

Cambridge International AS & A Level

MEDIA STUDIES**9607/41**

Paper 4 Critical Perspectives

May/June 2026

MARK SCHEME

Maximum Mark: 60

Published

This mark scheme contains the instructions and marking guidance that our examiners used to mark candidate responses for this component.

Before they start marking, examiners complete a standardisation process. They review a range of candidate responses and discuss the mark scheme in detail to agree which answers can and cannot be accepted. Examiners award marks where it is clear that candidate responses have met the requirements of the mark scheme. These requirements may vary between different components or different versions of the same component, depending on the exact requirements of the question and the candidate responses seen during the standardisation process.

Sometimes, our mark schemes may allow marks to be awarded to responses which contain elements that are factually incorrect or for content not covered by the syllabus. We do this in response to the demands of a specific question to support candidates and make sure that our assessments are fair. However, these allowances should not be used as a guide for teaching and learning.

We cannot discuss the mark scheme with schools, and we recommend that schools read the mark scheme together with the assessment material and the Principal Examiner Report for Teachers.

This document consists of **14** printed pages.

General marking principles

All examiners must apply these marking principles when marking candidate responses.

1	Examiners must award marks for each response in line with: - the specific content defined in the mark scheme - the specific skills defined in the mark scheme or in the level descriptions - the standard of response required as exemplified by the standardisation scripts.
2	Examiners must award whole marks (not half marks, or other fractions).
3	Examiners must award marks positively . This means that: - marks are not deducted for errors or omissions - marks are awarded for correct/valid answers as defined in the mark scheme and also for other valid answers which go beyond the scope of the syllabus and mark scheme referring to your team leader as appropriate - the quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar are judged only when the mark scheme indicates that these features are specifically assessed in the question. However, the meaning of all responses must be unambiguous.
4	Examiners must consistently apply the requirements of the mark scheme and any rules for what to do when candidates have not followed instructions correctly.
5	Examiners must use the full range of marks defined in the mark scheme, unless limited by the quality of the candidate responses seen.
6	Examiners must award marks according to the mark scheme and must not award marks with grade thresholds or grade descriptions in mind.

English & Media-Specific Marking Principles**(To be read in conjunction with the General Marking Principles (and requiring further guidance on how to place marks within levels))****Components using level descriptions:**

- We use level descriptions as a guide to broad understanding of the qualities normally expected of, or typical of, work in a level.
- Level descriptions are a means of general guidance and should not be interpreted as hurdle statements.
- Where indicative content notes are supplied for a question, these are *not* a prescription of required content and must not be treated as such. Alternative correct points and unexpected answers in candidates' scripts must be given marks that fairly reflect the knowledge and skills demonstrated.
- While we may have legitimate expectations as to the ground most answers may occupy, we must at all times be prepared to meet candidates on their chosen ground, provided it is relevant ground (e.g. clearly related to and derived from a relevant passage/text and meeting the mark scheme requirements for the question).

Annotations guidance for centres

Examiners use a system of annotations as a shorthand for communicating their marking decisions to one another. Examiners are trained during the standardisation process on how and when to use annotations. The purpose of annotations is to inform the standardisation and monitoring processes and guide the supervising examiners when they are checking the work of examiners within their team. The meaning of annotations and how they are used is specific to each component and is understood by all examiners who mark the component.

We publish annotations in our mark schemes to help centres understand the annotations they may see on copies of scripts. Note that there may not be a direct correlation between the number of annotations on a script and the mark awarded. Similarly, the use of an annotation may not be an indication of the quality of the response.

The annotations listed below were available to examiners marking this component in this series.

Annotations

Annotation	Meaning
	Unclear expression
	Credit-worthy point made
	Unclear expression
	Valid point/answer
	Blank page
	Example used
	Knowledge
	Response is mainly narrative
	Directly addressing the question
	Page has been seen by examiner
	Use of appropriate terminology

Assessment Objectives

The Assessment Objectives are applied to each question. The assessment objectives for the paper are:

- **AO1** Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of media concepts, contexts and critical debates, using terminology appropriately (60%).
- **AO2** Analyse media products, and evaluate their own work, by applying knowledge and understanding of theoretical and creative approaches, supported with relevant textual evidence (40%).

The Level Descriptors guide examiners to an understanding of the qualities normally expected of, or typical of, work in a band. They are a means of general guidance and must not be interpreted as hurdle statements. For the purposes of standardisation of marking, they are to be used in conjunction with the Standardisation scripts discussed during the coordination meeting and with Team Leaders, as well as the question-specific notes.

The indicative content provided is for general guidance; it is not designed as prescriptions of required content and must not be treated as such. Whilst there are legitimate expectations of the content of most answers, examiners may see responses that include ideas not covered in the indicative content. For these cases, examiners should credit valid responses fairly and not penalise candidates for including valid points outside the mark scheme.

Using a banded mark scheme

Place the answer in a level first. Look for the 'best fit' of the answer into a level. An answer needs to show evidence of most but not necessarily ALL of the qualities described in a level in order to be placed in that band. Then award a mark for the relative position of the answer within the level.

Higher level responses (Levels 4 and 5) will demonstrate excellent knowledge and understanding of the key concepts (AO1). They should use a wide range of terminology accurately (AO1). They should show clear understanding of how meaning is created in the text (AO2). They should support their answer with many detailed references to the text (AO2).

Middle range responses (Level 3) will demonstrate satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the key concepts – there may be uneven coverage or some misunderstanding (AO1). They should use some terminology, but not always accurately (AO1). They should show some understanding of how meaning is created in the text (AO2). They should support their answer with some references to the text (AO2).

Basic responses (Levels 1 and 2) will demonstrate basic knowledge and understanding of the key concepts – misunderstanding might be common (AO1). They might use some terminology, but rarely accurately (AO1). They will have limited understanding of how meaning is created in the text (AO2). They rarely support their answer with references to the text (AO2).

Section A: Media debates

Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
1	EITHER Media regulation Explain how and why media regulation changes over time. <u>Indicative content</u> Candidates may draw upon a wide range of contemporary and historical case studies which can be used to support and illustrate key points. Candidates should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of contextual issues surrounding media regulation and be able to link them to their chosen case studies. Candidates may address: • Changes in regulation impacted by changes in society • The purposes of regulation – taste and decency; protection of children; protection of plurality of voices; restrictions on monopolies; protection of truth; protection of reputation etc. • Case studies based on different regulatory bodies, such as Ofcom, BBFC, PEGI, IPSO, ASA • Case studies based on problematic/controversial cases • Livingstone and Lunt – consumer/ citizen tension • Online Safety Bill in UK • Audience theory – Gerbner	15	Candidates should be given credit for their knowledge and understanding, illustrated through case study material, relevant to the question. Assessment will take place across five criteria: • Media concepts (AO1) [3 marks] • Contexts and debates (AO1) [3 marks] • Use of terminology (AO1) [3 marks] • Analysis of how meaning is created (AO2) [3 marks] • Use of examples (AO2) [3 marks] Candidates' work should be judged on each of these criteria individually and marks awarded according to the level attained. It should be noted that it is possible for a candidate to achieve a different level for each assessment criterion. This guidance should be used in conjunction with the Level Descriptors. It is not prescriptive, nor is it exclusive; examiners must be careful to reward original but well-focused answers and implicit as well development. This indicative content is intended to indicate aspects of questions that may feature in candidates' answers.

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
2	OR Postmodern media Explain the key challenges with interpreting the postmodern media text <u>Indicative content</u> Candidates may draw upon a wide range of contemporary and historical case studies which can be used to support and illustrate key points. Candidates should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of postmodernism and be able to link them to their chosen case studies. Candidates may address: • Theories of reading/interpretation • Postmodern thinkers including Baudrillard, Kristeva and Lyotard • Simulacra • Collapse of the grand narrative • Characteristics of Postmodernism including • Playfulness • Homage • Self-referentiality • Irony • Fragmentation of time/ space/ identity • privileging style over substance • Social media -Deepfakes as simulacra • Arguments that pomo texts can work on their own terms i.e. without understanding intertextual references	15	Candidates should be given credit for their knowledge and understanding, illustrated through case study material, relevant to the question. Assessment will take place across five criteria: • Media concepts (AO1) [3 marks] • Contexts and debates (AO1) [3 marks] • Use of terminology (AO1) [3 marks] • Analysis of how meaning is created (AO2) [3 marks] • Use of examples (AO2) [3 marks] Candidates' work should be judged on each of these criteria individually and marks awarded according to the level attained. It should be noted that it is possible for a candidate to achieve a different level for each assessment criterion. This guidance should be used in conjunction with the Level Descriptors. It is not prescriptive, nor is it exclusive; examiners must be careful to reward original but well-focused answers and implicit as well development. This indicative content is intended to indicate aspects of questions that may feature in candidates' answers.

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
3	OR Power and the media ‘In the age of social media, where people are in control, traditional media have no power anymore.’ To what extent do you agree with this statement? <u>Indicative content</u> Candidates may draw upon a wide range of contemporary and historical case studies which can be used to support and illustrate key points. Candidates should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of power and the media and be able to link them to their chosen case studies. Candidates may address: • The political economy of the media • Critiques of media owners’ interests being evident in editorial output • Gramsci and Hegemony • Theories of Dominant Ideologies and resistance to them • The style, form and rhetoric of media messages • Theories of audience reception • Theories of media influence • The language of news • The rhetoric of the image • Identity – Gauntlett • Gilroy – postcolonial theory • Case studies of ‘othering’ – Bibby Stockholm/ refugees, Arab representation	15	Candidates should be given credit for their knowledge and understanding, illustrated through case study material, relevant to the question. Assessment will take place across five criteria: • Media concepts (AO1) [3 marks] • Contexts and debates (AO1) [3 marks] • Use of terminology (AO1) [3 marks] • Analysis of how meaning is created (AO2) [3 marks] • Use of examples (AO2) [3 marks] Candidates’ work should be judged on each of these criteria individually and marks awarded according to the level attained. It should be noted that it is possible for a candidate to achieve a different level for each assessment criterion. This guidance should be used in conjunction with the Level Descriptors. It is not prescriptive, nor is it exclusive; examiners must be careful to reward original but well-focused answers and implicit as well development. This indicative content is intended to indicate aspects of questions that may feature in candidates’ answers.

Marking criteria for Section A Question 1, Question 2 and Question 3				
AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of media concepts, contexts and critical debates, using terminology appropriately.		AO2: Analyse media products, and evaluate their own work, by applying knowledge and understanding of theoretical and creative approaches, to explain how meaning is created, supported with relevant textual evidence.		
9 marks		6 marks		
Media Concepts	Contexts & Critical Debates	Use of Terminology	Analysis of how meaning is created, including use of theory	Use of Examples
3 marks	3 marks	3 marks	3 marks	3 marks
Sophisticated understanding of and insightful reference to several relevant key concepts	Insightful understanding of the wider contexts and critical debates raised in the question	A wide range of media terminology is used precisely and accurately, and with sophistication, to make subtle points	Sophisticated and insightful analysis of texts from multiple case studies is used to explore the chosen area in depth Relevant theories are sophisticatedly used to explore the question	Insightful and fully appropriate selection of examples from a wide range of texts
3 marks	3 marks	3 marks	3 marks	3 marks
Clear understanding of and appropriate reference to some key concepts	Clear understanding of the wider contexts and critical debates raised in the question	Media terminology is used appropriately, to make clear points	Clear analysis of texts from one or more case study is used to respond appropriately Occasional references to relevant theories, not always accurately used or understood	Clear and appropriate selection of examples from a range of texts
2 marks	2 marks	2 marks	2 marks	2 marks

Marking criteria for Section A Question 1, Question 2 and Question 3				
AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of media concepts, contexts and critical debates, using terminology appropriately.		AO2: Analyse media products, and evaluate their own work, by applying knowledge and understanding of theoretical and creative approaches, to explain how meaning is created, supported with relevant textual evidence.		
9 marks		6 marks		
Media Concepts	Contexts & Critical Debates	Use of Terminology	Analysis of how meaning is created, including use of theory	Use of Examples
3 marks	3 marks	3 marks	3 marks	3 marks
Basic understanding of and minimal reference to any key concepts	Minimal understanding of the wider contexts or critical debates raised in the question	Basic use of media terminology, with frequent errors which impede communication	Basic analysis, from case studies which may not be appropriate to the question Minimal references to even basic media theory.	Basic and minimal selection of examples, may lack relevance in parts
1 mark	1 mark	1 mark	1 mark	1 mark
No creditable content	No creditable content	No creditable content	No creditable content	No creditable content
0 marks	0 marks	0 marks	0 marks	0 marks

Section B: Media ecology

Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
4	Explain the significance of a recent or emerging media technology and consider its possible impact on society. <u>Indicative content</u> Material listed below demonstrates how candidates might approach the question. It is a description of possible content only. It is not prescriptive, nor is it exclusive; examiners must be careful to reward original but well-focused answers. This question is synoptic so candidates should draw on their learning throughout the course, and may also make connections between this learning and other, related, areas. • AI as a revolutionary technology? • convergence of personal communication technology and mass communication technology – Shirky – media increasingly social ubiquitous and mobile – Boyd • migration of old media to online platforms • impact on society of technological change including the collection and sharing of information and data protection regulation/ lack of – Section 230, Trump and Twitter/ Cambridge Analytica. Facebook and Myanmar/ Thailand. Weibio and China • the nature of globalisation and the responses of audiences and institutions – Tiktok • the changing nature of media ownership and distribution models including net neutrality – Oligopoly – Metaverse • the representation of public and private personae – Instagram – Turkle/ Gauntlett	30	Assessment will take place across five criteria: • Media concepts (AO1) [6 marks] • Contexts and debates (AO1) [6 marks] • Use of terminology (AO1) [6 marks] • Analysis of how meaning is created (AO2) [6 marks] • Use of examples (AO2) [6 marks] Candidates' work should be judged on each of these criteria individually and marks awarded according to the level attained. It should be noted that it is possible for a candidate to achieve a different level for each assessment criterion. This guidance should be used in conjunction with the Level Descriptors. It is not prescriptive, nor is it exclusive; examiners must be careful to reward original but well-focused answers and implicit as well development. This indicative content is intended to indicate aspects of questions that may feature in candidates' answers.

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Question	Answer	Marks	Guidance
4	- the relationships between software, hardware and audiences – economics – FB in Thailand is the web - the impact of developing technologies on media language – native forms – Tiktok - Surveillance capitalism – data mining/ location tracking/ Privacy - Morozov powerful tool for engaging in mass surveillance, political repression, and spreading nationalist and extremist <u>propaganda</u> - Buckingham Tech impact is always dependent on how they are used, by whom, and for what purposes - Astra Taylor – Internet amplifies real-world inequities – attention and influence largely accrue to those who already have plenty of both, handful of giant companies remain gatekeepers, while the worst habits of the old media model – the pressure to seek easy celebrity/ sensation proliferate in the ad-driven system. - Track others (see if they are active on Snapchat, etc) - Citizen journalism – sharing of private moments/ insight - Impact of social media on identity - Technological determinism – death of privacy - Danah Boyd – public/ private personas - Lanier – 10 reasons to delete social media accounts - Closed messaging groups – Telegram		

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Marking criteria for Section B Question 4				
AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of media concepts, contexts and critical debates, using terminology appropriately.		AO2: Analyse media products, and evaluate their own work, by applying knowledge and understanding of theoretical and creative approaches, to explain how meaning is created, supported with relevant textual evidence.		
18 marks		12 marks		
Media Concepts	Contexts & Critical Debates	Use of Terminology	Analysis of how meaning is created, including use of theory	Use of Examples
6 marks	6 marks	6 marks	6 marks	6 marks
Sophisticated understanding of and insightful reference to several relevant key concepts	Insightful understanding of the wider contexts and critical debates raised in the question	A wide range of media terminology is used precisely and accurately, and with sophistication, to make subtle points	Sophisticated and insightful analysis of texts from multiple case studies is used to explore the chosen area in depth Relevant theories are sophisticatedly used to explore the question	Insightful and fully appropriate selection of examples from a wide range of texts
5–6 marks	5–6 marks	5–6 marks	5–6 marks	5–6 marks
Clear understanding of and appropriate reference to some key concepts	Clear understanding of the wider contexts and critical debates raised in the question	Media terminology is used appropriately, to make clear point	Clear analysis of texts from one or more case study is used to respond appropriately Occasional references to relevant theories, not always accurately used or understood	Clear and appropriate selection of examples from a range of texts
3–4 marks	3–4 marks	3–4 marks	3–4 marks	3–4 marks

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Marking criteria for Section B Question 4				
AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of media concepts, contexts and critical debates, using terminology appropriately.		AO2: Analyse media products, and evaluate their own work, by applying knowledge and understanding of theoretical and creative approaches, to explain how meaning is created, supported with relevant textual evidence.		
18 marks		12 marks		
Media Concepts	Contexts & Critical Debates	Use of Terminology	Analysis of how meaning is created, including use of theory	Use of Examples
6 marks	6 marks	6 marks	6 marks	6 marks
Basic understanding of and minimal reference to any key concepts	Minimal understanding of the wider contexts or critical debates raised in the question	Basic use of media terminology, with frequent errors which impede communication	Basic analysis, from case studies which may not be appropriate to the question Minimal references to even basic media theory.	Basic and minimal selection of examples, may lack relevance in parts
1–2 marks	1–2 marks	1–2 marks	1–2 marks	1–2 marks
No creditable content	No creditable content	No creditable content	No creditable content	No creditable content
0 marks	0 marks	0 marks	0 marks	0 marks