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# **MEDIA STUDIES**

7571/W Written Paper  
Report on the Examination

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## Overview

The first thing to do is to congratulate teachers and students who responded to the challenge of the new specification and very different assessment structure with tremendous energy and purpose. Even though there have been two specimen papers, this was the first live paper and it is pleasing to say that it was addressed admirably by the majority of students.

It is easy to see, also, where there is room for inevitable improvement, as teachers and students come to understand the new specification and the ways in which these new assessments are different to those previously sat in the subject. These examinations are much more specifically tests of knowledge and understanding of specific parts of the subject content and particularly the theoretical framework. This means that there is less focus on students applying key ideas and their own examples autonomously to develop personal responses to media products. They now have a set of Close Study Products (CSPs), which serve as a common set of exemplars to evidence understanding of parts of the theoretical framework.

CSPs are not intended to be treated as set texts in the way that, for example English Literature might have set texts but rather as sources of information to demonstrate how media products are constructed, produced and received. Students should be familiar with the CSPs in order to engage with the requirements of the questions being asked. Each CSP is located in only one of the three sections of the examination:

- Section A – deals with Media Language and Representation
- Section B –deals with Media Industries and Media Audiences
- Section C –looks at the in depth close study products across the whole of the framework.

Our decision to have only one examination means that students spend significantly less time being examined than with other awarding organisations but that this reduced time is expended in one sitting. Therefore the style of examination is much more prescriptive and focused than on legacy specifications. Time is a significant factor in completing this examination and therefore exam technique is crucial.

In simple terms there is a hierarchy of questions, which is indicated by allocated marks and by the amount of space offered in the answer book. This space is enough for students with average-sized handwriting and there should be no need for additional pages. Low tariff questions are targeting knowledge and understanding and can be answered in a few sentences or a short paragraph. However, too many students wrote paragraphs and went on to additional pages when their answer-book answers had already received full marks. Therefore, students wasted valuable time that could've been spent on the higher tariff questions. This was inevitable in the first sitting and the marking was genuinely appreciative of both of these important contexts: time and occasion.

It is not up to us to prescribe timings for particular questions but it would be ingenuous not to reflect that for sections A, B and C carrying 40, 32 and 40 marks, guidelines might suggest 50, 40 and 50 minutes each, allowing 10 minutes reading time. Students significantly exceeding these are unlikely to complete the exam.

## Section A: Media Language and Media Representation

This section addresses the following media forms and their CSPs:

- advertising and marketing
- magazines
- video games.

### Response to unseen print text

There are two places on the paper where students are asked to offer focused analysis of an unseen print text and this is the most valuable. Here the text was the cover of *Trillionaire* magazine, which is not a magazine that students or their teachers are likely to be familiar. It proved an accessible text and one that elicited very different responses, particularly around the issue of female empowerment / enslavement within the central image.

### Question 1

Question 1 offered a gentle introduction to the unseen text and its deconstruction, partly to test some basic knowledge and partly to prepare for the more substantial comparative work on issues of representation in question 2.

Question 1.1 was a multiple choice question requiring students to select the correct four statements relating to the unseen text in Figure 1. The majority of students picked up 3 or 4 marks on this question.

Question 1.2 was another low tariff question that offers a very specific and contained focus. Students were asked for a brief explanation of 'dominant ideology' before identifying how it might apply to the unseen text in Figure 1. This means effectively a question which is 2+2 (knowledge of and application to). This was not particularly well answered with less than half of the cohort getting more than half marks. . The first part of 1.2, along with question 4 and 5, were testing knowledge and students who didn't remember these terms did not access many marks. The key is to understand that, for example, 'dominant ideology' is to be offered in a couple of sentences.

Students who lacked a working definition or the confidence to realise it was merely the formal name for those aspects of media communication which were a part of most lessons, panicked and tried to work it out semantically from the two words. Thus the two mainly unfruitful paths were via either 'popular ideas' or a simple misallocation of the idea of 'dominant signifier', the most important sign on the cover. More damagingly though these detours often stretched to additional pages.

### Question 2

Here the issue was representation and the question asked for a comparative analysis of some specific aspect in the unseen text and one of the CSPs from this section, in this case the advertising CSP *Maybelline – it's a Boss life*. The idea is that by the time the student reaches this question, they are ready to focus on two familiar texts, having addressed Figure 1 and having prepared the CSPs for just this kind of eventuality.

This very much proved to be the case, with this by far the most accessible of the 20 mark questions. The key, as elsewhere, was technique. In the limited time available, what is needed is

structure (simple paragraphs which each do a particular job), focus (doing precisely what you are asked to do) and detail (perhaps particularly in the case of the CSP). The format is familiar and will become more so: selection, rationale, comparison and context.

### Question 3

The second of the unseen response questions focused on a fairly stereotypical horror magazine cover (*Horrorville*). The direction of the reading was provided by the issue of genre and Steve Neale's notion that one thing genre does to prompt certain kinds of readings of texts. Note that the theorist Neale prompts the direction of the analysis. This is not a question about the theories Steve Neale compiles in his work on film genres but rather an analysis guided by one aspect of Neale's work as stated in the question.

Students handled this question very well. The generic elements, structurally, iconographically and thematically were widely discussed.

### Question 4

Students tended to remember this useful term (plot) in the study of narrative, with over half of the cohort picking up both marks.

## Section B: Media Industries and Media Audiences

This section addresses the following media forms and their CSPs:

- television
- music video
- film (industries only).

### Question 5

Students were less familiar with public service broadcasting (PSB) with only a third offering convincing definitions. Many tried to guess and time was wasted for no reward. Approximately one third of students got no marks, which suggests that PSB is a less familiar term that it used to be.

### Question 6

The two remaining questions in section B both have 15 marks allocated to them and the responses here to Common's *Letter to the Free* were a great success, with the majority of students getting over half marks. The response to the challenge of proving social and cultural significance was pleasingly varied, addressing both the themes and details of this compelling text. In no more than 15 or 20 minutes, students created well-structured answers, which evidenced the required knowledge of the CSP and an engagement with the video and its agendas.

### Question 7

This question asked students to explain the appeal of low to medium budget films to Hollywood conglomerates, requiring them to engage with the *Hidden Figures* CSP. Given all of the same kinds of restraints and pretty much the same structure as question 06, it was surprising that answers here were significantly less convincing. It seems clear that a bit part of the reason for this was some kind of uncertainty about what constitutes the film CSP, since there is no requirement to

watch the film itself and no opportunity to be assessed on responses. However, here is a question in which the content of the film (its central characters and themes) are relevant to the arguments about the appeal of such films.

This is perhaps, by default the clearest example of the character and status of the CSP where knowledge of the specifics of finance and economic and creative partnership are essential to making successful responses in the narrow context provided, but also where knowledge of the product (even its drama and narrative) takes precedence over experience of the product. Seeing *Hidden Figures* more clearly in this way will certainly improve responses in this section in future.

### **Section C: Close Study Products**

This section addresses the in depth media forms and their CSPs:

- radio
- newspapers
- online, social and participatory media.

The paper ends with two high tariff questions, which represent a significant challenge. Mistiming and fatigue were clearly factors in the tailing off of performances across the higher tariff questions. It is worth saying that although the paper logically and deliberately starts with the first unseen and the multiple choice question, after question 2, there is no particular reason to do these questions in any particular order. For many students it might be advantageous perhaps to attempt the high tariff questions earlier, although this is a matter of preference.

### **Question 8**

Section C sets the CSPs very much at the centre of things and those who prospered on this question showed explicit knowledge of the particular parts of the particular edition of the i newspaper provided as a CSP. This turned out to be the significant performance indicator as most were able to offer the general arguments about the identity of the tabloid.

Media Studies teachers are used to preparing their students to write essays that develop arguments to conclusion, which meant they were well equipped for the demands of extended response questions. .

### **Question 9**

Responses to this question about *The War of the Worlds* were very pleasing, particularly as it was the last on the paper. Again the factor was the specific knowledge of the CSP which was again helped by a product that was, with all respect, less accessible to experience than knowledge. Students who did well had significant amounts of information about the production, the occasion and the theoretical arguments around its impact, and all of these contributed to the better answers accessing marks.

The synoptic element in this question is chiefly about opening up the framework to allow, but not require, responses which use ideas from all four quadrants of the framework, rather than specifying a focus.

## **Afterword**

All in all a creditable effort from all concerned with a mean just over 50%, which might be thought of as ideal.

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

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