



GCSE

Media Studies

8572/C Non-exam assessment: Creating a media product

Report on the examination

Version: 1.0
June 2025

Further copies of this report are available from aqa.org.uk

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Introduction

This year, online submission was the 'new normal,' with centres knowing that this would be the submission method from the start of the year. Most centres were therefore well prepared for this, and there seemed to be very few issues as a result.

As we had expected, with two print briefs available this year, they were the choice of the majority of centres or students.

The use of AI has been on a rapid increase over the past year, and while some uses are valid, the entire creation of products through AI is not. The use of found images was also on the increase, although the specification has always been clear that these are not allowed. There will be more on this later in the report.

It felt, to the moderating team, that a significant minority of teachers had not accessed the advice and guidance available to them, including the teachers' version of the NEA briefs booklet. In addition to the booklet and this report, teachers can also access:

- Assessed folders of student work on the Teacher Online Standardisation system (TOLS) on AQA's Centre Services, with written commentary as to how marks have been awarded.
- Guidance documents on the GCSE Media Studies section of the AQA website, for both teaching and submitting the work.
- Live, on-demand and archived professional development training courses / materials, both on Centre Services and on the main AQA website.
- One-to-one email advice from their assigned NEA advisor – any centres requiring this support who are not yet aware of their advisor should contact eos@aqa.org.uk citing their centre number.

Applying the assessment criteria

Approximately 55% of centres' marking was within tolerance of the agreed AQA standard. This obviously means that approximately 45% of centres' marking was outside that tolerance, almost always being too lenient overall, although sometimes also being too severe at the bottom end of the mark range. As in all previous series, it is the marking of the Statement of Intent and of Production: Effectiveness that is most likely to be inaccurate, whereas the marking of Media Language and Media Representations is much more secure.

Statements of Intent

Despite our emphasis on this aspect in training sessions, and in the individual feedback to centres, we are still seeing whole centres with far too much concentration on theory in the statements of intent, at the expense of writing about intentions for the media product.

There is no need to reference any theorists or theories in order to gain full marks. Instead, the best statements give clear, detailed evidence of the student's specific intentions regarding their production work, such as outlining how and why the mise-en-scène will be constructed for their photographs, and why specific actors or models are being chosen to create specific

representations. The theoretical framework is addressed by discussing aspects such as camera angles, shot sizes, deliberate signifiers to be included, and the relationship being built with the audience, rather than by including theorists.

After reading a high-quality statement of intent, moderators can already imagine what the product will look and/or sound like and can understand how the decisions taken would meet the needs of the designated audience.

Sometimes students did not mention the key focus of the brief. This was particularly the case with the health drink adverts, where a surprising number of students spent most of the statement describing the benefits of their drink without mentioning their plans for the adverts at all, a clear misunderstanding of the statement's purpose.

Several centres still presented statements of intent as evaluations which had clearly been written after products had been completed; centres are reminded that the statement should explain *intended* uses of elements of the theoretical framework rather than concentrating on how they *were* used.

As has been true since the inception of this qualification, statements were skewed towards media language or audiences, with representations (when mentioned) being vague and not always coordinated with the brief. There were quite a few statements where the target audience discussed was clearly not the audience specified in the brief, which had implications for the marking both the statement and of Production: Effectiveness.

Marking of the production

It is always the advice of the moderating team to start with the Production: Effectiveness mark, to avoid penalising or rewarding the same elements twice.

Production: Effectiveness for an audience

The key statements in this section of the marking criteria relate to meeting the brief and the needs of the audience and using media conventions. In centres where marking of this section was outside of tolerance, the biggest issues were products not meeting the brief but being awarded high level marks as if they had, products not using conventions but being placed into the top bands, or products using found images or (much more rarely) copied text from elsewhere.

There has been a marked rise in the use of found images, as well as the use of AI. While the latter is permitted under certain circumstances for imagery (never text), the former is not permitted at all, even within manipulated images. Students should not be using any found images/footage or copying and pasting any text in order to meet the requirements of the brief. If they do, the specification (pages 22-23) makes it clear that the Production: Effectiveness mark has to be capped at the top of level 2, a maximum of 8 marks out of 20. Where centres had not applied this cap, this was often enough to pull folders out of tolerance of the agreed standard and was probably the biggest issue we came across this year.

As all work is now submitted digitally, moderators can quickly check whether an image or a piece of text has been copied from elsewhere. Centres need to make the same checks if they are not sure whether the work is the student's own. Students using apps such as Canva to

create their products can very easily use the image library within the app to add ‘finishing touches’. Many students did this in their health drink adverts, using images of fruit, for example. These are found images and therefore should not be used. Their use adversely affects students’ marks.

There were far fewer students misinterpreting the briefs this year, or ‘bending’ them to their own preferences. It is hoped that centres have taken on the advice to ensure that all students have their own copy of the brief they are following and are therefore able to use it as a checklist several times during the production process. There were some students who ignored the need for the film promotion to be for a superhero film, and some who ignored the ‘aspirations’ focus of the health drink brief, or the need for a narrative situation and character. Their work could not be said to meet the brief fully (level 5) or to have met almost all the requirements of the brief (level 4) as these were crucial elements. But happily, far more students engaged with the briefs as they were intended and created some very successful products that showed a real understanding of the conventions of those forms.

Production: Media Language

Once Production: Effectiveness has been marked, any issues with meeting the brief can be put to one side, and the ability of the student to make media language choices and to construct representations can be assessed on their own merits.

Both Media Language and Media Representations tended to be more accurately marked than the other two aspects of the marking criteria. The emphasis in marking these sections is on the choices the student has made and how well these convey meanings.

As stated above, there is growing evidence of the use of AI in imagery. A separate section has been added to the candidate record form for this, so that AI generators and the prompts used can be listed. These enable the moderator to see the decisions that have been made by the candidate. It is advised that AI is only used where it would not be reasonable or safe to take photographs of the same subject – explosions and other worldly landscapes in the superhero film posters are obvious examples of where AI was correctly used. Where students could reasonably take photographs – such as of cut fruit, or of someone engaging in exercise – AI should not be employed. To do so almost always takes away the nuanced decision-making from the student and places it within the AI generator. The student cannot be rewarded for decisions they did not make.

Please note: AI generation should not be used for any text, either in the statements of intent or in the productions.

There was some superb photography for each of the relevant briefs, and some exceptional blending of real photography and AI elements in the superhero posters. The best uses of media language were seen in folders with a high level of verisimilitude, clearly based on excellent research into the media format.

Production: Media Representations

This was generally marked accurately, as students had often given at least some thought to representation, both of people involved and of the product being promoted, in the most popular briefs. There was, happily, a move away from the tendency to reward Language and

Representations with the same marks, perhaps because the use or lack of representations was more obvious and thus easier to accurately reward.

Some students had clearly thought very carefully about how to represent their subjects through a combination of verbal and non-verbal codes, with a very clear appreciation of stereotype/countertype (for example, the use of individuals representing different social groups on adverts or the choice of characters representing Global Majority groups in the film posters).

However, some students did not make it clear how their subjects were being represented. This was particularly evident in some of the health drink adverts where the focus on the characters did not really match the lifestyle element of the brief. It was also an issue for some film posters, where the representations of the movie represented far darker or family-unfriendly themes/characters than the brief allowed. In general, students continue to find representation a little more challenging than media language, reflected perhaps in the lack of detail seen in statements of intent regarding this area of the theoretical framework.

Common misunderstandings and rubric infringements

The most common misunderstandings and rubric infringements have mostly already been outlined. These are the inclusion of too much theory and not enough detail in the statement of intent, the use of found images and an over-reliance on AI in the production.

The other issue moderators saw most often was products not meeting the minimum word count. Both the print briefs included the need for written content: 70 words per health drink advert, and 150 words for the film synopsis. Student work that does not meet *all* the requirements of the brief cannot gain marks in the highest level for Production: Effectiveness, and occasionally such work was over-rewarded despite not meeting the minimum word count. Students should always have a copy of the brief they are answering so that they can use it as a checklist to avoid these problems. Teachers should also check against the brief when marking the work.

Rubric infringements beyond the use of found images were very rare indeed. The handful that occurred were mainly where students had worked together, using the same images or footage. All work must be created individually, although students can use other people as their cast and crew. All decisions must be the student's own, or they cannot be rewarded.

Responding to the different briefs

The five briefs this year included two print briefs. We are aware that print is a preferred option for some centres, but cannot guarantee two print briefs every year, as the emphasis changes each year. There will always be at least one brief in each of these four media formats: print, audio, video, and e-media. All briefs are connected to one or more of the CSPs, so that learning in the 'theory' part of the course can be used directly within the practical assessment.

Centres can choose how many of the briefs to offer to their students, and at what part of the course (after 1 March of the first year) the NEA is done.

Judging by the work seen in the samples, in almost half of centres only one brief was tackled this year, with this often being the health drink brief, but with occasional instances of each of the other briefs. Less than 10% of centres appeared to offer all five briefs, with just over a third offering a choice of two (usually the two print briefs).

Brief One: Print or TV adverts for a health drink

This brief was evident in over 80% of centre submissions, with about half of these including both the print and the TV option. The brief was generally handled well by students, with a good sense of house style across the advertising campaigns even at the lower end of the marks. The focus on a positive lifestyle, a health drink and a teenage to young adult audience seemed to have given students plenty of scope for original photography or video footage, including appropriate costume for the activities undertaken.

TV adverts were often quite quirky and inventive, and tended to make good use of music to support the visuals. Camera angles were generally well-considered and the pace of editing was good. Unfortunately, there were still instances of adverts created in portrait mode, despite the brief specifying that these were intended for television viewing not social media. These cannot be said to meet the brief.

Conventions of advertising were generally well-used in both media formats, with a clear sense of the positive benefits of the drink in most campaigns. This brief also seemed to include the strongest consideration of representation, compared to the other briefs, with the majority of students thinking about using a diversity of representations across the two TV or three print adverts.

A very small number of centres seemed to have suggested a layout 'formula' to their students, with the slogan, packshot, images and text always being in the same place across the submission. Students' decisions should be made independently, and such tight control can hamper students from showing genuine creativity within their media production.

Some students missed the brief's requirement for a focus on a successful lifestyle, and some working in print failed to include a narrative situation or at least one character in each advert. This led to some products, that presented attractive campaigns, gaining lower marks than would otherwise have been expected, because they had not met the given brief.

Students who did less well on this brief often included the following issues in their folders:

- Adverts which included huge blocks of copy and very small images
- Adverts which were the wrong size for a magazine
- Adverts which did not follow basic design protocols such as the rule of thirds/ Z-reading
- Adverts which did not have a sense of campaign (different fonts used, lack of consistency in colour palette, inconsistent layouts etc.)
- Adverts which relied on AI to create images which students could have created or photographed themselves (e.g. characters at the gym, bottles of drink etc.)

Brief Two: Promotion for a new superhero film

Only slightly less popular than brief one, this brief was tackled in almost two-thirds of all centres. The overall format of film posters was clearly well-understood by students, along with the need to unfold detail over time in a poster campaign. However, the details of design were less evident, suggesting that students had perhaps not engaged with and analysed professional products before designing their own. Often, this brief had the weakest responses, for this reason.

The best posters used the same logo, tagline and colour palette throughout but gradually added more information in both the text and the images. This included the addition of actors' or directors' names, the date of release being more precisely defined, more characters or new situations being added into the imagery, and the addition of the credit block at the bottom of the final poster. Many students had also considered representation carefully for this brief, so a large number of non-stereotypical superheroes were seen, particularly including female and non-white actors in the central role.

This was, as expected, the brief with the highest use of AI. This was used well when students mixed AI with their own photography, staging their real-life models in poses and costumes appropriate to the form, and then adding backgrounds using AI prompts. The creation of characters in AI was more problematic and should be avoided, leading as it did to some campaigns appearing to have three different lead actors, as the AI imagery created new faces each time. Students who tried to do too much in AI tended to have campaigns that lacked coherence, often appearing to be promoting three different styles of film. Students have much more control, and can be rewarded more highly, when they create the assets of their products themselves.

A significant proportion of students missed the need to feature the simultaneous release on all three posters, in response to the requirement to include 'how to access the film'. More than any other brief, students responding to brief two were highly likely to miss out some of the minimum requirements – especially the tagline, date of release, or ways to access the film.

Moderators found it helpful to start with each student's synopsis before looking at the posters, as this set the tone for the whole campaign. Most synopses grasped the correct mode of address, and presented lively evocations of the superhero film, emphasising the genre features the intended audience would enjoy. Unfortunately, some missed this opportunity, used too few words, or presented film ideas for other genres.

In brief, students who did less well on this brief tended to have created:

- Film posters which did not include the release date or reference to the cross-platform release
- Film posters which over-relied on AI (sometimes being totally AI-generated)
- Film synopses which were too short or (in some cases) too long
- Film campaigns which repeated the same images across products

Brief Three: Excerpt from a mainstream radio breakfast show

This brief was tackled less often than the print briefs but was seen in almost a fifth of centre submissions. As is often the case with radio briefs, the students who did choose this brief tended to understand radio as a medium, and in this case understood mainstream music radio as a format. Just occasionally, a student would present a show for another format, such as a 'Talk Sport' or heavy metal show, which clearly would not meet the brief, but these were very much in the minority.

The vast majority went for a two-header breakfast show team, with a professional and confident, but relaxed, style of presentation, in line with current radio conventions. Almost all correctly included audience interaction in some form, and overall, there was a strong sense of a relationship being built between the presenters and the listeners. While a few submissions definitely sounded like they were being read from a script, most managed to avoid this.

The two most obvious areas for development in the future are the use of 'other sound sources' (such as music beds and jingles), and the consideration of representation in the voices used, as many used voices that sounded very similar to each other and so lacked in overall diversity.

Students who did less well on this brief tended to have created:

- Radio pieces which did not reference the breakfast show aspect
- Radio pieces which used no conventions of music radio (e.g. bedding, stingers etc.) and which were just recordings of dialogue
- Radio pieces where there was a lot of background noise (with participants clearly being recorded in a noisy classroom)

Brief Four: Website for a new TV sci-fi drama &

Brief Five: Online promotion of a new slice-of-life video game

The two e-media options were less popular this year and were both seen in only around a tenth of submissions. As with the radio brief, students who tackled these briefs tended to be doing so due to their own interest in and engagement with either website design or the subject matter of the online products: sci-fi TV drama or slice-of-life video games.

Some fantastic, animated work was seen amongst the video trailers for the video game websites. Websites generally tended to have a clear grasp of their audience, and a strong sense of house style. The social media posts were better constructed than in previous years, with students understanding how a social media campaign can be tightly-controlled.

Students who did less well on these two briefs included those who submitted:

- Websites which only featured one page
- Websites with no navigation
- Websites with few images and a lot of text

Guidance given by teachers

Although less frequent this year, there were sometimes whole centres where students had made similar errors, such as missing out the need for a character in the health drink adverts or not referring to the simultaneous streaming and cinema release of the film. In such cases, it is clear that neither the teacher nor the students were referring to the briefs often enough.

The answers to most questions from students can be found in the briefs themselves. There are two versions of the booklets, one for teachers and one for students. It is strongly recommended that centres download both, as the teacher booklet contains extra information that answers some of the more obvious questions. Teachers should refer to the briefs themselves throughout the NEA production work and point students back to these at each stage to ensure they are responding appropriately.

Where students are straying from the brief as set, or are not including some of the minimum requirements, teachers are advised to guide them back, using the brief as a checklist.

Administrative procedures

Online submission, for the second year, went very well, with even fewer issues seen than last year.

Centres have access to guidance on how to label and upload files in advance of the upload window. In some centres it was clear from communication between the moderator and the centre that this process was shared between several people, such as the teacher, the IT support team and the exams officer. In a few cases this led to errors creeping in, but in most cases the upload was successful.

Candidate Record Forms (CRFs) were usually filled in accurately as far as names and marks were concerned. However, it is a requirement that teachers add comments about their marking (see specification page 33, section 5.5). The quality of these comments varied hugely. The moderating team are happy that centres which had previously provided such comments on their own centre derived comment sheets, are continuing to do so. These were usually excellent and were uploaded alongside the CRF and the students' work, which was very helpful. Other centres made good use of the expanding 'Concluding comments' box on the CRF to write detailed concluding comments which provided clear exemplification from folders. Many centres though only included very brief, non-bespoke comments on CRFs or copied the level descriptors from the specification, rather than directing the moderator to specifics of where these could be seen in the folder of work. Several centres submitted CRFs with no comments at all.

Recording of unassessed participants is also inconsistent. Some students scrupulously noted down the names of every participant, explaining clearly what each had done and how they were directed, as per the specification requirements. Many centres simply recorded the names of unassessed participants, often with no indication of how they had been directed. There were also many centres where, although unassessed participants had been used, this information was not recorded at all.

Two other issues seen this year:

- Files uploaded that required specialist software to open them – Photoshop and Publisher files for example. Guidance for file types for submission is available online, and the requirements for specific file types have not changed. These enable the moderators to see all the work submitted.
- Design files for adverts and film posters uploaded as .docx or .pptx – these rely on using the fonts available on the recipient's computer. Substitutions can be made automatically by the software if a font is unavailable, so moderators are sometimes not seeing the intended design. Such design work should be exported as PDF files, or screen-grabbed as JPEG files, before uploading.

The best practice for labelling and uploading was to label each of the students' files (including the CRF) clearly not only with their centre number, candidate number and part of the name, but also with a brief description of the file's content, e.g. 10000_1000_Hal_Sol.pdf or 10000_1000_Hal_advert1.jpg

Best practice

There were, as always, some excellent examples of work enjoyed by moderators, with students engaging well and learning from the process.

In the best submissions, moderators saw:

- Students who have clearly engaged with their brief and who have been able to explain their choices and decisions
- Cogent and focused statements of intent, written when students knew the detail of what they were about to produce
- Adherence to the chosen brief in full
- Media production work that would engage the target audience
- Attentive use of media conventions or deliberate and delightful subversion of those conventions, as explained in their statement of intent
- Deliberate control of media language to create intended meanings
- Strong representations of concepts, products, people and places, in words, sounds and images.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.