



## Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Media Studies

Unit Support:

MEST2: Creating Media



## UNIT SUPPORT

### MEST2: Creating Media

This unit accounts for 50% of the final AS grade and, as such, should be accorded appropriate weighting in terms of support and classroom delivery. It actually accounts for the equivalent of two and a half hours per week class contact (assuming a five hour teaching week.) However, because of the close possible relationships between MEST 1 and MEST 2 it is perfectly possible for centres to integrate aspects of the two units so that they support each other.

Centres, will, in all likelihood, be teaching two cross-media topics for MEST 1 and candidates could easily be encouraged to supplement their own and others' knowledge and understanding as well as supplementing the breadth of the curriculum by presenting their research and pre-production work to the group in a relatively formal manner. This might be useful to teachers in providing resources to the group and helping teachers keep abreast of the vast range of media available across the three platforms. There are, of course, clear key skills opportunities here as well.

There are four components to this unit and candidates will need to manage their time carefully if you are to be able to send their work to the Moderator by the deadline. A possible timetable might run as follows:

- Research and practice productions to be completed by early December
- Intentions finalised and pre-production work completed by mid January
- All Production work to be finished towards the end of the Spring term
- Leaving candidates the Easter holiday and the early part of the Summer term to complete their Evaluations

There is considerable freedom in terms of content within the Coursework Briefs as to what sort of projects candidates undertake and they are usually defined more by institutional or audience led concerns; candidates will, therefore, need to take particular care in researching these areas and making sure that the productions conform to the institutional context and clearly target a well-defined audience.

Candidates should choose their topics carefully, in consultation with you, and it is likely that they will want to choose a project that is reasonably clearly linked to one of the cross-media topic areas that you are teaching in preparation for the MEST 1 examination. Having said that, the candidates should not choose projects that are the same as those being taught for MEST 1 and neither should separate topics be taught for MEST 2 with entire groups ending up submitting Productions from the same genre or the same subject matter, except where this is defined by the Brief.

If candidates are working as a group you should make sure that all the members of the group can contribute equally and that the size of the Production reflects the size of the group. It is certainly unlikely that you would want them to work in a group of more than three or four people, as the size of the Production and the logistics of making sure that everyone had a chance to contribute properly would work against the likelihood of the Production being a success.

## Research

Before candidates can even begin to plan their Productions they will need to *research* the area in which they plan to work.

The AQA Brief will give candidates a context in which to base their work, normally this will be institution and audience centred but will not be fully realised, giving candidates freedom and scope for their research. For example, a Brief might tell candidates that their Production should target young people but make no mention of ethnicity, regional issues or sexuality. In this case candidates **should** research and analyse these issues and consider how their **specific** audience will be targeted without presuming a white, heterosexual, middle-class lifestyle.

Candidates might research the kinds of institutions that produce similar genre/content media artefacts to those they are intending to work on. They might then look at how these institutions present themselves in terms of brand and how this brand appeals to its target audience.

Similar media artefacts can be researched and analysed in a similar fashion before candidates set out a profile of their own target audience.

**Example:** A candidate could be planning to make the opening sequence of a psycho-thriller genre-based film and their research might engage with some of the following:

Primary sources: 4/5 films that they have analysed for themselves and

Secondary sources: reviews from specialist film magazines, lifestyle magazines and newspapers, official and fan-based web-sites, audience profiles from media industry sites, etc, as well as reading more theoretical media texts that engage with issues of genre and film.

- **Genre:** the psycho thriller has clear links to both thriller and horror movies, and candidates should ask themselves what marks them off as a separate genre from both of these. Another question that they could address is whether the 'psycho-killer' is different from the serial killer.
- **Narrative:** Most psycho-thrillers have employed the conventions of realism in cinema with a linear narrative following the line of cause and effect through a three-act structure. However, some psycho-thrillers use narrative techniques of flash-back (how is this signified?) and first-person narrative voiceover. The openings of most psycho-thriller films serve to introduce the audience to the primary location, the protagonist and antagonist, and many films use elements at the beginning that foreshadow elements that can be found at the end.
- **Media Language:** mise en scene; the psycho-thriller makes use of both urban and rural locations; candidates should ask how and why it does so – how is the city/countryside represented? There are commonly startle shots and jump cuts used in psycho thrillers – how and why are they used? Soundtrack character motifs are often used, how and why? There are often stock characters and scenes, what are they and to what effect are they used? e.g. the secondary victim and the false resolution.
- **Representation:** the psycho-thriller has been a predominantly white American genre down the years, although there are some notable exceptions.

How do the exceptions differ from the mainstream? Male and female psychos are represented quite differently what are the similarities and differences?

- The conventional **audience** for mainstream films is age 15 – 25 with a male bias. Is the audience for psycho-thrillers any different to this? If so, why might this be?
- **Institution:** the vast majority of psycho-thrillers have been Hollywood productions down the years. What kinds of audiences do mainstream Hollywood films target and how does the content reflect this? How do non-Hollywood productions reflect where they originate from?
- **Values and Ideology:** There are various common oppositions within psycho-thrillers; e.g. promiscuity versus fidelity, the individual versus the community. What values and ideologies do the films that the candidate has studied promote and which do they criticise.

Of course this is not intended as a prescriptive or exhaustive list, there are many other issues that candidates can engage with in their research.

## Intentions and Pre-Production

Candidates can then go on to formalise their intentions for their Productions by setting out what they are hoping to achieve, a rationale if you like; this will certainly include a clear identification of primary and secondary audiences and ideas on how the detail of the production will target them.

Through the individual production and revision of mock-ups, storyboards or shooting-scripts candidates should engage carefully with the signification process.

If working in a group individual ideas should be drafted before the group settles on a final project, which may well contain ideas from all of the individuals' initial pieces. In this instance it is likely that the group will benefit from having fixed a common rationale before commencing the pre-production stage.

It is important that candidates be realistic about what they can achieve, and consider the resources (both human and equipment) that are available to them. If they are working as part of a small group, are they able to get together outside of class time. Does their project require them to film or take photographs outside of school? How will they get there? Can they go back again in order to correct mistakes or equipment failures? Will the people that they want to involve be as committed to the project as they are?

While these may seem to be rather elementary considerations, it is vital that candidates consider the demands of the project that they wish to undertake at the start and accept some timely teacher advice about the practicalities of their plans.

## Evidence

Candidates should submit:

- a representative sample of their research along with a summary of their findings
- A full list/bibliography of resources accessed
- their rationales
- mock-ups and storyboards/shooting scripts

In respect to the research evidence swathes of highlighted text and/or notes should *not* be submitted although annotated photocopies demonstrating analysis of primary texts might be appropriate.

If the centre has asked candidates to present their research to the group then a Powerpoint printout and script notes might fulfil a number of these requirements.

## The Productions

It is important that candidates undertake a practice practical Production in order to familiarise themselves with the equipment and to realise the demands of their final Production.

Example practice practicals:

- Shoot a thirty-second video about buying a drink or parking ticket from a machine. Try putting different styles of music on the soundtrack and see what effect this has upon the impact of the piece.
- Take a series of photographs on a theme such as 'loneliness' or 'autumn'
- Write some copy for a local newspaper for an article about a bus driver strike or a series of shoplifting offences at a local shop. Take photographs to illustrate your story.
- As a class, divide into pairs and storyboard a short sequence about a man picking up a child from school, then present your sequence to the class and explain the function of each shot – the framing, the mise en scène, soundtrack and dialogue. What do you want each element to communicate to the audience?
- On paper try designing a number of pages for a fan website for a media star of your choice
- Using a desktop publishing package, add a picture of yourself to an image that you have found on the internet or scanned from a magazine. Remove any existing captions or text and add your own.

As stated in the specification, the Productions should be as fully realised as possible. The aim for candidates is to make productions about which they can explain why every element is like it is and what they were hoping to communicate through that element. E.g. in a psycho-thriller they might want a particular character to be wearing mirror sunglasses in order to signify that he is trying to hide the true nature of his violent character.

Although the Productions are linked it is envisaged that there will not be much repetition of images or text between the two. Given the different platform and audience this is unlikely to be appropriate in any case.

The exam board does allow candidates to make some use of 'found' material, that is material that they have not created themselves; obviously they can use music that they have not written or performed themselves or short clips of video that it would be impractical for them to film, explosions for example. However, it is expected that the Productions should be substantially the candidate's own work and that, where there is much use of found material, it should be extensively manipulated so that they are not just re-presenting someone else's work. If candidates do need to include found material, make sure that they keep the originals so that the moderator can see how the candidate's work differs from them.

## The Evaluation 1500 words

The function of the Evaluation is to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the Productions in relation to the media concepts and the media context in which candidates were working. They should take care not to slip into simply *describing* the processes they went through in the creation of their Productions or finding excuses for why their Productions are not as good as they might have been. These are the sorts of questions that they should be looking to answer in their Evaluation:

- What kind of institutional context did the Productions fit into?
- What were the target audiences and what effects did the candidate hope to have on them?
- What genre(s) was the candidate working in and how would this be apparent to their audience?
- How do the Productions communicate meaning to their audiences through the various aspects of media language that have been employed?
- How were the narratives constructed and what part did they play in the creation of the meaning/experience of the pieces.
- What kind of values and ideologies did the Productions promote or attack? How were these apparent in the texts?
- What issues of representation do the Productions raise?

In addition there should be some, relatively short, consideration throughout the piece of how the three different media platforms facilitate communication and audiences' different relationships with them.

Candidates should try to use the vocabulary of Media Studies throughout their Evaluation, e.g. writing about the 'signification process' rather than the 'creation of meaning.'

Candidates should also be encouraged to stick to the word limit, as, unless they do, it is unlikely that they will be able to hit the top band descriptor which calls for cogency.

Centres are reminded of the existence of Coursework Advisors (details from AQA) who will be happy to give advice with any aspect of the MEST 2 coursework.