



External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	Media Studies
Level	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 increased pass rate in 2011 is gratifying to note. A significant contributory factor to this was the general improvement in responses to Paper 1, Section 2: Media Production. Many centres have clearly acted upon the advice in the 2010 external assessment report and 2011 update letter, and are to be commended in this respect.

Textual selection in both Unseen Analysis and Section 1: Media Analysis were generally accessible enough for C-grade candidates to understand and also rich enough for A-grade candidates to analyse in depth. In some cases, however, poor textual choices caused difficulty for candidates. Centres need to be extremely careful that texts allow analysis appropriate to the standards expected in the exam.

The same care must be taken with the management of the Media Production Unit. Although there was a general improvement in responses to the reflective question, some answers suggested a rather haphazard experience of the Unit which made Higher level reflection difficult.

Areas where candidates performed well

Unseen Analysis

Adverts, film posters and trailers have become popular textual choices; these work well partly because candidates seem better able to consider the cumulative effects of individual codes to connote meaning or achieve particular purposes than they might in response to other types of texts. That is not to say that there were not excellent responses to other types of text. As in previous years, successful answers had the following characteristics:

- ◆ equal attention was paid to categories and language
- ◆ attempts were made to transfer existing analytical knowledge to the stimulus of the unseen text by providing detailed exemplification of a *range* of codes and categories
- ◆ discussion, where appropriate, considered the *cumulative* effects of textual elements as well as their individual connotations
- ◆ a genuine attempt was made to respond to the stimulus of the text rather than produce a general description of genre, purpose and/or codes anticipated

Section 1: Media Analysis

Part of the added value of taking the whole Course in Media Studies, as opposed to simply the Units, is being able to respond to the demands of an unforeseen question. Candidates who did so were well rewarded, providing their answer included adequate analysis, integration and justification of at least three key aspects of a text they had studied. Additionally, such answers often demonstrated knowledge of media analysis themes relevant to more than their own texts.

Section 2: Media Production

Successful answers to the reflective question demonstrated a clear understanding of the need to document media production processes with reference to the implications for, or of, the given and at least two other key aspects. Such answers clearly communicated the ways in which planning decisions about representations were made for specific reasons and taken forward, changed or developed according to creative, audience, technological or institutional factors.

As in previous years, it was often the case that ideas for content in response to the advertising brief were sometimes rather basic or their appropriateness dubious. The constraints of examination time and conditions are taken into account when marking such responses and of course there were many examples of highly creative responses. It is the justification of plans and decisions that is rewarded; candidates performed well when they justified their ideas for content *and* a range of codes to realise that content.

In the 2011 exam, the pre-question rubric for the scenario question was amended to encourage candidates to avoid producing the type of answer that is not well rewarded in the marking scheme. Candidates performed well when they based their ideas and discussion of production issues closely on the details of the scenario; Markers noted a particular improvement in this respect. Responses also attracted high marks if they included and justified the use of a *range* of codes.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Unseen Analysis folio

Candidates had difficulty accessing the available marks when:

- ◆ the text or extract was too long (eg more than 5 minutes of an a/v text or several pages from a newspaper or magazine), or too basic (eg a very simple print advert)
- ◆ there was an imbalance in the attention to categories and language
- ◆ pre-existing knowledge about categories was reproduced without specific application to, and exemplification from, the unseen text
- ◆ codes were identified but not interpreted
- ◆ the analysis was not of the depth and/or detail required at Higher level

Paper 1: Media Analysis section

Candidates had difficulty accessing the available marks when:

- ◆ one of the three aspects used to answer an analysis question was categories or language
- ◆ fewer than three of the key aspects were adequately analysed
- ◆ understanding of specific, key-aspect concepts was not clearly demonstrated
- ◆ analysis of narrative simply relayed story or content rather than discussing structure, codes or conventions
- ◆ analysis of representation comprised a series of descriptions rather than a discussion of how/why portrayals were constructed
- ◆ analysis of target audience did not include discussion of specific audience segments

- ◆ analysis of institution detailed production or institutional factors but did not discuss the specific impact of these on narrative, representation, or audience
- ◆ exemplification of concepts or argument was insufficient
- ◆ there was little integration of key aspects as directed by the question
- ◆ a learned response was produced which meant there was little attempt to respond to the terms of the question

Paper 1: Media Production section

Candidates had difficulty accessing the available marks in the reflective question when:

- ◆ little attempt was made to answer the question, ie how representations were developed or realised in the production stage
- ◆ the response was mainly a Unit evaluation or a description of the product
- ◆ the support and direction offered by the prompt list was ignored
- ◆ production activities were mainly described rather than discussed
- ◆ key aspects were described but implication for, or of, them was not discussed
- ◆ production activities and key aspects were not linked

Candidates had difficulty accessing the available marks in the creative questions when:

- ◆ a list of content, shots or technical elements was described but no adequate production perspective justification was given for their inclusion
- ◆ the codes given were very narrow in range, for example only about camera angle or font
- ◆ content, style or any other plans were not closely based on the brief or scenario
- ◆ time was spent justifying medium, audience, casting and/or other such elements in ways which were irrelevant or unnecessary
- ◆ knowledge of production processes was reproduced but not discussed in relation to the specifics of the brief or scenario, which meant that the candidate could only gain limited credit for what was essentially a prepared essay on the mechanics of production

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Unseen Analysis folio

Centres should ensure that the Arrangements for Unseen Analysis follow the specifications given in the Course Assessment Pack for Higher, available on SQA's website. This pack gives detailed advice on the selection of texts, and the organisation and administration of the unseen analysis.

Although this paper is generally unproblematic for centres, candidates should be prepared in such a way that they understand the following:

- ◆ Both categories and language should be analysed equally.
- ◆ Knowledge about categories and language must be applied to the text selected for the assessment. Candidates will not pass if they simply produce learned information (eg about genre) without specific analysis of how this applies to, or is evident in, the text they have been given on the day of assessment.
- ◆ The key aspects being assessed are categories and language — these should be the focus in the response produced and no others need be referenced to gain the highest marks. However, a candidate may judge it appropriate to refer to other key aspects. This is acceptable and credit will be given if such references are clearly contextualised as part of the analysis of categories or language; otherwise, any such references are likely to gain no credit.
- ◆ Responses need not be written in an essay format, and some candidates may find it helpful to use sub-headings in their analysis.

Paper 1: Media Analysis section

As failure to respond adequately to the terms of the question is a significantly re-occurring characteristic of inadequate answers, it is recommended that centres give as much time as possible to teaching and learning in this respect. Once the candidate is secure in his/her knowledge of the key aspects of the text being studied, it might be a useful starting point in exam preparation to write statements linking these. When the candidate can confidently write about the implications for, or of, key aspects in the construction of the text, time should be spent examining past papers. This will reveal that, essentially, all analysis questions are focused on the concept of 'construction' and specific questions detail the approach the candidate should take. Candidates could practise writing introductions, conclusions and linking/signposting phrases which convey an effort to respond to the terms of the question. The following should be emphasised:

- ◆ Questions ask the candidates to do more than that required in the Unit assessments, so candidates must be prepared to answer a variety of potential questions centred on particular key aspects. The simple reproduction of a Unit assessment is inadequate; a candidate *must* make an attempt to answer the question set in order to achieve a pass.
- ◆ Answers must show how key aspects integrate with one another.
- ◆ Whilst candidates are not expected to cover every concept as detailed in the Arrangements, they must be prepared to cover those required by the question. So, in relation to representation, candidates should be prepared to analyse selection, portrayal and/or ideological discourses as required; in audience they should be prepared to analyse target audience and/or mode of address and/or preferred reading and/or differential decoding; in narrative, structure and/or codes may be asked for; and an

analysis of institution must detail specific internal and/or external controls and their influence on the text. Discussion of key aspects in a general way without reference to one or more of these component concepts will be marked as inadequate.

- ◆ Candidates must give detailed textual examples in support of their discussion of the question/concepts. Where, for example, a film or TV series or a newspaper or magazine title has been studied, specific reference should be made to a particular programme or edition.
- ◆ The analysis section examines a candidate's ability to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of at least three of the key aspects from narrative, representation, audience and institutions. Candidates may wish to refer to categories or language as part of the response but, to gain credit for doing so, any such references must clearly support the main three being analysed. Categories and language must not be used as stand-alone key aspects in this section.

Paper 1: Media Production section

Candidates should be advised of the following:

- ◆ Candidates should ensure that they prepare as fully for this section as for the Media Analysis section and Unseen Analysis folio, as it is marked just as rigorously, against the same standard.
- ◆ Candidates must make an effort to answer the question set and write from a production point of view. They should not produce a learned response.
- ◆ In response to reflective questions, candidates should be prepared to discuss such things as their production experience, knowledge, constraints and opportunities and the relationship between these and the active planning, production or evaluation of their own text. They should be prepared to answer questions which ask them to demonstrate knowledge of what happens at the specific stages of media production and how the decisions they made at these stages relate to the key aspects that underpin the Course. Any one production stage from planning, implementing and evaluating may be demanded by the question. Any one of categories, language, narrative, representation, audience or institution may be named as one of the three key aspects to be used in the answer.
- ◆ Reflective answers which consist mainly of a production diary, Unit evaluation or product description are not sufficient. Although the candidate might reference aspects of the production schedule, evaluate choices made or describe parts of the product made, any such references should be part of a response which, according to the terms of the question, reflects on the active construction of their text according to a number of factors.
- ◆ In response to creative questions, candidates should ensure that they include all the elements required by the question.
- ◆ Candidates should justify creative decisions by referring, as appropriate, to details in the brief or scenario or the meanings intended. No matter how detailed, a description of technical and cultural codes or any other element without justification is inadequate.
- ◆ In creative questions, an attempt to use media production knowledge to genuinely respond to the stimulus of the brief or scenario with justifications will be better rewarded than a prepared answer about production practices.
- ◆ In creative questions, candidates need not justify audience or medium; a simple indication of what they are is all that is required. Candidates who do spend time justifying these tend to use up valuable time writing information which is irrelevant.

- ◆ In the scenario question, candidates should avoid spending time discussing casting or concepts such as synergy. Such information is not required by the question and is not rewarded.
- ◆ In the scenario question, candidates should plan how to create or report on the specific narrative details given. Responses that seem to be for a completely different narrative will not be well rewarded. Some candidates clearly come to the exam with a prepared scenario that they reproduce and try to link somehow to the one given. Others try to make the scenario details fit the conventions of a fictional genre they are familiar with, even where the scenario clearly does not belong to that genre. As a result, appropriate treatment of specific details in the narrative becomes difficult to plan and justify, and low marks are the result.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	801
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	869
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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	15.7%	15.7%	136	70
B	25.1%	40.7%	218	58
C	27.7%	68.5%	241	47
D	11.7%	80.2%	102	41
No award	19.8%	100.0%	172	-

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, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.