

Principal Assessor Report 2004

Assessment Panel:

Media Studies

Qualification area

**Subject(s) and Level(s)
Included in this report**

Media Studies – Higher

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2003	821
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Number of entries in 2004	827
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General comments re entry numbers

The number of entries is still high and there is an issue of presentations which are at an inappropriate level.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards

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Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

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Grade boundaries for each subject area included in the report

Maximum mark: 100

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	13.9	13.9	115	70
B	17.7	31.6	146	58
C	23.2	54.8	192	47
D	12.5	67.3	103	41
No award	32.8	100.0	271	
			827	

General commentary on passmarks and grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create mark schemes which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum 50% of the available marks (notional passmark) and a very well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70%, it is almost impossible to get the standard absolutely on target every year, in every subject and level
- Each year we therefore hold a passmark meeting for each subject at each level where we bring together all the information available (statistical and judgmental). 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 senior management team at SQA
- We adjust the passmark downwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly more demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- We adjust the passmark upwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly less demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- Where the standard appears to be very similar to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries
- 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 are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. And just because SQA has altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry 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
- Our main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

The grade boundaries for B, C and D were slightly lowered compared to previous years because the analysis questions proved inaccessible for all but the very able candidates.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Markers felt that candidates were better prepared for this year's exam, particularly in respect of the Unseen Analysis and the Analysis Section of the exam paper. However, in their responses to the creative questions (1 and 2) of the exam paper, candidates still tend to describe their completed text rather than demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the production processes, which all the questions in the Production Section are seeking to elicit.

Centres should continue to stress to candidates the need to answer the questions they have selected as the examination is not a memory test of learned responses, a factor which has caused, yet again, some candidates to perform badly.

Markers also felt that there are still too many candidates being presented at the wrong level.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

In general the Unseen Analysis was tackled better than in previous years although Key Aspect 2, Language, is still being more effectively dealt with than Key Aspect 1, Categories.

In the examination paper the candidates who chose wisely in the Analysis Section often did very well indeed while, in the Production Section, those who clearly understood that they were being examined on their knowledge and understanding of production processes also did well.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

In the Unseen Analysis too many candidates still only pay lip-service to Key Aspect 1, (Categories) and superficially allude to as many categories as possible without dealing, in depth, with two. This limits the amount of analysis in their answers which, in turn, is reflected in their scores. As far as the examination paper is concerned there are still too many candidates trying to fit pre-learnt responses to completely inappropriate questions. This is true not only of the Analysis Section but also of Question 3 of the Production Section, while many responses to Question 1 of the Production Section clearly reveal that the candidates had no real understanding. This is particularly obvious in the references to digital video which often reveal complete ignorance of the production processes and the technology involved.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Centres should provide candidates a text for the Unseen Analysis of a suitable length, ie one which allows candidates to analyse in detail. Texts in time based media should be no longer than five minutes (preferably shorter); page-based media should require candidates to concentrate on one page only. Where candidates are given a text that is too large, they tend to describe, rather than analyse.

At this level candidates are required to analyse a text which is in a medium and genre which is familiar. It should not be from a title that has been studied in class. If centres provide for unseen analysis, a text which is from the same title as texts that have been studied in class, (eg, a different day's bulletin from the same news title – Channel 4 News, say, or a different edition of The Sun), candidates may be tempted to repeat what they have learned in class about the title, and fail to use the transferable skills of analysis to analyse what is 'specific' about the specific text (the news items, for example). Centres should note that what is being examined in the Unseen is the spontaneous application of the tools of analysis in a relatively unforeseen situation. This is the assessment objective contained in this part of the external assessment; and because it is a more difficult task than remembering and repeating learnt knowledge about familiar texts, it is more discriminating and thus enables candidates' work to be graded more effectively.

Centres should also note that one copy of the unseen text should be included in **every** envelope of scripts, (ie one text for every complete envelope of 10 scripts and one for every partially full envelope). As markers have to 'consume' the text before any of the Unseen Analysis can be marked, it causes a delay in the marking of a particular batch of scripts if there is no text in the envelope – the different envelopes from an individual centre go out to different markers. This is particularly important where the text is of a particularly ephemeral nature, a newspaper or a broadcast commercial/trailer, for example.

Candidates should also be aware that the Unseen Analysis tests knowledge and understanding of both Outcomes 1 and 2. Candidates are still favouring Language over Categories, often simply identifying categories rather than analysing. There is, however, a slight improvement in this respect this session over previous sessions.

Centres should make candidates aware that it is very important to answer the question chosen. It is an assessment objective of the examination that the candidate displays transferable skills of analysis and of knowledge and understanding of production processes. The external assessment is not simply a test of learned knowledge. Therefore, learned responses that do not match the chosen questions will not help them achieve a pass in the Analysis Section. Also the point of the questions in the Production Section is that candidates display the knowledge and understanding that they gained in the Production Unit. Therefore responses that simply describe the production process (in the reflective questions) or ones that describe an 'ideal' text (in the creative questions) will not enable candidates to achieve a pass.

Centres should make candidates aware that it is the application to texts of the key aspects that is being looked for in the Analysis Section. Candidates who simply display knowledge of the theory of, say, narrative codes, will not achieve a pass unless these codes are applied to a specific text or texts, as required by the question. In the Production Section it is the knowledge and understanding of production processes that is being examined, in both the reflective and creative questions.