



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	Media Studies
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. 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 question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The excellent quality of many responses indicated high levels of critical awareness in relation to media texts, theories and issues. A varied and interesting range of texts for analysis, and the creativity conveyed in production, reflected professional, engaging and enthusiastic approaches to Media Studies learning and teaching.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Unseen Analysis

Candidates performed well when they were provided with a rich text for analysis, and applied knowledge of a range of categories and codes, in roughly equal measure. They demonstrated critical understanding that elements of media texts create meaning in combination with one another, and are deliberately employed for specific purposes. There was a genuine attempt to respond to the stimulus of the unseen text, rather than simply reproduce pre-learned knowledge.

Question Paper Section One

Questions in Section One ask candidates to demonstrate their understanding of how concepts apply to media analysis generally, and not only their own text. Candidates performed well when they made an attempt to answer the question set, and used detailed knowledge of three key aspects of a media text to justify and exemplify their responses. There were some very insightful answers, and even where a bare pass was achieved, there was some attempt to answer the question.

Question Paper Section Two

In the reflective question, candidates performed well when they remained focused on a discussion of how they tried to achieve the purpose given in their brief. Good answers gave details of key aspect and production decisions, and linked these clearly to purpose, conveying an active decision-making process and an understanding of media production practice.

Candidates who used and justified a range of codes in their responses to the creative questions were well rewarded. Close attention to achieving the purpose of the advertising brief, or realising specific details of the scenario, led to answers that clearly demonstrated a production perspective. There were some highly creative responses, particularly given the time constraints for these questions.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Unseen Analysis

Sometimes the text given for analysis was either too basic for a Higher level analysis, or too long, which often resulted in superficial listing of textual elements at the expense of analysis.

Poor responses were generally characterised by an imbalance in the analysis of categories and language, or by an explanation rather than analysis. In this respect, candidates gave basic connotations of individual codes rather than discussing how elements were used to create meaning in accumulation or combination.

Question Paper Section One

Some candidates found it difficult to apply their knowledge of a media text to the focus of individual questions, and tended to provide a run-through of the key aspects of their text with limited integration and little attempt to answer the question. Others failed to analyse three key aspects from narrative, representation, audience and institution, and therefore did not meet the basic requirements for a pass.

Question 2 proved demanding for many of those who selected it. Poorer answers did reference representation, but the idea of challenging ideologies — which goes beyond the confines of individual texts — did not seem to be well understood.

Question Paper Section Two

Poor reflective answers were characterised by a tendency to simply describe the product made in terms of key aspects, rather than discuss the active use of audience to achieve a purpose. In doing so, candidates failed to demonstrate adequate understanding of production processes, which is the focus of this question. Where candidates did reference the process but still failed, this was generally because they produced a production diary, rather than discussing the relationship between the process and the product with reference to audience and purpose.

Weak responses to creative questions generally consisted of content description with limited justifications. Often only a very limited number of codes were used, and the response did not convey Higher-level knowledge or understanding of production perspectives and how to manipulate media codes to create meaning or target an audience.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Unseen Analysis

Centres must select texts for the unseen analysis carefully. Too basic a text does not allow an 'A' candidate to demonstrate his/her ability to analyse in depth. Too long a text can often lead to a lengthy but thin analysis as candidates try to cover as many details as possible, but do so in limited depth. An extract from the middle of a text, although rich in language, sometimes fails to provide obvious hooks for the analysis of categories.

Candidate responses indicate that short, complete texts such as detailed print or a/v adverts, trailers or detailed film posters work well. So too do extracts from the beginning of a text such as the opening of a programme or film, or the front page of a newspaper or magazine.

Candidates should be advised that they must try to analyse categories and language equally, and that they will be rewarded for a genuine attempt to respond to the stimulus of the text, rather than for a reproduction of mainly pre-learned knowledge (especially in categories). They should demonstrate knowledge and application of a *range* of language codes, and try to analyse how they convey meaning in combination as well as, or rather

than, in isolation. Although it is not a requirement to integrate key aspects in this component, the complex construction of a text means that it can sometimes be artificial to separate concepts in deconstruction. Therefore, candidates should be encouraged to link concepts where appropriate, as this often leads to a richer, more insightful analysis.

Question Paper Section One

It would be beneficial if candidates had a strategy for responding to unforeseen questions. One way to do this is to spend time writing statements in which they integrate key aspects of the texts they wish to reference in the exam, and writing introductions and plans for past paper questions. Whilst they should not simply reproduce these in the exam (as they might not fit the question), this strategy can help them respond to the stem and instruction in the paper.

Question Paper Section Two

Candidates should be advised that the two most common reasons for failing the reflective question are: simply describing the product made in terms of key aspects; and reproducing a production diary. The reflective question demands that candidates write about the relationship between a given stage of the production process and the product planned or made.

It can be difficult to isolate processes, decisions, impact of constraints and so on to particular stages in production once the final product is complete. Throughout the production unit, candidates could be advised to keep notes (beyond the level required for the Unit Assessment) on the processes and key aspects used at each stage of planning, production and evaluation. This should assist with writing about the stage and key aspects of production that the question demands.

In creative questions, candidates are not expected to make complicated creative choices — a straightforward idea for content in the advertising question, and close detail to the specifics of the scenario, rather than too much time spent providing a context for choices, often work best. However, candidates **are** expected employ a **range** of media codes to realise their content ideas, and justify the use of these in relation to intended or specified purposes, audiences or meanings.

In the scenario question, some effort should be made to indicate realistic production issues.

Through practice and feedback, candidates should be encouraged to develop a personal strategy for ensuring they do all of this in the exam.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	927
Number of resulted entries in 2013	977

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 100				
A	14.7%	14.7%	144	69
B	27.4%	42.2%	268	57
C	28.8%	70.9%	281	46
D	12.9%	83.8%	126	40
No award	16.2%	100.0%	158	-

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.