

**A LEVEL**

**Moderators' report**

# **MEDIA STUDIES**

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**H409**

For first teaching in 2017

**H409/03/04 Summer 2023 series**

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## Introduction

Our moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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# General overview

## Administration

Generally, administration was good, with most centres uploading marks by the deadline. There were a number of clerical errors, but seemingly fewer than in previous sessions.

Most centres uploaded work via the OCR Repository and the best practice was where the Statements of Intent and NEA Cover Sheets were separate files, with the candidate's material for assessment in a single zip file containing a single URL for the candidate's work which was held online, usually on a blog. Some zip folders were very large and difficult to download for moderation. Other centres put each item into a separate zip file which was also not ideal for the moderation process.

There were still some postal centres, most of whom sent USB drives containing well-organised and well-labelled work, with just the cover sheets as hard copy. Work submitted for moderation should be digital, all Products 1s should be in a digital format (not paper) and all Product 2s must be online.

Most material was submitted as required, but occasionally website links were incorrect or difficult to read. There seemed to be fewer issues with passwords this year but there were still some. When every page submitted by a candidate needed a password for access, this slowed the moderation process.

Most administrative material was in good order. The best cover sheets included clear, detailed, bespoke, candidate-specific commentaries that referenced assessment criteria and cited examples from student work, guiding the moderator to where these had been met. Less helpful comments lacked detail, which did not help when identifying why certain marks had been given. This was particularly evident with digital convergence. In some cases, comments written by the centre suggested that work should be placed in a different level from that indicated by the marks given (for example, citing missing elements while suggesting the work should be placed high in Level 4 or even in Level 5). It also remains the case that comments on cover sheets sometimes did not match the quality of the work seen: some centres still seem a little unclear on what represents excellent/sophisticated work or what 'addressing all the requirements of the brief and elements of the production detail' means. This was the case across all briefs. In a very small number of cases comments were clearly expressing a subjective viewpoint about a candidate's work and effort, with no application of the criteria at all, which should be avoided in future submissions.

The majority of cover sheets listed unassessed participants, as required.

Most cover sheets gave a clear indication of which two pages of the websites had been assessed (where more than two had been created) although some centres appeared to have assessed more than one of the linked pages, which is not permitted.

Most centres used the interactive cover sheet from the OCR website (not the amended cover sheet which was used in 2022 when prototypes were permitted due to the pandemic) which totals marks when entered for each aspect of the component. It was noticeable that most clerical errors arose where centres did not use this sheet and had made errors in the totalling of marks. There were also some discrepancies where the total marks on cover sheets did not match those entered on OCR Interchange, which required the clerical errors to be resolved by the centres. Most centres did include the teacher's email address on the coursework cover sheets, which was helpful: when there were issues which required the moderator to contact the centre this made it much easier and more efficient than going through exams officers which sometimes resulted in significant delays to the process.

Several (postal) centres provided only a hard copy list of website addresses without offering a digital version. Given the complexity of some URLs if a link to a central online hub is not provided, a USB with a

Word file or PDF with live links is helpful. The situation noted above led to several mis-keyings of addresses, which did not help the moderation process.

Most centres submitted research and planning, although some of this was quite sparse. In some cases, particularly with magazines, where candidate had not researched the Hearst model, there were sometimes anomalies between what was produced and what fitted the industry context of the magazine brief.

Statements of Intent varied significantly in quality. Occasionally these were not included, incurring a 10 mark penalty as set out in the specification and brief. Some statements were incredibly detailed, going into great depth about how and why particular effects would be created and how this linked to ideas explored elsewhere in the course (for example, with reference to theorists or specific products). The most successful made clear links between the two main products and explained how digital convergence would connect the two.

Many statements were unbalanced, with a lot of detail about Product 1, but very little about its companion online piece, Product 2, suggesting that these candidates saw a hierarchical relationship between the two. Some candidates submitted incomplete statements where the website was not mentioned at all, or (where they produced magazines) described the second magazine as Product 2 and just discussed the website in digital convergence. These candidates produced websites which were nowhere near the standard of their Product 1. Digital convergence was still sometimes only represented by a line or two. Some candidates did not seem to fully understand what this element of the project meant and referred solely to social media rather than the broader intersections between the products. There was marginally better engagement with this element than in the previous session.

## Standard of Work

Standards varied substantially, as always, ranging from work rightly placed at the very top of Level 5 to less successful submissions, mainly placed in Level 2 or 3. As with 2022, marking often seemed to be a little generous, particularly at the upper end of the rank orders. This was again mainly due to centres not considering where candidates had missed certain elements of the production detail, which precludes marks in Level 5 from being given, or where the quality of the work had perhaps not been fully factored in (particularly where work had met all of the production details but could not be regarded as being sophisticated or highly developed). There did not seem to be a particular pattern to this generosity, although marking of websites was perhaps a little more uneven than that of the Product 1s.

## Set Briefs

Most work sampled this year involved magazines, followed by music videos. This session also saw an increase in both television and radio submissions.

The most successful productions had clearly been supported by focused research, effective, detailed planning, attention to detail and a strong, sustained central concept clearly based solidly on the requirements and production details of the brief. Although not an assessed element, the final production outcomes showed how essential the underpinning process of research and planning is in constructing a successful piece of work that demonstrates the verisimilitude expected for the highest levels.

### OCR support



The NEA Delivery Guide available on [Teach Cambridge](#) has suggestions for a range of preparatory activities students could complete.

Representation of at least two different social groups remains a key area where submissions are lacking in response to all four of the briefs, and which is often not addressed in the marking of work. Centres are reminded that a candidate can only achieve Level 5 marks when all elements of the brief and **all** production details are met.

The online aspect of each brief will be discussed in the section titled 'Online Productions'.

## Television

A number of television submissions were seen with the most successful meeting both the conventions of Channel 5 and the lifestyle genre well. There were many topics covered including sexuality, the environment and healthy living. The most successful pieces considered the requirement to be an opening sequence and that the topic should suit a late teens-mid 20s audience.

Most shows and websites included the Channel 5 logo, and websites usually paid homage to the format of Channel 5's own house style.

Less successful submissions either did not capture the lifestyle element of the brief (for example, a documentary about the lives of TikTok influencers) or pieces which did not consider how an intro sequence works (for example, going straight into the first package without actually explaining what the focus of the show was). Several less successful pieces submitted a hybrid of the gameshow format. Other areas which were not so successful included: music overwhelming the dialogue, lack of attention to sound levels on dialogue, unfocused or pixelated video, due either to being recorded at a low resolution or being recorded at night, lack of captions or onscreen graphics where these would be appropriate, or overuse of captions (for example, keeping the website address on for the whole show). A few shows did not use a presenter or did not make it clear what the show was meant to be about. Some did not make it clear that this was a new show (so using 'previously on' sequences, for example). In many cases, mise-en-scène could have been more carefully considered to make sure a professional feel, some were all too readable as a classroom.

## Radio

There appeared to be more radio submissions than in previous years. Some were highly effective. The strongest pieces were not obviously scripted like dramas, word for word, although they did have running orders. These ones also used higher quality microphones and were not recorded on the candidate's phone. They included commercial elements such as sponsorship bumpers and ad breaks, using stings, station idents and bedding to create a degree of realism. One candidate 'shot' the piece as a videocast as well as providing the audio, which was an interesting approach.

Some outcomes were only tangentially related to the briefs: quite a few of the radio pieces had either no commercial dimension or no local setting and some did not seem to be openings. Some did not meet the brief for a new celebrity interview programme as they took the form of magazine programmes with a range of material.

Less successful pieces either missed basic features of radio (such as stings) or were recorded using low quality microphones and at too great a distance from the microphone. Several pieces were heard which were not the opening to a new show. At least one piece was the show in its entirety. Other common issues were the music bed being mixed in too loudly, overpowering the vocal track; voices recorded at different levels; work recorded in a classroom where background noise intruded or where the acoustic space was wrong.

## Magazines

This was the most popular brief by far. Some candidates produced magazines with an effective broad lifestyle approach, others picked on a focused aspect, such as fitness/sport/health (or travel, but these tended to be far less successful, as candidates usually focused on landscape and forgot social groups). When candidates picked a single focus the magazine often effectively changed genre, becoming a health magazine, or a fitness magazine, for instance, rather than a lifestyle magazine. Some very successful examples were seen where candidates had achieved everything required by the brief, with well-considered and appropriate photography being used and an overall design aesthetic being carried across both editions of the magazine, including the contents pages, and to the websites. Such magazines had clearly been inspired by existing examples from Hearst and captured a sense of verisimilitude. Most magazine candidates understood the requirement to appeal to the target audience and there were some inventive approaches to this.

In general, less successful magazines either missed key elements from the brief, did not adhere to the codes and conventions of the form or did not meet the conventional expectations of the industry context. For example, those magazines which could not be said to belong to the lifestyle genre (i.e. where very niche interests were being explored, such as promoting local gyms). Many magazines showed a lack of consideration of the need for representation of two different social groups. Magazines did not always refer to or draw attention to the website either on the cover or the contents page, even though a call to action was specified in the brief. Some magazines used QR codes with no context while others placed huge social media symbols on their covers, not something Hearst is known for. A significant number of magazine productions included photographs without direct address or backgrounds that were too busy, so that there was no hierarchy of content. Coverlines were sometimes unconventionally long and there wasn't always a clear main coverline anchoring the meaning of the image. Candidates should also be advised that it is unconventional to put page numbers on coverlines.

A number of magazines did not include the price on the cover, despite the brief stating that this was required. Several sets of magazines did not refer to the fact that these were supposed to be the first two editions, which was another requirement of the brief. Some candidates submitted sets of magazines with the same month on the cover, demonstrating a lack of industry understanding.

There was an apparent lack of careful research into real magazines in some cases – candidates must study contents pages, not just covers. Some magazines had excellent front covers but less successful contents pages. Contents pages should be conventional to print magazines, not conventional to online templates, which can look more suited to company brochures. Contents pages often didn't include enough content for a full magazine. Some did not link the coverlines to the contents page; others gave sequential page numbers for articles. Many had no sub-headings; a limited use of images; little or no copy; no use of columns; or overly large fonts.

Less successful candidates sometimes lacked understanding of the brief's industry context. Some excellent magazines were seen which could not really be considered as being appropriate for Hearst as a mainstream publisher. In some cases these focused on very niche topics (such as Goth subculture or 1970s retro lifestyles) while in others the cover design and photography, despite being excellent, was more fitting to niche publishers than a mainstream organisation such as Hearst. Often, no obvious research had been done into Hearst's output; other candidates considered Hearst, but also explored more alternative publishers, not specified in the brief but who ultimately became the inspiration for their productions. This seemed to demonstrate a misunderstanding of this element of the brief.

## Music videos

This was a popular brief, although there seemed less music videos than last year. There was some excellent work. Most candidates have a good grasp on what a music video looks like and were able to create convincing performances and engaging narratives. Some centres have fully engaged with all elements of the brief and production detail - considering the specific audience and thinking carefully about representations. The most successful products demonstrated that candidates had understood how to shoot and structure a music video, considering the implications of rhythm, pace and lyrical content (particularly important for anthems). Location work was often effective, with fewer pieces seen that had been shot in centres.

Less successful music videos did not apply effective use of media language. A number of these appeared to be mostly (or totally) either footage from holidays, footage from nights out or material shot at music festivals; where this was the case, the videos rarely worked well.

Most did centre on an anthem as specified, although in a few cases the definition of 'anthem' was being stretched. Some were clearly not anthems. More candidates may have benefited from taking the anthemic nature of the song as a starting point in the planning and construction of the narrative and/or performance in terms of illustrating the themes of the track.

Most videos included some element of performance combined with narrative. A few conceptual videos were seen and in the main, these were successful. Some videos demonstrated very well-performed lip synching, although this tended to be a less successful element and is perhaps something for centres to consider as an area to develop (as is miming musical instruments, particularly the drums and guitars, which were frequently not in synch when they were featured). The majority of videos featured a range of shots and camera movement that were appropriate for the form and genre. Most videos featured two social groups, although this was occasionally 'shoehorned' in with cameos at the end of the videos (which is not really in the spirit of the brief). There were some excellent examples of performance seen using a variety of costume changes and settings and a wide variety of shot distances, framing and camera movement. In other cases, videos featured a performance filmed in just one setting (often either the classroom or a bedroom) and with very little variety of shot used.

In general, less successful music videos either missed key elements from the brief or did not adhere to the codes and conventions of the form. For example, tracks that were not anthems or videos which did not reflect the tone of the track, the name of the band/artist/track not being mentioned at the start or end of the video or editing which did not match the pace/ rhythm of the chosen track. Many videos included random footage which had clearly not been planned and bore no relation to the song or performance and added nothing to the narrative. A significant number also used a lot of repetition of shots, which meant that the actual footage filmed by candidates was quite brief and as a result did not demonstrate a breadth of skill.

Some less successful responses had narratives which lacked a clear through-line (for example, pieces which were effectively just characters on holiday or wandering about in the woods); other pieces had perfunctory performance footage or lip-synch that was not fully effective. A number of music videos had no real performance element, making it difficult to see who the artist was and how this would link to the website. Significant numbers had no titles and did not include the Sony logo. In some instances music videos included footage of vaping, smoking and drinking alcohol, which were not appropriate for an examination response.

In terms of editing, the synching of sound and visuals was varied. The most successful had excellent synching throughout with some sophisticated editing on the word or phrase. Where synching was not accurate this was often not addressed in the comments on the coursework cover sheets or the marks allocated. Editing to the beat of the track was less common in this session, particularly in narrative

videos, and is something candidates would be best advised to consider in future submissions to make a stronger link between the visuals and the music.

As with previous sessions, the performer in a number of productions did not match the voice, for example a female performer lip synching to a male voice and a group lip synching to a track performed by a solo artist. Candidates would be best advised to establish who is going to be appearing in their video before choosing the track to make sure that it is appropriate.

Quite a few music videos did not direct viewers to the website (although some videos did in novel ways, such as including the address on the bass drum or, in one case, editing the video so that the website was a key feature). This clearly had an impact on marks, particularly for digital convergence.

Camerawork or camera movement did not always demonstrate the level of skill, finish or excellence required for the Level 5 marks given by the centre to be justified.

## Online productions

Each of the four set briefs has an online product (Product 2), which is worth the same marks as Product 1 and in combination with Product 1, creates the third assessed element, Digital Convergence.

Some candidates produced strong, informed online products and then explored the cross-media aspects of the brief very well, with excellent links being made between products, demonstrating very good understanding of the nature of digital convergence. This was particularly the case with magazine, television and music video submissions; radio sites were generally less successful. There were many examples of very effective layouts, with an excellent level of content across the two pages. Some included strong photography, with care taken with framing and mise-en-scène.

It sometimes appeared as if some centres were approaching the websites as an ancillary product, rather than a piece of work of equal importance to Product 1. Given the products are each worth the same number of marks, it seems some candidates spent less time on the websites, submitting sites which included very little content, no A/V element (or A/V lasting only a few seconds or material which had clearly not been recorded specifically for the project) or no reference to the company specified in the brief (e.g. Hearst, Channel 5 or Sony). It is also the case that this element tended to be assessed less accurately. The wording of the Level 5 marking criteria implies a certain level of quality ('sophisticated'; 'highly developed'; 'highly appropriate'; 'accomplished', etc.). It was difficult to match those descriptors to some of the online productions they were applied to in some instances by centres, particularly where websites consisted of a couple of photos, a small amount of text and a mocked-up tour schedule, for example. Formatting and layouts were also often an issue in less successful productions, with some candidates giving little consideration to the aesthetics of website design.

The majority of websites were designed and hosted using Wix. A few were hosted on Google, but these were a little less sophisticated. Most video work was hosted on YouTube or occasionally Vimeo, with several candidates using Wix's own in-built video streaming (which is not the best platform for music videos since it cannot be played full screen although it works well enough for other video content).

In general, the content and/or quality of websites was very variable. Websites were often either exceptionally detailed and demonstrated a great deal of commitment from candidates or were lacking in content and seemingly created quickly; many were seen which included very little content, consisting of simply an animated background – clearly a Wix template – and a couple of images, quite often slotted in with no consideration of design.

Several superb examples were seen, going beyond the specifics of the brief in terms of the amount of material included, both in terms of the visuals and the copy. This was generally related to the magazine brief, where candidate had clearly researched what a Hearst magazine website looks like. Such candidates appreciated that the website is worth the same number of marks as Product 1 and had put an

equivalent amount of time into creating it. These sites exhibited effective, bespoke photography and copy, often capturing a tone appropriate to the needs of the intended audience, with a degree of sophistication being clear (as well as a wide range of representations). It was always clear from such sites which two pages were to be assessed. Crucially, such sites did not rely on stock images from Wix and carefully adapted the templates to suit the specific needs of the project.

Generally, the TV sites were appropriate constructions, with obvious awareness of the Channel 5 house style; there tended to be an imbalance in content between the home and linked pages, and some sites did not suggest a Channel 5 house style (and sometimes did not mention Channel 5 at all). Quite often there was no sense that the programme was part of a series.

Less successful websites either demonstrated a lack of attention to detail or missed key elements of the brief or the codes and conventions of the form. Some examples included sites which did not include a menu bar or where the menu bar was hidden or consisted only of the two assessed pages, or where it consisted of icons rather than text; sites where the linked (or in a couple of cases home) page was virtually blank or included text but no image.

There were some sites where it was difficult to find the second (linked) page or where candidates had only created one scrolling page with internal links; although this is how some websites operate, it did not meet the requirements of the brief, which explicitly requires two individual pages. Where social media links were visible on sites (often as part of the template chosen) some candidates could have made stronger use of them. This was done very effectively in some cases by candidates who produced constructed Instagram posts for the website; constructed tweets giving comments on the song or an article in the magazine; and had strong calls to action to the artist's social media.

A large number of the websites used a high proportion of non-original images padding out the sites in addition to the bare minimum of original photos. This is to be strongly discouraged.

Less successful websites often featured very short embedded A/V content, in several cases only a few seconds of audio or where this was footage shot on a mobile device at a festival or on holiday and then shoehorned into the project. Use of template backdrops or a lack of editing of template materials, rather than using customised imagery and text (which was particularly the case for the standard text at the bottom of the Wix templates) was also seen often. Some sites reused the same images on both pages and other sites did not introduce the artist/product/show.

As in previous series the least successful music video sites often had a linked page which was either a tour schedule, a merch shop, or a single photo and a brief block of text.

Some candidates who undertook the radio and TV briefs slightly misunderstood that the website is for the show and not the channel. Similarly, some candidates that followed the music video brief had created a website which outlined the creation of the video rather than focusing on the artist. Centres are advised to direct their candidates to the fine detail of the brief. Some candidates linked their music video to a charity, such as one related to mental health, and the websites then tended to focus on the charities.

## Digital convergence

This was explored both directly and indirectly with some success, although a significant number of pieces were seen which did not include direct traffic between both products. This tended to be the most generously assessed element.

Where convergence was effective, the use of imagery, logo and models across products clearly demonstrated that the overall branding had been considered and there was clear cross-product promotion between the two artefacts. Successful Product 1s were overt in using the 'call to action' to direct readers, listeners or viewers to content on the website (for example, a link at the end of the video,

a reference in a voiceover or copy on the cover or contents pages of the magazines). Some candidates used the websites effectively to create cross-media links (for example, featuring the front page of the current edition or embedding the video or radio show) and highlight specific content in the partner product. There was also some very effective consideration of how to interact with the target audience (for example, designing contact forms, or featuring subscriptions, exclusive offers, social media feeds, partnership deals and sponsorships, etc).

Where there was a lack of convergence this was often because Product 1s did not mention the website at all (which was mainly prevalent in music videos) or websites did not link directly to their partner Product 1 (some music video and TV sites did not include the embedded video and, in such cases, a screengrab from YouTube was not a suitable alternative). Other less successful responses included sites with little or no imagery taken from the partner product; logos or mastheads on websites which did not match those on the partner product; models or actors featuring on the website but not seen in the partner product and features on the website which were not mentioned in the partner product.

Candidates who did well generally:	Candidates who did less well generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• included all elements of the brief, including all production detail</li> <li>• were secure in their knowledge and understanding of the media theoretical framework</li> <li>• were confident in their use of the appropriate technology</li> <li>• gave equal weight to their work on Product 1 and 2, ensuring the demonstration of digital convergence</li> <li>• researched industry models</li> <li>• planned both pieces thoroughly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• did not include all elements of the brief, or much of the required production detail</li> <li>• demonstrated limited knowledge and understanding of the media theoretical framework</li> <li>• lacked controlled use of the appropriate technology</li> <li>• had one product that was stronger than the other</li> <li>• demonstrated little digital convergence</li> <li>• undertook little research and/or planning.</li> </ul>

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