



Course Report 2016

Subject	Media
Level	Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: question paper

The 2016 question paper proved slightly more demanding than anticipated. Grade boundary decisions addressed this by making an adjustment of one mark each against questions 1(b) and 1(c). This benefited those candidates whose responses decoded narrative, or other key aspects of their choice, in some detail, but who didn't make a link to Institutions as instructed in the question.

Component 2: assignment

The assignment performed as expected, with candidates achieving consistently across all parts of each section of the task. The performance of candidates across this component was considerably stronger than last year.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

Question 1: Media Content in Context

1 (a) Institutions: Where candidates demonstrated a sound understanding of institutional factors, their influence on the text(s) studied and how institutional factors can be interrelated, they performed well in this question.

There were some full answers where candidates insightfully analysed how institutional factors influenced the media content that was exemplified. This was sometimes done by close reference to the impact of institutional factors on a selection of particular elements of the content, or by analysis of how institutional factors such as budget considerations could permeate a range of aspects of a text, ultimately driven by a need to maximise profits.

1 (b) Impact of Institutions on Narrative: Many candidates found it fairly straightforward to write about narrative and gave detailed responses outlining specific narrative codes, structures and/or conventions used in the media content they had studied. Successful candidates linked these examples of narrative to specific institutional factors already referenced in 1(a), showing how these factors had influenced the construction of narrative in the media content being discussed.

Insightful responses to this part of the question successfully addressed the question by analysing how the narrative had been influenced by the institutional factors discussed in 1 (a). This was done in a range of ways including such things as: focusing on how endings were rewritten for various institutional reasons, such as the Hays code or to please a studio;

discussing how familiar narrative structures could lead to maximum profits; looking at how health and safety considerations could impact on the way that various stages of narrative structure or various narrative codes were shown on screen, and so on.

1 (c) Impact of Institutions on chosen key aspect(s) of content: Some candidates focused exclusively on one key aspect from categories, language and representations, whilst others covered a combination of two of these, or even all three. Whichever was the case, candidates performed well when they analysed concepts in detail, giving specific examples from the media content studied, and commented on how they had been influenced by the institutional factors already referenced.

There was some very insightful understanding of the constructed nature of media content and how institutional factors could impact on this construction. This was done in a range of ways including such things as: linking the representation of a character to casting, and then linking that in turn to audience expectations and the need for profit; discussing how editing and sound could be used to appease censors or certification bodies whilst allowing violence to be implied; considering how health and safety requirements might impact upon the way in which genre conventions are used, and so on.

Question 2: Role of Media

Candidates were rewarded when they gave several detailed points of information or ideas relevant to the referenced role of media, made comment on some of the information, and drew at least one conclusion with reference to the task and/or the ideas discussed in their answer.

There were some excellent responses where candidates developed a clear line of argument that showed not only their knowledge of relevant issues, but a concerted effort to engage with them in terms of the task, by offering critical comment and personal opinions. At times these responses drew conclusions throughout the essay as relevant to their line of argument, while at others a clear conclusion was drawn at the end of the essay.

Such answers made several detailed references to media content to exemplify points, arguments or opinions. Sometimes these references were about content generally, and sometimes they included close textual exemplification and/or references to key aspects. Candidates made comments about the references, and these related logically to the discussion. Candidates in general performed better when they looked at a range of texts, often linked together by a common theme such as the treatment of gender or bias in the press, rather than when using a close analysis of one specific text to exemplify their points, arguments or opinions.

These answers generally responded to parts (a) and (b) in an integrated fashion, giving detailed references to media content to exemplify the points they were making.

Component 2: assignment

Section 1: Planning

There was an increase in the average mark for all parts across section 1.

Candidates performed best when they dealt with each part of the planning section separately, rather than by producing an integrated response. Successful answers were characterised by clear points of justification which provided a rationale for planning decisions and demonstrated a clear relationship between the decision and the specific area given in the task.

Successful responses for individual parts were usually structured in one of two ways: either giving the details of a planning decision followed by a relevant justification; or giving details of the brief, creative ideas or research followed by a planning decision taken and justified as a result of these. In either case, marks were awarded for points of justification: each clear justification was rewarded one mark, and additional marks could be gained for further development of a justification. Further development was characterised by additional details of the planning decision or research undertaken.

Candidates could therefore gain the highest marks for each part by providing five separate points of justification, or a smaller number of justifications with additional development, for example: four points of justification worth one mark each, plus another mark for the further development of one of the points.

In relation to each part, successful points typically covered:

1 (a) The brief: details of any relevant plans made which could be justified in terms of such things as the genre, purpose, medium, form, audience, stimulus etc; details of the brief and how the candidate hoped to research, include or achieve these. Points of justification included general considerations of the brief or references to research.

1 (b) Creative intentions: ideas for content, structure, codes etc justified in relation to constructing style, meanings, messages, tone, mood, effect and so on. Justifications included general considerations of creative intentions or references to research.

1 (c) Audience research: plans justified in relation to audience targeting, preferred reading, minimising differential decoding, meeting needs, influencing, persuading etc. Research into audience needs and expectations were included as part of the justification.

1 (d) Content research: justification of plans for content, codes, structure etc in relation to content research, drawing on professional practice and common, interesting or inspirational techniques used in media content. Research findings on content were included as part of the justification.

1 (e) Institutional context research: justification of plans for the production process, or plans for content, codes, structure etc, were made in relation to the constraints or opportunities of institutional contexts. Research findings on institutional contexts were included as part of the justification.

Section 2: Development

2 (a) Evaluation of production process: Candidates were able to gain the highest marks when they gave at least four clear points of evaluation. Such points detailed information about the nature and implications of institutional contexts (whether opportunities or

constraints) and the decisions about either the content and/or the production process made as a result of those constraints. There was also (and crucially) evaluation of the effectiveness of the decisions made, either in terms of the finished content or production process. Consideration of the final content indicated that the contexts and development referenced were appropriate and supported the discussion.

2 (b) Evaluation of finished content: Candidates who were diligent throughout the assignment did very well in this task. Careful research, planning and organisation meant that candidates had a clear sense of what they had wanted to achieve and were therefore able to judge whether or not they had succeeded. In this respect, high quality content provided plenty of source material for the evaluation, and the combination of the two was well rewarded. Even where available resources did not enable a high technical finish, carefully made content conveyed a clear understanding of how to manipulate media codes, and the candidate was able to convey this in the written evaluation.

Candidates achieving the highest marks gave five or more developed points of evaluation and supported these with specific, detailed examples from the finished content. They did more than discuss individual examples of single codes, instead evaluating such things as the effectiveness of the construction of particular shots or sequences, how print codes were combined to make meaning, the construction of a particular representation, and the combined effect of a range of codes used, and so on. Some evaluations included comparisons with professionally produced content.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Question 1: Media Content in Context

(a) Institutions: Candidates did not access the available marks when they only made reference to institutional factors in a general way, not linking specific examples of media content. This does not constitute analysis at Higher level. At Higher level, analysis of institutional factors must go beyond simple description of the issues that can arise when creating media content, although it may include these to support points made. A detailed and complex analysis should include detailed points about institutional factors which have impacted upon a specific example of media content, how the factors impacted the content, and, where appropriate, how this led to a wider impact on the content as a whole, or how this was then connected to other related institutional factors affecting the same content.

Some took institutional factors to refer to societal factors or audience reactions, rather than the medium-specific factors which arise from the institutions involved in the creation of media content within the industry. This limited their engagement with the content and the question.

(b) Impact of Institutions on Narrative: Weaker answers focused solely on an analysis of narrative in media content, rather than integrating this with an analysis of the influence of institutional factors on narrative, as directed by the task. In such answers, candidates mainly gave detailed analysis of how narrative structures, codes and/or conventions functioned within the media content. Sometimes there were implicit or basic statements about the influence of institutional factors, eg that this would appeal to audiences and lead to profit, but

in general there was little in the way of comment that attempted to address the terms of the question.

(c) Impact of Institutions on chosen key aspect(s) of content: Weak answers tended to identify rather than analyse other key aspects of content, and provided limited exemplification. These answers read like an extended list of concepts plus example, with very little (if any) comment about how elements had been influenced by institutional factors. Such answers tended to be brief and not of the depth or detail expected at Higher level. Some responses made links to audience reactions and/or societal factors rather than institutional factors. As with task 1 (b) there were some implicit or basic statements about the influence of institutional factors, eg that editing had been employed to achieve a desired certification, but in general there was little in the way of comment that attempted to address the terms of the question.

Question 2: Role of Media

Weaker answers tended to focus on one or more ways in which media content can influence behaviour and/or attitudes, and outlined the ways in which this was evident in a particular text. Although valid information was given, there was often very little comment or opinion relating this information to the task. Rather these responses simply gave an explanation of how media content can influence behaviour and/or attitudes, and this could not be well rewarded.

Other weak answers were characterised by what seemed to be a pre-prepared essay for the 'role of media' question given in the specimen question paper, exemplar paper or the 2015 question paper. These responses could not gain much credit as the added value of this component is that candidates apply their knowledge to a previously unseen task, and marks are awarded for responses to the specific question given in the exam.

Candidates found it difficult to access marks when the references to media content were sparse and without comment that would help relate them logically to the points made. In addition, some references were very broad or vague (eg to the actions of a particular media owner or institution, or the content of phone messages that had been hacked rather than to a specific article about the case) and did not clearly support points made.

Component 2: Assignment

Section 1: Planning

Some justifications were very short, and did not provide the amount of detail expected at Higher level. Weak answers on institutional contexts often consisted of descriptions about what couldn't be done rather than a justification of plans made to deal with constraints or benefit from opportunities.

Candidates who produced an extended response covering all five areas of justification tended to provide less detail on each than those who dealt with them separately, and had difficulty clearly conveying what active planning decisions had been taken and/or what the reasons behind them were.

It seemed as though some responses to Section 1: Planning had been written after the development stage of the Assignment had been completed. This may have made it difficult for some candidates to remember what they originally planned and why, and at times their responses were little more than a description of the final product and process.

Section 2: Development

2 (a) Evaluation of production process: Weaker answers were most often characterised by a tendency to describe the contexts and problems faced during production, without much discussion or evaluation. In this respect the responses read like production diaries detailing what was carried out on a daily or weekly basis. There was little or no attempt to evaluate how well the individual had performed or how successful the finished content was, given the constraints. Consideration of the final content sometimes revealed that the contexts referenced were irrelevant so could not be credited.

2 (b) Evaluation of finished content: Weaker evaluations usually dealt with a few individual codes such as one particular camera angle, or the use of a particular font. Whilst these are appropriate codes to *include* in an evaluation, discussing them in isolation makes it difficult to produce the considered, reflective evaluation required at Higher level and rewarded by the marking scheme.

Some evaluations consisted mainly of description of the final content, with some indication of the planned creative intentions. It was often difficult to find clear points of evaluation in such responses, although implied points were rewarded where possible.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper

Candidates should be given opportunities to accumulate a number of examples of media content they can draw upon when answering the question paper, and should be prepared to answer questions which cover any of the following concepts individually or in combination:

Media content

- ◆ Categories: genre, purpose, tone, style
- ◆ Language: technical codes, cultural codes, anchorage
- ◆ Narrative: structures, codes, conventions
- ◆ Representation: selection, portrayal, cultural assumptions, ideological discourses

Media contexts

- ◆ Audience: target audience, mode of address, preferred reading, differential decoding
- ◆ Institution: internal and external controls and constraints
- ◆ Society: time and place (eg ideas, history, events, politics, technology or any other factors relevant to the society in which particular examples of media content were made, set or consumed)

Role of Media

- ◆ Meeting needs: entertainment, education, information
- ◆ Achieving particular purposes: profit, promotion, public service
- ◆ Influencing attitudes and behaviour: intentionally, unintentionally

The specimen question paper, exemplar question paper, and the 2015 and 2016 past question papers and their marking instructions, could be used to practise exam technique and devise strategies for adapting knowledge and understanding to the terms of the questions that are set.

Candidates may find it beneficial to answer each part of the Media Content in Context question separately, and answer the Role of Media in an integrated way.

Candidates should be prepared to integrate concepts relating to media content and context in their responses to Q1 should the task require this, even if answering each part separately.

Component 2: Assignment

Candidates should be given a copy of *Appendix 1: Instructions for Candidates* from the *Higher Media Assignment Assessment Task* document available from the SQA secure site. Marking instructions reward the tasks outlined in this document only, so other centre-devised tasks should not be used. Although candidates may find it useful to keep notes in a centre-devised logbook or workbook, the material submitted to SQA must correspond to that set out in the task document, ie:

- ◆ five clearly identified responses to Planning task 3
- ◆ the finished media content made in Development task 1
- ◆ two clearly identified responses to Development task 2

No other material is required. Where the work for several candidates is included on one disc or memory stick, or within one piece of content, it must be clearly indicated what work belongs to each candidate.

To ensure that all parts of the assignment can be completed successfully within the constraints of time and resources, teachers and lecturers should carefully negotiate or set the brief using the advice above and that given in the *General Assessment Information* document. At Higher level, the brief must specify **finished** media content: storyboards, scripts, mock-ups or other pre-production material are not acceptable, and candidates will not be able to adequately complete the written parts of Section 2 if they have been given a brief that permits these types of finish.

Marking instructions can be shared with candidates to help them devise a strategy for answering the written parts of the Assignment. The ways in which marks are awarded are clearly indicated, and understanding this can help candidates to structure their responses.

Candidates should be advised to draft/complete their responses to the questions in Section 1 *before* beginning the development stage. Each question should be completed separately rather than combined in an extended response.

Responses to the written parts of Section 2 must include points of evaluation — candidates should be advised that they must do more than describe their processes or intentions. Each question should be completed separately rather than combined in an extended response.

Course and Unit Support Notes and Common Questions are available online, and give further advice on course content and approaches to teaching and learning.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	587
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Number of resulted entries in 2016	1055
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	21.6%	21.6%	228	68
B	20.5%	42.1%	216	58
C	25.4%	67.5%	268	48
D	10.0%	77.4%	105	43
No award	22.6%	-	238	0

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related, as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.