



Key Concepts & Skills for Media Studies

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Hodder & Stoughton

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message answering service. Email address: orders@bookpoint.co.uk

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 340 807849

First Published 2002

Impression number	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Year	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003					

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Typeset and produced by Gray Publishing, Tunbridge Wells, Kent
Printed in Malta for Hodder & Stoughton Educational,
a division of Hodder Headline Plc, 338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH
by MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin, Cornwall

Preface: to the student

We wrote this book to support you in preparation for your Media Studies assessment. It is meant to be a practical companion to use while you're studying and revising (whether at home, school or college) and we've tried to design it so that it is easy to find what you are looking for, quickly.

We cannot claim to have included everything you need to know here in such a small space, as the subject is very wide-ranging, but the main aim of the book was to produce something that would give you the basic key concepts and skills you need to get started.

Media Studies is a demanding subject. You are required to be a know-it-all about new technology, current affairs and new topics, on the one hand, and you're asked to be a graphic designer or a film director for your practical project, on the other. In addition, someone, somewhere (usually a self-appointed guardian of the nation's educational standards or a jaded newspaper editor), will tell you that this subject is a soft option!

We do not believe that Media Studies is an easy option and this book aims to provide you with definitions and examples of the **key concepts** and **skills** that you will have to learn; the essential 'what', 'how' and 'why' of studying the media. We also provide you with demonstrations of **textual analysis** of a variety of media texts as examples to show you the application of key concepts and skills in action.

How the book is arranged

The book has the following features to help you to find your way around:

- ☐ **Key terms:** these are important terms with their definitions. They are provided near to their use in the relevant chapter and are included in the index, so that you can look up other references to them.
- ☐ **Activities:** these offer you opportunities to engage with some of the ideas in the book. They are numbered to help you and your tutors to identify them quickly.
- ☐ **Examiners' tips:** these are some points of advice from our experience as GCSE and A-level Media Studies examiners, to help you to prepare for your assessments.
- ☐ **Extend your knowledge:** this gives you some suggestions for more advanced research, especially if you are continuing this subject to the

second year of A-level, to SQA Advanced Higher level, to AVCE or preparing to start an undergraduate course in a media-related subject.

We are pleased to have included photographs of some of our own students at work, with some examples of their media production projects, to show you how they have approached their work.

What level are you studying for?

The book is ideal for **AS-level Media Studies** and has been written for students following the Media Studies specifications of **OCR, AQA and WJEC** awarding bodies alike. However, it has been designed with students on other courses in mind, such as **GNVQ, AVCE, BTEch and Scottish Higher** courses. It will also be very useful to you if you have not studied Media Studies at A-level, but are starting as an undergraduate on a **media-related degree** course.

Chapter 5, **Improving your study skills**, aims to help you to prepare for the range of assessments you are likely to encounter. It also anticipates some of the types of study you will progress to in the second year of an A-level course or on an undergraduate course, such as research.

In the Appendix, the sections on **Bibliography and recommended reading** and **Useful websites** contain lists of books and sites that you might find helpful for your studies. Within this section is **Student guidance**, which contains sources that offer you guidance on choosing a media-related degree course or on career routes if you are considering taking your studies further in this field.

The authors have many years' experience of teaching GCSE and A-level Media Studies to hundreds of students, many of whom, we are pleased to say, went on to study a media-related degree course and are currently working successfully in various parts of media industries.

Whatever path you choose to follow, we hope that you find the book useful and we would be pleased to hear from you about anything you liked or think that we have missed out. You can contact us at <mailto:info@screenstudies.com> when you have a moment.

We will be producing complementary material on this website: **www.screenstudies.com** so be sure to visit it.

Vivienne Clark, James Baker and Eileen Lewis

Preface: to the subject tutor

Given that exam specifications tend to change frequently, we decided to produce a book that dealt with the essential foundation of Media Studies, namely the **key concepts** and the **skills** of analysis, research, exam preparation, student media production and evaluation.

Even though new topics and texts may be introduced and technology changes, this common conceptual foundation for studying media texts and products remains, and will probably remain, essentially the same. This foundation is shared by most Media Studies courses at all levels and so it is our intention that this book is a versatile, accessible and, in times of restricted budgets, fairly timeless resource.

In such a space as this, there will inevitably be omissions and a lack of detail (for example, we have not addressed Key skills, but these are comprehensively referenced in every awarding body's specification). But given the wide-ranging nature of this subject, and the tendency of other textbooks on the market to pack a bit of everything in, we decided to emphasize the basic key concepts and skills that you need to cover with your students.

Levels of study

This book is ideal for **AS-level Media Studies** and has been written for students and tutors following the Media Studies specifications of **OCR, AQA** and **WJEC** awarding bodies alike. These three specifications essentially share the same **conceptual framework**, even if the nomenclature or emphases may differ slightly. They also have much in common in terms of topics and methods of assessment and we have focused on these common areas, namely textual analysis, preparing for unseen media text examinations, student media production and key topics.

This book was in production while the first cycle of the new A-level specifications was in progress and what was quite apparent to us from our teaching was that there was quite a jump in the level of demand required between AS- and A2-level. While it is clear that not much theory

is needed to succeed at AS-level, students are certainly required to demonstrate much more theoretical understanding at A2-level. Therefore, we have included some examples of using theory and make references to extension or research activities to help students (and tutors) to anticipate this jump, identified as **Extend your knowledge**.

This book has been designed with students on other courses in mind, such as **GNVQ**, **AVCE** and **BTech** and **Scottish Higher** courses. It will also be very useful for anyone who has not studied Media Studies at A-level, but who is starting as an undergraduate on a **media-related degree** course.

How this book is arranged

The book has been designed to be used by the student for independent learning as well as by the tutor in class or small group work.

See the preface for students earlier (page vii) for a guide to the book's features.

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCES

The increasing number of students opting to take Media Studies at A-level as an option in our schools and colleges has inevitably resulted in an increase in demand for numbers of tutors to deliver the course. From our work with awarding bodies and for various professional development agencies, the authors are well aware that many tutors find themselves 'in at the deep end' at the start of September, many not having taught the subject before and with no prospect of training. This book has also been written with you firmly in mind.

In the Appendix we have included a section, **Resources and contacts for tutors**, that includes contact details of most of the key networking, continuing professional development and resources agencies, at the time of publication.

Please feel free to contact us at info@screenstudies.com if you have any feedback on our book. We will be producing complementary material on this website: **www.screenstudies.com**

Vivienne Clark, James Baker and Eileen Lewis

Acknowledgements

The authors and publisher would like to thank the following for permission to use copyright material in this book:

Routledge and the author for extract from Paul Levinson, *The Soft Edge*; Routledge and the author for extract from John Fiske, *Television Culture*; M.U.P. and the author for extracts from Richard Kilborn and John Izod, *An Introduction to Television Documentary: Confronting Reality*; Ebury Press and the author for extracts from Mark McCrum, *Castaway: The Full Inside Story of the Major BBC Series*. BBC Radio 4 and the presenter, Paul Lewis, for the script extract from *Moneybox* (16 September, 2001). Canterbury Christ Church University College, Kent, UK for stills from *What Women Want* and for the script extract from the radio play *Beans Means Fines*. Film Education and Aardman Animations for the synopsis and script extract from *Chicken Run*. Arnold and the authors for material on websites in David Gauntlett and David Silver, *Web Studies*, Arnold, 2000. OCR, AQA, WJEC, Ed-Excel and SQA awarding bodies, for references to their post-16 qualifications specifications.

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Special mention is due to Nina Welling and to Laurence of Mar for their excellent photographs of students at work and to the students of Hurtwood

House, Ravens Wood and Maidstone Boys' Grammar themselves for allowing us to feature their work, which bring all the theories alive.

Every effort has been made to trace and acknowledge ownership of copyright. The publishers will be glad to make suitable arrangements with any copyright holders whom it has not been possible to contact.

Thanks

The authors would like to thank our many students, past and present, for their enthusiasm, creativity and commitment to their studies, as well as the staff at Ravens Wood School, Maidstone Grammar School for Boys and Hurtwood House, respectively, for their support.

We would also like to thank our long-suffering families for their support and encouragement.

We are very grateful to Lesley Riddle and Alexia Chan at Hodder Arnold, for their helpful guidance and enthusiasm for the project. Thanks are also due to Lesley Gray and the team at Gray Publishing for all their hard work.

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CHAPTER

7

Key concepts and skills

Defining communication processes and media forms

Activity 1.1

- What is your personal style of inter-personal communication?
- Ask a friend or family member what typifies how you communicate with family, friends and others.
- If it is difficult to think objectively about yourself, try asking a friend for their opinions or make a video recording of yourself when you are talking to friends and directly to the camera. Watch yourself on the recording.
- What can you observe about your voice, gestures, body language and vocabulary?

It is an obvious point to remind you here that communication is an essential part of the human experience, but it is worth pausing for a moment to consider how methods of communication have evolved from what we might term as **inter-personal** to those communicated via mass media forms. This book is concerned with **media communication**, but in many cases these forms are essentially the result of centuries of creative and technological evolution from basic forms of inter-personal communication.

Diagram 1.1 outlines the basic ways in which humans communicate on an inter-personal basis. However, there are other forms of communication, which are neither inter-personal nor strictly media forms, in the contemporary sense of the word, which are very closely related to the areas that we will be studying and which contribute a great deal to collective and individual identities, cultures and self-expression. For example:

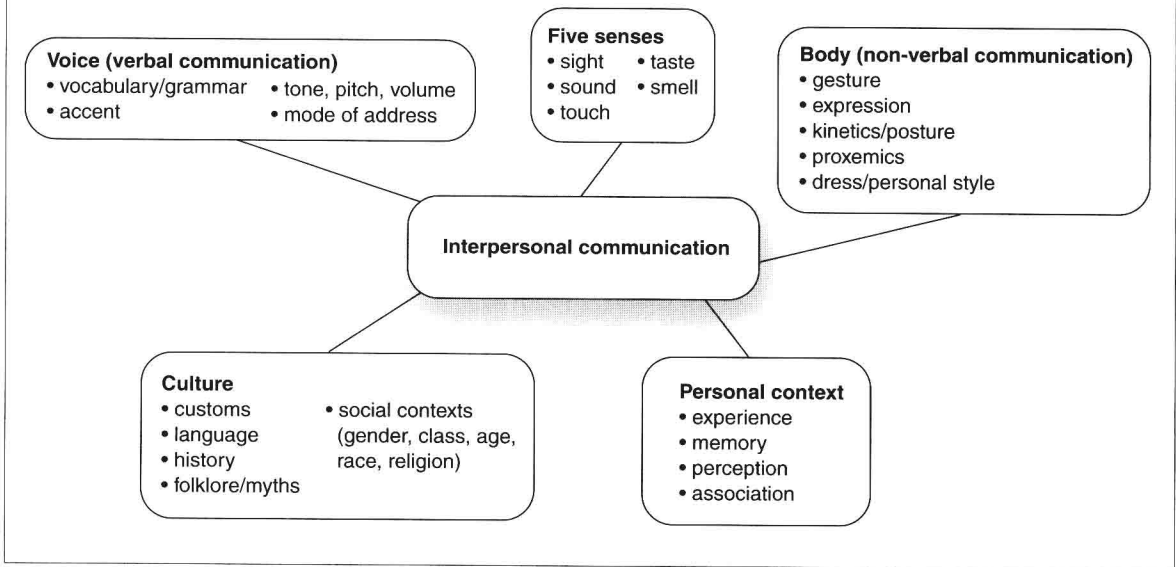
- ☐ art, sculpture and architecture
- ☐ literature (including poetry, plays and novels)
- ☐ theatre, music concerts and dance
- ☐ fashion
- ☐ hobbies and crafts, including sport.

MAIN MEDIA FORMS

Throughout this book we have grouped the various forms of media communication into **three study areas**, for ease of reference:

- ☐ **audio-visual media forms** comprise moving image media (film and television), which use moving images and sound, and audio forms
- ☐ **print media forms** which use still images and words
- ☐ **ICT-based media forms** combine elements from both moving image and print media.

Diagram 1.1 The main forms of inter-personal communication.



Activity 1.2

- Using the information above about these forms of communication, consider the various ways in which you communicate your identity and opinions to other people.
- What forms of communication do you enjoy, other than media forms?

In this book we will be referring to the objects of our media study as either:

- ☐ **media texts**, if we are studying their content and meaning or
- ☐ **media products**, if we are studying them as the outcome of a production process and in an institutional and audience context.

You might find that this distinction is useful to you in your own writing.



Extend your knowledge

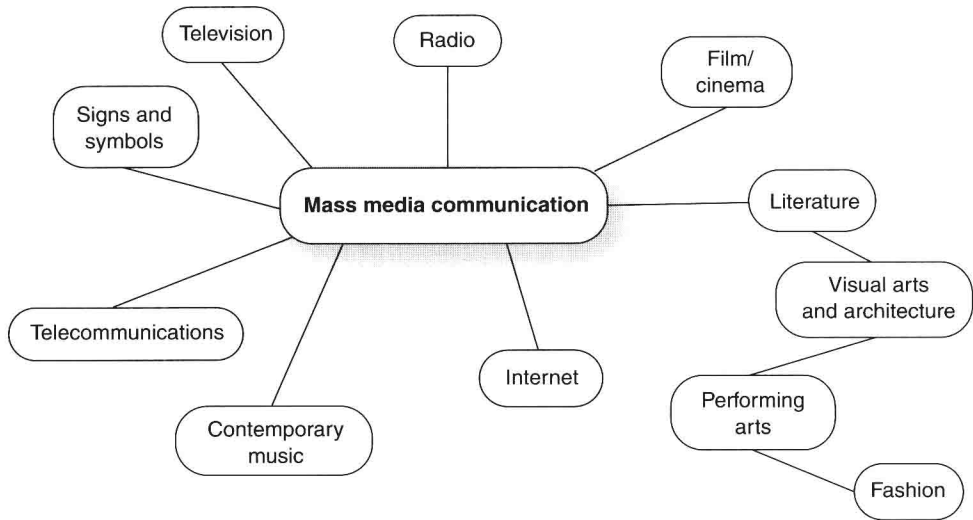
- Communication Studies is a discipline related to Media Studies and looks at a wide range of communication, including linguistics, psychology and sociology as well as media forms.
- Have a look at some textbooks on Communication Studies to consider the relationship between Media Studies and Communication Studies.



Activity 1.3

Keep a diary of what you watch, read and listen to for one week. What patterns emerge about:

- Favourite choices?
- Times of day? When do you access different media forms?
- Duration? How long do you do this activity for?
- Location? Where do you access these forms?
- Activity and company? What else are you doing when you are watching/reading/listening? Who else is with you? What impact do they have on your experience/enjoyment?

Diagram 1.2 The main forms of media communication.

The key concepts of Media Studies

We don't need an explicit understanding of key concepts to understand how to read a newspaper or enjoy a film, as these are skills that we have developed along with other competencies we use in our daily lives. Nor does a film-maker necessarily analyse the representation of female characters in a film, but they will nevertheless be influenced by ideas, decisions and processes that we study as the concept of **representation**, in the casting of a particular actor or the design of a costume, for example.

You will also be introduced to a number of **media theories** in what follows below. But it is important to understand that these have been developed over time, by a wide variety of writers and academics to explain the **effects** and **processes** of media texts and industries, rather than to provide rules to which media producers adhere.

These key concepts make **explicit** that which is **implicitly understood** by us all, when we watch a television programme or see a billboard campaign, but more importantly, they can direct us to levels of knowledge and understanding that are not immediately apparent to us.

The key concepts of Media Studies are those that have been gathered together to form the academic study of the media, and, together with various skills referred to below, you will need to demonstrate your competence in them in order to be successful in your Media Studies assessments. Furthermore, what you will learn from these various perspectives will undoubtedly deepen your enjoyment of media products and might encourage you to be creative yourself.

A concept is abstract, an idea or way of thinking about something. Over the years, several key conceptual areas have been assembled from a variety of other disciplines (such as linguistics, literary studies, politics, history, economics, sociology, aesthetics, psychology and anthropology) about how to study the media. These **concepts** are considered to be of essential, or **key**, importance because they unlock ways of understanding media texts and products that we may not have considered before. A stone arch contains a key stone, the most important one, as it holds the whole arch together, by supporting the weight of the other stones. So a key concept is one which supports the structure, or conceptual framework, of Media Studies.

Without these key concepts, Media Studies would be a chaotic and haphazard subject. There are so many media texts and products to study and they keep changing on a regular basis, with new films being released, news events occurring by the minute and new technologies being invented and superseded on a daily basis, that it would be impossible to learn everything about everything!

This is one of the features that makes Media Studies such an exciting subject, for students and tutors alike. But, armed with an understanding of the key concepts and skills associated with this subject, you can transfer them to any topic or text without much difficulty. This is the intention of this book.

Every awarding body (exam board) that offers a qualification in Media Studies has its own conceptual framework and assessment objectives, as well as different areas and topics of study. We have tried to assemble the elements that are common to most of these qualifications post-16 and while there are slight differences in the terms used by different awarding bodies in their specifications, we have tried to make it as easy as possible for you to follow.

It is important to point out here that there is a variety of terms used for a variety of purposes and that Media Studies combines two specialist languages that you will have to learn and apply:

- ☐ the first is the **technical language** of media production processes
- ☐ the second is the **critical language** of media analysis and theory.

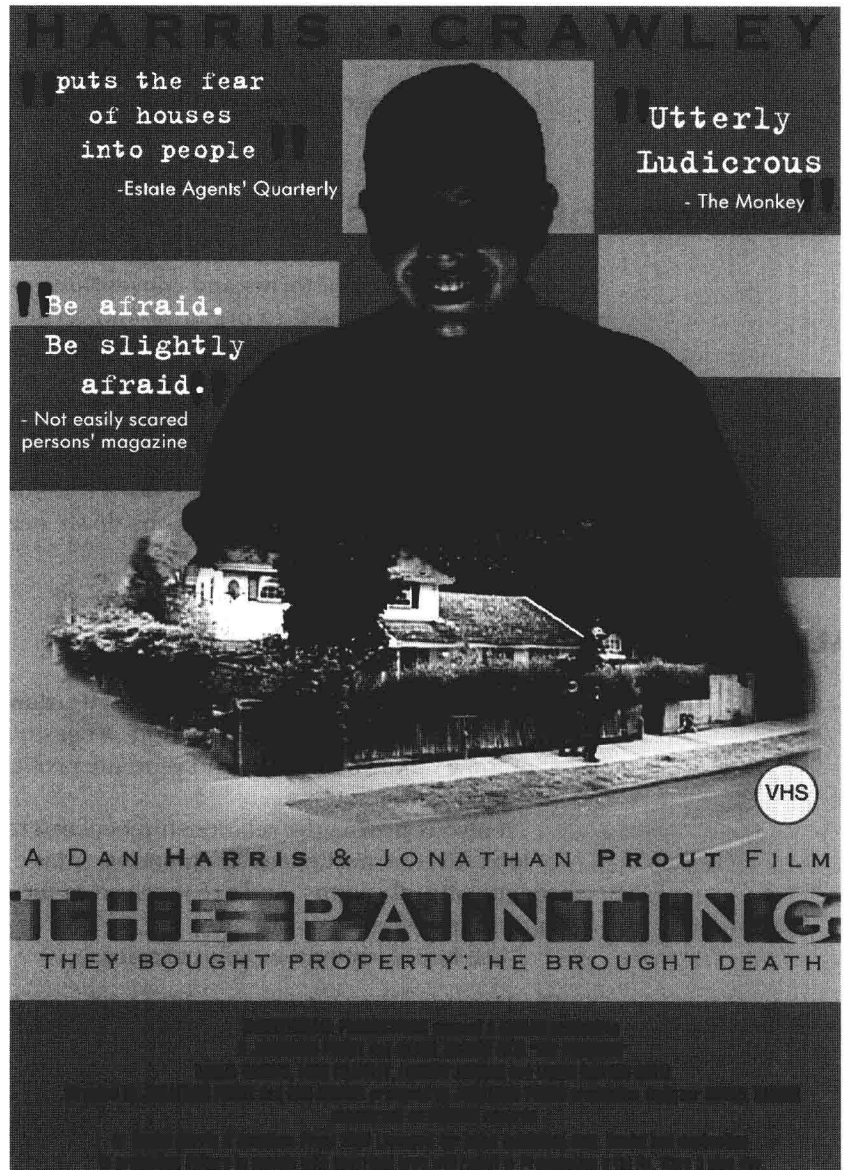
The key concept areas of Media Studies comprise main groups of related concepts and we have outlined them below as sets of basic questions that you can apply to texts in order to analyse them more closely. The outcomes of applying these key questions are what you will be assessed on, so keep referring back to them occasionally.

MEDIA LANGUAGE

Media language, sometimes termed **mediation**, refers to the languages used by audio-visual, print and ICT-based media to produce meaning.

Picture 1.1

Students use the language of film promotion in their own media production, for example, this poster for the film *The Painting* by Jonathan Prout and Daniel Harris (poster by Jonathan Prout).



The key questions to ask here are:

- ☐ What is this text called and what associations do we have with this title/name?
- ☐ What is this text about? What does this text 'say'?
- ☐ How does it 'say' it?
- ☐ What are its languages (print, moving images, sounds) and style? How do they create meaning?
- ☐ How are these languages put together, or constructed, to make this text?
- ☐ What languages do we need to consider and use when making our own media text?

FORMS AND CONVENTIONS

The concept area of **forms and conventions** refer to the forms, categories and conventions used to organize and structure the languages of media products.

The key questions to ask here are:

- ☐ What category, or genre, of text is it? How can you identify this?
- ☐ What can we learn from this text from its opening minutes or front cover?
- ☐ What codes and conventions does it follow or disobey?
- ☐ What categories and conventions do we need to consider and use when making our own media text?

AUDIENCES AND INSTITUTIONS

The concept area of **audiences and institutions** refers to the participants with roles in the media production process, the institutions they represent, how they are financed and generate profit, and the processes of media production themselves.

It also concerns the relationship between the media and audiences and a look at the audiences themselves, made up from individuals and social/cultural groups, and are involved in the consumption of media texts and their responses to them.

The key questions to ask here are:

- ☐ How was the text produced (production processes)?
- ☐ By whom (company, individual, team) and why (entertainment/information) was it produced? What else have they made?
- ☐ Who is in it? What else have they produced/appeared in?
- ☐ How does this effect our understanding of this text?
- ☐ When and where was it produced and how did this influence its production?
- ☐ What is it similar to? Why might this be relevant?
- ☐ What was/is its competition/market?
- ☐ For whom was it produced (target audience)?