



Department
for Education

Media studies

GCE AS and A level subject content

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The content for AS and A level media studies

Introduction

1. AS and A level subject content sets out the knowledge, understanding and skills common to all AS and A level specifications in a given subject. It provides the framework within which the awarding organisation creates the detail of the specification.
2. There is no requirement for students embarking on an AS or A level in media studies to have previously taken a GCSE media studies course. Students should, however, build upon the knowledge, understanding and skills gained through other relevant study at key stage 4, particularly literacy and analytical skills.

Aims and objectives

3. AS and A level specifications in media studies must enable students to:
 - demonstrate skills of enquiry, critical thinking, decision-making and analysis
 - demonstrate a critical approach to media issues
 - demonstrate appreciation and critical understanding of the media and their role both historically and currently in society, culture, politics and the economy
 - develop an understanding of the dynamic and changing relationships between media forms, products, media industries and audiences
 - demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the global nature of the media
 - apply theoretical knowledge and 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
 - engage in critical debate about academic theories used in media studies
 - appreciate how theoretical understanding supports practice and practice supports theoretical understanding
 - demonstrate sophisticated practical skills by providing opportunities for creative media production

Subject content

4. AS and A level specifications in media studies must recognise the fundamental relationship between theory and practice, requiring students to apply and develop their

understanding of the media through both analysing and producing media products¹ in relation to the theoretical framework set out in paragraph 5.

5. AS and A level specifications in media studies must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework which informs all study of the media as set out below. The four areas of this theoretical framework, which are set out in detail in paragraphs 13-28, are:

- media language - how the media through their forms², codes, conventions and techniques 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. AS and A level specifications in media studies must require students to study age appropriate examples of the media 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

7. A level specifications must extend these studies in breadth by requiring students to study at least one media product produced for a non-English speaking audience and at least one produced outside the commercial mainstream. A level specifications must also

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.

² Forms of the media: see paragraph 6 for the media forms to be studied at AS and A level.

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 GCE AS and A level film studies, 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).

extend studies in depth by requiring students to engage with complex media theories including structuralism, postmodernism and theories around ethnicity and postcolonialism.

8. AS and A level 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 studied in depth at both AS and A level, together with the associated media products, will be specified by the awarding organisation.

9. AS and A level 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 underlying the study of media outlined in paragraphs 5 and 13-28 together with the theoretical perspectives associated with them
- illustrate a full range of media products in terms of perceived quality, form and structure
- provide rich and challenging opportunities for interpretation and in-depth critical analysis, enabling students to develop a detailed understanding of how the media communicate meanings and how audiences respond
- cover different historical periods and different global settings
- be intended for different audiences
- demonstrate emerging, future developments of the media
- cover examples of media students would not normally engage with

10. In addition, at A level, specifications must require students to study:

- at least one media product produced before 1970
- at least one media product produced for a non-English speaking audience
- at least one media product produced outside the commercial mainstream
- at least one media product targeting, or produced by, a minority group

11. AS and A level specifications in media studies must require close analysis and comparison of media products in relation to relevant key social, cultural, economic, political and historical contexts.

12. AS and A level specifications must require students to apply knowledge and understanding of the media studies theoretical framework, set out in paragraph 5, to an

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

⁵ This significance will primarily be established with reference to the theoretical framework outlined in paragraphs 5 and 13-28 and may be reflected in critical acclaim and/or audience popularity.

individual media production⁶ in response to a brief set by the awarding organisation. At AS, knowledge and understanding will be applied to a single product of the media (audio/visual, print or online). At A level, knowledge and understanding will be applied to a cross-media production⁷ reflecting the digitally convergent nature of contemporary media.

Knowledge and understanding

13. AS and A level specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following aspects of:

Media language

- how the different modes⁸ and language⁹ associated with different media forms communicate multiple meanings
- how the combination of elements of media language influence meaning
- how developing technologies affect media language
- the codes and conventions of media forms and products, including the processes through which media language develops as genre
- the dynamic and historically relative nature of genre
- the processes through which meanings are established through intertextuality¹⁰
- how audiences respond to and interpret the above aspects of media language

14. In addition, A level specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:

- how genre conventions are socially and historically relative, dynamic and can be used in a hybrid way
- the significance of challenging and/or subverting genre conventions
- the significance of the varieties of ways in which intertextuality can be used in the media
- the way media language incorporates viewpoints and ideologies

⁶ To avoid overlap with GCE AS and A level film studies, this production cannot be a film opening, film extract, complete short film or film trailer.

⁷ Cross-media production: a production of related products which reflects the way digital platforms are exploited by producing, for example, a television programme and a related magazine and website. To avoid overlap with GCE AS and A level film studies, this production cannot include a film opening, film extract, complete short film or film trailer.

⁸ Modes: images, sound, speech and writing.

⁹ Language: media language associated with audio-visual, audio, print and online media.

¹⁰ Intertextuality: the way aspects of a particular media product relate to another and thus accrue additional significance.

15. AS and A level specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following theoretical aspects of media language:

- semiotics including Barthes
- narratology including Todorov
- genre theory including Neale

16. In addition, A level specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of theories associated with media language including:

- structuralism including Lévi-Strauss
- postmodernism including Baudrillard

17. AS and A level specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following aspects of:

Media representation

- the way events, issues, individuals (including self-representation) and social groups (including social identity) are represented through processes of selection and combination
- the way the media through re-presentation construct versions of reality
- the processes which lead media producers to make choices about how to represent events, issues, individuals and social groups
- the effect of social and cultural context on representations
- how and why stereotypes can be used positively and negatively
- how and why particular social groups, in a national and global context, may be under-represented or misrepresented
- how media representations convey values, attitudes and beliefs about the world and how these may be systematically reinforced across a wide range of media representations
- how audiences respond to and interpret media representations

18. In addition, A level specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:

- the way in which representations make claims about realism
- the impact of industry contexts on the choices media producers make about how to represent events, issues, individuals and social groups
- the effect of historical context on representations

- how representations may invoke discourses and ideologies and position¹¹audiences
- how audience responses to and interpretations of media representations reflect social, cultural and historical circumstances

19. AS and A level specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following theories associated with representation:

- theories of representation including Hall
- theories of identity including Gauntlett

20. In addition, A level specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of theories associated with representation including:

- feminist theories including bell hooks and Van Zoonen
- theories of gender performativity including Butler
- theories around ethnicity and postcolonial theory including Gilroy

21. AS and A level specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following aspects of:

Media industries

- processes of production, distribution and circulation by organisations, groups and individuals in a global context
- the specialised and institutionalised nature of media production, distribution and circulation
- the relationship of recent technological change and media production, distribution and circulation
- the significance of patterns of ownership and control, including conglomerate ownership, vertical integration and diversification
- the significance of economic factors, including commercial and not-for-profit public funding, to media industries and their products
- how media organisations maintain, including through marketing, varieties of audiences nationally and globally
- the regulatory framework of contemporary media in the UK
- the impact of 'new' digital technologies on media regulation, including the role of individual producers

¹¹ Position: how audiences are encouraged to adopt a particular 'position' or point of view in relation to what is being represented.

22. In addition, A level specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:

- how processes of production, distribution and circulation shape media products
- the impact of digitally convergent media platforms on media production, distribution and circulation, including individual producers
- the role of regulation in global production, distribution and circulation
- the effect of individual producers on media industries

23. AS and A level specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following theories associated with media industries:

- power and media industries including Curran and Seaton

24. In addition, A level specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of theories associated with media industries including:

- regulation including Livingstone and Lunt
- cultural industries including Hesmondhalgh

25. AS and A level specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following aspects of:

Media audiences

- how audiences are grouped and categorised by media industries, including by age, gender and social class, as well as by lifestyle and taste
- how media producers target, attract, reach, address and potentially construct audiences
- how media industries target audiences through the content and appeal of media products and through the ways in which they are marketed, distributed and circulated
- the interrelationship between media technologies and patterns of consumption and response
- how audiences interpret the media, including how they may interpret the same media in different ways
- how audiences interact with the media and can be actively involved in media production

26. In addition, A level specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:

- how specialised audiences can be reached, both on a national and global scale, through different media technologies and platforms

- how media organisations reflect the different needs of mass and specialised audiences, including through targeting
- how audiences use media in different ways, reflecting demographic factors as well as aspects of identity and cultural capital
- the role and significance of specialised audiences, including niche and fan, to the media
- the way in which different audience interpretations reflect social, cultural and historical circumstances

27. AS and A level specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of theories associated with media audiences including:

- media effects including Bandura
- cultivation theory including Gerbner
- reception theory including Hall

28. In addition, A level specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following theories associated with media audiences:

- fandom including Jenkins
- 'end of audience' theories including Shirky

Skills

29. In analysing media, AS specifications must require students to be able to:

- analyse and compare how media products construct and communicate meanings through the interaction of media language and audience response
- use key theories of media studies and specialist subject-specific terminology appropriately
- debate key questions relating to the social, cultural, political and economic role of the media through discursive writing

30. In independently¹² creating media, AS specifications must also require students to be able to:

- apply knowledge and understanding of media language, representation, media industries and audiences to a media production based on one media form from the list in paragraph 6 (not including film)

¹² 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.

- use media language in a single media form to express and communicate meaning to an intended audience

31. In analysing media, A level specifications must require students to be able to:

- analyse critically and compare how media products, including products outside the commercial mainstream, construct and communicate meanings through the interaction of media language and audience response
- use and reflect critically upon a range of complex theories of media studies and use specialist subject specific terminology appropriately in a developed way
- debate critically key questions relating to the social, cultural, political and economic role of the media through sustained discursive writing

32. In independently¹³ creating media, A level specifications must also require students to be able to:

- apply knowledge and understanding of media language, representation, media industries and audiences to a cross-media production based on media forms from the list in paragraph 6 (not including film)
- apply knowledge and understanding of the digitally convergent nature of contemporary media noted in paragraph 22
- use media language across media forms to express and communicate meaning to an intended audience

¹³ 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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