

Cambridge International AS & A Level

MEDIA STUDIES**9607/04**

Paper 4 Critical Perspectives

October/November 2025**MARK SCHEME**Maximum Mark: 60

Published

This mark scheme is published as an aid to teachers and candidates, to indicate the requirements of the examination. It shows the basis on which Examiners were instructed to award marks. It does not indicate the details of the discussions that took place at an Examiners' meeting before marking began, which would have considered the acceptability of alternative answers.

Mark schemes should be read in conjunction with the question paper and the Principal Examiner Report for Teachers.

Cambridge International will not enter into discussions about these mark schemes.

Cambridge International is publishing the mark schemes for the October/November 2025 series for most Cambridge IGCSE, Cambridge International A and AS Level components, and some Cambridge O Level components.

This document consists of **16** printed pages.

PUBLISHED**Generic Marking Principles**

These general marking principles must be applied by all examiners when marking candidate answers. They should be applied alongside the specific content of the mark scheme or generic level descriptions for a question. Each question paper and mark scheme will also comply with these marking principles.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 1:

Marks must be awarded in line with:

- the specific content of the mark scheme or the generic level descriptors for the question
- the specific skills defined in the mark scheme or in the generic level descriptors for the question
- the standard of response required by a candidate as exemplified by the standardisation scripts.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 2:

Marks awarded are always **whole marks** (not half marks, or other fractions).

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 3:

Marks must be awarded **positively**:

- marks are awarded for correct/valid answers, as defined in the mark scheme. However, credit is given for valid answers which go beyond the scope of the syllabus and mark scheme, referring to your Team Leader as appropriate
- marks are awarded when candidates clearly demonstrate what they know and can do
- marks are not deducted for errors
- marks are not deducted for omissions
- answers should only be judged on the quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar when these features are specifically assessed by the question as indicated by the mark scheme. The meaning, however, should be unambiguous.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 4:

Rules must be applied consistently, e.g. in situations where candidates have not followed instructions or in the application of generic level descriptors.

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 5:

Marks should be awarded using the full range of marks defined in the mark scheme for the question (however; the use of the full mark range may be limited according to the quality of the candidate responses seen).

GENERIC MARKING PRINCIPLE 6:

Marks awarded are based solely on the requirements as defined in the mark scheme. Marks should not be awarded with grade thresholds or grade descriptors in mind.

Annotations guidance for centres

Examiners use a system of annotations as a shorthand for communicating their marking decisions to one another. Examiners are trained during the standardisation process on how and when to use annotations. The purpose of annotations is to inform the standardisation and monitoring processes and guide the supervising examiners when they are checking the work of examiners within their team. The meaning of annotations and how they are used is specific to each component and is understood by all examiners who mark the component.

We publish annotations in our mark schemes to help centres understand the annotations they may see on copies of scripts. Note that there may not be a direct correlation between the number of annotations on a script and the mark awarded. Similarly, the use of an annotation may not be an indication of the quality of the response.

The annotations listed below were available to examiners marking this component in this series.

Annotations

Annotation	Meaning
	Unclear expression
	Credit-worthy point made
	Unclear expression
	Valid point/answer
	Blank page
	Example used
	Knowledge
	Response is mainly narrative
	Directly addressing the question

Annotation	Meaning
SEEN	Page has been seen by examiner
T	Use of appropriate terminology

Assessment Objectives

The Assessment Objectives are applied to each question. The assessment objectives for the paper are:

- **AO1** Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of media concepts, contexts and critical debates, using terminology appropriately. (60%)
- **AO2** Analyse media products, and evaluate their own work, by applying knowledge and understanding of theoretical and creative approaches, supported with relevant textual evidence. (40%)

The Level Descriptors guide examiners to an understanding of the qualities normally expected of, or typical of, work in a band. They are a means of general guidance and must not be interpreted as hurdle statements. For the purposes of standardisation of marking, they are to be used in conjunction with the Standardisation scripts discussed during the coordination meeting and with Team Leaders, as well as the question-specific notes.

The indicative content provided is for general guidance; it is not designed as prescriptions of required content and must not be treated as such. Whilst there are legitimate expectations of the content of most answers, examiners may see responses that include ideas not covered in the indicative content. For these cases, examiners should credit valid responses fairly and not penalise candidates for including valid points outside the mark scheme.

Using a banded mark scheme

Place the answer in a level first. Look for the “best fit” of the answer into a level. An answer needs to show evidence of most but not necessarily ALL of the qualities described in a level in order to be placed in that level. Then award a mark for the relative position of the answer within the level. Answers may be in different levels for different parts of the same Assessment Objective.

Higher level responses (Q1-3 Level 3, Q4 Levels 5-6) will demonstrate excellent knowledge and understanding of the key concepts (AO1). They should use a wide range of terminology accurately (AO1). They should show clear understanding of how meaning is created in the text (AO2). They should support their answer with many detailed references to the text (AO2).

Middle range responses (Q1-3 Level 2, Q4 Levels 3-4) will demonstrate satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the key concepts – there may be uneven coverage or some misunderstanding (AO1). They should use some terminology, but not always accurately (AO1). They should show some understanding of how meaning is created in the text (AO2). They should support their answer with some references to the text (AO2).

Basic responses (Q1-3 Level 1, Q4 Levels 1-2) will demonstrate basic knowledge and understanding of the key concepts –misunderstanding might be common (AO1). They might use some terminology, but rarely accurately (AO1). They will have limited understanding of how meaning is created in the text (AO2). They rarely support their answer with references to the text (AO2).

Section A: Media debates

Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
1	EITHER Media regulation To what extent does media regulation protect freedom of expression? <u>Indicative content</u> Candidates may draw upon a wide range of contemporary and historical case studies which can be used to support and illustrate key points. Candidates should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of contextual issues surrounding media regulation and be able to link them to their chosen case studies. Candidates may address: Classification/ labelling vs Censorship • The notion of regulation as a set of ethical principles vs a 'consequentialist ethics' (i.e. notional outcomes of particular practices determine policy); • Concepts of freedom of expression and how this is limited either in law or 'common sense'; • Rights to freedom of expression vs rights to be unharmed or even not offended; • The ways in which ideas about politics, art and comedy culture are mobilised in order to justify particular media content; • The ways in which ideas about class and reception are mobilised in order to justify different regulation strategies and policies; Online Safety Bill • The shifting sands of social norms which determine the limits of acceptability – see, for example the new BBFC guidelines and the response to perception of representations of language, sex, drug use and violence; • The tensions/balance between regulation (as a system of governance) and information (as a system of allowing adults to determine what they want to see/hear/read); (Classification/ labelling vs Censorship)	15	Candidates should be given credit for their knowledge and understanding, illustrated through case study material, relevant to the question. Assessment will take place across five criteria: • Media concepts (AO1) [3 marks] • Contexts and debates (AO1) [3 marks] • Use of terminology (AO1) [3 marks] • Analysis of how meaning is created (AO2) [3 marks] • Use of examples (AO2) [3 marks] Candidates' work should be judged on each of these criteria individually and marks awarded according to the level attained. It should be noted that it is possible for a candidate to achieve a different level for each assessment criterion. This guidance should be used in conjunction with the Level Descriptors. It is not prescriptive, nor is it exclusive; examiners must be careful to reward original but well- focused answers and implicit as well development. This indicative content is intended to indicate aspects of questions that may feature in candidates' answers.

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
1	The role of social media in fuelling ‘cancel culture’ around key topics such as gender identity, religion, politics in the Middle East.		

Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
2	OR Postmodern media ‘The postmodern media text is always about itself or other media texts.’ To what extent are self-referentiality and intertextuality the defining characteristics of postmodernism? <u>Indicative content</u> Candidates may draw upon a wide range of contemporary and historical case studies which can be used to support and illustrate key points. Candidates should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of postmodernism and be able to link them to their chosen case studies. Candidates may address: • Different interpretations of postmodernism and the strength/justification of these distinctions; • Postmodern thinkers such as Baudrillard and Kristeva who emphasise the significance of recycling, recontextualising and intertextuality; • Postmodern thinkers such as Derrida and Lyotard who emphasise the impossibility of fixed meaning in an age where signifiers slide infinitely over signifieds; • Students may argue that any of the following are key characteristics of Postmodernism if they provide valid justification and evidence: Collapse of the grand narrative Playfulness Homage Self-referentiality Irony Fragmentation of time/space/identity Privileging style over substance	15	Candidates should be given credit for their knowledge and understanding, illustrated through case study material, relevant to the question. Assessment will take place across five criteria: • Media concepts (AO1) [3 marks] • Contexts and debates (AO1) [3 marks] • Use of terminology (AO1) [3 marks] • Analysis of how meaning is created (AO2) [3 marks] • Use of examples (AO2) [3 marks] Candidates’ work should be judged on each of these criteria individually and marks awarded according to the level attained. It should be noted that it is possible for a candidate to achieve a different level for each assessment criterion. This guidance should be used in conjunction with the Level Descriptors. It is not prescriptive, nor is it exclusive; examiners must be careful to reward original but well- focused answers and implicit as well development. This indicative content is intended to indicate aspects of questions that may feature in candidates’ answers.

Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
3	OR Power and the media Explain why particular social groups may be misrepresented or underrepresented in the media. <u>Indicative content</u> Candidates may draw upon a wide range of contemporary and historical case studies which can be used to support and illustrate key points. Candidates should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of power and the media and be able to link them to their chosen case studies. Candidates may address: • The asymmetry between powerful and ‘weak’ voices in the media – how and where they are represented; Hierarchy of voices • Rhetoric – particular linguistic tropes which come to define particular social groups (e.g. ‘benefits scroungers’, travellers, the deserving and undeserving poor); • The political economy of the media – ways in which economic interests determine particular positions and inform the nature of debates; • News aesthetics – the ways in which conflicts, heroes and villains are used as tropes to generate engaging stories; Alternative news sources and their impact (Tim Tok etc.) • Examples of social change driven by the media; • Examples of resistance to change being fueled by the media; • Gramsci and Hegemony; • Theories of Dominant Ideologies and resistance to them; • Audience Theory, e.g. Stuart Hall/Morley; • Competing readings of different media texts. • ‘If you can’t see it you can’t be it’ – under represented groups absent from Hollywood/ Primetime TV	15	Candidates should be given credit for their knowledge and understanding, illustrated through case study material, relevant to the question. Assessment will take place across five criteria: • Media concepts (AO1) [3 marks] • Contexts and debates (AO1) [3 marks] • Use of terminology (AO1) [3 marks] • Analysis of how meaning is created (AO2) [3 marks] • Use of examples (AO2) [3 marks] Candidates’ work should be judged on each of these criteria individually and marks awarded according to the level attained. It should be noted that it is possible for a candidate to achieve a different level for each assessment criterion. This guidance should be used in conjunction with the Level Descriptors. It is not prescriptive, nor is it exclusive; examiners must be careful to reward original but well- focused answers and implicit as well development. This indicative content is intended to indicate aspects of questions that may feature in candidates’ answers.

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Marking criteria for Section A Question 1, Question 2 and Question 3				
AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of media concepts, contexts and critical debates, using terminology appropriately.			AO2: Analyse media products, and evaluate their own work, by applying knowledge and understanding of theoretical and creative approaches, to explain how meaning is created, supported with relevant textual evidence.	
9 marks			6 marks	
Media Concepts	Contexts & Critical Debates	Use of Terminology	Analysis of how meaning is created, including use of theory	Use of Examples
3 marks	3 marks	3 marks	3 marks	3 marks
Sophisticated understanding of and insightful reference to several relevant key concepts Insightful understanding of the wider contexts and critical debates raised in the question	A wide range of media terminology is used precisely and accurately, and with sophistication, to make subtle points	Sophisticated and insightful analysis of texts from multiple case studies is used to explore the chosen area in depth	Relevant theories are sophisticatedly used to explore the question	Insightful and fully appropriate selection of examples from a wide range of texts
3 marks	3 marks	3 marks	3 marks	3 marks
Clear understanding of and appropriate reference to some key concepts	Clear understanding of the wider contexts and critical debates raised in the question	Media terminology is used appropriately, to make clear points	Clear analysis of texts from one or more case study is used to respond appropriately Occasional references to relevant theories, not always accurately used or understood	Clear and appropriate selection of examples from a range of texts
2 marks	2 marks	2 marks	2 marks	2 marks

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AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of media concepts, contexts and critical debates, using terminology appropriately. 9 marks			AO2: Analyse media products, and evaluate their own work, by applying knowledge and understanding of theoretical and creative approaches, to explain how meaning is created, supported with relevant textual evidence. 6 marks	
Media Concepts 3 marks	Contexts & Critical Debates 3 marks	Use of Terminology 3 marks	Analysis of how meaning is created, including use of theory 3 marks	Use of Examples 3 marks
Basic understanding of and minimal reference to any key concepts 1 mark	Minimal understanding of the wider contexts or critical debates raised in the question 1 mark	Basic use of media terminology, with frequent errors which impede communication 1 mark	Basic analysis, from case studies which may not be appropriate to the question Minimal references to even basic media theory 1 mark	Basic and minimal selection of examples, may lack relevance in parts 1 mark
No creditable content 0 marks	No creditable content 0 marks	No creditable content 0 marks	No creditable content 0 marks	No creditable content 0 marks

Section B: Media ecology

Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
4	Explain how the media environment shapes our beliefs and values. <u>Indicative content</u> Material listed below demonstrates how candidates might approach the question. It is a description of possible content only. It is not prescriptive, nor is it exclusive; examiners must be careful to reward original but well-focused answers. This question is synoptic so candidates should draw on their learning throughout the course, and may also make connections between this learning and other, related, areas. The focus here is on the interrelationship between the media environment and the beliefs and values that are shared in a particular culture. As long as the evidence is appropriate, any conclusion is acceptable. Elements might include: • The characteristics of the modern world in which information is abundant, but certainty is elusive and how this creates the conditions for, for example, the growth of conspiracy theories, and disillusionment with mainstream politics; Monetisation of followers. • Anxiety about key issues (e.g. climate change) in tension with personal lifestyles and the desires fueled by capitalism via the media; Ownership • The appropriateness of the notion of ‘shaping’ in relation to beliefs and values – the extent to which personal values and judgements are purely personal, and separate from the media environment in which they emerge; • The seduction of and resistance to media messages; levels of online engagement • The ways in which the media encourage us to see ourselves as part of different (and different scales of) communities, and the effects of this;	30	Assessment will take place across five criteria: • Media concepts (AO1) [6 marks] • Contexts and debates (AO1) [6 marks] • Use of terminology (AO1) [6 marks] • Analysis of how meaning is created (AO2) [6 marks] • Use of examples (AO2) [6 marks] Candidates’ work should be judged on each of these criteria individually and marks awarded according to the level attained. It should be noted that it is possible for a candidate to achieve a different level for each assessment criterion. This guidance should be used in conjunction with the Level Descriptors. It is not prescriptive, nor is it exclusive; examiners must be careful to reward original but well- focused answers and implicit as well development. This indicative content is intended to indicate aspects of questions that may feature in candidates’ answers.

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
4	• The notion of ideology as either ‘false consciousness’ (Marx) or something which is inescapably part of our consciousness and even unconscious (Zizek, Fisher); • The significance of social groups and personal value formation – the degree to which authentic social bonds constitute resistance to the media environment or have another relationship with it.		

Marking criteria for Section B Question 4				
AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of media concepts, contexts and critical debates, using terminology appropriately.			AO2: Analyse media products, and evaluate their own work, by applying knowledge and understanding of theoretical and creative approaches, to explain how meaning is created, supported with relevant textual evidence.	
18 marks			12 marks	
Media Concepts	Contexts & Critical Debates	Use of Terminology	Analysis of how meaning is created, including use of theory	Use of Examples
6 marks	6 marks	6 marks	6 marks	6 marks
Sophisticated understanding of and insightful reference to several relevant key concepts	Insightful understanding of the wider contexts and critical debates raised in the question	A wide range of media terminology is used precisely and accurately, and with sophistication, to make subtle points	Sophisticated and insightful analysis of texts from multiple case studies is used to explore the chosen area in depth Relevant theories are sophisticatedly used to explore the question	Insightful and fully appropriate selection of examples from a wide range of texts
5–6 marks	5–6 marks	5–6 marks	5–6 marks	5–6 marks
Clear understanding of and appropriate reference to some key concepts	Clear understanding of the wider contexts and critical debates raised in the question	Media terminology is used appropriately, to make clear points	Clear analysis of texts from one or more case study is used to respond appropriately Occasional references to relevant theories, not always accurately used or understood	Clear and appropriate selection of examples from a range of texts
3–4 marks	3–4 marks	3–4 marks	3–4 marks	3–4 marks

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AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of media concepts, contexts and critical debates, using terminology appropriately.			AO2: Analyse media products, and evaluate their own work, by applying knowledge and understanding of theoretical and creative approaches, to explain how meaning is created, supported with relevant textual evidence.	
18 marks			12 marks	
Media Concepts	Contexts & Critical Debates	Use of Terminology	Analysis of how meaning is created, including use of theory	Use of Examples
6 marks	6 marks	6 marks	6 marks	6 marks
Basic understanding of and minimal reference to any key concepts	Minimal understanding of the wider contexts or critical debates raised in the question	Basic use of media terminology, with frequent errors which impede communication	Basic analysis, from case studies which may not be appropriate to the question Minimal references to even basic media theory	Basic and minimal selection of examples, may lack relevance in parts
1–2 marks	1–2 marks	1–2 marks	1–2 marks	1–2 marks
No creditable content 0 marks	No creditable content 0 marks	No creditable content 0 marks	No creditable content 0 marks	No creditable content 0 marks