

Principal Assessor Report 2003

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 2002	901
Pre appeal	746

Number of entries in 2003	941
Pre appeal	821

General comments re entry numbers

At pass marks stage the number had risen by 75 over the previous year. This is a rise of over 9%.

Grade boundaries at C, B and A for each subject area included in the report

Maximum mark 100

Minimum mark required for

Upper A	85
A	70
B	59
C	48

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 syllabuses evolve and change

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

The grade boundaries for C and B were slightly lowered in 2003 over previous years, because some of the questions proved somewhat inaccessible for all but the very able candidates.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

In general terms, candidates did better in the Analysis Section than in the Production Section of the question paper. In their responses to the creative Questions, 2 and 3, candidates are still inclined to delineate their ideal, completed text, rather than demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the production processes, which all the questions in the Production Section seek to elicit. For Question 1 of the Production Section, there were too many learned responses which dealt with last years' question, rather than an **evaluation** of the production process which is what the question required.

Centres must stress to candidates the necessity to answer the question they have chosen; the examination is not a memory test of learned responses, but a test of knowledge and understanding which is demonstrated by the spontaneous application of the tools of textual analysis and by imagining or reflecting on the production process.

Markers have also observed that there are still too many candidates being inappropriately presented.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Markers reported that there was a clear distinction between centres which prepared their students well and those that did not.

In general the Unseen Analysis was tackled better in previous years, though there were very few outstanding responses. Where centres had limited the text in some way, (eg by showing only a title sequence/trailer, or a front page), candidates fared better because they were able to concentrate on the details of a text and therefore to **analyse** it. As Usual, Outcome 2, Language, was tackled better than Outcome 1, Categories, in which candidates tend to identify or describe, rather than analyse.

In the question paper, the Analysis Section was done better than the Production Section. Section 1 Question 1 of the examination paper is an interesting question for those who had studied a certain kind of text (mainly cinema film, because of the difficulty of obtaining the implied past nature of the text in other media), but is much more difficult with a text unsuited to the question, a problem of selection that some less able candidates did not realise. In addition, Section 2 favoured those who had studied the moving image in the Production Unit. There were some very good responses to Section 1 Question 1, but only where the candidates had previously studied a suitable text, such as old cinema film or an old advertising campaign (which some centres have in teaching packs). Likewise, there were some good answers to Section 1 Question 3, but only again where candidates had previously studied a suitable text. The more able candidates were able to spot the match between the text and the question. This question was not, however, a popular choice among candidates.

Question 4 was the most popular choice, allowing candidates to apply and integrate their knowledge and understanding of at least three aspects, as required for a good answer.

In the Production section, those candidates who understood that what is being examined is their knowledge and understanding of production did best – some inventing extraordinarily imaginative and well-informed production scenarios round the 'scenario' in Question 3.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Throughout the paper, candidates had difficulty if they reproduced prepared responses, instead of answering the question as asked. Some candidates are inclined to 'top-and-tail' their answers in response to the wording of the question, but the main part of the answer strays away from the point because it is fundamentally a learned response to the wording of a different question, recognisably from a past paper.

The Production Section was done least well. This is because candidates do not seem to understand that the questions test the knowledge and understanding of production processes gained during the Production Unit.

In the creative Questions, 2 and 3 candidates continue to devise texts which are 'ideal', rather than showing that they understand the problems (and opportunities) associated with media production. Both of the creative questions favoured those who had studied the moving image in the Production Unit. Candidates who tackled Section 2, Question 2, found themselves describing the soap opera itself rather than the title sequence as required.

Responses to the reflective question, Section 2, Question 1, were disappointing because candidates ignored the fact that they were asked to **evaluate** the production **process**. There was little evaluation, mostly description, and where there was evaluation, it was of the planning process – as in the 2002 paper. Many candidates had learned responses to the reflective questions of even earlier years which had very little to do with the question as set.

Many candidates waste too much time on drawing/storyboarding and not enough justifying their choices. It seems also that candidates spent too much time on the Analysis Section, leaving themselves insufficient time for Section 2.

The Analysis Section of the question paper was done much better than the Production Section, but candidates have to remember that at this level, all their assertions must be justified by reference to a text. This year, as opposed to previous years there was better understanding of the concepts of Media Studies, but some candidates simply display this understanding of theory rather than by **applying** it to a text.

Some candidates who tackled Section 1 Question 2, did not refer to a **non-fiction** text. Candidates would be advised to try to define what they understand by non-fiction (or indeed fiction) when they begin to tackle such a question, instead of simply asserting that the text they use is suitable. The markers are then able to gauge the level of understanding of the candidate.

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.

Centres should not provide extra information about the text, other than that required by the Flyleaf. Not only does this mean that there is a lack of standardisation, but candidates who are given extra information seem to think that they must therefore make use of all the information they have been given. This often means that they are distracted from what is required of them – as detailed on the Flyleaf.

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 discriminatory 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.