WJEC/Eduqas
Media Studies

for A Level Year 2 & A2

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Applying the Media Studies Framework

Tip

All of the work you have done and the skills you have acquired in Year 1 of the course will be used and developed in the second year. Revising the Year 1 work will be essential as you embark upon Year 2.

Tip

When you are exploring the techniques used in media products to communicate meaning, remember to discuss the purpose and the effect on the audience.

Rapid Recall 1.1

What is a media platform?

Rapid Recall 1.2

What term is used to describe audience members who make their own media content?

Tip

You will need to use the Year 1 book in conjunction with this book and revise the work done in the first year of the course.

The Theoretical Framework: A Reminder

You will have gained an understanding of the theoretical framework in Year 1 of the course and used it to support your analysis of the set products. This framework continues to be the focus of your understanding in Year 2. It will provide you with the tools to engage in critical understanding and analysis of the media. The framework consists of four inter-related areas:

- **Media Language**: how the media communicates meaning through their forms, codes, conventions and techniques
- **Representation**: how the media portray events, issues, individuals and social groups
- **Media Industries**: how the processes of production, distribution and circulation engaged in by the media affect media forms and platforms
- **Audiences**: how media forms target, reach and address audiences. How audiences respond to media forms and how audience members become producers themselves

The theoretical framework is explored in detail in Chapter 1 of the Year 1 book, what follows is a brief recap of the key elements. The additional aspects of theory and the theoretical perspectives required for the second year of the A Level course will also be briefly dealt with in this chapter; they will be explored and applied to specific media products in more detail in the relevant chapters of this book.

Media Language

In developing your ability to critically analyse the media and its products you will need to use your 'Analysis Toolkit', which will equip you to engage in complex analysis both inside the classroom and when conducting your own independent research. You will need to understand how products constructed with encoded messages are decoded by the audience.

What follows is a brief reminder of the aspects of media language which will be relevant to your A Level studies: the 'Toolkit'.

Technical Codes

Technical codes contribute to the construction of media products and communicate messages to the audience. Technical codes are important in the analysis of both audio-visual and print products.

Technical codes help to construct meaning.

Technical Codes in Audio-Visual Products

Camera Shots

A range of camera shots are selected by the creators of products to communicate meanings and elicit responses from an audience. These may include:

- **Close-ups**: create emotion and tension and involve the audience. The way they may be edited with other shots helps to establish the narrative. Close-ups help to establish a connection between the character or the action on the screen and the audience. They also position the audience emotionally within the world of the product.
- **Extreme close-ups**: used to focus specifically on one element of the mise-en-scène.
- **Long shots**: give the audience more information about characters and setting.
- **Point-of-view shots**: place the audience in a particular position, for example as a character in the action, and therefore enhance involvement.
- **Establishing shots**: show the audience where a scene is taking place, allowing them to anticipate the subsequent plot developments.

Establishing shot setting the scene.

Rapid Recall 1.3

What is the purpose and effect of the technical codes used in this image from the *Super. Human.* trailer?

Link

The different shots, angles and movement are explored in greater detail in Chapter 1 of the Year 1 book, page 15.

Tip

The theoretical framework 'Toolkit' will enable you to effectively analyse the set products and prepare you for the unseen stimulus in the exam.

Tip

Exploring the technical codes used by the creators of products will also equip you for creating your own media products in Component 3.

Camera Angles

- **High angle**: makes the subject seem vulnerable.
- **Low angle**: creates power and dominance in the mise-en-scène.

Camera Movement

This technique is used primarily to engage and involve the audience in the audio-visual product and to develop the narrative. Camera movement manipulates time and space for the audience and takes them through the story arc. Camera movements can position the audience, restrict the narrative and introduce surprises; they are linked to character movement within the mise-en-scène and encourage the audience to be more active participants in the action. The main techniques are:

- **Tracking**: this is a shot that moves the camera through the scene. The camera glides on a dolly (a type of wheeled cart use to transport the camera) and can track towards, away from or alongside the subject. A steadicam is also used to ensure smooth filming. Tracking can sometimes involve a single take to establish realism and involve the audience. is often used instead of a close-up shot to move towards or away from the subject.

Quickfire 1.1

How are camera shots related to genre?

Quickfire 1.2

What is the purpose and effect of a bird's-eye view camera angle?

- **Panning**: this involves movement across the scene. This rotating camera movement can be related to pace as well as time and space. A **whip pan** can cause the audience to feel disorientated and give the effect of speed and panic.
- **Tilting**: this is where a stationary camera pivots vertically down to up or vice versa and is used to restrict the narrative by slowly revealing the subject.

hi res to follow

Download preview image

Enlarge

Tilting from the feet up to introduce a character creates suspense.
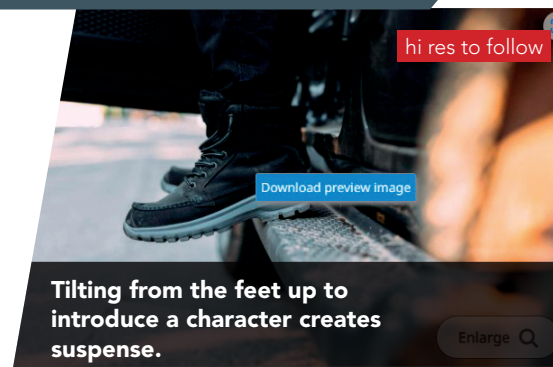
Editing

The combination of camera shots, movement and angles all work together to construct a narrative and create meanings for the audience to decode. The way in which the audio-visual product is edited can also indicate the genre of the product. Editing can also offer visceral pleasures for the audience by selecting shots, creating enigmas and restricting the narrative to create tension and suspense.

Audio Codes

There is a range of audio codes used across different products and platforms to communicate messages to audiences. Particular audio codes are related to forms and genres, and audiences have expectations of the diegetic and non-diegetic sounds that will be heard in certain media products. Audio codes are an integral part of the construction and mediation of the product and may encompass the following:

- dialogue
- ambient sound
- sound effects
- voiceovers
- music.

Technical Codes in Print Products

As you will be aware from studying the set products and related examples in Year 1 of the course, magazines, advertisements and other print products also employ a range of technical codes to construct a narrative, convey the genre and transmit meaning. These include:

- **Layout and design**: how the product is constructed to communicate meanings.
- **Camera shots and angles**: for example, close-up shots show more detail and the choice of the image may reflect the ideology of the product. This is true of newspaper front pages where images are carefully selected, cropped and constructed in order to communicate meanings to the reader.
- **Lighting**: choices made about lighting contribute to the construction of messages within the product.
- **Colour**: the visual codes of colour transmit meanings and these meanings are recognised and accepted by audiences as they have been established over time.
- **Graphics**: splashes highlight key selling points, and graphs and maps exemplify stories.

- **Post-production techniques**: photographs are often edited and manipulated to create an effect. In November 2017, *Grazia* magazine caused controversy by Photo-shopping the hair of actor Lupita Nyong'o to make it shorter and sleeker. The suggestion was that this was done in order to 'fit a more Eurocentric notion of what beautiful hair looks like'. Nyong'o stated on social media that she was disappointed *Grazia* had edited and smoothed her hair to fit its notion of what beautiful hair should look like. In the same week, Solange Knowles complained to the *London Evening Standard* when it digitally altered her hair for its magazine front cover. The digital manipulation of images in print products is much more prevalent now and while audiences are aware that it happens, they may still be influenced by the unrealistic images of perfection that are created.

Theoretical Framework: Roland Barthes

You will have studied Roland Barthes' theory of semiotics in Year 1 of the course. Barthes is one of the theorists you must study and understand. You will be required to apply his theoretical perspective to the set products you will study in Year 2 of the course and to develop your understanding further. The Media Studies A Level specification states that you must know the following in relation to Barthes:

- the idea that texts communicate their meanings through a process of signification
- the idea that signs can function at the level of denotation, which involves the 'literal' or common-sense meaning of the sign, and at the level of connotation, which involves the meanings associated with or suggested by the sign
- the idea that constructed meanings can come to seem self-evident, achieving the status of myth through a process of naturalisation.

Barthes and other theorists of the time originally centred their ideas on language and linguistics; however, their theoretical perspectives can now be applied to a range of media forms and products, as these are the most effective forms of modern communication. Signs function at three levels:

- **the sign**: something that stands in for, or represents something, to communicate meaning
- **the signifier**: the physical form a sign takes – a sound, word or image (the denotation)
- **the signified**: the concept or meaning that is portrayed, which is then interpreted by the audience (the connotation).

One of Barthes' key ideas with regard to semiotics is his exploration of **myths** and how signs that are regularly reinforced across media forms take on the role of a myth and become accepted as natural, when in fact they are a **social construct**. For example, the sign of the rose has only come to be associated with romance and Valentine's Day through reinforcement over time, this is also a cultural construct as it only has meaning for certain cultures. The rose in this context has now become a symbol of love and romance when in fact, at its simplest level of denotation, it is a flower. This is a good example of how signs and their meanings are learned and become accepted over time. Barthes asserted that signs have historical and cultural links that will change over time: '*signs and codes are not universally given, but are historically and socially specific to the particular interests that lie behind them*' (Strinati, 1995).

Stretch and Challenge 1.1

Find the front cover of the November 2017 *Grazia* magazine online and consider how the decisions made by the product to manipulate the image reflect its ideology.

Quickfire 1.5

How can the use of post-production techniques reflect the ideology of the magazine?

Link

Rapid Recall 1.7

What is meant by denotation and connotation in relation to Barthes' theory of semiotics?

Key Terms

Myth
Dominant ideas and beliefs that are not necessarily true but have been accepted by a culture.

Social construct
An idea or concept that is created, developed and accepted by society. These ideas are reinforced through repetition and practice.

Quickfire 1.6

Give another example of a myth that is in fact a social construct.

Quickfire 1.7

How might a red rose be interpreted in different ways?

Stretch and Challenge 1.2

Research semiotics, including Barthes' theory, in greater detail to develop your understanding. A useful resource is a paper written by a media theorist, Daniel Chandler called 'Semiotics for Beginners' in his 2017 book *Semiotics: The Basics*.

Key Figure

Charles Saunders Peirce
American philosopher whose research extended into semiotics. Although he is not a set theorist, his ideas are useful to the understanding of semiotics.

Key Terms

Iconic representation
A sign that has a physical resemblance to the thing that it stands in for or represents. For example, marketing materials often feature iconic representations of the products they advertise or promote.

Arbitrary signs
Signs that bear no obvious resemblance to the thing signified, the meanings of which have been accepted through repetition over time.

Barthes also believed that the theory of semiology proves that reality is always constructed through signs, codes and recognisable conventions. This theoretical perspective is obviously important when discussing the meanings encoded in media products.

He also suggested that all signs are polysemic and, when encoded into media products, mean different things to different people. He asserted that a text is:

> *a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances …* (Barthes, 2009)

Charles Saunders Peirce

Charles Saunders Peirce formulated the triadic model related to semiotics. This, like Barthes' theory, incorporated the sign or object, the signifier, and he also referred to a third stage which he named the 'interpretant', meaning how a particular audience may perceive or understand the sign. He essentially defined the sign by its effect on the interpreter. He also divided signs into the following groups:

- **Icons**: these are signs that bear a resemblance to what is represented. Iconic signs have a physical similarity to the objects they 'signify', for example a bottle of perfume in an advertisement or a road sign with a car/bike on it. The sign is therefore easily recognisable. This **iconic representation** is important in certain forms of advertising to enable the easy purchase of the product.
- **Indexical signs**: these are signs that have a direct link to what they represent, they cannot exist in isolation as there is a physical connection, for example thunder and a storm. Thunder is the sound signifier and the storm is the signified.
- **Symbols**: these are signs with a symbolic link to what is represented. The sign may not actually resemble the thing to which it refers – the understanding is built up over years of habitual use and becomes part of a shared communal understanding. A symbolic sign is one that represents an object or concepts solely by agreement of the people who come into contact with it. These **arbitrary signs** have a variety of meanings, for example Big Ben, depending on where it is used, can take on a symbolic importance related to tradition and London being the centre of power. Similarly, the Nike 'tick' meant nothing on its own but has come to mean high-end sports clothing.

Quickfire 1.8

Can the perfume bottle pictured on the right also function as a symbol?

The Nike logo is an example of an arbitrary sign.

The perfume bottle is an icon.

Theoretical Framework: Claude Lévi-Strauss

One of the theorists related to media language that you will study in Year 2 of the course is **Claude Lévi-Strauss** and his ideas regarding **structuralism**. You will be required to apply your understanding to the set products you studied in Year 1 and the new set products you will be introduced to in Year 2 of the course. The main elements of this theory you must study are:

- the idea that texts can best be understood through an examination of their underlying structure
- the idea that meaning is dependent upon (and produced through) pairs of oppositions
- the idea that the way in which these binary oppositions are resolved can have particular ideological significance.

Binary Opposites

Lévi-Strauss' theory of structuralism is relevant to the set products studied. His theoretical perspective focuses on the fact that all media products have a structure which encompasses a set of rules that are accepted by audiences. Lévi-Strauss first identified **binary opposites** in literature but they can be applied to media products. They are concepts or forces that are set against each other, which then can produce a dynamic that may work in, for example, a music video narrative.

Lévi-Strauss suggested narratives emerge through conflict and are another way in which signs and their meanings are created. With binary opposites, signs are contrasted with opposite meanings to make them more powerful. Basic binary oppositions tend to be between good and evil or male and female, and audiences are then positioned to respond in a certain way. Stereotypes are then constructed through the other attributes we give to the binary oppositions.

Another common binary opposite is between villains and heroes. A further aspect of this theory is that the understanding of one element of the conflict is dependent on awareness of the other: an audience needs to be able to recognise the villain in order to understand the role of the hero and to anticipate the progression of the narrative. Binary opposites are not necessarily natural; they are cultural and are used by media producers to communicate simple and, at times, more complex meanings. They often contribute to stereotypes and also create myths.

For example, crime dramas often establish the narrative through the creation of a structure of oppositions including good and evil, gender, race and class.

Binary opposites can be used by media products to help define what they want to represent. For example, in a charity campaign about Africa, the product may play on the binary opposites of developing versus developed world, as audiences understand these 'opposites'. Some media products, for example newspapers, will represent one side as positive and another as negative in a political story, in order to make their point.

1.10 Hi res to follow Alamy

Enlarge

The narrative of *The Bridge* is structured around a series of binary oppositions.

Named Theorist

Claude Lévi-Strauss
A French social anthropologist whose work was important to the theory of structuralism.

Key Terms

Structuralism
A critical approach used to analyse the underlying structures or patterns of meaning within a text or culture.

Binary opposites
When people, ideas, concepts or values are set up in conflict with one another.

Quickfire 1.9

How do the binary opposites used in crime dramas have an ideological significance?

Quickfire 1.10

What binary oppositions are established in the set television product *The Bridge*?

Visual Codes

As you will recall from your Year 1 work, visual codes are an intrinsic aspect of semiology and are one of the ways in which media products combine elements of media language to communicate meanings to the audience. Visual codes are used to encode messages to be decoded by the consumer of the product; they contain signs, the connotations of which will be read differently by different audiences. Following is a reminder of the main visual codes:

- **Code of clothing**: the costume choices made by the creator of the product communicate messages to an audience.
- **Code of expression**: this rapidly communicates meanings and advances the narrative.
- **Code of gesture**: this is another example of a non-verbal communicator that transmits messages to an audience.
- **Code of technique**: the manipulation of the image or audio-visual piece can convey meanings.
- **Images**: the selection of images to be used in a media product will construct a preferred meaning for the audience.
- **Colour**: due to the fact that certain colours have specific connotations and take on the role of signs, they can be used to establish meanings in certain media forms.
- **Iconography**: the meanings attached to the objects, settings and backgrounds.
- **Graphics**: the visual representations that are part of the construction of the media product, for example drawings, diagrams and typography.

Consider how visual codes that construct meaning are used to construct the image below from the TV drama *Peaky Blinders*:

Visual codes are used to construct meanings for the audience to decode in this image from *Peaky Blinders*.

1.12 Alamy hi res to follow

- The code of clothing of the men in the image places the drama in the past, the choice of clothing, including the caps, will be a key element of character construction and marketing for the programme. The similarity in the mens' clothing establishes them as part of a group with a common purpose.
- The code of expression of the characters is serious, intimidating and purposeful. They are looking directly at the audience and the still suggests it is taken from a shot tracking backwards, the effect being to make the audience feel threatened.
- The scene is shot at night, the colours are therefore muted and dull, suggesting the darker narrative themes of the drama and creating a sinister aesthetic. The iconography of the bleak setting and the weapons foreshadows the violent plot of the drama.

Paradigms and Syntagms

These form another aspect of semiotics related to how the combination of elements of media language, including visual codes, influence meaning. When they encode messages, the creators of media products must ensure they choose the right combination of signs, including language, graphics, colour and iconography, to communicate messages to the audience.

There is a set of options available to the producer depending on the product they want to create. This set of options is called a **paradigm**. The paradigm must work for the product and subsequently the audience if the meanings are to be successfully transmitted.

The paradigmatic choices made about a media product are important in communicating messages to the audience and include:

- **lexis**
- images
- graphics including font styles
- technical codes
- audio codes
- colours.

The encoder chooses one sign rather than another, making a paradigmatic choice that will influence the product's meaning.

In relation to these paradigmatic choices, the producer must ensure that the different signs chosen combine to create an overall effect. This combination of signs that are linked together in particular ways is called a **syntagm**. The combination has to be successful in order to create meanings for the audience. For example, in an advert the typography has to work with the image, the choice of colours, the layout and the lexis in order to communicate meanings effectively.

1.13 Alamy hi res to follow

Consider the paradigmatic choices that have been made in the advert on the right for the Miss Dior fragrance. The colour signifier is important: the natural skin tones and the use of pink for the bottle and the floral headband, signify the femininity of the fragrance. The construction of a natural image is reinforced by the inclusion of bare shoulders and wind-blown hair signifying a sense of freedom and romance echoed in the slogan '#WAKEUPFORLOVE'. The name of the fragrance 'Miss Dior' is written in cursive writing, that and the silver bow on the bottle add to the connotations of romance and are part of the brand identity of the product. The signs all work together to construct the syntagm that suggests the fragrance without actually being able to smell it.
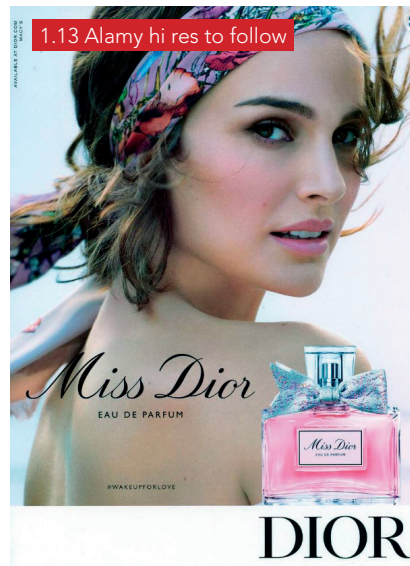
Language and Mode of Address

The term 'language' used here is different from the 'media language' that is part of the theoretical framework. Here it refers to the choices made regarding the written and spoken language used in a media product and how they communicate meanings to an audience. The linguistic choices made by the creators of media products may affect the meaning.

Language

The language incorporated in a media product may include:

- the imperative to create a dramatic effect
- **ellipsis** to establish enigmas
- slang and colloquialisms to appeal to a specific audience demographic
- direct quotations to establish realism and credibility

Key Terms

Paradigm
A set of related signs from which the encoder can choose. In choosing one sign rather than another, the encoder of the product makes a paradigmatic choice.

Lexis
The specific words used in a product which may relate to the genre of the product and include terminology that is understood by the target audience.

Syntagm
A combination of signs that, when linked together in a particular way, produce meanings.

Rapid Recall 1.9

Give an example of how specific lexis communicates meanings in a media product and the effect this may have upon an audience.

Rapid Recall 1.10

Give an example of a media product that uses ellipsis.

Key Term

Ellipsis
The use of three dots at the beginning, middle or end of a sentence to attract attention and interest through the withholding of information.

- idiomatic phrases are universally recognised by audiences and frequently are used by the tabloid press for humour and to make fun of people they don't like or approve of. The famous front page of the *Sun* with a headline of about bacon (seen at: https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/8969124/bacon-sandwich-loving-ed-miliband-says-brits-should-eat-less-meat-to-tackle-climate-change/) was said to have seriously damaged Ed Miliband's credibility in the run-up to the General Election in 2015. It uses two **idioms**: 'making a pig's ear' and 'saving the bacon'. This manipulation of recognisable idioms, combined with the choice of image, creates a negative representation of the politician and makes him a figure of fun, showing the power of language and images to create meaning.

Other language features used include:

- puns and alliteration for effect
- hyperbole to persuade.

Mode of Address: A Reminder

Mode of address refers to the way in which the media product communicates to the audience through the written and spoken language and style used:

- **Informal mode of address**: is used to communicate in a more casual way with an audience, using, for example, slang and abbreviations.
- **Formal mode of address**: including complex vocabulary and a serious code of expression, is employed by certain media products that want to engender a more serious approach.
- **Direct mode of address**: the product communicates directly with the audience through the positioning of the characters, the selection of the central image and language choices, for example the use of personal pronouns.
- **Indirect mode of address**: is used more commonly by products that aim to create a storyworld that does not involve the audience directly.

Genre

You will have developed your understanding of the concept of genre in Year 1 of the course and will continue to apply that understanding in Year 2 in a more sophisticated way to aid you in the analysis of the set products. Genre is an important element of media language, it is only assessed specifically in relation to the set products in Component 2 but may also enhance your analysis of the products you study in Component 1.

Here is a reminder of the key points related to a study of genre:

- genre is a way of categorising media products
- each genre has a **repertoire of elements** that are recognisable to audiences, as they have been built up over time. These established codes and conventions are useful in the marketing of the product
- some media products belong to hybrid and sub-genres. Nelson (2009) thinks that nowadays the planning of many TV drama series involves the consideration of generic hybrids.
- it has, however, recently become increasingly difficult to place some products in a specific genre, as the creators of products strive to find new forms in order to appeal to audiences.

Tip

Remember to use subject-specific lexis when discussing genre in relation to the set products.

The repertoire of elements of any genre can be divided into the following key areas:

- narrative, referring to the structure of the product
- characters
- iconography and setting
- technical and audio codes.

If you studied the sci-fi/supernatural thrillers television option, you will already have examined some of the elements above in Year 1 when studying the Component 2 set product *Black Mirror* and you will revisit them in Year 2 of your course when you study *The Returned*, considering the similarities and differences between the two genres including:

- the narratives of both genres focus on extraordinary occurrences and their effect upon the characters. However, the supernatural thriller genre usually focuses upon events that have no rational explanation and so creates unease in the characters. In contrast, the science-fiction narratives, as suggested by the name, focus on aspects of science, for example AI, robots and the effect of new technology on society
- the iconography of the sci-fi genre may include futuristic costumes and weapons in comparison to the often more everyday iconography of the supernatural thriller
- the setting of a product in the science-fiction genre may be bleak and dystopian or otherworldly, suggesting the thematic concerns of this genre. The supernatural thriller settings may be more ordinary and recognisable so making the extraordinary more frightening.

Theoretical Framework: Genre

In Year 1 of the course you will have studied Steve Neale, and applied his theory to set products. You will be required to develop your understanding of this theoretical perspective further and apply it to the products studied in Year 2. You will recall that the main elements of this theory you must study are:

- the idea that genres may be dominated by repetition, but are also marked by difference, variation and change
- the idea that genres change, develop and vary, as they borrow from and overlap with one another
- the idea that genres exist within specific economic, institutional and industrial contexts.

However, it is also useful to broaden your understanding of this central media concept by being aware of other theoretical perspectives related to the study of genre. Other theorists who discuss genre include:

Daniel Chandler

While the main focus of **Daniel Chandler**'s research work is semiotics, he also discusses genre and he concludes that:

- genres position audiences differently and therefore elicit different responses linked to audience expectations
- the creators of the product belonging to a specific genre will have an idea of their audience and therefore the 'preferred reading' for that product
- genres create an **interpretive community** where an audience derives pleasure from sharing their knowledge and understanding of a particular genre with others
- genres reflect society and as such genres come and go as audiences change. Audiences themselves can help to construct genres.

The rise of digital platforms means new genres are created but these new genres still tend to have their roots in pre-existing genres.

Genre Revision: Key terms checklist

You need to be confident in using the following key terms related to genre:

- hybrid genre
- sub-genre
- codes and conventions
- stock characters
- iconography
- linear narrative
- non-linear narrative
- formulaic structure
- story arc.

Key Figure

Daniel Chandler
He refers to himself as a semiotician and his book *Semiotics: The Basics* (2017) is a useful text for developing understanding of media language. Now retired, he is an Emeritus lecturer in the Theatre, Film and Television Studies department at Aberystwyth University.

Tip

Daniel Chandler's website, http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/, is also a useful area for research into media language.

Key Term

Interpretive communities
Initially used by Stanley Fish, a literary critic, to explain how different groups of people, i.e. readers or audiences, interpret texts similarly due to their shared social and cultural positions and their experiences.

Rick Altman

Rick Altman is another media theorist whose theoretical perspective on genre is useful to study. He stated that:

- A genre can be identified through two different elements: **semantic** and **syntactic**. The semantics of a genre are the recognisable elements that place a product in a given genre and communicate meaning to an audience. These are not rigid but fluent and changing and may include, for example:
  - language
  - visual codes including iconography
  - stars
  - ideology.
- The syntactic elements are less obvious; they give the audience a range of physical pleasures including emotional, visceral and intellectual. They may also link the semantic elements and the narrative structure of the product.
- Altman extended his theory to include **pragmatic** elements of genre. This refers to the way in which institutions use genres and the relationship between genres and the audience. For example, film companies will produce films from a range of genres in one year but they will also be aware of rising and falling trends. According to www.the-numbers.com from 1995–2023 the adventure and action film genres controlled 26.27% and 21.94% of the market share respectively compared with the romantic comedy genre at 4.41%. Audiences will respond to genres differently and may also recreate their own genres. YouTube is full of recut versions of existing media products made by fans of a specific genre.

Theoretical Framework: Narratology

From your Year 1 studies you will remember that all media products have a narrative, which is a structure that conveys meaning and is recognisable to an audience. Narratology is a term used to describe the study of narrative in media products and as such is an integral element of media language and the theoretical framework with which you must be familiar. All media products place events or textual features in a particular order; in this way they construct meaning.

In Year 1 of the course you will have studied Tzvetan Todorov, and applied his theory to set products. You will be required to develop your understanding of this theoretical perspective further and apply it to the products studied in Year 2. You will recall that the main elements of this theory you must study are:

- the idea that all narratives share a basic structure that involves a movement from one state of equilibrium to another
- the idea that these two states of equilibrium are separated by a period of imbalance or disequilibrium
- the idea that the way in which narratives are resolved can have particular ideological significance.

Many media products use a range of different narrative techniques to hold the attention of an evermore demanding audience. In audio-visual products these may include:

- **The manipulation of time and space**: television programmes, films and music videos frequently challenge their audiences by moving the action between different timeframes. Whereas in the past the audience would be shown the time change through a range of what now seems outdated devices, including the hands of a clock moving backwards or the use of sepia, now the sophistication of the audience is such that they are expected to work this out for themselves.

- **Three-strand narratives**: a common formulaic structure used in TV dramas.
- **Flexi-narratives**: interweave and are more complex and challenging for the audience.

Narrative Conventions in Audio-Visual Products

As you will remember, narratives are constructed through the use of specific conventions which are used to convey meanings to the audience and progress the storyline. These include:
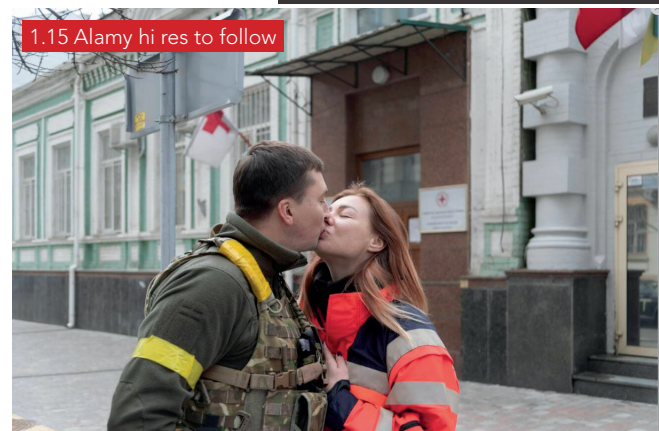
- flashbacks to move the narrative in time and space and to provide additional information
- point-of-view shots to position the audience
- apparently impossible positions, which enhance the viewing experience by showing the audience action from an unusual/impossible position
- privileged spectator position, giving the audience additional information through a specific shot, thus involving them more closely in the narrative
- voiceovers, which are used to supplement on-screen action
- enigma codes, restricting the narrative to create tension and anticipation in the audience
- action codes, which advance the narrative and create audience expectation of what will follow.

Narrative Conventions in Print Products

For media producers, narrative conventions are ways of organising random items of information into a structure that will make sense for the audience. As such, narrative is important in creating meaning, and the way in which the narrative in a particular media form is constructed will affect how audiences respond. This is true in the case of print forms, for example magazines and newspapers, where the producers are not dealing with a straightforward narrative as might be the case with a film or television programme.

With regards to a newspaper, the main story can often be a big event that has happened far away, for example a war or a natural disaster. The job of the journalist is to create a narrative around the event that will make it relatable to the target audience. This is often achieved through a focus on specific people (personalisation) or specific details that make the story seem more real to the reader. This gives the audience points of reference which they can relate to their own lives and experiences. Other elements, for example photographs, can function as mini narratives communicating aspects of a bigger story. The narrative of a front-page newspaper story is therefore constructed and creates meaning through the use of headlines, copy, photographs and captions.

The war in Ukraine in 2022 was a continuing news story, therefore using images to construct mini narratives helped to keep the focus specifically on the plight of the residents of the Ukrainian cities under bombardment. This news image of a soldier kissing a young woman was selected to personalise the distant war and make it more relatable to audiences, giving them a point of reference that is universal – the relationship between two people. The code of clothing of the soldier's uniform and her civilian dress emphasises the situation in Kyiv. Enigmas are established regarding who they are and where they are going and the audience is positioned to feel empathetic to their situation.

News photograph documenting the events in Ukraine.

1.15 Alamy hi res to follow

This example illustrates that the way in which the narrative is constructed in a media product, for example a newspaper, can also influence how the audience responds to the event. The narrative may contain points of view and bias, suggesting how the audience may view the event or which side to take and may reflect the ideology of the product's creators. The headlines and photographs will have been carefully chosen to position the audience emotionally. These choices about how to construct the narrative therefore limit the range of responses an audience may have.

Other narrative conventions used in print products include:

- taglines on a film poster, which give clues to the film's narrative
- headlines, which can be dramatic or informative in the way in which they communicate narrative information. They may also reflect a point of view
- cover lines on magazines, which create mini narratives and contain enigmas to entice readers to buy the product
- images and captions, which also develop the narrative, as illustrated in the example of the news photograph on the previous page. Consider what caption may have accompanied this image to anchor the narrative
- language and mode of address communicate information and may give clues to the genre of the product
- enigma codes, including teasers on film posters and DVD covers, which restrict the narrative information to attract an audience.

Additional Theories: Vladimir Propp

While Todorov's theoretical perspective largely relates to how the narrative progresses through chronological action, other theories consider different aspects of narratology. **Vladimir Propp** was a theorist who studied the importance of character in narrative. He used **character typology** to divide characters into different groups with differing characteristics and functions within the narrative.

Propp's research and subsequent theories are **trans-historical** and while his original focus was folk and fairy tales, his ideas can be transferred to more modern media products, including films and television programmes that reflect a more contemporary context. The ideas themselves, however, do not change. He divided characters into eight key roles and 31 functions.

Proppian character roles:

- the hero
- the villain
- the donor: helps the hero by providing a gift with magical properties
- the dispatcher: sends the hero on a quest
- the false hero: appears heroic but turns out not to be
- the helper: supports the hero in his quest
- the princess: the reward or prize for the hero
- the princess' father.

Proppian **character functions** are chronological events related to characters that drive the narrative, for example:

1. A command not to do something is addressed to the hero.

2. This command is ignored.

3. The hero is tested/attacked and receives a magical agent as a result.

4. The hero uses the magical gift.

5. The hero and villain join in direct combat.

6. The villain is defeated by a range of different means.

7. The false hero is exposed.

8. The villain is punished.

9. The hero is married, attaining his prize of the princess.

In character-driven narrative theory the idea is that characters influence a narrative through cause and effect, the narrative progresses as a result of their actions. All characters have motives, which are revealed during the course of the storyline; the narrative is driven through their need to achieve their goals. This may mean that characters then come into conflict with one another; this is another important element of narrative structure.

Theoretical Framework: Postmodernism

This is one of the more demanding theories you will study in Year 2 of the course. You will be required to develop your understanding of postmodernism and apply it to the products you studied in Year 1 and those you will study in Year 2. Postmodernism is only assessed in relation to the Component 2 products. The main elements of the theory are:

- the idea that in a postmodern culture the boundaries between the 'real' world and the world of the media have collapsed and that it is no longer possible to distinguish between reality and simulation
- the idea that in a postmodern age of **simulacra** we are immersed in a world of images that no longer refer to anything 'real'
- the idea that media images have come to seem more 'real' than the reality they are supposed to represent (**hyperreality**).

Key points related to postmodernism:

- Postmodernism focuses on the idea that the media no longer holds a mirror up to or manipulates reality, but instead has become that reality and as such is seen to be the only reality we have.
- The evolvement of postmodernism directly links to the modern consumerist culture that celebrates the pursuit of pleasure.
- Postmodernism also relates to technological progress, whereby the mass media have become central to all communication, thus defining what is relevant and important, for example the top 'trending' topics on Twitter and the use of Instagram to capture and share transient moments instantly. The internet, it could be said, is the ultimate postmodern form, lacking any sort of structure and offering a series of erratic, fragmented pages which may or may not have any meaning related to what we are looking for.

Key Term

Character functions
Refers to the structural reason the character is in the narrative. All characters have a key role to play in extending the plot.

Quickfire 1.17

Which of the Proppian character roles may be difficult to apply to more modern media products?

Tip

Although Propp is not a 'Named Theorist', his theory may be usefully applied to some of the products you study and may therefore enhance your analysis and understanding.

Tip

It is not possible to apply Propp's theory to all media products and you should not try to do so, it is more useful to some than others.

Key Terms

Simulacra
Postmodern concepts used to describe signs that simply refer to another sign rather than anything 'real'. Simulacra are commonly understood as copies of copies. The singular is simulacrum.

Hyperreality
A state or condition in which images or simulations may be accepted as 'real' as they come to seem more real than reality itself.

- Postmodernism as a theoretical perspective has progressed from theories such as those of Lévi-Strauss, which were focused on the idea that texts have a clear and formulaic structure. Postmodernism relates to a more collage-bricolage-like approach, postmodern texts deliberately play with meaning and use intertextuality.

- Postmodern texts are concerned with identity. This relates to Gauntlett's idea that we now have a range of different 'models' from which we can create our identities.

- Traditional references to identity anchored in 'the real', for example the family, class and community, are being eroded and replaced by hyperreality in the media.

- Postmodernism is concerned with the creation of a hyperreality where something fake and artificial becomes more definitive than the reality. Baudrillard uses Disneyland as an example, which in its immersive reality becomes more real than Los Angeles itself and as such masks the reality that surrounds Disneyland, which is also a simulation in its ideological representation of America.

- Baudrillard asserted that there then becomes an inability to distinguish reality from simulation; this is the case with regard to highly manipulated images of women in adverts and on magazine covers and in the construction of fake news images and footage. Similarly, fans of soap operas can find it difficult to distinguish between the fictional character and the actor playing the character (Baudrillard, 1984).

- Strinati (1995), in his discussion of postmodernism, asserts that **metanarratives** are being eroded as time and space become more confused. Modern technology has created a shrunken world. This was predicted by Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s, before the arrival of the internet, in his book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962). McLuhan's theory posed the idea that there are four eras of human history: the acoustic age, the literary age, the print age and the electronic age that the world was then entering. He predicted that the electronic age would be characterised by a group of people brought together by technology, which he called the **global village** – this could be understood as being the internet.

- With the advent of postmodernism, metanarratives were said to be eroded as new points of reference became established, largely from the media and popular culture. Postmodernism cannot, by its very definition, be explained by universal theories related to, for example, religion, history and science.

- A key word related to Baudrillard's postmodern theory is simulacrum, which refers to the construction of signs that then masquerade as reality. This is evident in the media, for example the way in which virtual reality computer games manipulate time and space and create believably real worlds for the players.

- Postmodernism includes borrowing from other elements of popular culture in order to make something seemingly new and more 'real'. Intertextuality is often a key element of postmodern texts.

Stretch and Challenge 1.5

In order to broaden your understanding of postmodernism as a theoretical perspective, read the chapter on postmodernsim in Dominic Strinati's (1995) book, *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*.

Key Terms

Metanarrative
Refers to an accepted account or interpretation of events on which people have come to base their beliefs, for example the narratives associated with historical truths and those related to religion. It is a term used for *'any theory claiming to provide universal explanations and to be universally valid'* (Sim, 2011).

Global village
This phrase was coined by Marshall McLuhan and refers to the metaphoric shrinking of the world due to advances in technology.

Advances in technology have enabled virtual reality computer games to create immersive worlds that appear real.

Applying Postmodernist Theory to Media Products

Postmodernism is evident across all media forms and products, and you will be required to apply this theoretical perspective and Baudrillard's specific theory to some of the set products you have studied for Component 2. It may also be appropriately applied to the unseen Component 1 products.

Television: this media form has become increasingly postmodern as it adopts a more playful and experimental approach to genre. One of the optional set products for Component 2 is *Black Mirror*, which contains postmodern elements as it blurs the boundaries between simulation and reality.

Although postmodernism is not one of the theories you are specifically required to study for Component 1, you may find it useful for exploring the way in which music videos, advertisements and video games create meanings and audience pleasures.

Advertising: this form is arguably most postmodern in its approach. A lot of adverts are now less focused on selling the actual product and more about constructing a visual experience for the audience in order to sell the product. Adverts very self-consciously use references from popular culture or will critique and parody existing media products. It is also true that contemporary advertising constructs a cultural representation within the advert rather than focusing on the product as it would appear in the real world. Adverts for beauty products construct a hyperreality centred on the ideology of beauty; the construction does not bear a resemblance to real life due to the use of post-production techniques.

The Guinness advert (2017), *The Compton Cowboys*, part of the *Made of More* series, demonstrates postmodern elements in its construction. The actual product does not feature in the advert and the only branding evident is the harp logo shown in the opening. While the advert uses references to popular culture through the focus on the riders of south central Los Angeles, there are also intertextual references to the western film and the documentary genre.

As with other postmodern texts, the focus of the advert is on the emotional and symbolic meaning and is not directly related to the product. This conforms to the idea that we are now a culture more concerned with superficiality.

Music videos: mix styles and genres in very obvious ways and incorporate collage, pastiche and intertextual references. While in the past the expectation would be that music videos would interpret the song lyrics in an often straightforward way, now an increasing number of music videos are more experimental, complex and challenging as a postmodern form.

Video games: offer a hyper-real experience first hand due to the interactive nature of the form. This has led to a moral panic in some areas of the media regarding the possible effect of video games on the behaviour of the players who are said to be unable to divorce the reality of the game from their own real lives.

Online media: the creators of blogs and vlogs create seemingly realistic worlds and invite the audience to become part of that hyperreality. They construct identities for themselves that are then 'sold' to audiences who may want to emulate the bloggers and use them as role models.

Quickfire 1.18

Watch *The Compton Cowboys* Guiness advertisment here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRr-hE9TMdo. How does the advertisement reflect the postmodern approach?

Stretch and Challenge 1.6

Engage in independent research into further examples of postmodern adverts.

Quickfire 1.19

How do video games and online sites illustrate elements of a postmodern theoretical perspective?

Applying Theory: Media Language

The grid below summarises the main theories and theoretical perspectives that must be studied over Components 1 and 2. The key elements related to each theory have been outlined above and will also be referred to in the chapters specifically dealing with each component and their forms and products. Although you may also study and show your knowledge and understanding of other relevant theories, the ones set out below must be studied in relation to the areas of the specification indicated.

Theory/theoretical approach	Component 1 forms	Component 2 forms/products
Semiotics, including Roland Barthes	Advertising and marketing Music video Newspapers	Magazines: both products Online: both products
Genre theory, including Steve Neale		Television: both products
Structuralism, including Claude Lévi-Strauss	Advertising and marketing Music video Newspapers	Television: both products Magazines: both products Online: both products
Narratology, including Tzvetan Todorov		Television: both products
Postmodernism, including Jean Baudrillard		Television: *Peaky Blinders* or *Black Mirror* or *Killing Eve* Online: both products

The Specification: Key Statements

For each of the key areas of the theoretical framework – Media Language, Representation, Media Industries and Audiences – there is a set of statements in the specification that must be used as the basis of your studies. These statements will be used to formulate the assessment for each of the areas of the specification. It is therefore important that you are aware of them, their meaning and how they can be applied to the set products. They can also be used as a basis for questions related to the sections of the examination papers. The grid below shows the statements for Media Language and explains their meaning and the forms and examination components to which they relate.

Key statement: Media Language	Component 1 Media forms	Component 2 Media forms	Explanation
How the different modes and language associated with different media forms communicate multiple meanings	Advertising and marketing Music video Newspapers	Television Magazines Online	Different media forms will communicate meanings in different ways through aspects of media language. This will include technical, audio and visual codes, language and mode of address. This statement also links to theoretical perspectives including Barthes (semiology) and Lévi-Strauss (structuralism). Media products are constructed using signs and codes, and as such are polysemic and include a range of meanings that will be interpreted differently by audiences. The modes and language will differ according to the media product.
How the combination of elements of media language influence meaning	Advertising and marketing Music video Newspapers	Television Magazines Online	Producers make choices and select elements of media language in order to communicate meanings. For example, the decisions a newspaper may make regarding what to put on its front page, including images, headlines and captions, and how these may influence the readers. This statement also refers to the paradigmatic choices made by the creators of the products that will affect the meaning; for example, in an advert, the choice made about colour, font style and shot type. The syntagmatic choices regarding how the product, for example a film poster, is constructed will also affect the meaning.
How developing technologies affect media language	Music video Newspapers	Online	This refers to the technological developments related to specific media forms and how these affect the meaning of the product. Developing technologies have allowed newspaper websites to combine elements of media language including audio-visual, images and text to construct meaning while computer-generated imagery (CGI) and other evolving technologies are used in music videos to enhance production. Developments in technology have also meant that there are greater opportunities for interactivity and consequently the relationship between the product and the audience has changed.
The codes and conventions of media forms and products, including the processes through which media language develops as a genre	Advertising and marketing Music video Newspapers	Television Magazines Online	This refers to the codes and conventions that place a product in a specific genre and that are common to particular media forms. This includes visual, technical and audio codes, iconography, narrative and characters. These conventions are common to all examples in a particular form, for example most television crime drama contains certain characters and has an expected narrative structure. Audiences become familiar with genre conventions, and producers will use this to market new products and to create audience expectation.

(continued)

Key statement: Media Language	Component 1 Media forms	Component 2 Media forms	Explanation
The dynamic and historically relative nature of genre	Component 2 only	Television Magazines	This is the idea that genres are constantly changing and evolving over time, reflecting historical and sociological changes. New genres appear and hybrid genres are created to address the needs of audiences and reflect changes in society. The popularity of genres also reflects society at the time. During the lockdown in 2021, according to a Vodafone poll, *Peaky Blinders*, *Downton Abbey*, *Only Fools and Horses* and *Friends* were in the top ten programmes watched, suggesting that audiences wanted escapism and comedy at this time. Genres are also important to industries in terms of marketing, playing on audience expectations. Theorists, including Steve Neale, suggested that genres were concerned with 'repetition and difference' – audiences need to recognise the genre's codes and conventions but also expect the product to offer something different.
The processes through which meanings are established through intertextuality	Advertising and marketing Music videos Newspapers	Television	Media producers use elements of media language to communicate meanings through references to other texts that are recognisable to audiences. For example, Janelle Monáe's music video for *Turntables* makes several intertextual references to communicate their message about social inequality, including news footage, documentaries, American icons, cultural codes and the protest song. Audiences will interpret this product on different levels according to their understanding of these references.
How audiences respond to and interpret the above aspects of media language	Advertising and marketing Music videos Newspapers	Television Magazines Online	How media products are constructed will affect how an audience responds to them. As stated above, media products are polysemic and will communicate more than one meaning and have more than one audience interpretation. This will also be affected by aspects of the audience themselves, e.g. their ideology.
How genre conventions are socially and historically relative, dynamic and can be used in a hybrid way	Component 2 only	Television Magazines	Genre conventions, particularly with regard to television and magazines, will evolve and reflect changes in society. This is evident, e.g., in the way in which gender is represented in magazines and how that reflects the issues and concerns related to the time in which the products were created. It is also the case that, in an attempt to attract audiences, hybrid genres are created which include elements of more than one genre, which, when combined, produce something new and innovative. According to Neale (1980), contemporary genres are examples of 'repetition and difference' – audiences need to be confident in the familiar while also being offered something new and exciting this may be relevant to the television set products.
The significance of challenging and/or subverting genre conventions	Component 2 only	Television	This statement is very relevant to the television set products in Component 2. The producers of media products will often challenge or subvert more typical genre conventions in order to produce something new that may appeal to a broader audience. An example is the episode of *Black Mirror*, 'San Junipero', which is a hybrid genre combining elements of sci-fi and romance. It is also a period piece as the plot takes place in the 1980s and 1990s.