



Department
for Education

Media studies

GCSE subject content

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The content for GCSE media studies

Introduction

1. GCSE subject content sets out the knowledge, understanding, and skills common to all GCSE specifications in a given subject. They provide the framework within which the awarding organisation creates the detail of the specification.

Aims and objectives

2. GCSE specifications in media studies must offer a broad, coherent and rigorous course of study, which will prepare students to make informed decisions about further study and progression to AS and A level or employment.

3. GCSE specifications in media studies must enable students to:

- demonstrate skills of enquiry, critical thinking, decision-making and analysis
- acquire knowledge and understanding of a range of important media issues
- develop appreciation and critical understanding of the media and their role both historically and currently in society, culture and politics
- understand and apply specialist subject-specific terminology to analyse and compare media products and the contexts in which they are produced and consumed in order to make informed arguments, reach substantiated judgements and draw conclusions about media issues
- appreciate how theoretical understanding supports practice and practice supports theoretical understanding
- develop practical skills by providing opportunities for creative media production

Subject content

4. GCSE specifications in media studies must recognise the fundamental relationship between theory and practice. Students must be required to develop and apply their understanding of the media through both analysing and producing media products¹, in relation to the theoretical framework set out in paragraph 5.

5. GCSE specifications in media studies must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework which informs all study of the

¹ The term 'media product' refers to media texts such as television programmes, newspapers, radio programmes etc., as well as to online, social and participatory media platforms.

media as set out below. The four areas of this theoretical framework, which are set out in detail in paragraphs 13-16, are:

- media language: how the media through their forms², codes and conventions communicate meanings
- representation: how the media portray events, issues, individuals and social groups
- media industries: how the media industries' processes of production, distribution and circulation affect media forms and platforms
- audiences: how media forms target, reach and address audiences, how audiences interpret and respond to them, and how members of audiences become producers themselves

6. GCSE specifications in media studies must require students to develop and apply knowledge and understanding of relevant theoretical approaches and theories specified in paragraphs 14, 15 and 16.

7. GCSE specifications in media studies must require students to study age appropriate examples of media products from all of the following media forms, using relevant aspects of the theoretical framework set out in paragraph 5:

- television
- film³
- radio
- newspapers
- magazines
- advertising and marketing
- online, social and participatory media
- video games
- music video

8. GCSE specifications in media studies must require students to study at least one audio/visual⁴, one print and one online media form in depth through contrasting media products and using all four areas of the theoretical framework. The media forms to be

² Forms of the media: see paragraph 7 for the media forms to be studied at GCSE.

³ Film is an inextricable part of the wider media landscape, which is intimately connected with other media, such as television, video games and online media. However, to avoid overlap with film studies GCSE, film should not be a primary object of study in this context. Students may study individual feature films, but this must only occur in the context of cross-media study, which explores the convergence of media platforms and technologies, or in the context of the study of media industries (see page 8). To avoid overlap with GCSE film studies, the media production (paragraphs 11 and 18) cannot be a film opening, film extract, complete short film or film trailer.

⁴ Audio/visual: refers both to audio-visual and audio media.

studied in depth, together with the associated media products, will be specified by the awarding organisation.

9. GCSE specifications in media studies must require students to study contrasting media products which together will:

- possess cultural, social and historical significance⁵
- reflect and illuminate the theoretical framework for the study of media outlined in paragraphs 5 and 13-16 and the theoretical perspectives associated with them
- provide rich and challenging opportunities for interpretation and analysis, enabling students to develop a detailed understanding of how the media communicate meanings

10. Together, the media products specified must ensure students study:

- a full range of products in terms of perceived quality, form and structure
- products from different historical periods
- products intended for different audiences
- products demonstrating emerging, future developments of the media
- products that they would not normally engage with

11. GCSE specifications in media studies must require students to complete one individual media production in response to a brief set by the awarding organisation. This production must require students to apply their knowledge and understanding of representation and media language from the theoretical framework in paragraph 5⁶.

Knowledge and understanding

12. GCSE specifications in media studies must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how media products reflect the social, cultural, historical and political contexts in which they are produced.

13. GCSE specifications in media studies must require students to draw on the theoretical framework in paragraph 5 to develop knowledge and understanding of the content specified in paragraphs 13-16.

⁵ This significance will primarily be established with reference to the theoretical framework outlined in paragraphs 5 and 13-16 and may be reflected in critical acclaim and/or audience popularity.

⁶ To avoid overlap with GCSE film studies, this production cannot be a film opening, film extract, complete short film or film trailer.

Media language

- the various forms of media language used to create and communicate meanings in media products
- how choice (selection, combination and exclusion) of elements of media language influences meaning in media products, including to create narratives, to portray aspects of reality, to construct points of view, and to represent the world in ways that convey messages and values
- the relationship between technology and media products
- the codes and conventions of media language, how they develop and become established as 'styles' or genres (which are common across different media products) and how they may also vary over time
- intertextuality, including how inter-relationships between different media products can influence meaning

14. GCSE specifications must require students to develop knowledge and understanding of theoretical approaches and theories of media language including:

- fundamental principles of semiotic analysis, including denotation and connotation
- theoretical perspectives on genre, including principles of repetition and variation; the dynamic nature of genre; hybridity and intertextuality
- theories of narrative, including those derived from Propp

Media representations

- the ways in which the media re-present (rather than simply present) the world, and construct versions of reality
- the choices media producers make about how to represent particular events, social groups and ideas
- the ways aspects of reality may be represented differently depending on the purposes of the producers
- the different functions and uses of stereotypes, including an understanding of how stereotypes become established, how they may vary over time, and how stereotypes enable audiences to interpret media quickly
- how and why particular social groups may be under-represented or misrepresented
- how representations (including self-representations) convey particular viewpoints, messages, values and beliefs, which may be reinforced across a wide range of media products
- the social, cultural and political significance of particular representations in terms of the themes or issues that they address
- how representations reflect the social, historical and cultural contexts in which they were produced

- the factors affecting audience interpretations of representations, including their own experiences and beliefs

15. GCSE specifications must require students to develop knowledge and understanding of theoretical approaches and theories of media representations including:

- theoretical perspectives on representation, including processes of selection, construction and mediation
- theoretical perspectives on gender and representation, including feminist approaches

Media industries

- the nature of media production, including by large organisations, who own the products they produce, and by individuals and groups
- the impact of production processes, personnel and technologies on the final product, including similarities and differences between media products in terms of when and where they are produced
- the effect of ownership and control of media organisations, including conglomerate ownership, diversification and vertical integration
- the impact of the increasingly convergent nature of media industries across different platforms and different national settings
- the importance of different funding models, including government funded, not-for-profit and commercial models
- how the media operate as commercial industries on a global scale and reach both large and specialised audiences
- the functions and types of regulation of the media
- the challenges for media regulation presented by 'new' digital technologies

Media audiences

- how and why media products are aimed at a range of audiences, from small, specialised audiences to large mass audiences
- the ways in which media organisations target audiences through marketing, including an understanding of the assumptions organisations make about their target audience(s)
- how media organisations categorise audiences
- the role of media technologies in reaching and identifying audiences, and in audience consumption and usage
- the ways in which audiences may interpret the same media products very differently and how these differences may reflect both social and individual differences
- the ways in which people's media practices are connected to their identity, including their sense of actual and desired self

- the social, cultural and political significance of media products, including the themes or issues they address, the fulfilment of needs and desires, and the functions they serve in everyday life and society
- how audiences may respond to and interpret media products and why these responses and interpretations may change over time

16. GCSE specifications must require students to develop knowledge and understanding of theoretical approaches and theories of media audiences including:

- theoretical perspectives on audiences, including active and passive audiences; audience response and audience interpretation
- Blumler and Katz's Uses and Gratifications theory

Skills

17. In analysing the media, GCSE specifications in media studies must require students to develop the ability to:

- analyse and compare how media products construct and communicate meaning and generate intended interpretations and responses
- respond through discursive writing to show knowledge and understanding of media issues
- use specialist subject specific terminology appropriately

18. In independently⁷ creating a media production, GCSE specifications in media studies must require students to develop the ability to:

- apply knowledge and understanding of media language and representation from the theoretical framework set out in paragraph 5 to a media production from the list of forms in paragraph 7 (not including film)
- use media language to express and communicate meaning to an intended audience

⁷ Unassessed students and others may act in, or appear in, the media product. In addition, unassessed students and others may operate lighting, sound, recording and other equipment under the direction of the assessed candidate if required.



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