



External Assessment Report 2012

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

This year the pass rate reflects the commitment of centres and candidates to understanding national standards and undertaking the preparation necessary to achieving them.

Areas in which candidates performed well

In the Unseen Analysis component, candidates performed well when responses reflected an understanding that the text or extract had been deliberately crafted for specific reasons, whether that was in relation to genre or purpose, for example, or to convey particular connotations. Although it is not a requirement to integrate the two key aspects, and the highest marks can be achieved without doing so, it is often a characteristic of top answers that this is a natural tendency in an insightful deconstruction. In strong analyses, candidates applied pre-existing Categories knowledge to the specifics of the text given and, in particular, demonstrated some insight into how the text was constructed to achieve its purpose. In Language, they analysed a *range* of codes and discussed how these worked in combination as well as in isolation to create meaning. Roughly equal attention was paid to both key aspects. The richness of the text or extract also had a bearing on the quality of analysis that could be produced.

In the media analysis section of the question paper, candidates must do three things to achieve a pass: make an attempt to answer the question, adequately analyse 3 key aspects from narrative, representation, audience and institution, and adequately justify their response with appropriate textual exemplification from one professionally produced media text. In C-pass answers, the response to the question tended to be rather weak, but there was at least some attempt to do so, and in all answers that passed, there was integration of key aspects. Some top answers demonstrated excellent understanding of concepts, issues or contexts beyond the confines of individual texts, reflecting an academic, analytical perspective, rather than a layperson understanding of content, audiences or industries.

Candidates produced good answers to the reflective question in the production section of the question paper when they demonstrated a clear production perspective which indicated an organised and logical approach to planning that took into account factors such as purpose, genre, audience, constraints and so on. Relevant research was outlined and the impact of that on content and style was explained; likewise with institutional factors. High-mark answers clearly charted the evolution of the plans, bringing in the creative and production process and key aspects throughout to indicate that all decisions were made for specific reasons. Plans described indicated understanding of professional practice.

In creative questions, the plans or treatment indicated a clear understanding of how to manipulate media codes to create meaning, target an audience and achieve a purpose. Answers used a range of language codes and clearly stated the intended connotations. Ideas were not necessarily complex or original – as is to be expected within the time and

task constraints – but they were appropriately justified and written from a production perspective.

Areas which candidates found demanding

In Unseen Analysis, weaker responses often demonstrated Media Studies knowledge, but the application was not of the depth and detail required at Higher. In such answers there was a tendency to identify and state basic connotations of language codes, apply only a very limited range of codes and/or produce generic information about categories without application to the text or extract given. Where candidates significantly favoured one key aspect over another, responses tended to narrowly fail as they did not meet the basic requirement for a pass, which is to analyse both categories and language adequately. Sometimes, the text given hampered candidates by being too basic to facilitate an in-depth analysis, or too long in the context of the time available for assessment.

In the media analysis section of the question paper, the characteristics of weaker answers were as in previous years. Candidates who narrowly failed tended to produce responses where one of the key aspects was inadequately analysed, or wrote all that they knew about the key aspects of the texts but did not make any attempt to respond to the terms of the question. Key aspects tended to be dealt with in a basic, sequential way, rather than integrated. Often, inadequate answers were characterised by description rather than analysis: in representation this could be a description of character, in narrative a description of the story, very general references to audience, and in institution a description of controls or context without application to the other key aspects of the text.

Although responses to the production section have improved considerably over the last few years, many candidates still perform less well in this section than they do in analysis. Perhaps this is partly because they have more personal responsibility for the preparation for this section as they may be less likely to have the sort of definitive study or support notes that can be produced for analysis texts.

In the reflective question, weak answers generally consisted of a description of plans or final products without an adequate explanation of the research, constraints and so on that contributed to the evolution of those plans. Where there was reference to research or institutions, these were mainly described rather than their implications discussed; key aspects were often simply outlined without discussion of the factors that impacted on them, or the reasons behind the choices made about them.

Weak responses to creative questions generally consisted of content description. There were often some justifications at the beginning of the response, but these tended to tail-off fairly quickly, which rendered the answer inadequate. Often only a very limited range of codes were used and the response did not convey Higher-level knowledge or understanding of production perspectives and how to manipulate media codes in the active construction of a text or extract. Discussion of production issues in the scenario question was often trivial or weak.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

In Unseen Analysis, candidates should be advised that they must try to analyse both 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.

Centres must select texts for the unseen analysis carefully. Too basic does not allow an 'A' candidate to demonstrate his/her ability to analyse in depth. Too long a text can often lead to a length 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. Short, complete texts such as detailed print or a/v adverts, trailers, detailed film posters, 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, work best in this respect.

When preparing for the media analysis section of the question paper, candidates need to be aware that if they do not make any attempt to integrate key aspects and to answer the question they will fail. They should be advised to spend time writing statements integrating key aspects and writing introductions and plans for past paper questions so that when they are faced with previously unforeseen questions in the exam they have a strategy for shaping their concept and textual knowledge as directed. Candidates must deal with the concepts specified by the question, rather than simply write about the lead key aspect however they wish, and should be prepared for a focus on any of the following concepts: narrative codes, conventions and structures; selection, portrayal and ideologies in representations; audience targeting, mode of address, preferred reading and differential decoding; internal and external institutional factors and the impact of these on other key aspects of the text.

Candidates must understand that the media production section of the question paper is marked as rigorously as the analysis section, against the same demanding Higher-level standards. They must prepare as diligently for this section as for the media analysis section and unseen analysis.

When preparing for the reflective question, 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 should 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.

The key to producing a successful creative answer is to demonstrate knowledge of media codes and their use in production, justify choices according to intended or specified purposes, audiences or meanings, and show knowledge of relevant production issues that apply to the task given. Through practise 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 2011	869
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	927
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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 100				
A	13.6%	13.6%	126	70
B	32.4%	46.0%	300	58
C	28.4%	74.3%	263	47
D	10.4%	84.7%	96	41
No award	15.3%	100.0%	142	-

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.