



Department  
for Education

# **Media studies**

**Draft 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 they 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 will 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 institutions 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
  - engage in critical debate about academic theories used in media studies
  - demonstrate sophisticated practical skills through providing opportunities for creative media production
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 products in relation to the theoretical framework set out in paragraph 5.

## Subject content

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 forms<sup>1</sup>, codes, conventions and techniques communicate meanings
- Representation - how media forms portray events, issues, individuals and social groups
- Media institutions – how the media industries' processes of production, distribution and circulation affect media forms and platforms
- Audiences - how the media forms target, reach and address audiences, how audiences interpret and respond to them and how 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 the theoretical framework set out in paragraph 5:

- television
- film<sup>2</sup>
- 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 extend studies in depth by requiring students to engage with complex media theories including discourse analysis, postmodernism and theories of race and postcolonialism.

8. AS and A level specifications in media studies must require students to study at least one audio/visual<sup>3</sup>, one print and one online media form in depth through contrasting media products. At A level, students will apply the requirements of A level study set out in paragraphs 13 to 28 (A level sections) to their study of each specified media form. The

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<sup>1</sup> Forms of the media: see paragraph 6 for the major media forms to be studied at AS and A level.

<sup>2</sup> 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 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 institutions.

<sup>3</sup> Audio/visual: refers both to audio-visual and audio media.

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 significance<sup>4</sup>
- 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 1950
- 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 all media products studied 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 individual media production<sup>5</sup> 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 production<sup>6</sup> reflecting the digitally convergent nature of contemporary media.

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<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

## 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 modes<sup>7</sup> and language<sup>8</sup> 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 intertextuality<sup>9</sup>
- 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

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

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
- discourse analysis including Fairclough
- genre theory including Neale

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

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<sup>7</sup> Modes: images, sound, speech and writing.

<sup>8</sup> Language: media language associated with audio-visual, audio, print and online media

<sup>9</sup> Intertextuality: the way aspects of a particular media product relate to another and thus accrue additional significance.

- 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 constructs 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 mis-represented
- 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 institutional 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 position<sup>10</sup> audiences
- 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 theoretical aspects of representation:

- theories of representation including Hall
- theories of identity including McRobbie

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

- theories of ideology including Gramsci
- 'race' and postcolonial theory including Said
- feminist theory including Butler
- postmodernism including Baudrillard

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<sup>10</sup> Position: how audiences are encouraged to adopt a particular 'position' or point of view in relation to what is being represented

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

- 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 institutions 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

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 impact of patterns of ownership and control including conglomerate ownership, vertical integration and diversification on society and culture
- the role of regulation in global production, distribution and circulation
- the effect of individual producers on media institutions

23. AS and A level specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following theoretical perspectives on media institutions:

- media economics including Doyle
- political economy including Murdock and Golding

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

- regulation including Livingstone and Lunt
- the propaganda model including Chomsky

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 institutions 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 the following theoretical perspectives on media audiences to include:

- media effects including Bandura
- cultivation theory including Gerbner

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

- cultural studies including Morley
- fandom including Jenkins
- cyberdemocracy including Poster

## Skills

29. In analysing media, AS specifications must require students to be able to:
- analyse critically 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, technological and economic dimensions of media through discursive writing
30. In creating media AS specifications must also require students to be able to:
- apply knowledge and understanding of media language, representation, media institutions and audiences to a media production based on one media form from the list in paragraph 6
  - use media language in a proficient and fluent way 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
  - apply 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, technological and economic dimensions of media through sustained discursive writing
32. In creating media, A level specifications must also require students to be able to:
- apply knowledge and understanding of media language, representation, media institutions and audiences to a cross-media production based on two media forms from the list in paragraph 6
  - apply knowledge and understanding of the digitally convergent nature of contemporary media noted in paragraph 19
  - use media language in a highly proficient, fluent and sustained way to express and communicate meaning to an intended audience



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