

GENERAL COMMENTS

The quality of student responses demonstrated a range of strengths and weaknesses, with many students handling one section well but performing poorly on another. Responses on Section C (Social Values) were generally not well handled.

Areas of strength and weakness

Short-answer questions rely on students demonstrating a clear understanding of their subject, and its specific knowledge and terminology. Many students handled the extended-response question (Section D) satisfactorily, but scored poorly in other sections.

Choice of texts

Selection of text is important for Sections A and C. Many interesting and refreshing texts were used in 2002; however, in some cases the texts used did not help students understand the key concepts outlined for the outcome and the related key knowledge and skills. Texts need to be chosen with care, especially for Section C (Social Values).

Examination preparation

Some students would benefit from more experience in responding to questions under examination conditions. This includes skill at identifying key words in questions. For example, in Section A, Question 3, a large number of students did not identify the key word 'editing' (although it appeared four times) and only responded to the bullet points. These responses did not answer the question.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Section A – Narrative

Many students handled this section well, showing a clear understanding of how specific story and production elements contributed to the particular narratives, and drawing upon an interesting range of texts to discuss. A number of responses used television texts. These often did not address specific aspects of television narrative and production conventions, such as the frequently on-going nature of a narrative, or the different lighting conventions sometimes demanded for studio production. Other text choices (e.g. silent movies, animation) also made it harder for students to write about production elements such as use of sound, or lighting. The questions in this section required students to have a firm understanding of both specific story elements and specific production elements.

Question 1 (Average mark 1.85/Available marks 3)

Students had to demonstrate how lighting, sound or acting contributed to an audience's understanding of a narrative. This was satisfactorily answered by many students, and the more successful answers focused on how the chosen element was used in a particular scene. This approach helped make clear the student's understanding of lighting, sound or acting. Less successful responses made a general comment that did not show the link between the element discussed and the audience's understanding. Responses on acting showed a poor grasp of the role or contribution of actors.

Question 2 (1.91/4)

'Cause and effect' is a basic element in understanding how a narrative develops, and is clearly identified in the study design. A high number of responses revealed students who did not know the term. By contrast, many students answered well, sometimes explaining how events at the beginning of the narrative caused other events and in so doing helped develop the narrative, and controlled the way that events in the narrative were organised.

Question 3 (3.67/8)

Students were asked to discuss how editing contributes to a sequence and the narrative in the two texts studied. Editing is a powerful production element in film and television narratives. The sequencing of shots can have an impact on suspense, on our understanding of a character's point of view, or on our response to the mood. It can have a strong rhythm (e.g. *Moulin Rouge*, *Run Lola Run*), or it can reflect a more leisurely pace. Many answers revealed a poor understanding of editing, confusing it with camerawork and did not address the specific related aspect. Answers sometimes did not discuss how editing was used in a specific sequence. It is imperative that students are able to demonstrate a detailed knowledge and understanding of the production elements, as listed in the study design.

Section B – Media production design

Students who answered this section well drew effectively upon their work earlier in the year. They demonstrated a clear understanding of the relationship between an intended audience and a finished product, and had a strong grasp of the particular qualities of the medium in which they would work.

Question 1 (3.61/6)

Successful media products are generally targeted at a specific audience – whether it is a teenager’s magazine, a television series aimed at high-earning 24–45-years-olds, a photographic exhibition for people with an interest in architecture. The most successful responses came up with production ideas that envisaged a particular audience, such as teenagers just finished school. The intended product was clearly linked to that audience, with a focus on holiday resorts likely to appeal to that group, and more importantly with an idea for a product that specifically addressed the interests of that group. Less successful students did not clarify the audience they had in mind. In such cases the intended product did not develop a close link between the product and the audience.

Question 2 (3.03/6)

Students had to expand on the ideas outlined in Question 1, specifically discussing how they would use two other design plan specifications in their product. More successful responses clearly identified design plan specifications (e.g. camera, edit details, layout) and explained how they would be used. Less successful responses frequently revealed a weak understanding of these specifications. Some students presented ideas for other media, or wrote about aspects of the planning process rather than explaining how their product would exploit particular design plan specifications.

Question 3 (1.34/3)

Students were asked to comment on the qualities or characteristics of their chosen medium of production. More successful responses clearly identified these characteristics (e.g. video can combine sound and eye-catching visuals to engage its audience). Less successful responses suggested that students did not understand the key term ‘medium’. Students who have developed skills in a medium could be expected to have an appreciation of its special characteristics.

Section C – Social Values

Many students revealed a poor understanding of the key concept, Social Values. These are different from aspects of society, or social issues. Many responses used gender, drugs, sexual preference, cars etc. as though they were social values, rather than factors about which society holds particular values or general attitudes. Others wrote about ‘the family’, without identifying the kind of family (nuclear, single parent, etc.) or what view was taken of that family. Still other students confused **social values with social issues**.

It was clear that certain texts studied had made it harder for students to clearly identify social values, and place them in the context of the period of production. Some responses did not suggest a benefit from the study of the text from this perspective but rather a confusion about the focus of the study undertaken. Current texts (e.g. currently screening TV series) frequently caused difficulties because the social values were not as visible as in series from 20 or 30 years ago. Satirical TV series or films also caused students more difficulty, because although these were frequently based on aspects of social values the extra level of satire or irony was difficult for students to understand or write about. Texts produced in one period but set in another period also caused difficulties, where students had trouble clearly identifying or describing the social values *of the period of production*.

Question 1 (3.47/7)

Students had to identify relevant social values of the time of their chosen text’s production, and to show that these are present in the text. More successful answers were able to clearly identify relevant social values. They made it clear that there was a general social attitude on the identified factor. For example,

One ethnic group was generally regarded as not equal to other ethnic groups. It was generally accepted that the proper role for a woman was to stay home, and look after the house, while the man was head of the household and went out to work.

From statements such as these students were able to show how the relevant social values were present in their text.

Question 2 (3.83/8)

Many responses basically repeated aspects of Question 1, instead of exploring how the text *supports and/or challenges* the social values outlined in responding to Question 1. More successful responses were alert to the ways that a text can support or challenge. They were sensitive to the mood of a scene, for example, which may mock what is on screen. In some cases, the canned laughter on the soundtrack was identified as ridiculing a certain behaviour. Or the impact of an ending, when a certain resolution of the story can be seen as endorsing a particular outcome. Or the way a character who embodies certain values and attitudes is presented as positive (endorsing those values) or negative (challenging those values.) These responses also generally showed a good knowledge of the period of production. There was a recognition of ‘emerging values’, or of different minority groups which may be emblematic of certain social values.

Section D – Media Influence

Question 1 and 2 (7.28/15)

Overall, this section was better handled than last year. Students showed a better grasp of major communication theories, of related research, and of major claims of media influence. In Question 1, where students were asked to discuss different ways of assessing the nature and extent of media influence, this information was frequently presented clearly. However, it was the better responses that went further and were able to discuss the implications of media influence. They saw that media influence meant more than the impact of a single road-safety advertising campaign,

claims made in the James Bulger killings, or the Columbine High School shootings. They showed an appreciation of the role of theories in attempting to explain certain phenomena, whereas less successful answers misunderstood, blaming *the theories* for various events. ('The advertisers used the bullet theory to persuade their audience.')

Question 2 asked students to discuss some of the issues involved in assessing the nature and extent of media influence. Bullet points indicated topics that could be explored, and were used in good answers. Less successful students went no further than a basic discussion of the theories. More successful answers showed an understanding that there are issues related to media influence, and developed these issues in their written responses. They were able to take their knowledge from a study of the theories, and extend it to address larger issues in terms of how we can determine if the media does influence us? if it does influence us, is that influence good or bad? what role do the various theories play in helping us resolve that issue? if the influence is bad (or if some of its influence is negative) are there measures that should or could be taken – by government, by media producers, by us?