



Questions matter



GCSE

Media Studies

8572/2 Media Two

Report on the Examination

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Overview

The improvements noted in last year's report were, once again, consolidated with a further rise in the mean mark to 41.5. In a paper that is dominated by three 20-mark questions requiring the skills of extended response writing, it is pleasing to note that competence in this area continues to rise. The marks for these questions are getting better and fewer students leave them un-attempted. In their responses, students demonstrated, by and large, a firm grasp of the theoretical framework, assured familiarity with the Close Study Products and an ability to express themselves coherently using the terminology of the subject. This is a great testament to the excellent teaching and learning that has gone on throughout some difficult years during and following on from the pandemic.

This was the second examination to feature a revised slate of CSPs and it is clear that the new CSPs have been thoroughly well integrated into teaching and learning strategies. '*City of Magpies*' featured in the television extract and examiners were impressed by the depth and breadth of understanding of this television product demonstrated in students' answers. Inevitably, some CSPs are replaced at shorter notice as we strive to keep a selection of suitable contemporary products to which students can relate within the broader slate of CSPs. Teachers are very good at responding to these developments and examiners, too, are conscious of the need to make sure that no student is disadvantaged.

It is now six years since the first examination of this specification. In the early years, there was often too much emphasis on the CSPs; many exam answers showed a very thorough familiarity with these texts, but only a limited acknowledgement of the theoretical framework and contexts of the media. This year's exam performance certainly shows a distinct improvement in this key area.

Section A

Questions 1.1 and 1.2

Briefly define 'narrative disruption'.

Give **one** example of narrative disruption in the extract.

These two questions were very well answered. Although it seems surprising that more (Q 1.1 mean: 0.8) were able to supply an example than those (Q 1.2 mean: 0.6) who were able to provide an adequate definition, perhaps this is because those who were able to define the term invariably identified a good example in the extract, whilst those whose definition was unsatisfactory quite often chose, perhaps at random, an example from the extract that could legitimately be seen as a 'narrative disruption'.

When preparing for or practising short 'definition/example' questions such as this, it is worth advising students to avoid using the very words that appear in the question. Here, for example, 'Something that disrupts the narrative' was not rewarded. Also, definitions comprised solely of an example, eg., 'Like when a gun goes off' will not get a mark, but very simple definitions such as 'A break in the story' will.

Question 1.3

How are the following codes and conventions used to create meanings in the extract?

- composition
- audio

This question formula, requiring an analysis that links codes and conventions to the creation of meaning, is familiar and most students knew what to do. With only eight marks at stake the identification of two valid instances of audio and two of composition codes and conventions, together with a brief account of their meanings, was enough for top band marks (7-8).

Unfortunately, many students were unfamiliar or uncertain with the term ‘composition’, causing them to leave out this aspect of the question or, in some cases, avoid the question entirely. The term ‘composition’ is widely used in media industries as well as media studies and it appears in the specification. Please refer to the mark scheme for a detailed set of examples of composition to be found in the extract.

Students were much more confident in referring to the use of audio in the extract, often achieving six marks for answers dealing with contrasting aspects of audio without touching on composition. Some answers referred to ‘musical composition’; an unanticipated interpretation of composition that was dealt with sympathetically by examiners.

In spite of the problems with composition, the mean mark for this question, 4.4, was quite a substantial increase over the equivalent question in 2023.

Question 1.4

‘Fantasy worlds can be just as real as the ‘real’ world.’

How far does an analysis of the extract show this to be true?

Answer with reference to:

- selection
- construction
- mediation.

Most answers to this question were able to identify aspects of the extract such as the talking daemon Pantalaimon that were clear indicators of a ‘fantasy world’ alongside other aspects such as the everyday clothes of Will and Lyra or the familiar appearance of Cittagazze that evinced the ‘real world’.

Relatively few answers, though, were able to really get to grips with the idea, expressed in the question, that fantasy can be represented in such a way as to seem ‘just as real’ as reality. Those that did were able to refer, for example, to the normalisation of Lyra’s world, with its perfectly realised talking animals, to such an extent that it seems sensible and natural; making Will’s shocked reaction appear fantastical instead. Similarly, the superficial normality of Cittagazze is ‘made strange’ by using the codes of music, lighting and camera angles so that the boundary between the reality and fantasy begin to blur away. In this question, With regards to the bulleted items in this question, all three of selection, construction and mediation feature in the specification, but many students had difficulty connecting their responses to the three bullet points; construction and mediation seemed the most unfamiliar to students. There

was a drop in the mean, from 6.2 to 5.2, when comparing the performance of this to last year on Q. A1.4. Linked to this, there was quite a steep rise in the number of very low scores, with 19% of students gaining fewer than 3 marks. . In marking the question, examiners interpreted the three bullet points as ‘the elements of representation’ (see mark scheme) so that there was no penalty for those many answers that did not refer explicitly to all or any of them. Teachers should note the need for students to build a working knowledge of key terms set out in the specification.

Question 2

‘Although representations in television drama have changed over time, the use of stereotypes has not.’

How far do you agree with this statement?

Answer with reference to *Doctor Who*, ‘*An Unearthly Child*’ (1963) and *His Dark Materials*, ‘*The City of Magpies*’ (2020) (Close Study Products).

Students always relish writing about the television CSP’s, and this year was no exception as Q A2 was the best answered of the three 20-mark questions. The focus on comparative stereotypes enabled students to demonstrate just how well informed and well prepared they were with a range of different but equally compelling arguments supported by a judicious use of evidence drawn from the two CSPs.

The strongest answers clearly recognised and responded to the distinction implied by the statement in the question between representation and the use of stereotypes. There were many different routes to high marks, with some answers strongly endorsing the statement and others arguing that both representation and stereotyping have changed over time.

Predictably enough, the representation of gender dominated most responses and students were able readily to identify gender stereotypes in ‘*An Unearthly Child*’, contrasting them with Will, Lyra and, occasionally, Mrs. Coulter in ‘*City of Magpies*’. The idea that stereotypes may be subverted is clearly well understood and was frequently referenced in these responses. Some argued that such examples undermine unconscious bias, but others pointed out that counter-stereotypes may still be simplistic representations.

Many excellent answers considered diversity by contrasting the all-white cast of ‘*An Unearthly Child*’ with the multiple ethnicities represented in ‘*City of Magpies*’. Such responses often took the opportunity to set these two approaches within the different sets of cultural norms found in the societies of 1963 and 2020. Stereotypes of the teenager (Susan, Will, Lyra), the elderly (Dr Who) and teachers (Barbara and Ian) were also considered in some cases. All had the potential to provide useful evidence when linked to a coherent set of judgements and conclusions in relation to the statement in the question.

The mean mark for this question was 10.7, a rise of 0.4 over the 2023 mark.

Section B

Question 3

How do producers of online and social media make money?

Give **two** examples.

With a mean mark of 1.7, the great majority of students coped admirably with this question and 76% achieved full marks. Of those that did not, many produced two examples deemed too similar to be worthy of both marks. An extensive list of acceptable examples can be found in the mark scheme.

Question 4

‘Uses and Gratifications theory helps us to understand the appeal of celebrities’ online presence to audiences.’

How far does an analysis of Marcus Rashford’s and Kim Kardashian’s online presence show this to be true?

Success in this question was largely premised on two attributes: familiarity with the two CSPs and an understanding of Uses and Gratifications theory. The latter proved to be more of a stumbling block than the former as quite a substantial number of students demonstrated little knowledge of U and G or could only offer guesses as to what this theory may be. Often, we could reward those guesses as the answers were still able to focus on the relationship between the audience and the content of the two products, essentially answering the question, ‘What is it that attracts people to the online presence of these two celebrities?’ On the other hand, fewer marks were available to those who simply offered descriptive summaries, however well detailed, of websites and social media associated with Marcus Rashford and Kim Kardashian.

For those students equipped with both of the attributes set out above, higher marks were accessed by linking some potential uses and/or gratifications to relevant online material. There are different versions of U and G, but most stuck to the four categories of the Blumler and Katz model: Diversion, Personal Identity, Social Relationships and Surveillance. However, examiners were sympathetic to answers showing implicit understanding of the principles of the theory although devising different categories or drawing on more extensive sets of categories. For marks in the top level (Level 4, 16-20 marks) we expected to find answers that contrasted different ways of accessing a range of uses and/or gratifications, drawing on evidence from the online presence of both celebrities.

The mean mark for this question was 9.2 and 42.5% of answers achieved marks in Level 3 or Level 4.

Question 5

‘Social media is the most dangerous media industry because it lacks regulation.’

How far do you agree with this statement?

This question provided an opportunity to explore an area of the specification that is also a topic of personal interest and experience as well as a significant national debate. Last year’s report noted that that Q B5 is the place at the culmination of the course where we hope to see students advancing ideas that they have developed in response to the specification; effectively putting their media studies into practice. Here, students really rose to the challenge, with many producing engaged, fluent responses that really had something to say.

As many students pointed out, social media has not been subject to formal regulation in the UK in the same way as other media. However, it was good to see that many teachers and students are keeping up to date with recent developments with quite a few answers referencing the passage of the Online Safety Act and the building of a regulatory framework that will gradually extend Ofcom’s powers in relation to social media. Answers often demonstrated a really thorough understanding of the approaches taken by major platforms to self-regulation and were keen to examine these in the context supplied by the question. The majority explored the idea of social media as a ‘dangerous’ media industry by focusing particularly on the protection (or lack thereof) provided for children (just as does the Online Safety Act). The inadequacies of current approaches were often illustrated by examples of the ease with which age-related restrictions on social media use can be circumvented.

Some responses took a perfectly legitimate comparative approach, looking at other media to determine whether social media is *the most* dangerous. The relationship between regulation and danger in, for example, film, television and newspapers was discussed; often leading to a conclusion that regulatory bodies such as IPSO, PEGI and BBFC and ASA have done little to curb the ‘dangers’ such as phone-hacking, copycat violence, game player addiction or the false claims made by advertisers. This approach certainly helped students to meet the question’s requirement for synopticity.

Another tack was to challenge the basis of the question, effectively by arguing that the benefits of social media far outweigh the dangers. These approaches celebrated the protection of free speech and were likely to endorse the approach to self-regulation that puts the onus on social media users to protect themselves by blocking, reporting and exposing misuse.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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