



Course Report 2018

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| Subject | Media |
| Level | Higher |

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: question paper

The question paper performed at a similar level to last year. There was an increase in the number of candidates integrating in question 1. However, the connections between content and context that candidates referenced were at times superficial, and comment on the connection was not always of the depth and detail required at Higher. This was the first year to sample the key aspect of categories in question 1 and a number of candidates appeared to be unfamiliar with the concepts that could be analysed in relation to this.

Component 2: assignment

The assignment performed as expected, with candidates achieving consistently across all parts of each section of the task. The performance of candidates across this component was stronger than last year.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

Question 1: Media Content in Context

Candidates were successful in their responses to the question when they analysed the possible responses of different audience groups to specific examples of media content in detail in part (a), and integrated these or other audience responses in their discussion of categories in part (b) and the other chosen key aspect(s) of content in part (c).

(a) Audience

Where candidates demonstrated a sound understanding of how specific audience demographics might respond to different aspects of the text(s) studied, they performed well in this question. There were some strong answers where candidates discussed specific, relevant audience sectors and analysed how these audience sectors might respond in specific ways to the media content exemplified. For example, some candidates discussed the political stance of certain audience demographics, and then analysed how this would lead to different responses to specific points in the film 'Children of Men'. Other candidates took a different approach and, in a discussion of the composition of different audiences, analysed the needs and/or expectations they might bring to a text, and the responses this could lead to. For example, some candidates looked at the expectations of fandom in the case of 'Bladerunner' and analysed how fans of Harrison Ford might be disappointed by his role in the film. Other candidates discussed specific audience sectors being targeted by the filmmakers, and how they might respond, alongside a consideration of differential decodings that specific audiences might make in regard to the same text(s). For example, the positive feminist response to 'Thelma and Louise' contrasted with a possible negative response from some male audiences.

(b) Categories and influence on audience responses

Many candidates gave detailed responses, analysing specific examples of the genre, purpose, tone and/or style of the media content they had studied. Successful candidates analysed how these could influence specific audience responses in either a positive or negative way. They did this in a range of ways including:

- ◆ focusing on genre conventions and the expectations of genre fans in film franchises, such as Star Wars or Bond
- ◆ focusing on how the purpose(s) of documentary films to inform or educate was achieved, and relating this to the specific audience responses this elicited
- ◆ analysing how specific tones were constructed to add to the impact of a scene and how different audiences responded to this tone

(c) Chosen key aspect(s) of content and influence on audience responses

Some candidates focused exclusively on one key aspect from narrative, language or representations, while others covered a combination of two of these, or all three. Candidates performed well when they analysed concepts in detail, giving specific examples from the media content studied and commenting on how these could have influenced specific audience responses. Successful candidates analysed their chosen key aspect(s) by giving

specific examples of concepts from the text(s) studied and analysing how the concept functioned in the text, before drawing connections to how these examples influenced specific audience responses. They did this in a range of ways including:

- ◆ analysing the representations of female characters and relating this to specific responses from both female and male audiences
- ◆ discussing the representations of ethnic minorities in a film and how members of those ethnic minorities in the audience might respond to this
- ◆ considering how the use of familiar narrative structures can influence a positive audience response
- ◆ analysing how a more challenging use of narrative structure can achieve very different responses from cinephiles as opposed to fans of blockbusters

Question 2: The Role of Media

Candidates were well rewarded when they gave several detailed points of information or ideas relevant to the referenced role of media (in this case the specific purposes of profit, promotion and/or public service), made comment on these points and how they related to specific examples of media content, and drew at least one conclusion with reference to the task and/or the ideas discussed in the essay.

There were some excellent responses where candidates developed a clear line of argument that demonstrated their knowledge of relevant issues and an obvious effort to engage with the task, by offering critical comment and/or personal opinions. These candidates either drew conclusions throughout the essay, as relevant to their line of argument, or at the end of the essay. These answers made several detailed references to media content to exemplify points, arguments or opinions. Sometimes the references made were to a range of content discussed in a more general way, and sometimes they included close textual exemplification and/or references to key aspects where appropriate.

For example, some candidates discussed a range of articles from the press, exemplifying the various purposes they could identify in the way a tabloid paper dealt with a story. These candidates examined the various ways a newspaper might use a story to make a profit, while also considering how particular bias, linked to ownership or political allegiance, could lead to other purposes such as promoting political ideas, and the impact this had on specific headlines or articles. Other candidates chose to focus on a small number of adverts, using specific details from the adverts to exemplify the points they were making. These candidates had a range of adverts to select from. They discussed profit or promotion through advertising products or brands and compared this to public service motives such as those found in public service announcements. In all cases, successful candidates made developed comments about the references that related their chosen examples logically to their discussion of the task.

Candidates performed better when they looked at a range of texts rather than using a close analysis of one specific text to exemplify their points, arguments or opinions.

Successful candidates generally responded to parts (a) and (b) in an integrated fashion, giving detailed references to media content to exemplify the points they were making.

Component 2: assignment

Section 1: Planning

Candidates performed best when they dealt with each part of the planning section separately. Successful answers had clear points of justification, which provided a rationale for planning decisions and demonstrated a clear relationship between the decision and the specific area given in the task. Successful answers for individual parts were usually structured in one of two ways: either giving the details of a planning decision followed by a relevant justification; or giving details of the brief, creative ideas or research in justification of a detailed planning decision that was taken. In either case, candidates gained marks for points of justification: each clear justification was awarded 1 mark and additional marks were available for further development of a justification. Further development was characterised by additional details of the planning decision or the research undertaken.

In relation to each part, points that gained marks typically covered:

1 (a) The brief: details of any relevant plan(s) made which could be justified in terms of such things as a negotiation of the genre, purpose, medium, form, audience, stimulus; or details of the brief and how the candidate hoped to research, include or achieve these.

Points of justification included general considerations of the brief, such as a discussion of how specific decisions relating to things like genre, audience or form had been arrived at, or references to specific and detailed plans for research, such as how specific genre conventions were used in professionally produced content, or to discover specific preferences from the target audience(s), with justification for this research.

1 (b) Audience: plans justified in relation to target audience, preferred reading, minimising differential decoding, meeting needs, influencing, persuading. Specific, relevant and detailed research findings relating to audience needs and expectations included as part of the justification.

1 (c) Content: justification of plans for content, codes, structure, in relation to content research, drawing on professional practice and common, interesting or inspirational techniques used in examples of media content. Detailed and specific research findings on content included as part of the justification.

1 (d) Institutional context: justification of plans for the production process, or plans for content, codes, structure, made in relation to the constraints or opportunities of the institutional context(s). Detailed and specific research findings relating to the specific institutional contexts (such as budget, equipment, legislation, rules and regulations, health and safety) included as part of the justification.

1 (e) Creative intentions: ideas for content, structure, codes justified in relation to constructing style, meanings, messages, tone, mood, effect. Justifications including detailed discussion of creative intentions or detailed references to research that had not already been discussed in other parts of Section 1.

Section 2: Development

2 (a) Evaluation of production process

Candidates were able to gain the highest marks when they gave at least four developed points of evaluation. Developed points of evaluation gave detailed information about the nature and implications of institutional contexts (whether opportunities: such as equipment available or prior skills and knowledge that could be used; or constraints: such as health and safety considerations, or school and/or industry rules or regulations) and the decisions about either the content and/or the production process made as a result of those constraints. There was also (and crucially) evaluation of the effectiveness of the decisions made, either in terms of the finished content or production process. Consideration of the finished content submitted indicated that the contexts and development referenced were appropriate and supported the discussion.

2 (b) Evaluation of finished content

Candidates who were diligent throughout the assignment generally did well in this task. Careful research, planning and organisation gave candidates a clear sense of what they wanted to achieve and they were able to evaluate their success. Well-planned content provided plenty of source material for candidates to evaluate. Even where available resources did not enable a high technical finish, carefully made content with a considered piece of evaluation conveyed a clear understanding of how to effectively manipulate media codes. Through evaluating how effectively the finished content did or did not achieve the initial creative intentions, and discussing the reasons for this, candidates were able to provide developed points of evaluation.

Candidates achieving the highest marks gave five or more developed points of evaluation and supported these with a discussion of specific, detailed examples from the finished content. They did more than discuss individual examples of single codes, instead evaluating in detail how codes worked together by considering such things as:

- ◆ the effectiveness of the construction of a series of shots or sequences
- ◆ how specific print codes were combined to make meaning
- ◆ the codes used in the construction of a particular representation
- ◆ the combined effect of a range of codes used in a specific scene or sequence

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Question 1: Media Content in Context

(a) Audience

Some answers that gained fewer marks tended to describe the targeted audiences of the text(s) studied in a general way, rather than analysing the specific audience responses to the text(s). Other answers tended to describe generic audience responses to a text, rather than teasing out how different audiences would respond to aspects of the text(s), as required by the task. In addition, some candidates did not comment on *how* the examples they selected from the texts might cause the audience responses being discussed, which meant they were unable to access the higher mark bands.

(b) Categories and influence on audience responses

Answers that gained fewer marks explained the use of categories in the media content studied, rather than analysing how specific examples of different categories influenced audience responses, as directed by the task. In such answers, candidates mainly discussed how genre, purpose, tone and/or style could be seen in the media content. Sometimes there were implicit or basic statements about how these could lead to generic audience responses (for example a jump scare will appeal to horror fans), but in general there was little in the way of comment on how the examples would achieve this.

There was also a significant number of candidates who took 'categories' to refer to either categories of an audience (for example an age group, or special interest group) or mistook the term for institutional factors. These candidates discussed concepts that were not relevant categories and, therefore, could not be given credit.

(c) Chosen key aspect(s) of content and influence on audience responses

Answers that gained fewer marks tended to identify or explain rather than analyse other key aspects of content, and/or provided limited exemplification. These answers often read like an extended list of concept-plus-example, with very little comment about how the examples had influenced audience responses. Other answers made links to audience reactions but there was little discussion of the chosen key aspect(s). These answers tended to be brief and not of the depth or detail expected at Higher.

Question 2: Role of Media

Answers that gained fewer marks tended to focus on explaining one or more ways that specific examples of media content had been created to generate a profit and/or promote or perform a public service. Although valid information was given, there tended to be very little debate, comment or opinion relating this information to the task. Where candidates did not attempt to discuss the examples given in relation to the task, the candidate was not awarded many marks. Other answers that gained fewer marks were characterised by what seemed to be a pre-prepared essay for the role of media question. Some candidates appeared to have prepared an essay for a question about influencing attitudes and behaviour. These responses could not gain much credit as the added value of this component is that candidates apply their knowledge to a previously unseen task, and marks are awarded for responses to the specific question asked. There were also a number of weaker responses, where candidates did not present two sides of an argument and merely wrote several

paragraphs discussing how different texts achieved the same purpose. These candidates were not able to present a discussion or draw a conclusion in terms of the task, which meant they did not gain many marks for question 2(a). Some candidates found it difficult to access marks for question 2(b) when the references to media content were sparse and/or lacked comment that would help relate the references logically to the points made. In addition, some references were very broad or vague and did not clearly support points made.

Component 2: assignment

Section 1: Planning

An effective brief, which allows candidates plenty of scope to negotiate, research and plan is crucial. When candidates were presented with a restrictive brief to work with, this led to weaker responses as they did not have enough scope to make specific and detailed plans that they were able to justify. This was also an issue in some cases when candidates worked in a group to produce a collaborative piece of content but had not highlighted their own contribution in their written work. A successful brief should allow candidates to make clearly justified plans, arising from their negotiations and research. Briefs such as planning and creating a film in 48 hours, or ones which specified too many parameters (for example specifying a narrow target audience, detailed purpose, genre) without room for negotiation, led to a lack of justification for planning decisions particularly in 1(a) The Brief.

Briefs set by centres that asked candidates to produce too much or too little content also led to weaker responses. A moving image text of up to three minutes was ample to allow a candidate to successfully complete the written work in both the planning and evaluation sections to a high standard. A brief that required candidates to produce something longer, led to them spending too long on the product and insufficient time on their written work. In contrast, a brief requiring just one print text was too restrictive and led to weaker responses as candidates found it challenging to find sufficient different plans to justify for each of the five parts in Section 1. These candidates also struggled to find sufficient examples to evaluate from their finished content in Section 2.

Answers that gained fewer marks for Section 1 were characterised by a number of features: some justifications were very short and did not provide the amount of detail expected at Higher. In particular, weaker answers relating to institutional contexts often tended to consist of descriptions of what could not be done, rather than a justification of plans made to deal with constraints or to benefit from opportunities. Although there were fewer instances of this, there were still candidates who produced an extended holistic response covering all five parts of Section 1. These responses tended to provide less detail than those that dealt with each part separately. Holistic responses often had difficulty clearly conveying what active planning decisions had been taken and/or what the justifications behind them were. In some responses there was repetition of points between the five parts.

Some responses to Section 1 appeared to have been written after the development stage of the assignment had been completed. This may have made it difficult for some candidates to remember what they originally planned and why. Some responses were little more than a description of the final product and process, which did not gain many marks.

Section 2: Development

2 (a) Evaluation of production process

Answers that gained fewer marks most often contained a description of the contexts and problems faced during production, without much discussion of steps taken to resolve the problems or an evaluation of how successful these steps were in resolving the issue. The responses read like production diaries, detailing what was carried out on a daily or weekly basis. There was little or no attempt to evaluate how well the individual had performed or how successful the finished content was, given the constraints. In some cases, consideration of the final content revealed that the contexts referenced were irrelevant because they did not relate to the media content created, so did not gain marks.

2 (b) Evaluation of finished content

Evaluations that gained fewer marks tended to deal with a few individual codes, such as one particular camera angle or the use of a particular font. While these are appropriate codes to *include* in an evaluation, discussing them in isolation makes it difficult to produce the considered, reflective evaluation required at Higher.

Some evaluations described the final content, giving only some indication of the planned creative intentions. It was difficult to find clear points of evaluation in these responses, although simple evaluative comments were rewarded where possible. Some candidates attempted to evaluate examples from the finished content, but their responses lacked a developed discussion of their original intent and merely made evaluative statements about whether the finished content was effective or not. These responses lacked the developed points of evaluation required in the higher mark bands.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper

For question 1, teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to respond to parts 1(a), (b), and (c) separately to focus their responses on what is required by the individual parts of the task. They should spend time in class looking at ways in which the different contexts and key aspects of content can integrate with each other, so that candidates are comfortable with analysing these connections in response to the tasks set in the question paper. Teachers and lecturers should also ensure candidates are familiar with all the terminology that might arise in the question paper. Candidates should be comfortable applying these concepts to the text(s) they have studied.

Most centres focus on feature length films, either fiction or non-fiction, for this section. This offers candidates a wealth of material from which to draw exemplification. Teachers and lecturers should spend time with candidates exploring how best to select and use evidence from the text(s) studied in their analysis.

Candidates can perform well after studying just one rich text, but they can also benefit from studying a few different texts that could be linked by franchise, genre, theme or another aspect. In both cases, the key teaching points should be:

- ◆ ensuring candidates have a firm understanding of all seven concepts that could be sampled in the question paper
- ◆ supporting candidates in developing analysis skills that enable them to use specific and detailed evidence from the text(s) to give a meaningful response in the question paper

For question 2, candidates should provide specific and detailed evidence from texts studied to back up the points they are making in response to the task. Studying a selection of texts in class will allow candidates to select from a range of evidence and ensure they are able to respond to the specifics of the task set in the question paper. It is essential that candidates understand the importance of responding to the task given — marks are awarded for their ability to discuss the question stem. The texts studied should provide candidates with a range of evidence to allow them to discuss different sides of an argument in relation to any of the three roles of media that could feature in the question paper.

Component 2: assignment

For the assignment, centres must set a suitable brief. It should provide candidates with some form of creative stimulus, but should not restrict their ability to negotiate and/or make their own decisions. The brief should take into account the technology available to candidates in that centre, and any other institutional restrictions that may have an impact. Good practice is to provide candidates with two or more possible stimuli, and also some room for negotiation of things such as form, medium, genre, target audience. This gives candidates some parameters to work within, but is not so restrictive that they will not be able to make sufficient justified plans to access the full range of marks available in Section 1.

Moving image texts should, ideally, be no longer than two to three minutes and print posters should, ideally, be part of a campaign of at least three posters to allow candidates a sufficient range of codes to discuss. Candidates can work as part of a group to produce their media content, but teachers and lecturers should highlight clear parameters in terms of individual roles and responsibilities from the outset. All planning, research and evaluation should relate to the work the individual candidate has carried out.

For Section 1, teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to complete their written responses on their plans and justifications as they go along. They do not need to complete them in the order given in the task document (although they should be submitted to SQA in this order), but they should be recording their plans and decisions, along with their justifications for these, as they work their way through the planning phase. Candidates should complete the written responses for this section before they create their media content. This gives them a logical progression into Section 2, where they evaluate the effectiveness of their plans.

For Section 2, teachers and lecturers should make it clear to candidates that they must *evaluate* in order to access the full range of marks. This requires some discussion of intentions and/or processes, and then an evaluation of how effective or otherwise these were. For 2(a), candidates should focus on discussing specific opportunities and constraints relating to the institutional context in which they are working. They should evaluate how effectively they worked with these opportunities and/or constraints, and what impact their actions had on the process and/or the finished content. For 2(b), candidates should discuss specific examples of how they hoped to achieve their creative intentions for the finished piece of content, and then evaluate, in detail, how effective the finished piece is in terms of their original intentions.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

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| Number of resulted entries in 2017 | 1013 |
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| Number of resulted entries in 2018 | 1061 |
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

| Distribution of course awards | Percentage | Cumulative % | Number of candidates | Lowest mark |
|-------------------------------|------------|--------------|----------------------|-------------|
| Maximum mark | | | | |
| A | 16.6% | 16.6% | 176 | 66 |
| B | 24.6% | 41.2% | 261 | 57 |
| C | 24.4% | 65.6% | 259 | 48 |
| D | 12.6% | 78.2% | 134 | 43 |
| No award | 21.8% | - | 231 | - |

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which 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.

Therefore SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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.

Grade boundaries from exam papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.