

media studies

A Level

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Exam board: Eduqas (WJEC)



What is this subject about?

Media Studies is a fascinating, important subject that will help you think about all the media texts that you use in a new and more critical way. The subject involves the close analysis of the images, sounds and text that we experience via the media and the messages and values that they convey. It is the study of individual media texts (TV programmes, magazines, newspapers, video games, film marketing materials and music videos) and, on a wider scale, you will be required to question how the media impact upon contemporary society. It also enables you to develop some practical skills applicable to a range of careers. As the specification has been designed in close consultation with industry professionals and academics, it includes a strong theoretical approach.

What will I study over the two years?

In the first year you will focus on Component 1 and you will learn the skills of textual analysis. This will involve deconstructing a wide range of media texts, including set products, in terms of their technical features and how these features are used to create meanings for a range of audiences.

You will explore and debate how different groups are represented in society. For example, you will consider how ideas about gender, age, ethnicity and national identities are constructed and the reasons for this. You will also explore media coverage of key contemporary events and issues, learning to question and challenge the messages that you receive. As part of this process you will apply a range of academic theories, in a critical way, to media texts. You will also learn about the historical, social and contexts that impact on the nature of those representations. A key part of the first year of study is also the exploration of audience and industry i.e. how ownership, technological change and the desire to attract and maintain audiences, impact on media products.

In the first year you will start Component 3 (coursework). This will provide you with the opportunity to show your understanding of the codes and conventions of different media forms, through the practical production of your own coursework materials. This will involve comprehensive research that will inform your designs. The briefs will be set by the exam board each year and might include options like producing a range of marketing materials for a new TV Drama, including a trailer, or creating a music video and accompanying promotional webpage. In the second year, you will complete Component 3.

In the second year you will also complete Component 2 (exam) which is a study in depth paper. You will explore the television, magazine and online media industries (including social media and vlogging). You will study a foreign language text as well as a British one, to compare industry practice and content. You will also compare texts from the 1960s with those produced today, considering industry issues and how messages and values have changed as society has changed. You will also look at the differences between independently produced texts and those produced by larger organisations.

How is the course assessed?

Assessment is by two exam papers (worth 70% of the final mark) and a creative coursework component (worth 30% of the final mark).

What skills will I need and develop in this course?

You will be encouraged to engage with a wide range of texts, developing skills of observation, critical analysis and personal reflection. You will need to feel confident with academic writing (essays) but we will help you to develop your skills further. You will also develop creative and practical skills, including: desktop publishing, video making and editing. You will also develop independent research skills. Please note that this is not just a practical course; it requires you to think, question and challenge ideas.

What can the course lead to in terms of higher education and future careers?

With regard to progression, this course does not guarantee a career in the media industry, but many students do go on to read media or film degrees at university. It also provides a good analytical and creative A Level which would support other subjects for university entry. Students who have studied A Level Media Studies have gone on to study a wide variety of degree subjects and some have gone on to apprenticeships.

What are the formal entry requirements for this course?

Aside from the general entry requirements that the College requires, you will also need a minimum of:

- Grade 4 in GCSE English Language (as there is the need for you to write analytical essays).

A sound level of creativity is also desirable as there is a strong requirement for creative thinking and application with the coursework production.

What extra support/enrichment activities are on offer?

The department has strong links with Southampton Solent University, University for the Creative Arts and other educational providers. We regularly seek guidance on how best to advise our students about progression opportunities. We also offer support and enrichment workshops, invite in guest speakers and enable students to build more of a practical portfolio during Wider Skills Week. At the end of the second year we celebrate student achievement with our own Esher Oscars.

Subject combination advice:

Media Studies is a subject that by its nature requires candidates to consider individual, moral, ethical, social, cultural and contemporary issues. Therefore it combines well with any humanities subject, for example History, English, Politics and Sociology. Students also often take Media with an arts subject, such as Photography.

Students could take Media Studies with Film Studies as, with the new specification, they are notably different. However, both subjects teach critical, textual analysis skills and have creative production elements so you may wish to go for more breadth over your choice of three A Levels. We advise that you speak to a member of the Department for further information, if you are considering this combination.

What is the difference between Media A Level, Film A Level and BTEC media courses?

Whilst Media Studies looks at a range of media texts including music videos, radio, TV programmes, webpages and advertising, Film Studies focuses purely on the study of films and requires a passion for watching a range of texts including black and white, independent and foreign language films.

However both involve a theoretical and practical element. To study Media Studies, you need to be engaged with a range of media texts or be interested to learn about different media industries. With Film Studies, it is essential that you are prepared to watch a diverse range of films from different cultures and time periods. Both Film and Media Studies encompass practical elements, with a 70% exam / 30% coursework ratio.

The focus in BTEC, for the learner, is the acquisition of professional media skills which are theoretically underpinned and this is a 'hands on', practical course. The dominant learning paradigm is to 'learn by doing'. The sharpest contrast between the two courses lies in the assessment of work.