



Bridging Unit:
A Level Media Studies
Exam board: AQA



What are the bridging tasks? These have been designed to give you a sample of a range of things we do in Media.

1. You will start with a 'Warm up task', using a bit of Media terminology, and researching what the words mean.
2. The 'Main tasks: Engaging with the frameworks' section is made up of three different tasks that relate to the 'frameworks' we study. Here, there is an extension you can choose to use by applying some Media theories. You will find these in a box at the end of this document.
3. An optional production task.

What am I looking for? I want to see close engagement with the tasks, with evidence and examples used, and clear explanations given. This should give me an idea of how you are beginning to think like a person who analyses the media and reflects on how the media communicate ideas, and how and why you are using it.

Warm up task: Media Terminology

A Level courses are full of new and often unfamiliar words that are crucial to learn. This will introduce you to a few we use in Media. **Find definitions and examples of the following media terms:**

Mise en scene
Iconography
Common conventions
Diegetic sound
Non diegetic sound
Representations
Stereotype
Colour connotations
Moral panics
Hypodermic Needle Theory

For example, if I'd asked for a definition and example of 'mean world syndrome' you might write this:

Mean world syndrome: when people watch too much negative news, they begin to think the world is 'mean'.

Example: most of the news about teenagers in some newspapers is negative, calling them 'thugs' and linking them to crime. This might make some people believe all teenagers are bad.

Main tasks: Engaging with the frameworks

There are four 'frameworks' on the Media course (Media Language, Audiences, Representations and Industry). The three tasks below will give you a flavour of most of these. **You can do these in any order you choose.** I also want you to read and apply some Media theories (mini outlines of these are under list of tasks below).

Media Language:

1. Read the mini outline of Barthes and van Zoonen's theories in your Mini Theory Guide below.
2. Find a front cover of a magazine that targets a specific gender (i.e. Vogue, Men's Health, GQ Magazine, Elle). These can be found by doing a search on Google images. Annotate it in detail to show what ideas are being created about that gender. Alternatively, you can describe them. Aim to use some of the Media theory below (Barthes and van Zoonen). Make sure you pick out a range of evidence – precise details of photographs such as colours, poses, the way they look at the camera, lighting, clothing, props, words etc.

Media Representations:

1. Read Hall and Gerbner's theories in your Mini Theory Guide below.
2. Decide on a specific group in society (for example, teenagers, black women, Muslim men, disabled people, elderly people, men, women... etc). Gather evidence of different ways they are represented across the media – it's important to get a range of different types (positive and negative). Gather evidence in quick notes from what you see – your examples need to be from a range of different types of media from news to films, soap operas to documentaries, YouTube to newspapers – the broader the range the better.
For example, I might choose teachers, then look at a teacher doing a blog for other teachers or their students, a news article about teachers that says they are all terrible, another praising a teacher for being a hero, then a TV drama such as *The Inbetweeners*. I might focus on some pictures from them, and a few different quotes from each, or a scene in *The Inbetweeners* to think about how they are represented.
3. Using your examples and the most appropriate theory (van Zoonen, Gerbner or Hall – you could use a little bit of each if it works), explain how you think the media might be able to influence the ways people see that group. This should be 250-300 words.

Media Audiences:

This part is all about you – how and why you use media, and how it might influence you. You are going to read two media theories. Then you are going to think about a range of media you use, and explain the reasons that you use it. Make sure that you use media theories to help explain - I will give examples below.

1. Theory 1: Read Dyer's Utopian Theory in your Mini Theory Guide below.
2. Dyer's Utopian Theory Task: Using at least four different pieces of media you use, explain why you use them, using this theory. *i.e. one of mine could be that during lockdown, I liked watching 'Race Around the World' at the moment because my life lacked adventure.*
3. Theory 2: Read Blumler and Katz's Uses and Gratifications in your Mini Theory Guide.
4. Blumler and Katz Task: Using at least four different pieces of media that you use regularly, explain why you use them, using this theory. Look again at the examples I gave if you are stuck. Remember that there might be some media texts you use for more than one reason

Optional production task: Make a piece of media in any form that tells me something about you. I could be short film, a blog, an article, a webpage – the choice is yours.



A Level Media Studies:

Mini Theory Guides for Bridging Unit



Below are some mini outlines of a few of the key theories we use in Media Studies: Aim to use these in each of the tasks. You will be directed to which ones work best in each task. However, you can mix them up.

Media Language: Roland Barthes – semiology

- Media products are decoded by readers (we read messages in them, such as red can be decoded as ‘danger’)
- Denotations occur when we recognise literal meanings, or physical objects (i.e. a picture of a man = man)
- Connotations are when words and objects can have associated meanings that we share across culture (i.e. a picture of a muscular man towering over us, with a glow around the edges, would represent him as god-like).
- When words and images are used together they can form complex meanings (think about the different features in the idea above). We call these different words and images ‘signs’ or ‘codes’. (i.e. the word ‘love’ is a verbal code, the colour red is a visual code.)
- Signs can help to reinforce myths in society (i.e. the myth of masculinity reinforces ideas that men should be strong, not have emotions, be violent etc.)

Representation: Liesbet van Zoonen

- The media has a powerful influence on our identities and can shape ideas of gender. (i.e. there is no ‘truth’ about what a man or woman should be like but we get lots of our ideas from the media).
- In a patriarchal society, women’s bodies are seen as objects and different to male bodies as powerful and strong. The ‘male gaze’ invites women to be looked at which makes them passive, and demeans them (i.e. many media images of women focus on their bodies and ideas of beauty, these encourage them to be looked at, as objects, not people.)
- Gender is performative based on ‘what we do’ not our biology (i.e. as there is not ‘truth’ about how men or women should behave, we can perform how we choose – women can be violent and men can be gentle.)
- Passive women/active male representations reinforce male social dominance.
- Representations can challenge dominant ideas in society.

Media Audiences: Gerbner’s Cultivation Theory

- The media cultivates beliefs and ideologies and acts as a form of socialisation
- It can be a stronger form of socialisation than real-life experiences – this leads to mainstreaming (where certain ideas, beliefs and trends become mainstream – or normalised)
- If audiences see messages repeated in the media, it becomes an easy sell to audiences. They’ve already been primed for the ideas and so are more likely to agree with messages that have been repeated across the media.
- If ideas resonate with your experiences, it amplifies the effect of the message, encouraging more people to believe them.
- Heavy use of negative media can lead to seeing the world in a negative way: mean world syndrome

Hall’s Representation Theory

Hall argues that the media is constructed in ways that influence us: Hall recognises that the media can imitate the world but that it does not simply do that because they are constructed through selection of choices that shape ideas, values, attitudes and beliefs about the world (we call this the mediation process). In the box below, it outlines some of the choices media producers make when constructing media texts.

Examples of the mediation process:

- **Selection:** by choosing the order in which news stories are ordered (first to last, longest to shortest) shapes our understanding of what is seen as important.
- **Composition:** codes are chosen for their connotations so have an impact – a scruffy sign chosen to represent a hospital will connote it is in a poor state of repair, dark clouds and rain can connote sadness or danger whereas sunshine connotes positivity.
- **Editing:** the way something is edited can also convey meanings. Fast paced edits can create ideas of something being exciting. A 30 second news item seems to not be very important.

However, Hall points out that we are not born with the ability to understand these techniques the media are using, so therefore, they are shaping our understanding of the world, even if we do learn to recognise some of them.

Effects of stereotyping: The widespread use of stereotypes encourages negative ideas about specific groups; they position some groups as powerful, and others as outcasts, or social ‘others’. He argues this is a form of ‘symbolic violence’ that suppresses some groups and acts as a form of social control- it makes some people more visible and others undesirable. It also suggests these ideas are natural, therefore normalising certain appearances and behaviours. Through this, stereotypes ‘fix boundaries’ for what is seen as socially acceptable while excluding everyone else who doesn’t fit inside these boundaries. Through this, it creates a ‘circularity’ which prevents some groups escaping oppression or poverty.

Stereotypes can be challenged: by deconstructing stereotypes (presenting groups represented in negative ways as normal people), appropriating them (such as Grime artists as violent black males), or creating countertypes, negative ideas can be challenged.

Dyer’s Utopian Theory suggests that we use media to fill a ‘gap’ or a ‘lack’ in our lives. For example, if we lack power, we might enjoy watching superhero films where people have incredible power. If we don’t have much money, we might use media that allows us to see lives filled with luxury. If our lives feel completely safe, we may even enjoy media that shows unstable lives.

You can do some further reading about this theory online – there are lots of explanations of it.

Blumler and Katz’s Uses and Gratifications. They suggest that there are four reasons why we use media texts:

1. **Diversión** (escapism): The audience use the media for escapism or emotional release from everyday pressure (*i.e. I like watching sci-fis like ‘Future Man’ as it is a complete escape from the real world into a fictional world – it is also funny*).

2. **Personal Relationships:** The audience use media texts to form relationships with ‘known’ TV programmes or characters, as well as relationships with other people who can discuss the same media texts. “Did you see East Enders? I really felt for poor Peggy/Sharon, Little Mo.....” (*i.e. Twitter: lots of people enjoy following footballers, or celebrities on Twitter. They may also enjoy talking with their friends about them.*)

3. **Personal Identity:** The audience use media texts to compare their own life with characters’ lives and situations, or to further develop our own sense of identity. (*i.e. News – The Guardian: when I see people whose lives are really difficult, it makes me recognise how lucky I am. Or, when I watch Masterchef, it helps me learn new cooking techniques*).

4. **Surveillance:** The audience use media texts to see what is going on in the world. (*i.e. Twitter: some people love to follow what celebrities are doing; others like to follow the news to keep up to date with current affairs.*)

