



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Media Studies
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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

Film posters and trailers, and commercial and public service adverts, were the most common types of text used for analysis; candidates had opportunities to perform well where these had clear genre markers, purposes, and/or conventional uses of media language, and were rich in detail.

Successful responses had the following characteristics:

- ◆ Knowledge of a *range* of categories and codes was applied in roughly equal measure.
- ◆ There was analysis of the ways in which codes and categories work in combination with one another as well as individually.
- ◆ Pre-existing knowledge of concepts was exemplified in detail from the text.

Question paper Section One

At a minimum, candidates attained a pass when they demonstrated detailed knowledge of the ways in which three key aspects were evident or could be applied to a specific text, and linked these in some way to each other and the question asked.

A key characteristic of a better response was where candidates made an effort throughout to respond to the question that was asked. This generally meant that the analysis of individual key aspects comprised conceptual knowledge, exemplification from the text **and** discussion/commentary in terms of the question, as well as a natural integration with other key aspects. This is well-rewarded by the marking scheme.

Question paper Section Two

In the reflective question, candidates performed well when they made an attempt to evaluate their final text from a production perspective, referencing such things as their audience needs, expectations and responses, critically appraising their use of media codes and techniques, and referring to their brief, purpose and contexts of production.

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 which 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.

As in previous years, 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 discussed how elements were used to create meaning in accumulation or combination, and/or in relation to particular categories.

Question paper Section One

Many of the candidates who did not perform well in this section only analysed two key aspects adequately, the third typically being sparse or absent.

Additionally, minimum competence unit-level responses, characterised mainly by analysis of key aspects as they apply to a text, rather than a discussion of these in terms of the question, were not well rewarded. A response to the terms of the question is a specific requirement of the added value represented by, and assessed in, the question paper.

A significant number of candidates in a particular centre used 'Twitter' as the focus of their analysis; performance was generally poor in these cases. Candidates were sometimes able to describe Twitter in audience or institutional terms, but as it is better categorised as a micro-blogging/social messaging service, forum or marketing tool, not a media text, candidates found it extremely difficult to apply analysis concepts in the ways required by this section.

Question paper Section Two

Poor reflective answers were characterised by a tendency to evaluate in very simplistic terms which were often from a consumer or personal response perspective, rather than in relation to audience, purpose, aims or production contexts.

Weak responses to creative questions generally consisted of content description with limited justifications. Often only a very limited number of codes were used and responses 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 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 benefit candidates if they 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 given, this strategy can help them respond to the stem and instruction in the paper.

Candidates should be advised that they must adequately analyse 3 key aspects in their responses and that markers will reward the extent to which the analysis of each key aspect has knowledge of relevant concepts, exemplification from the text **and** discussion/integration in terms of the question.

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, or 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.

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 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 to 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 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 2013	977
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	1140
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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	13.1%	13.1%	149	69
B	28.3%	41.4%	323	57
C	32.3%	73.7%	368	46
D	11.9%	85.6%	136	40
No award	14.4%	-	164	-

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.