MEDIA STUDIES

> **Paper 9607/01**
> **Foundation Portfolio**

Key messages

In order to successfully complete this coursework component, candidates must:
- follow one of the two set briefs as determined by the syllabus (video or print)
- keep a detailed blog showing the development of the project, their artefact, and a creative critical reflection upon their work
- ensure their blog remains online and easily accessible throughout the examination series.

Centres are reminded that:
- individual candidate Record Cards must be completed with clear comments to show how marks have been arrived at for each assessment objective. Expectations of evidence from each assessment objective are listed on pages 24–27 of the syllabus
- if candidates have worked in groups comments must reflect individual contributions to projects.

Centres should note that this is the final series where we will accept coursework which has previously been submitted. All coursework submitted for the June 2020 series must have been created for that series.

General comments

On the whole centres engaged well with this component and candidates produced some excellent work, demonstrating detailed research into existing magazines and film openings, which fed into the planning and construction of their own media products. Many candidates demonstrated high levels of skill in the use of media tools, in both the products and in the creative critical reflections. In the best work, knowledge and understanding of conventions of all aspects of the media products was coupled with comprehensive evidence of the process.

Comments on specific tasks

Blogs

Many centres have now set up blog hubs (a centre blog or web page with candidates' names and numbers hyperlinked to their work) which allow one-click access to the individual work of candidates. This helps teachers monitor candidates' work and aids the moderation process. All centres should follow this good practice and clearly transcribe the URL of the hub on the Individual Candidate Record Cards. All hyper-links in both the centre's hub and candidate blogs need to be checked carefully by centres to ensure that they are working. Blogs need to be organised carefully so that they read in a clear chronological order using date stamps if possible. The finished product (film opening or magazine pages) should be the first thing seen as the blog is opened so that it is clear to moderators which is the final version. All elements should be clearly labelled within the post. Moderators should not have to scroll backwards and forwards to find key elements.

The best blogs were comprehensive, with candidates posting on a regular basis. Some candidates produced upwards of fifty meaningful posts. The most effective blogs demonstrated the whole process of the project from initial idea, through research into similar products, planning, production and creative critical reflection. The clearest blogs to follow were those produced using dedicated blogging applications such as Blogger which use a linear format to order blog posts from most recent to earliest, with the earliest post last, and the most recent post at the top. They included a range of materials posted over the duration of the project, illustrating the production process from research and initial ideas to final production and critical reflection.

All elements of the portfolio must be presented online, either on or linked to the blog, for the moderation period. Hardcopy, such as DVDs, USBs and printouts, should not be included in the moderation package, even in support of online work, and are not considered by the moderators.

Creative critical reflections

Candidates who fully addressed the four set questions using a range of digital applications to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding performed best in this area. One method of responding which continues to be frequently successful is the use of a detailed voiceover video, especially when extracts from the finished product and from the process are included. Also submitted this series were some really imaginative approaches using presentation applications to which adequate time had been allocated.

Candidates should approach the Creative Critical Reflection as an integral part of the production process rather than something tagged on to the end of a project. Centres should encourage candidates to give equal value to each of the four questions. Some candidates start with a comprehensive and creative response to **Question 1** and regress to finish with a thin response to **Question 4**.

Products

Magazines

There were fewer print productions in this series than in the past. Candidates generally fulfilled the brief, with understanding of features of design, layout, font choice and size in evidence. Some candidates completed well organised and considered photo shoots resulting in some excellent original images. However, others would still benefit from support in this area. It is pleasing to see the move away from 'snapshots' taken with little consideration of framing or mise-en-scène and towards better considered images. However, there still needs to be a wider range of appropriate images with some candidates simply presenting the minimum number of images required rather than completing a full shoot with consideration to the content of their articles.

Contents pages continue to be an issue; some candidates would have benefited from returning to their research in this area, often presenting only the content of their chosen pages rather than a contents page that reflected the full content of the proposed magazine. Double page spreads require candidates to have had some training in journalistic technique; better research here would again have benefited candidates. Whilst centres continue to invest in appropriate technical tools for construction of media products, some candidates still need more support in building their skills with dedicated desktop publishing software such as InDesign or PagePlus.

Opportunities for interim feedback need to be built in to the production process so that candidates can benefit from the critical eye of peers and teachers, particularly in relation to how far they have carried through their research into codes and conventions into their own products. Weaker productions often appear to be based on little or inappropriate research into existing products, sometimes taken from genres other than those of the proposed product. Some candidates are still producing products that bear little resemblance to real print products; these candidates need to be supported in researching and using appropriate models.

Film openings

The video brief was the most popular this series, with the most effective products being carefully researched and planned. For the best film openings candidates had researched professional work relevant to their own genre choice and had developed a systematic understanding of the institutional conventions of opening titles. Most candidates are now moving away from trying to tell too much too soon and focusing on how their openings serve to establish enigma. However, there are still some film openings which resemble trailers. This issue can be avoided by careful research and close analysis of professional film openings.

Expectations for work in Level 4 and 5 is that a high level of skill will be in evidence, including camerawork, sound, use of mise-en-scène and editing. Candidates should have the opportunity to use appropriate 'tools of the trade' including some lighting equipment and sound recording equipment external to the camera. Many well-constructed openings are still being let down by a lack of consideration of the importance of light and an effective soundscape. Interim deadlines can assist candidates with feedback on the effectiveness of their work. When candidates work in groups as permitted by the syllabus it is important that all members' roles are clearly identifiable and that the centre has allocated marks appropriate to those roles. Comments on Individual Candidate Record Cards should clearly identify how marks have been allocated according to candidate roles.

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/02
Key Media Concepts

Key messages

Section A is a compulsory question; candidates must analyse an extract from an American TV drama, and consider how meaning is constructed through the technical codes of camerawork, editing, mise-en-scene and sound. An understanding of technical codes in moving image media is essential for candidates to be able to attempt the question, which this session was based on an extract from *Nashville*.

Section B presents two optional questions of which candidates answer one on one, with a focus on a media industry they have studied, adapting and applying their knowledge; in this series the questions were about audiences' concern about where texts come from and the importance of convergence. Candidates should support their responses using examples taken from the contemporary media landscape.

General comments

Many candidates showed evidence of thorough preparation, writing at length and supporting the points they made with examples. The ability to address the key terms of the question and to shape relevant knowledge towards fully answering the question was often not in evidence, with some responses lacking detailed, relevant or contemporary examples. This support is vital, as often the candidates understood concepts and produced sound arguments but were unable to illustrate this appropriately.

Section A

Question 1

Technical knowledge was often impressive across all four areas, and it was pleasing to see evidence of some effective teaching of all of the technical skills, with the majority of candidates able to identify a wide range of elements accurately and with ease. However, some candidates were limited by simply identifying elements without developing their answers by exploring what the impact of these technical elements would have upon the viewer. By not considering this, they were denied the opportunity to explore meaning and representation, and subsequently they were severely limited in their responses. Alternatively, some candidates were easily able to identify meaning but lacked the accurate use of technical language of the conventions of moving image to underpin their analysis. A significant number of responses relied on narrating the text with a list of technical terms without engaging with meaning at all, which resulted in an exceedingly limited interpretation.

There were some excellent responses at the higher end of the range, highlighting candidates' understanding of the ways in which meaning is constructed through the use of different technical areas. There were some very sophisticated, analytical responses demonstrating an understanding of how meaning and representation is created coupled with an excellent use of technical terminology. The best responses synthesised construction and meaning in an organic way. Often candidates were able to link the technical codes with analysis of gender politics, fame, power and the lives of those in show business, as well as the tropes of live country music videos.

The most common problems in responses were made by candidates who were able to identify the technical codes used, but did not explore how meaning is created. With these there was a tendency towards narrative or descriptive responses, rather than analysis. Other issues included candidates repeating the same points throughout, inaccurate use of terminology (for example using the term 'jump cut' or 'switch' when they meant 'cut') or reducing analysis to one word. Some candidates tried to apply theory in their responses (e.g. Mulvey, Propp et al), which was not really necessary and often left candidates trying to base their responses around a series of theories which are more appropriately discussed at A2.

Section B

Question 2

Discuss the importance of convergence to media institutions. Refer to the media area you have studied.

This was a very open question and invited candidates to discuss a range of convergences, including technological convergence and cross-media/synergy. The best answers were able to provide case study material and argue the impact of convergences by conglomerates and independents on audiences. Most candidates chose to discuss film for this question. Many responses had institutional examples of how cross-media convergence impacted on the successes of a media product with relevant and contextualised case study evidence, often citing Disney as an example. They were also able to explore the impact of synergy and cross-media convergence in the context of horizontal and vertical integration and ensured they addressed the significance of the impact on both institutions and audiences.

Many candidates were also able to explore the impact of technological convergence, particularly for independent case studies, as a way of levelling the playing field of production and distribution, thus enabling prosumerism. Many candidates chose to compare blockbuster and independent case studies, and while a range of evidence from the former was often evident, the latter would often be lacking, merely citing that they had not used convergence at all, by way of comparison. Some candidates gave a detailed history of their chosen institution/area, rather than shaping their knowledge towards answering the question. Frustratingly, some candidates were still presenting case studies on The Dark Knight, Avatar and even Titanic. More recent and relevant case studies should be encouraged by centres; the new version of the syllabus, for first examining in 2021, stipulates that while historical texts may be included for the purposes of comparison, case studies should be focused on contemporary texts (those released within 5 years of the examination date). Adopting this approach earlier is definitely to be encouraged.

Question 3

'Audiences are not concerned with where media texts come from.' To what extent do you agree with this?

Again, this was quite an open question, yet many candidates who chose to answer this did not seem to grasp the key terms and the fact that they could discuss ownership in particular, as well as aspects of production, distribution, piracy and audience/institution relationships against the background of Web 2.0. Most responses for this question tended to focus on the film industry, but there were some very strong answers in this series from the print and games media areas. Often for this question, specific case study material was not discussed and answers lapsed into generic points. Better responses were able to discuss specific examples of successes or failures of a media product with relevant and contextualised case study evidence. They were also able to explore the impact of Web 2.0 on impatient audience behaviours and the way they receive and interact with texts from oligopolies and independents alike, ensuring they addressed the significance of the impact on both institutions and audiences. Some were able to negotiate how loyal audiences have certain expectations from their chosen institutions, the ways in which they behave and the content they produce.

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/03
Advanced Portfolio

Key messages

Successful candidates should:
- complete one of the four set briefs
- keep a detailed blog that documents all of their own research and the production process
- reflect upon their work in the creative critical reflection

Each of these elements needs to be completed to a high standard, with a substantial amount of evidence demonstrating knowledge and understanding, targeted research, planning and appropriate use of media language and techniques. Expectations of evidence from each assessment objective are listed on pages 27–30 of the syllabus. Coursework Assessment Summary Forms must be completed by the centre, and should give clear comments for each learner explaining why the marks have been awarded for each assessment objective.

General comments

There were some exceptionally strong submissions for this component this series, with the vast majority of candidates completing all the tasks to a satisfactory level. A good number of candidates presented detailed and focused research into appropriate existing media, and used the knowledge gained to effectively plan and construct their own products, demonstrating a high level of control over both video and print production tools.

In the very best work learners exhibited a clear understanding of the relevant media conventions, both in general and through their targeted analysis of existing texts. They then applied their understanding of conventions rigorously to their planning and production, testing and illustrating their theoretical and technical learning in a reflective journey. The most rewarded submissions made innovative use of new technologies in both planning and production work as well as in the creative critical reflections.

The most limiting factor for many candidates is still a lack of clear documentation at all stages of the production process, including the learner's own research. Less successful candidates tend to be limited in their use of technologies and normally don't go beyond simple presentations in response to the creative critical reflection questions.

Comments on specific questions

Blogs

Centres are thanked for submitting work via a central hub (an online directory of all the candidates' blog links). This is considered an expectation and best practice, as a blog hub allows moderators easy access to individual candidates' work; typing in long URLs runs the risk of errors. Links must be checked in advance to ensure that they are working. Centres are once again reminded that **all** elements of the project must be online, either on or linked to the blog; disks, USB's and printouts should not be sent, and will be disregarded by moderators.

The strongest blogs were submitted by learners who documented the whole project process in detail and showed clear evidence of research in all aspects of the production, clearly documenting and justifying choices and decisions made – including the ideas at each stage that they rejected. The blog is key evidence of achievement in all the assessment objectives. Effective blogs often used a linear format, organising the blog so that the earliest post is last and the most recent post is first. Other strong candidates organised the different aspects of the production process under relevant heading and on separate pages – however, within

these pages, it is always most useful for moderators when posts are arranged chronologically. Either way a substantial amount of evidence, in a variety of forms (photos, video, articles, audio, presentation, comparisons, annotations, text, mock ups and tests, drafts and roughs) is needed to illustrate a competent understanding of the assessment objectives.

It is vital that blogs include a range of materials posted over the duration of the project which illustrate the entire process of production, from candidate's initial research and ideas to the final production and creative critical reflection. The blog should show and explain the choices made at each stage of production in order to illustrate their level of control over all aspects of the production process. The strongest work was from learners who consistently reflected on the revisions and choices they made. Very short blogs did not provide enough evidence to justify awarding marks even if the final products were strong.

The best research demonstrated a range of textual analysis with focused and annotated examples. It is vital that candidates include the exploration of similar products or with similar target audiences to those chosen for their production tasks. In the strongest work the research was revisited at stages throughout the production and reflection process, for the purpose of comparison and to demonstrate how conventions were used or deliberately broken.

Audience research was strongest when learners went beyond quantitative-based questionnaires, which are rarely as useful as qualitative analysis of how target audiences actually engage with products. Good examples included interviews with potential audiences as well as analysis of existing distribution data, audience responses and marketing material for similar existing media products. Centres looking to strengthen their marks for AO4 should seek to incorporate the use of digital video, audio and print technology into the presentation of their research ideas.

Candidates were highly rewarded when they explored multiple ideas for their product and then documented the progression and development of those into pre-production documents. There was a range of excellent planning and development, especially where learners had recorded evidence that enabled them to reflect and make informed choices about the way forward for their production.

Centres seeking to improve their marks should encourage learners to include evidence such as: script readings, screen tests for actors, location pre-shoots, practice shots or lighting tests, costume fittings and ideas, behind the scenes videos or photos, production vlogs (video logs) , and 'making-of' video(s). Learners should also be encouraged to take photos or video on the set and annotate them with reflection of their own roles. Work was almost always improved when candidates gained feedback on rough cuts and in many strong portfolios this was done on a number of occasions for each of the major and minor tasks.

Production work

The most successful production work built on previous experiences and was the end product of iteration and test shooting, rehearsals and detailed planning. Candidates who were rewarded high marks also needed to show strong control over software and hardware with a clear and well-documented understanding of media codes and conventions.

Centres are to be reminded that the production work is a package that needs to show a consistency in style, purpose and quality between the major and the minor tasks. Strong examples paid close attention to simulating form, style and genre characteristics across both video and print work as well as identifying a clear branding strategy.

It is important that production work is not presented as a finished product alone. Candidates are rewarded for plotting a journey both in terms of skills development and design and aesthetical understanding – this should include any preliminary tasks, test work and discarded ideas or media material (see section on blogs above). Centres are reminded that satisfactory evidence of planning is needed in order to access marks above Level 3, even if the submitted production work is strong. Candidates should show the choices they have made about equipment they have used as well as casting, settings and locations.

Creative critical reflections

The strongest critical reflections tended to be from candidates who had kept the most reflective records of their research, planning and production. If the work has been completed as the project unfold then many of the assets and materials needed for the critical reflection should be in place and the candidates task is to creatively present them in a way that enables them to reflect on the choices they made. Successful candidates thus answered the questions using clear examples from all stages of their project journey. The

best work also tended to use a variety of digital formats. Candidates are expected to use different formats to present each question and make good use of audio and video in their creative reflections.

Examples of submissions which were awarded a mark in level 5 included:

Question 1

A magazine article with annotated images from the learner's own production work; a split-screen video comparison plotting the reference points in existing media texts that the candidate had researched in the planning stage; a director's commentary.

Question 2

A presentation with side-by-side analysis of the image, fonts, colours, layout and graphics from the learner's three production tasks, with comparable industry examples; annotated screen grabs of video production work.

Question 3

A theoretical justification of the products' audience, as well as a model of the product's distribution alongside comparable real world examples; video demonstrating the changes made to the product after audience feedback; a breakdown of colour grading and other digital effects to illustrate the choices and consistent themes across the package.

Question 4

A podcast show aimed at film fans that interviewed the director and/or other key production staff in which all technologies used were explained for the purpose they served and on the project; a vizia-annotated video illustrating the key technology.

Other level 5 submissions included radio show and podcast, TV and radio talk show interviews, DVD extras, SFX guides, director Q&As, advertisements for specific technologies used, technology review shows as well as marketing packs info-graphic and posters.

There was some excellent self-reflective work in which candidates gave clear motivation for the decisions they made, backed up with examples from the industry or with research they had carried out into audience and institutions.

To reach the Level 5 criteria for AO3, digital creative tools must be used to excellent effect in the creative critical reflection. This is difficult to achieve without using a range of digital presentation techniques. Learners can improve their submission by avoiding brief or text-heavy answers that only used PowerPoint or Prezi. If a range of technology is used throughout the research and planning stages, learners are able to incorporate this into their creative critical reflections, in order to reassess their application of knowledge and development of skills from each stage of their journey. It is important that learners annotate and commentate on their own video and print products, comparing their own products to relevant industry texts.

Summary

It is clear from the work submitted that this component continues to gives students an exceptional learning opportunity and an experience to develop a wide range of soft and hard skills. Many candidates have obviously been on a journey of discovery, building practical skills and confidence as well as learning and understanding media theory. The difference in marks awarded continues to be largely down to the extent to which learners are able to generate evidence that they have reflected on their own practice and then given themselves time to go back to improve on both their technical ability and their application of relevant media conventions.

MEDIA STUDIES

Key messages

- Candidates should refer to both the Foundation and Advanced Portfolios in **Section A**
- In **Section A,** candidates should be prepared to discuss any of the key concepts for 1(b)
- Candidates are best served by building case studies using contemporary media texts. Texts which are no longer considered contemporary are unlikely to allow candidates to discuss the relevant and pertinent details required to respond to **Section B** questions.
- Centres should encourage candidates to complete individual case studies, in addition to any completed as a class. Candidates tend to do less well when relying on class-wide case studies.

General comments

It was very encouraging to examine scripts where candidates addressed a wide range of texts from a diversity of global cultures reflecting sound teaching and learning. An over-reliance on historic texts undermined some otherwise potentially good answers.

Candidates were very well prepared for the structure of the exam; there were few rubric errors. In this series there were some very well written responses which demonstrated personal engagement with subject matter. There were some insightful reflections on their production processes, some detailed analysis of their own texts and well-argued topical debates which made good use of case studies. There were, however, some significantly less successful approaches to *Section B* which are addressed below.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a) Most candidates were able to address the question with a good level of insight into how creative decisions were informed by the available technology. The very best answers opened by defining creativity before giving detailed examples from their own products to illustrate their use of digital technology and realise their artistic intentions. Progression is best demonstrated by clearly indicating their productions at AS and A Level. Several candidates concentrated exclusively on one product which makes it difficult to access higher bands. A chronological approach works really well here, although candidates should be conscious of the time limitations.

(b) Narrative is a key concept and there were some excellent responses utilising a full range of theorists on this topic, such as Propp, Todorov and Barthes among many others. The best responses clearly defined the term and offered detailed illustrations of how the structure of their text impacted it. These contained a high level of analysis underpinned by well-developed knowledge of associated theories. Weaker responses tended to offer an over simplistic evaluation, and often didn't engage with the concept itself.

Section B

The most commonly chosen topic was Media and collective identity, and in particular **Question 6.** Where a question has not been commented on, too few responses were available for meaningful comment.

Contemporary media regulation:

Question 3 – To what extent can today's media regulation be the same as that of the past?

The very best responses used their knowledge of institutions (BBFC/PEGI), Effects Theory and contemporary, indeed topical textual case studies (Birdbox challenge on social media/ Instagram court case) to present all-encompassing arguments which were an excellent read. Higher level responses directly addressed the prompt question about pressures on regulatory bodies brought to bear by advances in technology in particular Youtube. Less successful answers tended to list historical case studies at some length without comment on this crucial area which the question demanded. Successful texts included Deadpool, Red Dead Redemption 2. One exceptional response dealt with the old Childs Play 3/ Bandura arguments with real finesse where too often this debate ends up as a crude for/ against argument.

Media and collective identity

Question 6 – How far do contemporary media offer a diversity of representations of particular groups?

The best answers demonstrated a personal engagement with the texts referred to as part of their case studies – these included a very diverse field from domestic Indian TV programmes to more global broadcast media on Netflix. This yielded genuine analysis of the representation of youth, gender and sexual orientation as well as the class structures of society and the associated challenges to the established order. Giroux and Hebdige featured almost universally – the degree to which candidates utilised these in their arguments was closely linked to outcomes. Successful texts included Batwoman, The Festival, Article 15, and Crazy Rich Asians.

Question 7 – To what extent do people today now have the power to represent themselves?

Few candidates attempted this question on audience agency but those who did usually offer Youtubers as a good example, arguing their points using a range of examples and good terminology.

Media in the online age

Question 9 – To what extent has the online age changed the behaviours of audiences?
While a personal consumption approach is a good starting point for debate about the web and changes in Audience, with some exceptions, the few candidates who attempted this question generally failed to expand upon their experiences using theorists like Jenkins/ Shirky. This results in unsupported assertions and generalisations which reveal no tangible evidence of study

Postmodern media

Question 10 – 'Postmodernism is so much more than intertextuality.' To what extent do you agree with this view?
This question prompted a good level of informed debate about the different chracterics of postmodernism in the media. The most sophisticated responses dealt with the construction of interconnected media universes like Marvel and DC and the increasing popularity of interxtuality promoted via these franchises by conglomerates. Pastiche was illustrated with reference to Tarantino's films, particularly Once Upon A Time In Hollywood. Lyotard was the most popular theorist, often used to good effect.