A2 Media Studies

OCR Unit G325: Critical Perspectives in Media
Questions 1 (a) and 1 (b)
Thrillers and Music Video

This guide is aimed at students sitting the OCR exam Paper G325 for A2 Media Studies. In this section we focus on revising for questions 1. Question 1 is broken down into two section: 1(a) and 1(b).

Students have to answer a set questions selected by the exam board from a choice of concept areas. In question 1(a) students should write about both Foundation and Advanced Portfolios. For question 1 (b) they need only focus on one of the productions. The choice of production will depend upon the concept that the question focuses on.

For the purposes of this guide it is assumed that students have completed the following briefs for the Foundation and Advanced Portfolios respectively: the opening sequence to a thriller film and the production of a popular music promotion package including a music video. However, as this is a concept-based examination, many of the study skills are generic and can be easily adapted.

Front of Exam Paper

OCR Advanced GCE MEDIA STUDIES

Unit G325: Critical Perspectives in Media

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES
Answer **both parts of question 1** from section A and **one question** from section B.

INFORMATION FOR CANDIDATES

The number of marks for each question is given in brackets [ ] at the end of each question or part of question.

The total number of marks for this paper is 100

Section A: Theoretical Evaluation of Production

You must answer <u>both</u> 1(a) and 1(b).

In this section you need to write about your work for the Foundation Portfolio and Advanced Portfolio units. You must answer both 1(a) and 1(b).

Sample Question One (a)

1 (a) "Digital technology turns media consumers into media producers". In your own experience, how has your creativity developed through using digital technology to complete your coursework productions? [25]

EXAM TIP: THIS QUESTION IS WORTH A QUARTER OF THE MARKS FOR THIS PAPER, SO YOU SHOULD NOT SPEND MORE THAN 30 MINUTES ON IT. READ AHEAD TO QUESTION 1(b) TO MAKE SURE YOU DON'T DUPLICATE WHAT YOU NEED TO WRITE FOR THAT. REMEMBER CONTINUOUS PROSE AND PARAGRAPHING ARE VERY IMPORTANT.

Revision task

Re-read the question and **define in your own terms** what is meant by the following words or phrases:

Digital technology _____
Media consumers _____
Media Producers _____
Creativity _____

Using the **seven paragraph structure** below select five topics that you could talk about when answering this question:

Paragraph 1 - introduction – address question and define key terms

Paragraph 2 _____

Paragraph 3_____

Paragraph 4_____

Paragraph 5_____

Paragraph 6_____

Paragraph 7 – conclusion – summarise your five main pints

Focus on writing skills

Paragraphs – should be four to five sentences plus and should be connected by one thought, idea, point of view or topic.

Comparative vocabulary – however, on the one hand, one the other hand, likewise, similarly, conversely, by the same token, but

Topic sentences – useful at beginning of a paragraph, tell the reader what the topic is and in an exam should refer back to the question e.g. 'One of the ways in which digital technology **turns consumers into producers** is by making creativity fun'.

Give examples – in English you'll have used quotations, in Media Studies you need concrete factual evidence to support you claims. PEE – Point – Evidence –

What it says in the specification

Question 1(a) requires candidates to describe and evaluate their skills development over the course of their production work, from Foundation Portfolio to Advanced Portfolio. The focus of this evaluation must be on skills development, and the question will require them to adapt this to **one or two specific production practices**. The list of practices to which questions will relate is as follows:

1. **Digital Technology**
2. **Creativity**
3. Research and planning
4. Post-production
5. Using conventions from real media texts

In the examination, questions will be posed using one or two of these categories.

EXAM TIP: THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT REFLECTING UPON THE PROGRESS MADE FROM FOUNDATION TO ADVANCED PORTFOLIO. YOU NEED TO TALK ABOUT BOTH MAIN PRODUCTIONS AS WELL AS PRELIMINARY AND ANICILLERY TEXTS.

Writing your own exam questions

The question in this section is only a sample question, which focuses on two of the five specific production practices (Creativity and Digital Technology). However, there are three more (Research and Planning, Post-Production, Using conventions from real media texts). Using the same format, have a go at writing some specimen exam questions for the following topics:

Research and planning

Post-production

Using conventions from real media texts

You like to follow the formula of the specimen question: start with a quotation and then follow it up with a question. Suggested quotations:

'**Technology has taken all the creativity out of media production**'

'**A project that is too well planned lacks opportunities for spontaneity and creativity.**'

'**Media producers can learn nothing from studying the conventions of old texts.**'

Things to include for Thrillers and Music Video

Digital Technology
Internet, PowerPoint, YouTube, Wikipedia, IMDB, BFI Online, website/blogs, Facebook, MySpace, Sony digital cameras, editing software.

Creativity
Research into genre, mood boards, music, test shots, actors, location, scripting, mise-en-scene, camerawork, editing, lighting, costume, inspiration from other texts.

Research and planning
Audience research, BBFC, textual analysis of other texts, focus groups + questionnaires, UK Tribes, genre research, storyboarding, scripting, props lists, locations, test shots, filming schedule, actors.

Post-production
Uploading, editing, effects, music, transitions, sound, narrative, rendering

Using conventions from real media texts

Thrillers:
Reference to specific films, directors, actors, film noir, jeopardy and suspense, camerawork, editing, narrative, mise-en-scene, lighting, music etc

Music video
Reference to specific music videos, directors, performers, history of music video, camerawork, editing, narrative, mise-en-scene, lighting, music etc subversion or adherence to conventions

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Revision task

List the five biggest mistakes you've made on a practical during you A-level as a whole.

1
2
3
4
5

List five things you think you've learnt about productions a successful practical production.

1
2
3
4
5

Revision Task

Use the grid below to see how the use of digital technologies and creativity are interconnected.

Digital Creativity	IMDB, BFI Online,	Wikipedia,	PowerPoint,	YouTube,	MySpace,	Digital cameras,	Editing software.	Website/ blog	Facebook,
Research into genre	√	√	√	√					
Actors, location, scripting,					√			√	√
Mood boards					√			√	
Costume, mise-en-scene, lighting				√				√	√
Music and sound					√	√	√		
Test shots,				√	√	√	√		√
Editing and camerawork,						√	√		
Inspiration from other texts.	√	√	√	√					

Revision Task

Now create your own grid for the following pairing:

1. Digital technology and research and planning

2. Conventions from read media texts and post-production

3. Research and planning and post-production

What it says in the Mark Scheme

Candidates will need to refer to their work for the Foundation Portfolio and Advanced Portfolio units.

Useful production terms and conceptual media terminology

Audience – profile, testing, target, active, passive, ironic, effects, uses and gratifications

Institution – Research BBFC, BFI, Film studios, Film case studies, distribution, YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, MTV, VH1.

Representation –age, race, sex, class and status, ability disability, race and ethnicity, national and regional identity.

Forms and Conventions – Storyboarding, Generic Conventions, Camerawork (shot types etc), Editing, Soundtrack, Lighting, Mise-en-scene, Scripting, Costume

New Media Technology -Interactivity, Quality, Synergy and Convergence, Multiplatform branding

Revision Task

Define each of your practical productions in relation to the conceptual areas outlined above: audience, institution, representation, forms and conventions, new technologies.

Sample Question One (b)

(b) "Media texts rely on cultural experiences in order for audiences to easily make sense of narratives". Explain how you used conventional and / or experimental narrative approaches in one of your production pieces. [25]

EXAM TIP: AGAIN, THIS IS A 25 MARK QUESTION, WORTH A QUARTER OF THE TOTAL FOR THIS PAPER SO SPEND NO MORE THAN 30 MINUTES ON IT. AS WITH QUESTION 1(a) YOU NEED TO WRITE IN CONTINUOUS PROSE AND MAKE GOOD USE OF PARAGRAPHS. UNLIKE THE PROCEEDING QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ONLY WRITE ABOUT ONE OF YOUR PRODUCTIONS, WHICH ONE DEPENDS ON THE CONCEPT AREA TO WHICH THE QUESTION REFERS.

Revision task

Re-read the question and define in your own terms what is meant by the following words or phrases.

Media text _____

Cultural experience _____

Audience _____

Narrative _____

Experimental_____

Using the seven paragraph structure below select five topics that you could talk about when answering this question:

Paragraph 1 - **introduction – address question and define key terms**

Paragraph 2 _____

Paragraph 3_____

Paragraph 4_____

Paragraph 5_____

Paragraph 6_____

Paragraph 7 – **conclusion – summarise your five main points.**

What it says in the specification

Question 1(b) requires candidates to select one production and evaluate it in relation to a media concept. The list of concepts to which questions will relate is as follows:

1. Genre
2. **Narrative**
3. Representation
4. Audience
5. Media language

In the examination, questions will be set using **one of these concepts only**. In some circumstances, candidates will be expected to select the production that appears to relate most effectively to the specific concept that arises in the exam question. However, **the requirement for candidates to evaluate one of their productions in relation to a concept does not assume that the concept will necessarily always fit easily and in an orthodox way**. Thus in some cases candidates will be describing their productions in terms of them not relating straightforwardly to the concept. For example, a candidate producing three websites over their two portfolios might describe ways in which websites cannot be understood easily through applying conventional narrative theory. Whether the candidate applies the concept to the product or uses the production to challenge the concept, it is essential that candidates are sufficiently knowledgeable about the concept for either approach.

Genre – the grammar underpinning media texts

Film
The film you produced should have been in a recognisable genre. Typically at AS level this is thriller: a diverse genre, which drams upon various sub-genres including film noir and crime fiction. Aspects of genre you should comments on include camerawork, editing, mise-en-scene, sound, narrative and theme.

Popular Music Video
Though music video is a genre of short film making within that genre there are variety of sub-genres including performance clips, abstract styles and narrative based. Underpinning this of course is the diverse range of visual codes associated with individuals styles of music including hip-hop, r+b, hard rock, Goth, teen pop, adult-orientated rock etc.

Top Tip
To what extent does you production **adheres to or subverts genre conventions** will be a key theme of any response to genre.

Theoretical perspectives:
Tzvetan Todorov (Fantastic uncanny/fantastic marvellous)

Key Quote: Scientific method does not require us to observe every instance of a phenomenon in order to describe it; scientific method proceeds rather by deduction (Todorov, 1970)

Narrative – the way the story is told.

Film
Although you have produced the opening sequence to a film you will have produced a treatment in which the storyline for the whole film is delineated. To some extent the narrative structure will be determined by the genre conventions; however, the are certain rules that many film follow. Vladimir Propp's work on the fairy tale has been particularly influential. To what extent does you treatment adhere to this eight-point structure?

1. Normality
2. Extraordinary event
3. Avenge
4. Magical Agent
5. Good v Evil
6. Hero Escapes
7. Final Task
8. Glory/Reward

Popular Music Video
The narrative structure of music video tends to be more abstract that other forms of short film making; however, some production do adhere to more traditional forms of story-telling e.g. Gun 'n' Roses 'November Rain', which is very definitely adheres to the conventions of romantic tragedy. More often, the narrative is less obvious and is connected to the associated social activity with which the music is synonymous e.g. going to a gig or a nightclub. Other productions emphasise the celebrity lifestyle of the artist or in the case of director Jonas Ackurland his short films stray into avant-garde cinema.

Top Tip
Not all media texts have strong narrative elements and in this case it may be easier to argue against the importance of narrative in music video than it would be to talk about the narrative of your treatment for a thriller production.

Theoretical perspectives:
Vladimir Propp (Fairy tales)

Revision task:

Propp' theory fits hundreds of films and plays. Using the simplified plan can you think of a film that fits with Propp's structure fits George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977)?

1. Normality
2. Extraordinary event
3. Avenge
4. Magical Agent
5. Good v Evil
6. Hero Escapes
7. Final Task
8. Glory/Reward

Representation – the way the world is presented

Issues of representation relate closely to your study of television drama at AS. For this unit you will have considered the following issues:

1. **Age,**
2. **Race + ethnicity**
3. **Sex,**
4. **Class + status,**
5. **Gender**
6. **National and regional identity,**
7. **Ability and disability.**

Film
One of the key issues of representation in film is that of sex and gender. Laura Mulvey's work in the 1970s discussed the way in which cinema is shot through a 'male-gaze' i.e. the cinematography pleases the fantasies of the heterosexual male audiences. In turn women are objectified and presented in ways that are both sexualised and unrealistic. By the same token much Western cinema is heavily restricted in its depiction of non-Western cultural forms. Many productions have the tendency to festishize the otherness of non-Caucasian groups in a way that Homi Bhahba defines as 'orientalist'.

Popular Music Video
Music video is much less restricted in its representation of cultural identity. Indeed, in the 1980s the medium broke new ground for both African American artists and gay artists. In part this can be attributed towards the more topsy-turvy carnivalesque world of popular music in general, in which the normative structures of everyday life are turned on the head. That said, the status of a performer is often a central feature of the music video, while explicit depictions of disability tend to be put to one side.

Top Tip
When referring to issues of representation NEVER refer to the way in which your production depicts the world as 'normal' or 'ordinary'. These terms are value loaded and even if you did choose to depict people in ways that you consider normal that 'normality' needs exploring.

Theoretical perspective:
Laura Mulvey – The Male Gaze.

Useful quote: 'Women then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of women still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning'.
 (Mulvey, 1975, 586)

How do your Foundation and Advanced Productions represent people?

Representation	Foundation Production	Advanced Production
Age		
Race and Ethnicity		
Class and status		
Ability and Disability		
National and Regional Identity		
Gender		
Sex		

Audience – the consumers of the text

When defining the demographic that consume media texts it is useful to consider them in much the same terms we use when discussing issues of representation. And, of course, like many things in Media Studies, the two things are very connected: how an issue is 'represented' will depend on the audience for whom it is being portrayed.

1. **Age,**
2. **Race + ethnicity**
3. **Sex,**
4. **Class + status,**
5. **Gender**
6. **National and regional identity,**
7. **Ability and disability.**

Film

Film is an unusual medium in contemporary media in that it still has a mainstream audience. While audiences for television and print media have fragmented with the proliferation of niche market product in digital age, cinema audiences remain strong. Going to see a film is a staple cultural event for Western media consumers: more so than going to the theatre or an Art gallery. That said, cinema audiences are nowhere near the levels of the pre-War years: in age before television is what not uncommon for people to go to the cinema more than once a week. Unsurprisingly this period coincided with the golden age of Hollywood studio system.

While many films continue to adhere to the 'blockbuster' format, featuring huge budget and well-known stars, the decreasing cost of film production and accordingly many more low-budget independent films get made than in preceding yeas. While these might not always make it the local multiplex, many large cities have Art-house cinema showing more left field and avant-garde selections. Of course on of the key factors in audience consumption patterns is social class; as the French theorist Pierre Bourdieu argues education and cultural consumption are intimately connected.

Popular Music Video

The dynamics of audience consumption of popular music video has altered radically over the past fifteen years. Once upon a time, popular music consumption was cohered around the mainstream with the Top 40 countdown on Radio one and the BBC television show Top of the Pops being the most important event in the week. This all changed in the Noughties, with the deregulation of broadcast media, the proliferation of digital technology and the mp3.

Over the past ten years pop music consumption has become more fragmented with products niche marketed at defined communities of consumers. In this sense genre has become more important with audiences identifying with specific subcultures. This pattern echoes the work of Dick Hebdige in the 1970s who looked at the way in which punk subculture was linked to specific visual codes and clothing conventions. Today this strategy is more formalised with the Internet, MySpace and YouTube catering for specific subcultural groups.

Theoretical perspectives:
Dick Hebdige - Subculture and the Meaning of Style
Pierre Bourdieu - Distinction

Media Language – the deconstructive toolkit

When considering the role of media language in understanding contemporary media productions it is perhaps useful to consider the way in which technical terms informed your analysis of television drama at AS or GCSE. In this sense it is useful to use the same categories of deconstruction when thinking about your own media texts:

Camera Shots, Angle, Movement and Composition

Shots: establishing shot, master shot, close-up, mid-shot, long shot, wide shot, two-shot, aerial shot, point of view shot, over the shoulder shot, and variations of these. Angle: high angle, low angle, canted angle. Movement: pan, tilt, track, dolly, crane, steadicam, hand-held, zoom, reverse zoom. Composition: framing, rule of thirds, depth of field – deep and shallow focus, focus pulls.

Editing

Includes transition of image and sound – continuity and non-continuity systems. Cutting: shot/reverse shot, eye line match, graphic match, action match, jump cut, crosscutting, parallel editing, cutaway; insert. Other transitions, dissolve, fade-in, fade-out, wipe, superimposition, long take, short take, slow motion, ellipsis and expansion of time, post-production, visual effects.

Sound

Diegetic and non-diegetic sound; synchronous/asynchronous sound; sound effects; sound motif, sound bridge, dialogue, voiceover, mode of address/direct address, sound mixing, sound perspective. Soundtrack: score, incidental music, themes and stings, ambient sound.

Mise-en-Scène

Production design: location, studio, set design, costume and make-up, properties. Lighting; colour design.

In additions to this it is useful to think about the following concepts areas revised in part one (a):

Audience – profile, testing, target, active, passive, ironic, effects, uses and gratifications, defined communities, subcultures.

Institution – Research, BBFC, BFI, Film studios, Film case studies, distribution, YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, MTV, VH1.

Representation –age, race, sex, class and status, ability disability, race and ethnicity, national and regional identity.

Forms and Conventions – Genre, Storyboarding, Generic Conventions, Camerawork (shot types etc), Editing, Soundtrack, Lighting, Mise-en-scene, Scripting, Costume

New Media Technology -Interactivity, Quality, Synergy and Convergence, Multiplatform branding, Postmodernism, Niche markets,

Revision task

Perform a detailed textual analysis of each of both your Foundation and Advanced Productions. Use the media language covered in the preceding section to guide you.

Production one:

Camera Shots, Angle, Movement and Composition

Editing

Sound

Mise-en-Scène
.

Production two:

Camera Shots, Angle, Movement and Composition

Editing

Sound

Mise-en-Scène

Focus on writing skills

Explanation/analysis/argument – explore different interpretations and multiple meanings. Acknowledge that different audiences will read your text in different ways and that the meaning of a texts changes according to context and over time. However, also be clear about your interpretation of the text.

Use of examples - although this question requires you to focus on one production remember there are many stages to the production. Also remember that the examiner wont have seen your production so some contextual information will be necessary – describe interesting and relevant aspects.

Use of terminology – make sure your work is sprinkled with technically specific and conceptually accurate terms. Remember part of what makes you a Media Studies student is your ability to speak in this specialised dialect! The key thing is to show off; for example, when making reference to specific shot state the angles and shot type. Cohere your argument around conceptual terms like audience, representation, forms and conventions, institution etc.

Mark Scheme

Candidates will need to refer to their work for the Foundation Portfolio and Advanced Portfolio units.

1. Explanation/ analysis/argument (10 marks)
2. Use of examples (10 marks)
3. **Use of terminology (5 marks)**

Explanation/ analysis/argument (9-10 marks)
Candidates demonstrate a clear understanding of narrative theories /approaches and relate them articulately to the production process, describing specific decisions made in relation to narrative and expectations of audience response.

Use of examples (9-10 marks)
A broad range of relevant and interesting examples of the creative process are offered.

Use of terminology (5 marks)
Both conceptual language and production terminology are applied with excellent results.

Complex issues have been expressed clearly and fluently using a style of writing appropriate to the complex subject matter. Sentences and paragraphs, consistently relevant, have been well structured, using appropriate technical terminology. There may be a few, if any, errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Basic Media Studies Glossary

Aerial shot - a shot from a crane, plane, or helicopter.

Bias - a preference that interferes with objective judgements.

Camera angle - the position of the camera relative to the horizontal plane of the subject. In a high-angle shot, the camera is above the subject; in an eye-level or flat shot, the camera is on the same plane as the subject; in a low-angle shot, the camera is below the subject. Camera angles should make sense within the context of the shot.

Camera distance - the apparent distance of the camera from the subject (extreme close (XCU), close-up (CU), medium shot (MS), long shot (LS)).

Code - a system of signs--verbal, aural or visual--used to convey meaning.

Composition (visual media) - the placement and use of all the various elements in the frame of a movie, television show, or photograph in order to achieve maximum impact.

Continuity - the scripted part of a documentary program that introduces the topic, connects the various components (usually recorded interviews), and concludes the program; provides coherence to the disparate components of these programs.

Convention - a generally accepted custom or an established rule.

Crosscutting - intermingling shots of different events, used to suggest parallels or to create suspense.

Dissolve - the superimposition of one shot, which is fading out, on the next shot that is fading in.

Editing - a process of selecting, arranging, and combining shots.

Episode - one show of a television series.

Establishing shot (ES) - generally a long shot or extreme long shot used to show the setting.

Extreme close up (ECU) - a close up in which a small detail fills the entire screen.

Extreme long shot (ELS) - a very wide shot, often a panoramic view.

Fade-in - a shot that begins totally over or under exposed (white or black) and gradually becomes properly exposed.

Fade-out - a shot that ends by changing from the proper exposure to an extreme under or over exposure.

Fast motion - the opposite of slow motion (i.e., filmed at fewer than 24 frames per second).

Frame - a single, still image from a film or video.

Freeze frame - an effect in which a single frame is held on screen for an indefinite time.

Genre - a way to classify prose, poetry, drama, and other media.

High angle shot - a shot in which the camera looks down upon the subject from a higher vantage point.

Jump cut - an abrupt and jarring change from shot to shot or scene to scene.

Juxtaposition - the positioning of items side by side or close together.

Long shot (LS) - a wide shot or a scene, which relates the subject to the background or setting.

Low angle shot - a shot in which the camera looks up at the subject from a lower vantage point.

Media effects - a general term that refers to the consequences or impacts of media use on individuals, society, and culture.

Medium shot (MS) - a medium close shot in which the head, shoulders, and chest are normally included in the frame.

Montage - a sequence of shots cut together often in a stylized way, to suggest a theme or idea rather than a continuous event.

Narration - a scripted voice-over commentary, read by a narrator or participant in a film.

Pan - short for "panoramic" shot; a horizontal movement in which the camera is turned from the left to right or right to left to follow a moving subject or give a sweeping view across a scene.

Patch - the process of connecting audio devices so that the sound, in the form of electrical energy, is transferred from one to the other.

Point of view (POV) - a subjective shot that shows the point of view of a particular character.

Scene - a clearly identifiable part of an event, usually in a single location and in a single time span; it generally consists of several shots.

Sound editing - stage in which sound effects and music are added to program.

Sound effects (SFX, FX) - sound from any source other than voice-over narration, lip-sync, or music.

Stereotype - a highly opinionated, predictable, biased, and simplistic view.

Storyboard - a "short shot" script which includes drawings of each shot for a movie or for some television shows.

Synchronized sound - the matching of sound to action on the screen.

Text - anything that is read, listened to, or viewed.

Tilt - the vertical equivalent of a pan, in which the camera is titled up or down.

Tracking shot (dolly shot) - a shot in which the camera is mounted on a wheeled platform or dolly to create smooth, steady movements.

Travelling shot - a shot taken from a moving vehicle.

Zoom shot - camera shot that creates the illusion of moving toward or away from a subject simply by changing the focal length of the lens. A Zoom In magnifies objects to make them appear close; a Zoom Out widens the angle view, making objects appear to move farther away.