and sound were generally handled least well and these should be areas for attention in the teaching.

Section B

Question 2 – Evaluate the marketing techniques used in the media area you have studied.

The question was accessible to all candidates and elicited a wide range of responses; most case studies tended to focus on the film and music industry with many of these resulting in accomplished responses. The most interesting and engaging responses were from the games industry, as case studies tended to be more recent and often responses were quite personal.

At the higher end, candidates successfully evaluated a variety of approaches and were able to reinforce their evaluation through the discussion of specific sales successes and failures using a variety of modern marketing techniques and ploys. Disney/Pixar/Marvel were often used as examples and while being good case studies, candidates were often writing everything they knew about the institution rather than evaluating the success of the marketing techniques used and deploying quite a limited technical vocabulary in their answers.

Candidates were less successful when they didn't apply their knowledge and understanding of the relevant question area to their case study. In these circumstances, obvious marketing techniques such as synergy were often ignored, as were many more current strategies; candidates could have explored the way institutions use any of the following:

- Social/Location/Mobile (SoLoMo);
- push/pull;
- user generated/remix;
- cross-media; viral;
- niche/mass marketing etc.

Generalised responses often clearly showed an understanding of the key concepts, but when these lacked specific evidence from case studies candidates were disadvantaged. In some cases examples were well out of date (Blair Witch/Titanic/Dark Knight being the most common of these), and centres are reminded that contemporaneous examples are likely to indicate a wider engagement with the subject, as evidenced with the games industry responses.

Question 3 – “Digital technologies have transformed media production”

This question was answered less frequently than question 2, and the responses to this question tended to be less successful, with many candidates ignoring or confusing the key term 'transformed'. At times it wasn't clear what candidates were arguing in response to this question. Most responses for this question tended to focus on the film industry.

Better responses had institutional examples of how the possibilities of digital recording equipment and post-production hardware and software were transformative to the end product. Some responses offered a history of production, which might have been a productive route through the question. However, without concentrating sufficiently on the digital aspect of the question candidates struggled to access the higher bands.

'Prosumerism' was a fairly obvious area for discussion, which was often ignored, and this was especially frustrating when considering the rise in 'youtubers' and other vloggers, something most candidates will be familiar with. One area of exploration could have focused on how candidates themselves have become media producers, but this too was often overlooked. Many responses confused digital distribution with production and discussed streaming services at length.

MEDIA STUDIES

<p>Paper 9607/03 Advanced Portfolio</p>

Key messages

For success in this coursework paper, candidates need to complete one of the four optional tasks, keep a detailed blog of the process of the project, and reflect upon their work in the creative critical reflection. Each of these elements needs to be done to a high standard, demonstrating knowledge and understanding, research and planning and appropriate skilled use of media tools. Expectations of evidence from each assessment objective are listed on pages 27 – 30 of the syllabus. Coursework coversheets need to be completed with clear comments for each candidate to show how marks have been arrived at for each assessment objective – where this is incomplete it is much more difficult to understand how marks have been awarded.

General comments

Some strong work was submitted for this component, demonstrating detailed research into existing products, which fed into the planning and construction of candidates' own media products. There was some high level of skill shown in the use of media tools, in both the products and in the creative critical reflections. In the best work, knowledge and understanding of conventions of media products was coupled with comprehensive evidence of the process. In some cases, candidates did not complete all three elements of the set brief. It is important that both major and minor tasks are completed, as well as clear documentation of all the stages of the production process, including the research.

Comments on specific questions

Blogs

We request that centres set up blog hubs which allow one click access to the individual work of candidates. This is because typing in long URLs runs the risk of errors. Links must be checked by centres in advance to ensure that they are working and the finished product should be placed at the top of the blog and labelled as such, so that it is clear which version should be considered the intended final product. The best work was comprehensive, with blog posts which followed the whole process of the project and showed clear evidence of research into all aspects of the production, which then feed into the finished work. Very short blogs did not provide enough evidence of the process, and were often limited to no higher than Level 2 as a result. Centres are once again reminded that **all** elements of the project must be online, either on or linked to the blog. Disks, USBs and printouts should not be sent, and will be disregarded by Moderators.

There is an expectation that there will be a significant number of blog posts from each individual to document the process. The blog is key evidence of AO2, AO3 and AO4. The most effective blogs were those which used a linear format, organising the blog so that the earliest post is last and the most recent post is first. It is also 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 final production and creative critical reflection. The blog should provide a sense of journey which demonstrates how the choices made by the candidate are based on their own research into relevant genre specific industry products. Better candidates show a level of control over all aspects of the production process and a demonstration of reflection and revision in the choices made.

Production work

Centres are reminded that the production work is a package that needs to show a consistency in style and purpose between the major and the minor tasks. It is also important that the production work is not presented

as a finished product alone, but as a collective where the major and minor task show a clear relationship. Candidates will be rewarded for plotting a journey both in terms of skill development and design and aesthetic understanding – this includes any preliminary tasks.

Creative critical reflections

Candidates who fully addressed the four questions using varied digital formats performed best in this area. There are a number of programs and accessible applications, which enabled really interesting and reflective work, appropriate to the task. The best candidates also made good use of audio and video in their creative reflections. There were 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.

Weaker work tended to be very brief or text-heavy and overly reliant on PowerPoint, Prezi, or other presentation software. These sorts of programs rarely allow candidates to provide in-depth analysis, often featuring few slides with little illustration, and a lack of consideration for both the major and minor tasks. Such work could only meet the criteria for minimal marks. It is worth noting that the strongest critical reflections tended to be from candidates who had kept the most reflective records of their research, planning and production.

MEDIA STUDIES

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

Success in this paper requires a considered reflection on the coursework undertaken and the skills developed, analysis of one piece of coursework using a theoretical framework, and an extended response on one contemporary media theme.

General comments

The best answers showed evidence of high level analytical skill and the ability to consider different aspects of the task in limited time. At the bottom end candidates did not seem to be aware of the content required or of the nature of the assessment, writing very brief and general responses which gained barely any credit.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1 (a)

The question required candidates to explore how the conventions of real media texts had influenced their productions. Most candidates were able to identify some features of the conventions of real media and how these influenced their work. Some did not address both coursework units, but stuck to discussing just one of their projects, which limited the marks available to them. The best responses contained lots of detail and related it closely to the question set, ranging across their projects and reflecting upon the skills 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)

This question required candidates to analyse one of their own productions using the concept of narrative. Where candidates had been taught the concept of narrative, and had some relevant theory to use, this question was well answered. Where candidates were less confident with the concept of narrative, or how their production had engaged with this concept, they quickly ran out of ideas. Strong responses made detailed reference to their own production and applied theory effectively, successfully engaging with question and their product to fully explore a range of reflections.

Section B

Questions 2 and 3: Regulation

No questions were attempted in this section.

Questions 4 and 5: Global media

The answers on this topic were very general and lacked detailed reference to any case studies or supporting evidence, and centres are reminded that, for candidates to do well in Section B, answers must be supported with detailed examples from contemporary media. Where candidates didn't engage with the broader implications of the question, or made points which were often little more than assumptions and generalisations as opposed to carefully considered responses, they struggled to access the higher bands.

Questions 6 and 7: Media and collective identity

Candidates who used examples of collective identities that were overly broad or which lacked a nuanced understanding of identity struggled to go into enough detail to access marks in the higher bands. Candidates would have benefitted from more focused case studies in preparation for the question, including exploring a variety of media theory that could be applied in relation to collective identity.

Questions 8 and 9: Media in the online age

No questions were attempted in this section.

Questions 10 and 11: Post-modern media

Candidates who prepared well for this topic produced strong responses, using a range of good contemporary examples to explain postmodernism in detail. They engaged with the question, exploring in depth the implications and expanding their thinking, making clear references to relevant theory. Overall this question was answered well.