



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

Media Studies

MEST3

(Specification 2570)

Unit 3: Media: Critical Perspectives

Report on the Examination

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General

This exam report aims to explain the overall strengths and weaknesses of answers to the June 2012 exam and also to give examples of good answers, to help teachers and future candidates improve. Well done to all the teachers and students who have worked so hard for this exam, we marked many very good answers.

SECTION A

The Section A products were two film trailers from the official websites, the Eclipse trailer from www.eclipsethemovie.com and the Let the Right One In trailer from www.lettherightoneinmovie.com

The questions encouraged candidates to critically analyse the texts and in question 2 and 3 to address the more complex ideas of media, issues, debates, theories and wider contexts.

The focus of the 3 questions is:

Question 1. Media concepts

Use the unseen products to answer a question on concepts – forms (media language, narrative, genre), representations, institutions, audiences or values.

This year's question was on narrative, focusing on the narrative technique of enigma.

Candidates are rewarded for:

- analysis of both media products, preferably detailed analysis with detailed reference to the products
- understanding of concepts, in particular in this question narrative.

Question 2. Media issues and debates

Use the unseen products to answer a question on media issues and debates.

Candidates may refer to other media products to support their answer.

The 'may' is intended to encourage candidates to move beyond the two unseen exam products and include examples of and from media products other than the two exam products.

Candidates are rewarded for:

- evaluation using media issues/debates/theories.
- supporting their answers with a range of examples from other relevant media products.

Question 3. Wider contexts

Use the unseen products to answer a question on wider contexts.

Candidates should refer to other media products to support their answer.

The 'should' is intended to tell candidates they will be expected to move beyond the two unseen products and include other examples.

Candidates are rewarded for:

- evaluation using wider contexts.
- Supporting their answers using a range of examples from other relevant media products.

For questions 2 and 3 candidates can include examples from a wide range of sources, for example their individual case studies, their MEST4 coursework, other class work and from their own media use.

There was an improvement in the quality of the answers in Section A. There was more focus on the question and the assessment, i.e. Q1 concepts, Q2 media issues and debates and Q3 wider contexts. There was also more consistency over the three questions in this exam. Many candidates wrote well over all three questions and divided their time up between the questions, using the marks for each question as a guide on how long to spend on each.

Candidates are rewarded if they make a number different points and for higher levels a range of different points in each question. They will not achieve as high a level if they only include one point in an answer, even if that one point is answered well.

Candidates really benefited from consuming a wide range of media products in class, but also particularly for their own use and this was particularly evident in this exam. Candidates who watched, read and listened to a range of media and had thought about the products could include lots of original examples to support their answers and link them to media issues they had studied that were relevant to the questions.

1. Evaluate how the two trailers use the narrative technique of enigma to encourage the target audience to watch the films.

This question was answered well by almost all candidates.
Good answers identified that:

- Dialogue was used to create enigma. For example the use of unanswered questions and unfinished conversations throughout both trailers. Higher level answers discussed the lack of dialogue and use of silence in *Let the Right One In* to create an uneasy and mysterious mood.
- Characterisation also created enigmas. Characters were introduced with establishing shots and scenes to establish a relationship between them and the audience, creating enigmas about the characters and the relationships between them, including love and conflict. Some candidates argued the use of children in *Let the Right One In* was more challenging and created more enigmas, because the narrative was less predictable than the more formulaic *Eclipse*. Higher level candidates also argued that *Twilight* needed fewer enigmas because it was an already popular franchise or needed more because it was the third instalment.
- The music changed pace building up to a climax in *Eclipse* and in *Let the Right One In* the eerie music suggested an unexplained threat, both creating enigma.
- Enigma was created by setting up two opposing sides, Strauss's binary opposites, positioning the audience with one side. Audiences were encouraged to watch to the film to enjoy the dramatic conflict and find out who won. Higher level answers commented that changes in the vampire genre meant there wasn't a traditional human vs. vampire/good vs. evil binary. The use of costume emphasised the opposites, seen in the colours of costumes, the snow white setting in *Let the Right One In* and pale faces. Sophisticated answers argued that many of the *Eclipse* audience would already know the ending so they watched for the pleasure of a narrative resolution they could predict or to see how the predictable ending was achieved.
- Fast editing promised an action packed film and glimpses of gruesome violence in *Let the Right One In*. Action scenes were not completed and often stopped mid action with no resolution, again creating enigma.

- The settings of the dark forest and rainy city in *Eclipse* and the snow covered town in *Let the Right One In* created an unsettling and other worldly mood. This suggested the threat or impending danger, which created enigma.
- The use of close ups showed intense emotions, promising a dramatic film and creating enigma to find out the resolution of the fear or love shown.
- Different angles also created enigmas. Low angle shots created powerful sometimes scary characters and threats and high angle shots made other characters seem vulnerable. Will the powerful character win or will the vulnerable one fight back?
- The common theme in recent vampire films and television of forbidden love and the love triangle in *Eclipse* also created enigmas.

2. Why are media products that represented outsiders, such as vampire films, so popular?

You may also refer to other media products to support your answer.

Good answers focused sharply on a range of media debates, issues and theories, with lots of examples from other media products to support their points.

Good answers read the question carefully and focused clearly on the ‘outsiders’ of the question. Some weaker candidates just explained why the films were popular, so by not reading the question carefully they limited the marks they could get.

Good answers included reference to the following points:

- The appeal of characters audiences could relate to. Higher level answers explored why this might appeal particularly to the teenage girl audience of *Eclipse* or to older audiences because everyone as felt an outsider at some point in their life. Sophisticated answers explored whether the ‘outsider’ role offered in *Eclipse* was actually quite a conformist one, only offering teenage girls the narrative of love.
- The pleasure of escapism. Stronger answers explained this more, for example allowing audiences to escape from their ordinary lives in to a more dramatic, exciting and certain fantasy world, where the audience could come to no harm. Higher level answers also discussed the pleasures of voyeurism.
- Outsiders being glamourised , for example the more positive and often sexualised representation seen in many recent vampire films and TV programmes. Producers could manipulate how they represented outsiders to position the audience.
- The narrative pleasures of seeing good triumph over evil and innocence rescued.
- Audience knowledge that the outsider will succeed in the end. Sophisticated answers debated whether the common ending was for them to be accepted as they were and stay different or if they had to conform to achieve a happy ending. Sophisticated answers also discussed whether this communicated a positive value of it being ok to be different or because the resolution was often that the outsider was absorbed back in to society, they were actually socially conservative rather than a celebration of difference. In addition some answers also said outsider narratives could offer a ‘happy ever after’ or at least a resolution not always possible in real life.
- Outsider characters had the narrative appeal for producers of providing disruption to the narrative. Outsiders face obstacles which can drive the narrative.
- The outsider character in the vampire genre has been popular in recent years, so producers remake them because they are less of a risk than something completely new. Producers capitalise on an already popular and profitable genres and representations. Higher level answers developed this point into a debate between pluralist ideas of responding to audience demands or Marxist ideas of exploiting audiences for profit.
- Hybrid genres appeal to a wide audience.

- Outsider characters can sometimes offer more alternative representations of men, women or youth. The media is guilty of stereotyping many groups, so audiences enjoy media products that offer alternative representations. However they can also reinforce stereotypes and demonise particular groups by focusing so much on problems, defining groups negatively by their social problems.

There was a wide range of examples used to support points made. Good answers used their examples to explain and support points, weaker answers just listed or described the example.

Harry Potter was the most popular example. TV dramas and sitcoms such as *Glee*, *Skins*, *Inbetweeners*, *Big Bang Theory* and *Misfits*. *True Blood*, *Vampire Diaries* and *Being Human* from the vampire genre. Superhero films such as the new *Spiderman* and *Avengers* films. Films that explore social issues such as *Ill Manors*, *Attack the Block* and *Juno*. Reality TV programmes such as *The Undateables*, *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* and *Big Brother* and particular characters in soaps. Music artists and bands, for example *Lady Gaga*.

Often the best points were made by examples that were quite different from the exam texts, where candidates could really show wider media issues and debates, rather than just listing products that were very similar or the same. It was good to see candidates using really original and up to date examples from films, TV programmes etc that they watched themselves and bringing them into their answers.

A range of theories were used successfully used to support points, for example Neale Repetition and Difference, Uses and Gratifications, Dyer's Utopian Pleasures, Cohen Moral Panic, Baudrillard Hyperreality and Post Colonialist theory.

3. Do you think official and unofficial websites contribute to a film's box office success?

You should refer to other media products to support your answer

Good answers included reference to the following points:

- Websites allow for global marketing. Higher level answers developed this point, explaining how this was important for a Hollywood blockbuster like the *Twilight* franchise, but that it could also, if used well be helpful for less well know films like *Let the Right One In* with a lower marketing budget.
- Unofficial sites can't be controlled by the film distributor. Critical reviews could damage a film's success. However if they were positive they had the advantage of being seen as unmediated.
- Fansites were usually positive and had the advantage of building up a fan community that could contribute to the success of a long running franchise. Social media was particularly useful in creating this.
- Peer to peer marketing can be effective, for example by being seen as independent and can easily become viral and spread quickly and cheaply online.
- Official websites and viral marketing can be constructed to appear unofficial, promising the audience an unmediated view of the film, but actually be carefully manipulated by the film distributor.
- Websites help to create a brand image for a film and especially for a franchise.
- Websites can add value to traditional marketing, by for example being up to date, offering exclusive information and also be a source of revenue, for example selling merchandise.
- Links to social media can contribute to the films success by for example, building a fan base and creating peer to peer marketing. Higher level answers developed this by

discussing the advantages of, for example actors' use of Twitter, promising the audience a personal relationship with the star of a film.

- Official websites now had less influence, with for example audiences watching trailers on YouTube or getting 'exclusive' information from unofficial sites. There was now no need to go the official websites, which only attracted already devoted fans so didn't really contribute to box office success.
- Official websites could offer audiences interactive features that made them feel more involved with a film, which could be a profitable way of sustaining the success of a franchise. Sophisticated answers debated how real this involvement was and were critical of the impression given of personal involvement.
- Unofficial websites could also provide links to download the film illegally, damaging the films profits and the film industry in general. Higher level answers developed this point further by discussing other industries such as music.
- While websites were useful, many films needed to use a wide variety of marketing techniques and multiplatform campaigns, including more traditional ones such as poster and TV campaigns.
- Websites now offered a wider range of ways of watching films and media in general e.g. Netflix, Lovefilm so box office success wasn't the only way for films to make profits. Higher level answers debated whether these were opportunities or threats to the film industry and to other industries such as music.

There was a variety of examples to support points.

Harry Potter was the most common, although weaker answers just listed it rather than using it to support or develop a point. Other common examples included *The Dark Knight*, *Avatar*, *Hunger Games*, *Prometheus* and *John Carter*. Specialist film websites, such as IMDB and Rotten Tomatoes. Quite a few candidates also included examples from the music industry, with examples of innovative techniques used on artist and band websites

Theories that were successfully used to support points included Marxist and Pluralist debates, a range of audience theories such as Hall Encoding Decoding, Morley Reception Analysis and utopian and dystopian theories of new media.

SECTION B

Candidates were asked to choose 1 out of 4 possible questions, 2 from each of the 2 pre set topics, Representation and the Impact of New and Digital Media.

They were reminded on the exam paper that they would be rewarded for showing evidence of independent study by using their:

- own individual case study topic
- own individual media products

to answer the question.

Candidates were rewarded for:

- an individual case study with a range of examples
- understanding of the pre set topic, representation or the impact of New and Digital Media
- application of relevant media issues/debates/theories/wider contexts
- focus on the question

In Section B, there was better focus on the question, with most candidates really using their individual case study to answer the question, rather than an answer that was 'everything I know about my case study'.

Case studies

There were fewer original case studies this series, with many candidates choosing very common topics such as representation of teenagers/youth. If candidates choose to do this, it is useful for them to choose at least some less obvious media products to focus on. Including less obvious examples allowed candidates to show their own understanding and evidence of independent study and often to make more complex and original points. The best case studies were produced by candidates that had worked hard throughout their course and thought critically for themselves.

The best case studies included:

- a range of different media products from all or most of the three platforms, with different representation/values/genres/producers etc.
- detailed examples from particular media products with detailed analysis
- evidence of research into media debates and issues and relevant wider contexts
- theory applied to media products used to explain and support
- a genuine interest in the case study they had chosen to do, seen by engagement with the issues and their own opinions.

It is important that candidates use their own individual case study to answer the question. There is still a minority of centres doing centre led case studies with only centre led examples. Candidates from one centre shouldn't all have the same case study. This doesn't allow candidates to show evidence of independent study, which excludes them from the higher levels. For example a centre all writing answers on the representation of youth, with the same or very similar media products is disadvantaging their candidates. In addition, candidates who had their own case study were more engaged and more willing to focus on the question, rather than repeat a pre learned answer of descriptive points. All or at least the vast majority of the media products candidates use to support their answer should also be individual.

Centres can start the pre set topics with a class overview on Representation and The Impact of New and Digital Media to introduce the topic and may want to do a mini class case study as an example, but then candidates should do their own individual case study, with their own choice of media products.

Good Section B answers:

- Read the question carefully and completed a short plan before they started writing.
- Answered the particular question, not 'everything I know about my case study'. Stronger answers identified and addressed the key words from the question in their answer and answered the question directly in their conclusion. Good answers answered all parts of the question.
- Included detailed analysis of and references to particular media products, rather than just general examples. For example not just Facebook but an image, piece of text from a particular Facebook page or not just True Blood, but a particular shot, scene, costume, storyline or piece of dialogue.
- Showed range in their answers. For example referring to a range of platforms and using products from different genres/institutions/representations/values. Candidates were also rewarded for referring to a range of media products to support their answer. Answers couldn't achieve the higher levels if they only used one or two. Most good answers focused on about four main media products and then supported this with briefer references to others.
- Challenged and disagreed with the questions and debated the arguments for and against. This fulfilled the Level 4 descriptor of, 'a sharp focus on the question' and 'engaged'.

- Applied media issues and debates, what does their case study suggest are the current issues in the media? Applied relevant media theories to their case study and media products throughout their answers, using the theory to answer the question and support the point they are making, not just describing a theory. Weaker answers tended to list pre learned centre led theories, that although relevant were not clearly applied to media products or used to answer the question.
- Included relevant wider contexts and again applied them to their own case study. Weaker answers tended to include lists of facts and statistics about an institution or the history of a particular topic with no evaluation or link to the question.
- Included a range of points, supported these with examples and detailed analysis, evaluated and included a range of media issues, debates, theories and wider contexts.

REPRESENTATION

For Representation, the most popular group was still young people/teenagers. Other popular social groups were women, people with disabilities and gay men. Original case studies included the representation of people with a mental illness, the elderly, conflict and war, protestors, the police and places such as London in Indian films and TV, Bradford, the Middle East. When candidates chose a large case study area, such as the representation of women, they were often more successful when they focused on a specific group within this, for example women in the horror genre, women in sport, women in power.

Candidates showed a good understanding of the topic of representation. Good answers didn't lose sight of explaining how their group or place was actually represented in individual texts. Higher level answers did this in detail, with detailed examples from media products.

4. There are a wide range of representations in the media and audiences are free to choose how they interpret them. Do you agree?

This was the most popular representation question and was generally answered well.

- Good answers focused on both parts of the question, the wide range of representations and audience interpretation. Weaker answers only focused on the representations and not the role of the audience, either because they hadn't studied the role of the audience or because they needed to read the question more carefully and plan their answer.
- Stronger answers analysed and evaluated a range of representations of their group or place as asked to in the question. Choosing a variety of media products when planning their case study would help this.
- Higher level answers include debates about active and passive audiences. They also included detailed examples of how media products encouraged audiences to have a dominant reading.
- Higher level answers used a variety of media issues, debates and wider contexts, for example pluralist/Marxist debates, the power of media producers and audiences, social or political issues that had influenced whether representations were narrow or offered a wide range.
- Weaker answers started their essays with lengthy descriptions of the history of the representation of their group and didn't leave themselves enough time to analyse contemporary examples in enough detail. Less history and taking the time to plan their answer before they started writing would have helped them.

5. How and why do alternative representations of the group or place you have studied challenge mainstream values and ideology?

This was a less popular question but was answered well by those that chose it.

- Good answers focused on both parts of the question, the alternative representations and how they challenge mainstream values and ideology.
- Good answers also supported the points they made with detailed examples and analysis of particular media products.
- Good answers addressed the values and ideology of the representations and explained in detail how they were different from more dominant representations.
- Good answers had a number of alternative representations to discuss. Choosing a variety of media products when planning their case study would help this.
- Higher level answers discussed how some representations were complex and not always simply dominant or alternative.
- Sophisticated candidates were able to use their NDM study to argue that new and digital media had at least the potential to offer more alternative representations and be a space where mainstream values and ideologies could be challenged. However they also discussed the potential influence of different texts, concluding that many of the more alternative representations had smaller audiences.

THE IMPACT OF NEW AND DIGITAL MEDIA

For The Impact of New and Digital Media case studies the most popular was Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. However this sometimes led to very general or overly descriptive case studies with a lack of detailed examples or detailed analysis. A case study on Twitter makes it difficult for candidates to include any detailed or high level analysis of actual media products/texts. A Twitter account or trending topic could be used as one of a range of examples, but using Twitter for all the examples doesn't work well.

A sharper focus and a selection of a small number of actual media products with detailed analysis would help. For example a case study on a particular record company with detailed examples of how their artists have used new and digital media, for example analysis of a music video or live performance on YouTube, the official Facebook page, a fansite, an online music magazine interview or review.

A few candidates chose their case studies poorly and struggled to keep a media focus, for example case studies on Apple and smartphones don't end up being Media Studies essays, include too much description and have no media products/texts to analyse.

Almost all candidates showed good understanding of the impact of new and digital media. A minority of weaker candidates got bogged down in only knowledge of new and digital media and their answers tended to be descriptive lists of, for example technical innovations. This was particularly true of very general case studies on, for example games which sometimes ended up being just a descriptive list of technical developments. Candidates would be better focusing on a particular games company or franchise.

Successful case studies often focused on a particular institution and a range of media products from that institution. For example the BBC or Channel 4, with a range of programmes, websites, trails etc or a film or games franchise with a range of trailers, official and fan websites, gameplay etc.

6. The only way to survive in the digital world is to keep innovating. Do you agree?

This was a popular question and was generally answered well.

- Most answers included a range of innovations that their case study showed.
- Weaker answers just described innovations with little evaluation. Good answers evaluated how and whether they had contributed to survival. Higher level answers explored arguments for and against and came to a conclusion for their own case study.
- Good answers also supported the points they made with detailed examples and analysis of particular media products. This may seem harder to do for NDM, but should be taken in to account when students are planning their case study and choosing media products/texts to focus on.
- Good answers included a range of media issues and debates and wider contexts to explain why their case study innovated, for example competition, ownership and control, profit, the influence of technology, convergence, globalisation.
- Good answers showed understanding of the impact of innovation on their industry in general as well as individual companies or texts.
- Sophisticated answers were often complex and often decided new and digital media offered both opportunities and threats for their case study. Some answers also discussed some innovations that hadn't been successful or that had been economically successful but could have negative consequences for audiences and society, for example privacy, choice.

7. Most traditional media's attempts to compete with new and digital media have been too little and too late. Does your case study support this view?

This was less popular but was usually answered well, with good focus on the question.

- Some weaker answers chose this question even though their case studies were based on exclusively new media products.
- Answers discussed the range of ways that traditional media had attempted to compete, for example by developing online products, using social media, allowing audience interaction. Good answers discussed a range of attempts, rather than just focussing on one.
- Good answers also supported the points they made with detailed examples and analysis of particular media products. This may seem harder to do for NDM, but should be taken in to account when students are planning their case study and choosing media products/texts to focus on.
- Weaker answers stayed at this level and just described traditional media's attempts. However, most answers evaluated the attempts, discussing how and why they were successful or 'too little and too late'. Higher level answers also evaluated the advantages for producers and audiences of the attempts to compete.
- Good answers developed this further and showed how their case studies raised important media debates and issues, for example the changing role and relationship between audiences and producers, the decline of some traditional media, the increasing use of social media, Marxist and pluralist debates, globalisation.
- Sophisticated answers discussed some of the advantages that traditional media had, for example the brand capital that many of the traditional media institutions had and how they had used this to exploit new media.
- Some answers quite rightly disagreed with the question, showing they could really apply their case study to a particular question. Sophisticated answers were often complex and concluded that their case study suggested some attempts were successful and some weren't, but that there wasn't a definite answer yet.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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