

Principal Assessor Report 2002

Assessment Panel:

Media Studies

Qualification area

**Subject(s) and Level(s)
included in this report**

**Media Studies
Higher**

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2001	
Pre appeal	593
Post appeal	642

Number of entries in 2002	
Pre appeal	746
Post appeal	

General comments re entry numbers

Increase in uptake of a popular and relevant subject

General comments

The poor results in Media Studies reflect the fact that (a) many candidates are clearly being entered at the incorrect level and (b) the Higher course is generally taken as a 'crash' course. In general, candidates fail to do well because they tend to give a pre-prepared answer instead of tailoring their responses to the question(s); and/or fail to show the required level of analysis in their responses, relying instead on identifying or describing; and show a lack of understanding of/fail to use Media Studies technical terms. The importance of displaying specialist Media Studies knowledge, as opposed to describing the subject in layman's terms, cannot be over-emphasised. Media Studies is a discrete subject and candidates cannot rely on their ability in Higher English, for example, to ensure they will pass Higher Media Studies.

Grade boundaries at C, B and A for each subject area included in the report

Maximum marks available – 100

C	50 marks
B	60 marks
A	70 marks
Upper A	85 marks

General commentary on grade boundaries

Notional percentage cut-offs for each grade

Question papers and their associated marking schemes are designed to be of the required standard and to meet the assessment specification for the subject/level concerned.

For National courses the examination paper(s) are set in order that a score of approximately 50% of the total marks for all components merits a grade C (based on the grade descriptions for that grade), and similarly a score of 70 % for a grade A. The lowest mark for a grade B is set by the computer software as half way between the C and A grade boundaries.

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

Grade boundaries set at 50%, 60%, and 70% of the maximum mark.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Poor overall. Too many prepared responses which did not answer questions properly.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Often candidates who answered on Film did better than those who answered on other media. This may reflect teachers'/lecturers' special interests. But in general terms, candidates did better with shorter and more up-to-date texts.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

In Unseen Analysis, many candidates simply ignored the fact that they are required to demonstrate knowledge of Outcome 1, and concentrated simply on Outcome 2. Many of those who did acknowledge Outcome 1 did so in a very sketchy way, identifying rather than analysing. Many candidates simply said, for example, that the medium of a text was 'print' and that they recognised this by the black type on a page. This is Access 3 level, at most. A candidate at Higher level should be able to show an understanding of why print is used to communicate a message, rather than, say, television. Centres should impress on candidates the need to analyse at least two categories in depth. Many candidates clearly do not understand the terminology used on the flyleaf – 'motivation' for example – and 'anchorage', although sometimes recognised correctly, is rarely analysed in terms of the reason for it and its ideological function.

Some candidates were unfortunately disadvantaged by the choice of text provided for analysis, usually because these were too long (eg an entire Guardian and supplements or a whole episode of EastEnders). It is important to remember that much of the purpose of the Unseen is to allow candidates to display their ability to use the tools of analysis in a close semiotic (mainly) analysis of a text – they cannot do this properly if the text is too long for them to deconstruct in detail. Also candidates who are rehearsed in pre-prepared answers which deconstruct one title sequence of, say, Channel 4 News, are bound to disgorge their prior knowledge when subsequently given a title sequence of another episode as 'unseen', rather than use the tools of analysis to respond spontaneously to what is in front of them.

In the Production Section, many candidates are still not demonstrating the knowledge and understanding acquired during the Production Unit, and are rather displaying lay knowledge or answering from the perspective of a consumer. Justification is frequently lacking and knowledge of technical terms shaky. Many candidates did not read the wording of the questions carefully enough and, for example, in Q2, mentioned only one product, or, more frequently, simply evaluated their own productions rather than analysed the planning of it using the key aspects.

In the Analysis paper, once again candidates did not answer questions properly, but repeated rehearsed answers, sometimes 'topping and tailing' their answers to try to fit the questions.

Areas of common misunderstanding

Key Aspect 1 must be analysed in Unseen Analysis.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Guidance to centres has previously recommended that a short text be used for the Unseen, so that candidates can perform a close analysis, demonstrating their understanding of Outcomes 1 and 2. When a whole episode of soap opera, for example, is provided, the answers are too diffuse. Occasionally, the reverse is true, and centres are providing texts that are too 'thin'.

With an overlong text it is not possible to achieve a sufficiently detailed analysis in the time allocated. It appears from the scripts of some candidates that some centres may have allowed candidates half an hour to view the text and then an hour to write about it. This is not in accordance with the published instructions for 2002 diet, although centres will already have been advised of the change to 1½ hours for the Unseen from Session 2002/3. Some centres are still providing more information on the provenance of texts than is required by the flyleaf. For a national standard to be achieved, the information given must be only that mentioned on the flyleaf.

It should be stressed that in the Unseen, candidates must tackle both Outcome 1 and Outcome 2. Many candidates ignore Outcome 1 completely, or 'identify' rather than 'analyse' the categories of the text. Also many candidates seem to think they should be displaying prior knowledge of a text, rather than demonstrating their ability to use the tools of analysis to deconstruct spontaneously the text they are presented with. Candidates need to answer the question asked, and not ones they have rehearsed in class. They should at all times demonstrate the knowledge they have gained from taking the Media Studies course and that they can use Media Studies terminology. Candidates should not be answering from a lay perspective. This is especially the case in the Production Section, where many candidates are still answering as if they are consumers rather than producers. Technical terms should be used appropriately and correctly in "creative" options/questions especially.