St Philomena’s Catholic High School for Girls

A Level

Media Studies
Welcome to A Level Media Studies!

Welcome to A’ Level Media Studies. The course seeks to empower students and to transform their passive relationship with the media into an active, critical engagement.

The subject offers you the opportunity to combine a theoretical understanding of the mass media in society with the methods of analysing media texts (e.g. television programmes, films, advertising, music, the internet and the press) together with the development of practical skills for media production.

The course also aims to enable you to learn how media industries operate and to research and investigate issues about the role of media and their audiences while undertaking a media productions of your own.

A Level Media Studies is a subject that can be combined with many different subjects in the sixth form. It is particularly well suited to complement GCEs in English and/or Art. Research shows that Media Studies graduates are more likely to gain employment in a variety of careers than the average of all other subjects.

Now that you’ve decided to study Media Studies at A level, you’ll need to do a bit of preparation. This pack contains a programme of information sheets, activities and resources to prepare you to start your A Level in September. It is aimed to be used after you complete your GCSE throughout the rest of the summer term and over the summer holidays to ensure you are ready to start your course in September.

The resources include:

- Key pre-knowledge topics that are required for you to be successful in your course with activities associated with the topics, which test your key knowledge and understanding of the building blocks required to be successful in this subject.

- Suggested reading and associated websites where you can research the topics you will be exploring in your A level course.

- Suggested visits and activities over the summer holidays including places of interest that will generate enthusiasm and engagement.

- How to make the most of the technology you use every day.
Course Outline

Paper 1: Media Messages

Section A: News
Learners will engage in an in-depth study of contemporary news in the UK, requiring learners to explore how and why newspapers and magazines are evolving as media products. Learners' study will be through media products set by OCR.

Section B: Media language and representation
Learners will explore media language and representation, through media products set by OCR for:
- advertising and marketing
- music videos

In addition, learners will engage in an overarching in-depth study of the online, social and participatory media forms of all of the specified media products for Component 01.

Assessment: Examination, 1 hour 45 mins
Weighting: 32.5%

Paper 2: Evolving Media

Section A: Media industries and audiences
Learners will explore media industries and audiences, through media products set by OCR for:
- radio
- video games
- film

Section B: Long form television drama
Learners will engage in an in-depth study of television as an evolving, global media form. Learners must select two specified media products from lists set by OCR. In addition, learners will engage in an overarching in-depth study of the online, social and participatory media forms of all of the specified media products for Component 02.

Assessment: Examination, 2 hours
Weighting: 37.5%

Making Media

Learners will create a cross-media product in response to an OCR set brief. Briefs will focus on the following media forms:
- Television and online
- Radio and online
- Print and online
- Music video and online

Assessment: Non Examined Assessment, (Coursework)
Weighting: 30%
Learning Approaches and Resources

The subject is designed to enable students to work independently and to develop knowledge, experience and enjoyment of the media while demonstrating considerable technical, creative and evaluative skills. Students have the opportunity to use equipment such as Apple Mac computers, digital cameras and “up to the minute” film editing software packages. Media Studies students will have exclusive access to their own suite of computers in order to explore and extend their ideas during study periods. We are currently investing in reading material for the library and each student will be required to purchase their own copy of the course textbook at the beginning of the course.

Set Texts

All students will be required to purchase a copy of the OCR A Level Media Studies textbooks for each of the examined components to support their learning. The titles and ISBN numbers are as follows:

**OCR A Level Media Studies Student Guide 1: Media Messages**

**OCR A Level Media Studies Student Guide 2: Evolving Media**

Taster Day

You will experience an introduction into the course that involves looking at the concept of representation in relation to the topic of music videos. You will also consider how media language, (composition and framing, mise-en-scene, sound and editing) is used to construct these representations.
Media and Representation

Part of your A Level Media Studies exams will require you to evaluate the representation of a particular social group from the genre of news.

Understanding representation is all about understanding the choices that are made when it comes to portraying something or someone in a mass media text. It’s impossible to portray every aspect of an individual in a photograph, or even in a feature film, so certain features of their personality and appearance get highlighted, and are often enhanced, when it comes to constructing the representation that the audience will see.


When you’re analysing representation, think about the following questions:

- **Who** or what is being represented? Who is the preferred audience for this representation?
- **What** are they doing? Is their activity presented as typical, or atypical? Are they conforming to genre expectations or other conventions?
- **Why** are they present? What purpose do they serve? What are they communicating by their presence? What’s the preferred reading?
- **Where** are they? How are they framed? Are they represented as natural or artificial? What surrounds them? What is in the foreground and what is in the background?

Once you start to think carefully about different representations, you will find that the same representation means different things to different people. We all decode representations according to our own life experience, where we’ve lived, how old we are, and what other media texts we are familiar with, as well as a myriad psychological factors. Other elements such as political sympathies and social class can come into play. When producers construct a media representation, they often assume that the audience is one homogenous mass that will all decode the representation in the same way. However, people see even the most basic images in different ways.

Look at the two famous optical illusions below. What do you see first?

![Optical Illusion](image)

Old or young woman? Duck or rabbit? The problem with representing any kind of reality in a media text is that it’s never going to be 100% accurate. Representation always involves the construction of a version of reality, not reality itself (even in so-called Reality TV!) So media producers have to make choices; what to put in, what to leave out.
Summer Task A:

Representation in News

Activity:

Conduct your own research into the representation of a particular social group by the news media. This should focus on:

- The front page of one tabloid newspaper, (including use of masthead, headline, image and text, including how language and other conventions are used for effect on the reader)
- The front page of one broadsheet newspaper, (as above)

Different social groups might include a particular social class, age, gender, ethnicity, etc.

Make detailed notes on each. This will form the basis of one of your first lessons when you return in September. You will need to bring in a copy of the newspapers that you used to conduct your research.
Summer Task, B:

Textual Analysis, Technical Codes and Conventions

In your A Level Media Studies Paper 2 exam, you will be required to analyse long form TV Drama and comment on how technical codes and conventions are used to construct the representation of a specific social group.

The four technical codes and conventions are as follows:

- Composition and framing
- Mise-en-scene
- Sound
- Editing

Even if you have not studied Media Studies before, you will be familiar with these technical codes from your own experience of watching moving image, whether this is on TV, film, on the internet, etc. However, as A'Level Media Studies students, you will need to become more active and observant critics of how these different forms of media language are used to create meaning. (Warning – this might affect the way in which you watch films and television in the future!)

Composition and Framing:

- To establish place and time: establishing shot/master shot; aerial shot.
- To emphasise character, narrative, relationships: closeup, mid-shot, long-shot, wide-shot, two-shot, over-the-shoulder shot.
- To construct a subjective point of view through the eyes of a character (PoV shot) or an editorial viewpoint of the action or a character – e.g. high, low or canted camera angle.
- To follow action or focus on significant details – e.g. pan, tilt, track, dolly, crane, steadicam, zoom in or out.
- To frame important details within the shot to create emphasis, mood, tension, balance: deep and shallow focus shots; framing devices; the rule of thirds.
- What use has been made of different types of camera shot, and why?
- What kind of shots open and close the sequence, and what is their function?
- How do the height and angle of the camera contribute to meaning and impact at different points of the scene?
- Camera movement: at what points in the sequence does the camera itself move – and what effect does this have on the way we ‘read’ the action?
- Framing/composition: does the position and angle of the camera encourage us to ‘read’ a shot in a particular way?
- From whose viewpoint are we looking, and what details are we being positioned to notice?

Conduct your own research into how composition and framing are used to create meaning in TV Drama. Refer to a particular example of long-form TV Drama that you have watched. Analyse how that social group was presented through the use of composition and framing.
Different Shot Types:

EWS (Extreme Wide Shot)
The view is so far from the subject that he isn't even visible. Often used as an establishing shot.

VWS (Very Wide Shot)
The subject is visible (barely), but the emphasis is still on placing him in his environment.

WS (Wide Shot)
The subject takes up the full frame, or at least as much as comfortably possible. AKA: long shot, full shot.

MS (Mid Shot)
Shows some part of the subject in more detail while still giving an impression of the whole subject.

MCU (Medium Close Up)
Half way between a MS and a CU.

CU (Close Up)
A certain feature or part of the subject takes up the whole frame.

ECU (Extreme Close Up)
The ECU gets right in and shows extreme detail.
Variation: Choker

Cut-in
Shows some (other) part of the subject in detail.

CA (Cutaway)
A shot of something other than the subject.

Two-Shot
A shot of two people, framed similarly to a mid-shot.

OSS (Over-the-Shoulder Shot)
Looking from behind a person at the subject.

Noddy Shot
Usually refers to a shot of the interviewer listening and reacting to the subject.

Mise-en-scène

The hugely important design aspects of a production: locations, lighting, colour, props, clothing and make-up. Production design is crucial in shaping visual impact and meaning. Originally used in the theatre, the French term mise-en-scène literally means ‘putting on stage.’

- In film or TV, it refers to everything that appears on screen, and the way it is arranged – sets, props, costumes, colour palette and lighting.
- Mise-en-scène can also include the positioning/movement of actors on the set or within the individual frame (called blocking).
- Usually involves collaboration between the Wardrobe, Properties, Lighting, Set Design, Make-up and Art Departments.
- What different settings are used in the sequence? Interior or exterior? Studio-based or shot on location?
- What information or meanings can you draw from the different places in which the action takes place?
- What objects, props, images or symbols, do you particularly notice in each location, and what associations or ideas do they suggest?
- How is lighting and shadow used to create meaning in the scene?
- What colours stand out in the sequence, what associations do they suggest, and what effect do they create?
- What information can you draw from the ways the characters are dressed, made-up or accessorised?
Conduct your own research into how mise-en-scene is used to create meaning in TV Drama. Refer to the programme that you researched in the composition and framing activity. Analyse how that social group was presented through the use of mise-en-scene.

**Sound:**
Includes:
* verbal soundtrack (for example, dialogue, voiceover, narration)
* sound-effects (for example ‘natural’ sound, pauses, silence)
* music score, themes and stings, bridges and motifs
* ambient sound (such as general background noise used to establish place, and create a sense of realism).

Can be:
* diegetic – i.e. a natural part of the fictional world of the narrative; or non-diegetic – i.e. added from outside the narrative (e.g. heartbeat, music score, voiceover) in postproduction (created by the Foley artist)
* synchronous – matched to the images on screen, or asynchronous – deliberately contradicting the flow of images.

List all the different types of non-verbal sound you can hear on the soundtrack.
* Which sounds are diegetic (i.e. part of the narrative action in the ‘world’ of the drama) – and what clues do they give about the characters?
* Which sounds are non-diegetic (i.e. additional music or sound effects, added to create atmosphere or mood) – and what effect do they create?
* Has music been used, and if so, where, in what form, and why? For example, instrumental sound motifs, a song with meaningful lyrics, a bridging music track which ‘covers’ the images from one scene to the next,
Conduct your own research into how sound is used to create meaning in TV Drama. Refer to the programme that you researched in the sound activity. Analyse how that social group was presented through the use of sound.

**Editing:**

The post-production selection, sequencing and joining together of camera shots, sound and/or text. Editing is used:
- to create a particular visual style, pace or mood
- to create a narrative sequence, through cutting
- to construct the illusion of reality through ‘invisible’ processes such as continuity editing; the 180-degree rule; shot-reverse-shot; match on action; eyeline match
- to show the passage of time through visual effects or transitions: dissolve, fade in, fade out or to black; wipe, slow motion or fast-forward; short or long takes; flashback
- to represent simultaneous activity: insert; cutaway, cross-cutting, parallel editing
- to disrupt or challenge the viewer’s expectations: jump-cut, montage editing, post-production special effects.

- What’s the pace and rhythm of editing in the sequence? Try:
  - counting the shots to gauge the variety of shot lengths and variations in pace
  - mapping the edit points in a diagram to get the ‘shape’ of the sequence.
- What different types of edit are used at different point in the sequence, and why?
- Is the editing style ‘invisible’ – i.e. a natural ‘flow’ using conventional continuity techniques – or is it disorientating or disjointed – and what does this add to the narrative?
- Are sound and image synchronous or contrapuntal (that is, do the images work with or against each other)?
- Are particular editing devices or visual effects used, and what is their impact?

Conduct your own research into how editing is used to create meaning in TV Drama. Refer to the programme that you researched in the editing activity. Analyse how that social group was presented through the use of editing.
Media Studies, Theory:

A Level Media Studies requires students to apply a range of academic theories to the set texts for study.

In total, there are 18 different theories which you will need to remember and be able to apply. They are summarised below:

Theories of media language:
- semiotics, including Barthes
- narratology, including Todorov
- genre theory, including Neale.
- structuralism, including Lévi-Strauss
- postmodernism, including Baudrillard.

Theories of media representation:
- theories of representation, including Hall
- theories of identity, including Gauntlett
- feminist theories, including Bell Hooks and Van Zoonen
- theories of gender performativity, including Butler
- theories around ethnicity and postcolonial theory, including Gilroy.

Theories of media industries:
- power and media industries, including Curran and Seaton.
- theories of regulation, including those of Livingstone and Lunt
- theories of cultural industries, including those of Hesmondhalgh.

Theories of media audiences:
- media effects, including Bandura
- cultivation theory, including Gerbner
- reception theory, including Hall
- theories of fandom, including Jenkins
- theories of ‘end of audience’, including Shirky.

Summer Task C:

Research the theories of representation referred to above. Apply these to the texts you have analysed for tasks A and B, eg. can you apply gender theory or theories of ethnicity to the representations you have analysed?
Set texts:

You will be required to study a wide range of set texts across nine different media, ie. film, advertising and marketing, radio, magazines, video games, music videos, TV drama and newspapers.

Please be advised that A Level Media Studies is *not* an easy subject. This is a common misconception amongst some students who assume that it involves making a few films and watching stuff! If this is why you have chosen the subject then you may wish to consider whether or not you have made the right choice. The new A Level Media Studies specification challenges students into acquiring an in-depth knowledge and understanding of a range of challenging academic theories and concepts, and then rigorously applying them to a broad variety of complex subject matter. Students must be prepared for a high level of academic challenge.

It also helps if you are someone who has a strong relationship with the media, ie. you are passionate about news and current affairs, have a love of film and high-quality television and have a genuine interest in the media industry, (eg. how films, TV programmes, newspapers, etc are produced, distributed, etc.) If you have your finger on the pulse of popular culture in terms of music, radio, etc. this is no bad thing either.

In short, if you are excited by the media in all its forms and prepared for an intellectually stimulating but rigorous learning experience, then you should hopefully find A Level Media Studies to be a very rewarding course.