

A2 Module 5: The Independent Study

2005/06

At-a-Glance

Module 5 of the AQA Media Studies A2 qualification is an independent research study of 3000 words on a text, texts or media issue.

- Independent research skills are vital
- You must use the Key Concepts to analyse your text(s) and place them in context.
- This project makes up 20% of your final A level grade.

It is vital that you meet the deadlines for this module

- A detailed outline of your proposal (at least 500 words) is due in before the half term holiday. It will be returned to you during the first week back, with comments and suggestions.
- Your first full draft is due in the first week *after* the Christmas holiday. This must be type-written.
- Your second draft must be completed and handed in by the first week *after* the February half-term.
- Your study will be finished during the second half of the spring term.

Introduction

This module requires you to produce an extended essay (described as an ‘independent study’) on

- **either** a contemporary media text or texts
- **or** a topic or issue arising out of or suggested by a contemporary media text or texts.

Objectives (or What are the examiners looking for?)

This module requires you to demonstrate...

- knowledge and application of the Key Concepts employed within Media Studies and the evaluation of texts and ideas using the Key Concepts.
- knowledge and application of the wider contexts (historical, social, political, economic) relevant to Media Studies
- the ability to use appropriate investigative and research techniques in carrying out an independent study of a media text, topic or issue. **This last objective is worth the most marks.**

Content (or What am I allowed to write about?)

Note that you must write about *Contemporary texts*. That is, they must have been **produced or released within the two years before the start of your AS course**. Repeats of programmes made outside this period don't count.

You **may** use historical texts for the purposes of *comparison* with your contemporary text, but they must be secondary to your contemporary text(s).

Any text studied should be given a **context**, *such as* relevant historical, social, political or economic contexts. You could also include the contexts of production, distribution and reception. A simple textual analysis of a film or soap opera, would **not** be appropriate. You must research your chosen area and give it a context which illuminates your text or topic without overshadowing it.

The Independent Study should be clearly textually centred; that is, a media text or texts should lie at the heart of your essay. It should also be **investigative** or **research-based**. It should seek, for example,

to answer a question, clarify an issue, or test a hypothesis. You will be expected to use appropriate investigative and research techniques in carrying out the study. (*see below*)

Your evaluation and analysis **must** demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the relevant Key Concepts.

Before you begin, you **must** have a clearly focused and carefully considered title. You need to have agreed this with your tutor BEFORE you start writing either the preliminary study or the final 3,000 word essay.

Guidance on research methods (*or How do I do this properly?*)

The Independent Study is **not** intended to be an exercise that will involve the collection of large quantities of data. It should be textually centred.

It would be a good idea to...

- Look at reviews of the literature on the text, topic or issue.
- Formulate a question, problem, hypothesis or area of debate around the text, topic or issue.
- Investigate or research the question you have chosen. This should involve some textual or content analysis. Look out for other similar questions posed in other texts.
- Conduct a comparative analysis (e.g. with a generic or historical text) which clarifies or illuminates your contemporary text.
- Investigate an issue (e.g. censorship; the value of the Internet; the influence of ratings) through the analysis of a contemporary text.
- Investigate political, social, economic or historical influences upon a text. Institutional influences or audience issues might also be researched.

It is *not* appropriate to...

- Use research techniques such as: questionnaires, surveys and interviews
- Present information in the form of charts, graphs or computer analyses.

Possible Topics (*or Help – where do I start?*)

How successful was the marketing campaign of (a current film)?

An evaluation of the appropriateness of the objectives, structure, techniques and target audience of the marketing of the film in the light of an analysis of the film. The study will analyse both the film and the campaign as texts.

How important are interactive services in the presentation of televised sport?

A textual analysis of a range of interactive services offered to viewers of televised sport will be placed within the context of the publicity for such services, and their actual use by a small sample audience. Particular attention will be paid to the economic contexts of production and reception.

Is the research on representations of women in the media still valid?

A review of the research and literature on images of women in the media is followed by a summary of its major findings. These are then tested against a random selection of contemporary representations of woman taken from three different media. The similarities and differences between the research and this contemporary evidence is then accounted for.

What are the major differences between contemporary sitcoms and their historical predecessors?

The contemporary sitcom *My Family* is compared with an episode of *Butterflies* first shown in 1978. Major differences are analysed and accounted for in terms of issues of class, geography, the institution of television itself, and changing social attitudes and mores. Similarities and differences in the representation of motherhood and fatherhood are also analysed.

How important are visual criteria to television news values?

A review of the research and literature on television news is carried out to ascertain the significance attributed to visual criteria in the selection of news by academics, researchers and broadcasters. These findings are then tested in an analysis of three randomly selected television news broadcasts in the same week.

How has a (certain film / programme) made an impact on the development of its genre?

The contemporary film would be analysed in the context of its current social context and the context of past genre pieces.

Assessment

Candidates will be required to produce a written study of approximately **3000** words. This word count will not include any supportive material the candidate considers relevant.

As the Independent Study is designed to assist in the development of your critical autonomy, it will test your ability to:

- Present a clearly focused title
- To carry out an investigation or piece of research based upon that title
- Collect and evaluate appropriate evidence.
- Reach coherent conclusions, based on that evidence.

More titles to think about

FILM and BROADCAST FICTION.

1. How are suspense and tension conveyed in the construction of the narrative in (a film of your choice).
2. How important is the title sequence in the introduction of characters and the initiation of the narrative in (a film or broadcast fiction text of your choice).
3. How is the representation of the hero in (film/fiction of your choice) constructed?
4. What is the role and contribution of the (name your movie actor) as the “star” of (name your film or films). Here you can choose a star or icon of your choice and analyse his/her contribution to 3 or so productions of your choice.
5. How does the creative use of the camera create atmosphere in (a film of your choice).
6. What is the importance of the musical score in the construction of a film or broadcast fiction production. You can evaluate individual production or compare artefacts from different genre.
7. Develop a question around the contemporary work of a particular individual; director/musician/scriptwriter/actor/actress.
8. With reference to (a film or films of your choice) can European film be considered a genre? evaluate one particular production and compare it to a typically British film.
9. Construct a question around the representation of a particular category of person (your choice, but for example: the disabled, London gangsters, the police, the clergy, soldiers, female criminals/prisoners).
10. How have developments of film merchandising and marketing affected the popularity of films such as (your choice).

NEWS MANUFACTURE AND PRODUCTION AND THE BRITISH PRESS.

1. How important are the issues of *time* and *place* to broadcasters and journalists in the selection and production of news?
2. How does current affairs topicality influence news agendas of rival news media?
3. How important is the local news broadcast to the future of television news?
4. Are there “tabloid” and “broadsheet” news broadcasters?

5. In the battle for ratings, how do the branding of rival TV news networks influence audience readings and audience loyalty?
6. How is the use of fiction techniques (re-colouring and redesigning of footage, music, editing, etc.) influencing 21st Century News broadcasting?
7. To what extent do (the news media of your choice) contribute to stereotypical representations of (pick your minority group).
8. Choose one group whom you believe to be inadequately represented by the news media. Discuss some examples of how the group is represented. Why is the group represented in these ways.
9. Has good news any part in the agenda of the BBC?
10. The news transitionally has little appeal for the teenage audience. Investigate the reasons for this and provide your own suggestions for the strategies to target a teenage sector.
11. Radio news: compare stations for agenda/audience/context/ideology and delivery.
12. Explore the advent of BBC NEWS 24 and the concept of round the clock news. Look at audience/ideology/production/media language/institutions.
13. Electronic news: issues of time and place / audience / debates about reality construction / representation / audience / accountability.
14. Do we have a free press? Debate the issue using evidence, press regulatory bodies, press ownership, political accountability.
15. How diverse is the British press? Consider how a news story is processed and delivered by a tabloid and a broadsheet newspaper.
16. How has institutional bias affected the representation of a single news event by rival newspapers?
17. Photo-journalism: analyse either the work of a particular photographer, or a named paper, which you can monitor for a period of time to evaluate the quality and contribution of the pictures.
18. Intertextuality of the news. Explore, evaluate and debate the radio/TV and newspaper coverage of ONE news story, over 24 hours.

ADVERTISING

1. How does institution effect the delivery and presentation? Conduct an analysis of adverts considering intertextuality / magazine / TV / radio.
2. To what extent does (the ad campaign of your choice) contribute to stereotypical or alternative representations of (pick your social group).
3. How do public service advertising campaigns such as (your choice) get their message across to their target audience in today's crowded media landscape?
4. How do charity appeals identify and target their audiences?
5. Advert control and censorship. Debate the issues of taste and morality in advertising.
6. Analyse and evaluate a campaign of your choice.
7. Advertising and reality: how do adverts conceptualise the real world?
8. The body image in adverts: engage in the debate over thin is beautiful.
9. The use of music to create atmosphere in adverts.
10. How does political correctness influence the world of advertising?
11. Is there an argument for banning all television advertising targeted at children?

RADIO

This sector will be looked upon with favour by the examiners.

1. Analysis of the content of a radio product of your choice.
2. What public service broadcasting remit does local radio service?
3. What are the roles and function of presenters in local/national radio.
4. How does BBC Radio 5 Live address its target audience and differentiate itself from its sister stations?
5. Does mainstream radio cater for ethnic / cultural minorities?
6. Is radio advertising effective?
7. Radio is the communication of the future: discuss, exploring the links between radio and the Internet.
8. Debate “Interactive radio gives listeners their say” versus “Censorship of the airwaves – who controls the output?”.

Run me through the timescales again?

We will give over approximately one session each week to the planning, research, development and writing of your Independent Study. What follows is a draft outline of how the schedule will work.

It may be subject to change.

Autumn term

- Week 1: Get to know your school library
- Week 2: Introduce the unit, content and research techniques.
- Week 3: Peer/teacher review. Thought-showering of ideas
- Week 4: Planning a long essay
- Week 5: Movie analysis: last week’s screening
- Week 6: Peer review: short presentations on each proposal (part 1)
- Week 7: Peer review: short presentations on each proposal (part 2)
- Hand in written outline of at least 500 words for assessment**

Half term

- Week 8: Outlines returned, titles finalised
- Week 9: Movie analysis: last week’s screening
- Week 10: Grouped research tutorials
- Week 11: Grouped research tutorials
- Week 12: Movie analysis: last week’s screening
- Week 13: Writing. Individual tutorials
- Week 14: Writing. Individual tutorials

Spring term

- Week 1: **Hand in first draft for assessment**
- Week 2: Movie analysis: last week’s screening. Drafts returned.
- Week 3: Writing. Individual tutorials
- Week 4: Writing. Individual tutorials
- Week 5: Movie analysis: last week’s screening
- Week 6: Writing. Individual tutorials

Half term

- Week 7: **Hand in second draft for assessment**