

National Unit Specification: general information

UNIT	English: Reading the Media (Advanced Higher)
NUMBER	D9GX 13
COURSE	English (Advanced Higher)

SUMMARY

The English and Communication: Reading the Media unit is concerned principally with extending the skills of candidates in reading and responding to media texts. Candidates will study a substantial number and variety of texts in at least two of the media categories specified by SQA.

The content of the unit comprises:

- knowledge of the various ways by which meaning is created in media texts
- understanding of critical/analytical concepts and approaches to reading the media.

What distinguishes the study of media texts at Advanced Higher from that at Higher is the greater number and variety of texts studied, the greater depth to which they are studied and the emphasis on comparison, contrast and generalisation.

OUTCOME

Respond critically to seen media text(s).

RECOMMENDED ENTRY

While entry is at the discretion of the centre, candidates would normally be expected to have attained at least a Higher course award in English or in Media Studies.

Administrative Information

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CREDIT VALUE

1 credit at Advanced Higher.

CORE SKILLS

There is no automatic certification of core skills or core skills components in this unit.

Additional information about core skills is published in the *Catalogue of Core Skills in National Qualifications* (SQA, 2001).

National Unit Specification: statement of standards

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OUTCOME

Respond critically to seen media text(s).

Performance criteria

Understanding

The response takes a relevant and thoughtful approach to the prescribed task and demonstrates secure understanding of key elements, central concerns and significant details of the text(s).

Analysis

The response makes relevant and thoughtful critical comment and demonstrates secure handling of media concepts, techniques, forms.

Evaluation

Judgements made are relevant, thoughtful and securely based on detailed evidence drawn from the text(s).

Expression

Structure, style and language, including the use of appropriate critical terminology, are consistently accurate and effective in developing a relevant argument.

Evidence requirements

Candidates must produce one critical essay.

The essay must be written:

- without assistance
- under supervision
- within the centre
- in response to an unseen question
- on text(s) from a media category selected from the list of categories specified by SQA.

Candidates must:

- have access to relevant text(s) during the writing of the critical essay (compilation texts are permissible)
- meet all of the performance criteria in one critical essay.

National Unit Specification: statement of standards (cont)

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Authors, texts and topics that are the subject of teaching, study or assessment in other units of the English course or in the units of other courses must not be used for assessment purposes in this unit.

The following is the list of media categories specified by SQA:

- film
- television
- radio
- print journalism
- advertising.

The list of specified categories may be changed from time to time.

National Unit Specification: support notes: summary

UNIT English: Reading the Media (Advanced Higher)

This part of the unit specification is offered as guidance. The support notes are not mandatory.

While the exact time allocated to this unit is at the discretion of the centre, the notional design length is 40 hours.

<p>Content</p> <p>This unit is concerned principally with how meaning in media texts arises from the relationships which exist between texts and their concerns, production, languages and techniques.</p> <p>Candidates will study and respond to a range of media texts covering at least two of the media categories specified by SQA.</p> <p>As relevant to the topic chosen, candidates will study media concepts and conventions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• analysis – encoding and decoding, denotation and connotation• representation – stereotyping and cultural values• narrative – structure, conventions• genre – categorisation• audience – address• authorship.
<p>Activities</p> <p>Candidates will engage in a variety of activities such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• reading a variety of media texts and identifying their languages• analysing the relationship between sound and vision• analysing the relationship between the printed word and the printed image• identifying key media concepts such as genre and narrative• exploring how different media audiences perceive and select meaning• examining how representations are constructed• studying how media authors and technologies shape textual meaning.
<p>Outcome</p> <p>Respond critically to seen media text(s).</p>
<p>Assessment</p> <p>Candidates must produce one critical essay in accordance with the evidence requirements of the unit.</p>
<p>Note</p> <p>Authors, texts and topics that are the subject of teaching, study or assessment in other units of the English course or in the units of other courses must not be used for assessment purposes in this unit.</p>

National Unit Specification: support notes

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GUIDANCE ON CONTENT AND CONTEXT

The summary table gives indication of content and context. While the specific area for analysis is the relationship between words and images, whether in still form (such as newspapers) or in the form of moving image (such as film), opportunities will arise for integrating related skills that will be developed in other units of the course.

Key areas for study will be:

- media texts which are sound only or combine either sound and vision or printed words and images
- key aspects of the text(s), in such terms as narrative, intention, production, design and audience
- the relationships between the languages of media texts and their presentation and effect.

Points of likely interest related to the specific categories are as follows:

Film

- The language of film and its ability to communicate through the negotiated codes of technique (ie camera, lighting, editing etc.) and cultural meaning (ie setting, costume, stereotyping etc.), sound and written codes
- the influence of genre and audience expectations
- classic Hollywood narrative structure and variations
- the star phenomenon
- authorship in film
- technical developments.

Focus should be on depth rather than breadth – it is better that the study should focus on one or two genres, and variants within these genres, and on the work of one or two significant directors rather than on a wider range.

Analysis should be exhaustive – a significant **short** extract thoroughly analysed is preferable to attempting too large a task, and is more instructive and rewarding in terms of the insight into the process of film-making and language.

Television

- The language of television (related to, but distinct from, that of film) and communication through technical, cultural, audio and written codes
- the domestic audience and constraints on broadcasting (public service, family viewing, ratings, scheduling etc.)
- the conventions of genres
- the preference for open narrative (series/serials/soap etc.).

Radio

- The ability of radio to communicate through sound alone (ie through speech, music and sound effects) and to overcome the problems of communicating in a "blind" medium – character through voice in all its aspects, setting and atmosphere through sound effects, atmosphere through music
 - the domestic audience, the personal, one-to-one advantages of radio
 - the conventions of genre and narrative
- audience segmentation through channel (Radios 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and Local Radio.

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In both television and radio the focus should be an **in-depth** analysis, on one or more genres in television and on at least two in radio.

Print Journalism

The language of the print media should be seen as both written text and its conventions and the language of the photographic image, and both should be analysed in terms of denotation and connotation.

The turning of events into stories in newspapers especially through the devices of narrative and representation (people transformed into characters – frequently through stereotyping) should be studied and the influence of audience/readership should not be overlooked.

Advertising

The initial process of analysis should be based on denotation and connotation of words (caption and copy) and images. It is important that the process of deconstruction should be thorough, and will apply to still advertisements and television advertisements, which will also have to be analysed in terms of audio codes.

Only after this process is complete should narrative and representation in advertising be explored and the value messages about, for example, gender, nation, family, race, be evaluated both in terms of the cultural values expressed and in terms of underlying ideology.

GUIDANCE ON LEARNING AND TEACHING APPROACHES

The unit offers clear extension of work already undertaken in the media option in *Literary Study* at Higher. There are, however, significant differences.

- The emphasis will be on depth and breadth of study.
- Candidates will, as a matter of course, adopt an analytical approach to media texts. This will lead to greater understanding of the media, and should allow candidates to select and follow their own enthusiasms from a standpoint which is informed by greater understanding of how the meaning of a media text is constructed.
- Candidates will acquire the theoretical tools necessary to study different critical approaches to reading the media.
- Candidates will, in all probability, find themselves in much smaller teaching groups and in more flexible learning and teaching contexts. Direct, teacher/lecturer-led guidance will still have a place, but there will be greater emphasis on independent study, on supported self-study and on interaction with tutors and fellow candidates in groups which have a variety of remits and settings. Candidates will be required to assume greater responsibility for their own learning and progress.
- There will be a larger volume of work to be undertaken and more intensive study of more complex texts.

National Unit Specification: support notes (cont)

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GUIDANCE ON APPROACHES TO ASSESSMENT

In order to achieve the unit outcome, the critical essay which candidates are required to produce **must** meet:

- all of the evidence requirements
- all of the performance criteria.

As assessment is an integral part of the learning and teaching process, candidates should undertake a number of activities for formative purposes.

In summative assessment care must be taken in question design. Questions should create a framework within which candidates have opportunity to demonstrate coverage of all of the performance criteria. In particular, there must be opportunity to demonstrate competence in the analysis of media texts.

SPECIAL NEEDS

This course specification is intended to ensure that there are no artificial barriers to learning or assessment. Special needs of individual candidates should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment instruments or considering alternative outcomes for units. For information on these, please refer to the SQA document *Guidance on Special Assessment Arrangements* (SQA, 2001).