



Questions matter



GCSE

# Media Studies

8572/C NEA: Creating a media product

Report on the Examination

8572

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## Introduction

This was the first year of online submission of students' files for GCSE Media Studies. The vast majority of centres handled this process well, and moderators reported far fewer technical issues than in previous years when centres were usually submitting a mixture of printed work and digital files on USB sticks. We hope that centres found it as beneficial as the moderating team.

Student engagement with the briefs was evident across the cohort, especially with the print and website briefs. There were very few rubric infringements, though one or two centres completed briefs other than those provided on Centre Services for submission in 2024.

It appeared that teachers had made more use this year of the resources available to them. Apart from this report, teachers can also access:

- Assessed folders of student work on the Teacher Online Standardisation system (TOLS) on AQA's Centre Services.
- Guidance documents on the GCSE Media Studies section of the AQA website, for both teaching and submitting the work.
- One-to-one email advice from their assigned NEA advisor – any centres requiring this support who are not yet aware of their advisor should contact eos@aqa.org.uk citing their centre number.

## Applying the assessment criteria

Between 50% and 60% of centres' marking was within tolerance of the agreed AQA standard, applying the mark scheme in the specification. This obviously means that between 40% and 50% of centres' marking was outside that tolerance. As in previous years, the biggest issues arose over the marking of the Statement of Intent and of Production: Effectiveness. In comparison, Media Language and Media Representations were more accurately marked across most centres.

## Statements of Intent

These were most often over-marked when students had concentrated on theory at the expense of their actual intentions. There is no requirement to reference theorists in the statement. Instead, students are assessed on their ability to write about their intended uses of specific aspects of media language to create media representations, explaining how these target the specified audience and meet the set brief.

The best statements gave clear evidence of detailed and specific intentions, such as outlining how a character will be dressed and how they will act and speak in order to create a specific representation. Having read such a statement, the reader could imagine what the completed product would look and/or sound like and could understand how the decisions taken would fulfil the needs of the audience.

The magazine brief gave particular issues this year, as some students appeared not to have read the brief very closely, and so, instead of outlining their intentions for a consumer/lifestyle magazine for an upmarket audience, they explained their ideas for a more specialist magazine targeting an audience of their own devising. Such statements could not be said to be discussing intentions appropriate to the brief, however detailed, and so could not be agreed in the higher bands.

## Marking of the production

It is always the advice of the moderating team to start with the Production: Effectiveness mark, to avoid penalising or rewarding the same elements twice.

**Production: Effectiveness for an audience**

The key statements in this section of the marking criteria relate to meeting the brief and the needs of the audience and using media conventions. In centres where marking of this section was outside of tolerance, the biggest issues were products not meeting the brief but being awarded marks as if they had, products not using conventions but being placed into the top bands, or products using found images/footage or copied text from elsewhere.

The latter point was more of an issue this year than in previous years. Students should not be using any found images/footage or copying and pasting any text in order to meet the requirements of the brief. If they do, the specification makes it clear that the Effectiveness mark has to be capped at the top of level 2, a maximum of 8 marks out of 20. Where centres had not applied this cap, this was often enough to pull folders out of tolerance of the agreed standard. As all work is now submitted digitally, moderators can quickly check whether an image or a piece of text has been copied from elsewhere. Centres need to make the same checks if they are not sure whether the work is the student's own.

Moderators use the brief as a checklist to discover whether students have met the brief in full for the top level, or almost in full for the next level down. It is therefore very strongly recommended that all students have their own copy of the brief and also use it as a checklist while creating their work. Without this, it is very hard for them to know whether they have met the brief in full.

Students who 'interpret the brief' and try to bend it to fit what they would like to create often fail to meet the main requirements of the brief. Those students who failed to notice the magazine brief was targeting an upmarket audience, or that the promotional music website was for a pop music artist, will not have been able to access the higher bands for this aspect of the mark scheme.

Work in the top band should also make consistent use of existing conventions of the relevant media format and genre. Students should therefore be aware of what these conventions are. For this reason, each of the briefs are linked to at least one of the CSPs. Students should be encouraged to look at a range of similar products before starting to plan their own work, to note what the existing conventions are. Any deliberate subverting of conventions should be outlined in the statement of intent.

**Production: Media Language**

Once Production Effectiveness has been marked, any issues with meeting the brief can be put to one side, and the ability of the student to make media language choices and to construct representations can be assessed on their own merits.

Both Media Language and Media Representations tended to be more accurately marked than the other two aspects of the marking criteria. The emphasis in marking these sections is on the choices the student has made and how well these convey meanings.

There was some evidence of the use of AI in imagery this year. This is permitted, but it is advised that AI is only used where it would not be reasonable or safe to take photographs of the same subject – explosions and earthquakes are obvious examples of where AI could be considered. Students who use AI should write the name of the AI generator, and the prompts they used, on the student record form. This enables the moderator to see the decisions that have been made. AI generation should not be used for any text, either in the statements of intent or in the productions.

**Production: Media Representations**

While generally marked accurately, there were some centres that gave equal marks to Media Language and Media Representations for every student. Although they may often be in the same level, the two marks are not necessarily the same.

A student may, for example, have made poor choices of fonts, layout, and colours in a production, which would affect their Media Language marks, but their decisions in photography and the content of the text might convey representations very strongly. It was more likely this year that a student made good use of media language overall but had not given the same level of thought to the representations. For example, the costume, background, voice, and body language used may not have created a construction of the character that was relevant to the media format and the audience.

**Common Misunderstandings and Rubric Infringements**

The most common misunderstandings have already been outlined. They remain, as in previous years, those caused by not reading the briefs fully, or not sticking to the briefs as set. Students should be discouraged from adapting the briefs and should try to meet them exactly as they are written. Each brief includes a specified media format, a target audience, and an industry context. Further details are provided in the wording, including the length / quantity of work to be created, and the minimum requirements within that work.

As has already been stated, student work that does not meet *all* the requirements of the brief cannot gain marks in the highest level for Production: Effectiveness. Students should therefore have a copy of the brief they are answering so that they can use it as a checklist. It still did not appear that all centres had done this.

The biggest issues were the magazines that did not meet the requirement to be an upmarket consumer/lifestyle magazine, and the music promotion packages that were not for a pop artist or band, or that did not mention the international launch of their new album and a related tour.

Although misconceptions of the briefs were relatively common, rubric infringements were very rare. The few that occurred included centres working to briefs other than those published by AQA for submission in 2024, and students who had worked in pairs. The briefs for submission each year are published on Centre Services on 1 March in the year before submission. All work must be created individually, although students can use other people as their cast and crew. All decisions must be the student's own.

**Responding to the different briefs**

The five briefs this year included two print briefs. We are aware that print is a preferred option for some centres, but cannot guarantee two print briefs every year, as the emphasis changes each year. There will always be at least one brief in each of these four media formats: print, audio, video, and e-media. All briefs are connected to one or more of the CSPs, so that learning in the 'theory' part of the course can be used directly within the practical assessment.

Centres can choose how many of the briefs to offer to their students, and at what part of the course (after 1 March of the first year) the NEA is done.

Judging by the work seen in the samples, in almost half of centres only one brief was tackled this year, with this usually being the magazine brief, but with occasional instances of each of the other briefs. Only

about 2% of centres appeared to offer all five briefs, with almost a quarter offering a choice of two, and almost a fifth offering a choice of three.

### **Brief One: Radio or video adverts for mental health careers**

This brief was evident in almost 20% of submissions. The vast majority had opted for the radio adverts, with very few submissions of television adverts. A small minority of students had misunderstood the brief and created three adverts for three different mental health organisations, but most had grasped the concept of a campaign very well.

The conventions of radio adverts were used well on the whole, with students creating relevant, clear narratives, and selecting appropriate voices to realise their adverts. There were some excellent uses of background sounds and music to create soundscapes and evocative atmospheres which brought the mini dramas to life.

Radio productions have, in the past, often suffered from a lack of attention to detail and poor sound mixing, but those issues were much less in evidence this year. Occasionally, students missed the careers aspect, and promoted positive mental health instead.

### **Brief Two: Upmarket consumer/lifestyle magazine**

This was by far the most popular brief, with 85% of centres submitting some work for this brief. Three of the four biggest issues have already been mentioned, but these did affect a high number of centres:

- Creating work for an audience other than that described in the brief
- Creating magazines in a genre other than that described in the brief
- Using found images or text
- The double page feature not focusing on a person of importance

Students who understood the link between this brief and their study of the Tatler magazine CSP tended to do well. They employed the conventions of such magazine covers very well, with one large image and a minimal colour palette for the fonts. They selected appropriate content for the coverlines, showing their understanding of the genre.

Double page features were more mixed, even in those magazines that had understood the brief, perhaps because students had not studied these in as much depth before planning their responses. Some used over-sized fonts or had text that ran across the central gutter. Images sometimes featured students clearly in school uniform. More than anticipated used fewer images than specified in the brief, suggesting they had not used this as a checklist, as this is a simple error to correct. A relatively high number did not focus on a person of importance, instead often being a marketing article for a fashion or design brand, without including a person. Again, this suggested that students did not have their own copy of the brief, as this was a clear requirement.

The best double page features had selected a believable character, adopted an apposite mode of address for the upmarket audience, and used images with an appropriate mise-en-scene, considering both the character and the background.

**Brief Three: Quality newspaper**

This was far less popular as a print brief than brief two, with just over a quarter (26%) of centres submitting newspaper productions.

There was a full spread of understanding of newspaper conventions in evidence, with some students submitting work that relied on newsletter templates in programmes like Word, which could not be said to emulate newspapers, and others making full use of quality newspaper conventions, as seen in their CSP The Times.

The notes about this brief in the Teacher Booklet made it clear that placeholder text could be used by students going beyond the required 420-450 words. Students who had done this tended to create more believable newspaper pages, as they made good use of appropriate layout and font sizes.

Some students struggled to understand what was meant by a quality newspaper, and so produced products that were more like the Daily Mirror in feel, or that were too specialist and thus more magazine-like in content. It is strongly recommended that students study the conventions of existing products in the same genre before planning their own response.

**Brief Four: Online promotional package for pop music artist/band**

This was the second most popular brief but dwarfed by the magazine brief. Approximately 37% of centres submitted web-based work.

Students made good use of online website templates, substituting in their own content. Centres must be careful, however, to ensure that students do not leave in content that has been created by others, as this could fall foul of the 'no found images' rubric.

The quality of submissions was not as strong as for previous online promotional briefs, partly because students often had not considered the representations as fully as they did for other briefs. There appeared to be a tendency to select friends to appear as music artists in the products, without first considering what the branding of the artist should be. This gave an unevenness to the products, with fonts, images and colours lacking any alignment. In some cases, there were disparities between the branding projected by the site and the branding projected in the social media posts. This was also the brief with the highest likelihood of using found images.

The brief was clear that the artist was nationally known but about to launch internationally, and this context was often missing. In the best submissions, there was a strong focus on the international launch, with all aspects of the website and social media posts being geared towards a global audience, but also commenting on the national / local roots of the artist.

**Brief Five: TV fantasy drama**

Just over a quarter (26%) of centres submitted work for this brief. As is often the case with video briefs, submissions tended to be good, with students and centres who had selected the brief showing a good understanding of the relevant conventions.

The required recognition of the disruption was clear in most submissions, and there were some strong elements of the fantasy genre. Seemingly abandoned houses and dense woodland appeared often, with some excellent use of low-key lighting and special effects in places. The very best submissions also used sound well to evoke atmosphere or to convey aspects of narrative off-screen.

As this is a television fantasy drama, submissions should have been filmed and presented in landscape format. Fewer students made mistakes with this than in previous years, but portrait format was still in evidence for some. **Guidance given by teachers**

Where whole centres had made similar errors, such as missing out the person of importance in the magazine brief, it is clear that neither the teacher nor the students were referring to the briefs often enough.

The answers to most questions from students can be found in the briefs themselves. There are two versions of the booklets, one for teachers and one for students. It is strongly recommended that centres download both, as the teacher booklet contains extra information that answers some of the more obvious questions. Teachers should refer to the briefs themselves throughout the NEA production work, and point students back to these at each stage to ensure they are responding appropriately.

### **Administrative procedures**

As stated in the introduction to this report, this was the first year of online submission of files. This was a learning experience for AQA and the moderators as well as for centres, and as far as moderators can see this process has gone relatively smoothly.

Centres were sent guidance on how to label and upload files in advance of the upload window. In some centres it was clear from communication between the moderator and the centre that this process was shared between several people, such as the teacher, the IT support team, and the exams officer. In a few cases this led to errors creeping in, but in most cases the upload was successful.

Centre Declaration Sheets (CDSs) and Candidate Record Forms (CRFs) are still required, and some of these had to be called for separately. Centres which had previously had excellent practice in evidencing their marking using their own extra materials, such as centre derived comment sheets, tended to upload these alongside the CRF and the students' work, which was very helpful.

Some issues seen this year:

- Documents scanned in the wrong orientation and not rotated.
- Documents wrongly labelled so duplicates of one document were uploaded and others were missing.
- Files uploaded that required specialist software to open them – Photoshop and Publisher files for example. While the 'Recording and Submitting NEA Evidence' document available on the Media Studies section of the AQA website is now out of date due to online submission, the requirements for specific file types have not changed. These enable the moderators to see all the work submitted.
- CRFs with nothing or very little by way of comment to support the marks. Such commentary is a requirement of submission and assists the moderation process.
- Extra files uploaded, such as planning documents.

The best practice for labelling and uploading was to:

- Upload the CDS to the centre documentation page.
- Label each of the students' files (including the CRF) clearly not only with their centre number, student number and part of the name, but also with a brief description of the file's content, e.g. 10000\_1000\_Hal\_Sol.pdf or 10000\_1000\_Hal\_mag\_cover.jpg

### **Best practice**

There were some excellent examples of work enjoyed by moderators this year, with students engaging well and learning from the process.

In the best submissions, moderators saw:

- Students who have clearly engaged with their brief and who have been able to explain their choices and decisions
- Cogent and focused statements of intent, written when students knew the detail of what they were about to produce
- Adherence to the chosen brief in full
- Media production work that would engage the target audience
- Attentive use of media conventions
- Deliberate control of media language to create intended meanings
- Strong representations of issues, people, and places, in words, sounds and images.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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