



Course report 2024

National 5 Media

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2024 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 1,302

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 1,358

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	537	Percentage	39.5	Cumulative percentage	39.5	Minimum mark required	84
B	Number of candidates	254	Percentage	18.7	Cumulative percentage	58.2	Minimum mark required	72
C	Number of candidates	254	Percentage	18.7	Cumulative percentage	77.0	Minimum mark required	60
D	Number of candidates	169	Percentage	12.4	Cumulative percentage	89.4	Minimum mark required	48
No award	Number of candidates	144	Percentage	10.6	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- ◆ 'most' means greater than 70%
- ◆ 'many' means 50% to 69%
- ◆ 'some' means 25% to 49%
- ◆ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper performed as intended, with most candidates managing their time well and completing the paper. The question paper allowed candidates to demonstrate sound knowledge of the key aspects of media.

Most centres prepared candidates with a selection of texts for different question types, which meant candidates were able to avoid repeating content in different questions. Most teachers and lecturers selected media content that was stimulating, age-appropriate and varied.

Most candidates responded well in the analysis of a media text section, displaying good analysis skills.

Assignment

The assignment performed as intended. It is evident that candidates understood what was required.

For the development section, most candidates structured their responses into (a) and (b) answers, as the coursework assessment task directed. Those who chose to use a template for the answers — whether SQA's or centre-developed — found it helpful.

As with every year, there were some original, entertaining and creative assignments (particularly in film and storyboards) where candidates showed considerable technical expertise.

It was clear that most candidates had engaged well with the process, whether working individually or in groups.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

Most candidates approached the question paper methodically and showed considerable knowledge. Centres taught varied and appropriate content, and candidates made good choices in matching content to the questions.

Most candidates completed the paper, and some wrote a substantial amount for every question.

Candidates achieved high marks in different ways, whether for showing detailed knowledge in many individual points, or by developing points they had made.

Question 1 (language)

Most candidates chose to write about how technical and cultural codes could create representations and this was a successful route. Many candidates wrote well about the representation of teenagers, women and/or heroes/villains. Candidates often discussed the use of costume, body language, lighting, camera angles, editing and sound for analysis. *The Breakfast Club* and *Derry Girls* were popular choices and worked well. Some candidates wrote about the use of language to create tone, and used the horror/thriller genre for exemplification, focusing on the use of lighting and camerawork to create a mysterious or 'creepy' tone. *A Quiet Place* and *Shutter Island* were often used well for exemplification.

Question 2 (narrative)

This question was straightforward, and many candidates gained high marks. Most candidates chose to discuss the narrative theories of Tzvetan Todorov, and were able to successfully segment media content into stages. However, some candidates were limited in the marks they could gain, as they only referenced the stages in the text without explanation of what the stage involved or giving specific examples. There was also some misunderstanding that the final stage, 'return to normality', was always a return to the exact situation at the start. Some candidates suggested all new normalities were 'happy'. Joseph Campbell's theory of the 'hero's journey' was also a popular point of discussion, as was Vladimir Propp's analysis of character roles.

Other candidates also answered well on binary oppositions and enigma codes. Candidates were able to apply these theories to a wide selection of texts, but mainstream film was the most popular choice. Some candidates wrote a lot on this question, which meant they might have had less time to spend on other questions.

Question 3 (audience)

Many candidates chose to discuss age, race and in terms of target audiences, and were able to apply this to relevant media content. Once candidates chose a target audience, they were able to show how representations, narrative structures, and textual elements, such as special effects and props, might appeal to a particular audience. Candidates tended to continue to answer using their previous texts, rather than choose a new one.

Question 4 (society)

Many candidates successfully discussed the influence of the murder of George Floyd by a white police officer, and the 'Black Lives Matter' movement and its influence on media content. Many chose the film *Get Out* for exemplification, and candidates showed how these societal factors influenced the references to slavery and racism.

Some candidates confused society with institutional factors and seemed unprepared for the question.

Question 5 (role of media: achieving particular purposes)

This question gave candidates scope to discuss mainstream media and/or public service media content. Candidates used public service adverts extensively, which worked well due to their clear purpose. A large number of candidates used the Australian text, 'Dumb Ways to Die' (which educates on train safety).

Some candidates seemed to have prepared for an answer on 'meeting needs', and were unprepared for this particular role of media.

Question 6 (analysis of a media text)

Most candidates dealt with this question successfully. The film poster (*Hobbs and Shaw*) was by far the most popular option, and many candidates showed a very good understanding of the dramatic elements depicted and could relate this to purpose and audience. Many candidates discussed the strong representation of women and how this might appeal to a female audience. There was also very good analysis on the layout of the poster, use of colour, body language, facial expressions, costume and props.

Some candidates made simplistic points about textual elements in the poster but didn't fully analyse these in terms of purpose and/or audience. Institutional comments often applied to any film poster, but the candidate didn't always focus on the one sampled in the question paper.

The few candidates that attempted the magazine cover or advertisement options were less well-prepared.

Assignment

As in previous years, most teachers and lecturers had negotiated stimulating, individualised briefs with realistic parameters. Candidates who followed a clear structure and approached the questions in a systematic manner scored well. Templates worked well, whether centre- or SQA-devised. Candidates benefited from the clear instruction to complete their planning work before making their product. Storyboard briefs are still the most popular option for the National 5 assignment and students who follow the guidance generally perform well.

Section 1: planning

Surveys and focus groups worked well for this section, and candidates showed a clear understanding of how research into audience would affect the planning of a media product.

The most successful candidates based each point around a specific audience research question asked, discussed their results, and then made a specific plan based on this.

Many candidates conducted relevant, targeted research, and explained the relationship between the research findings and the planning decisions made. This meant that candidates were likely to make the connections required, sometimes above and beyond the requirements of 5 marks.

However, in the planning section, not all candidates defined relevant research connected to specific plans. As in previous years, in question 1 (audience), some candidates discussed research into content, rather than research into audience. For example, some candidates discussed genre conventions or narrative or stereotyping in detail, and then made simplistic statements about who they thought might like this. This question required them to consider their target audience and conduct focused research. Candidates who undertook surveys or focus groups tackled this question more successfully.

Section 2: development

As always, the standard of many National 5 media products was excellent, in particular films and storyboards. Simple briefs (for example, films of only a two-minute duration, or a single-page advertisement) worked well, and left time for writing afterwards.

Assignments that allowed candidates to use their imagination worked well, whether in producing storyboards, posters or moving image texts. Short films made on mobile phones and hand-drawn posters showed how basic equipment could be successful if candidates could explain the impact or connotations they intended.

Posters that included just one main image were sometimes problematic for candidates when writing up their development section, as there wasn't enough to write about.

Not all candidates made their individual input into a group production clear enough.

When candidates were given a product to design and advertise, such as a gadget, they sometimes spent too much time designing and naming it rather than concentrating on the advertisement of it in a media text. In addition, sometimes they evaluated the product rather than their media text(s).

Evaluation points for all types of content were often more successful when commenting on potential improvements or changes rather than successes. This is due to points about successes often repeating information already provided in part A of the evaluation.

Another issue was centres that allowed candidates to make posters for films that already existed, with candidates using screenshots of moments from the film in their poster. As a result, in the development section, they were limited in the marks they could achieve. For example, if candidates hadn't decided on representation, colour, lighting, and layout, they couldn't be given credit for those elements — just the decision to include that moment in the poster. This meant it was more like content research than development.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Centres new to the course should ensure knowledgeable staff are delivering the qualification, and seek support, training and development where appropriate. Support materials from SQA include [Understanding Standards](#) material, the annual webinar, and the course support notes. There is also a subject implementation manager for media who can carry out centre development visits.

Question paper

Centres should refer to the [course specification](#) to ensure that all mandatory course content has been covered.

As with previous years, it is paramount that centres provide candidates with a selection of texts to choose from in answering the questions — some questions are more suited to certain types of media content. The role of media should be taught with different types of media content which fulfil different purposes, for example those that entertain, educate and/or inform. Centres should consider candidate preferences, although there is also merit in learning about media content they would not usually experience. Texts with simple narrative structures work well, as complex narratives can be hard to deconstruct.

Candidates should be taught the clear difference between questions that ask them to describe, and those that ask them to explain. 'Explain' questions require candidates to give detailed textual exemplification that shows cause and effect.

Different genres from different time periods should be covered when preparing for the 'Analysis of a media text' section.

Assignment

Centres should incorporate candidate preferences when creating the brief to encourage engagement. However, giving candidates too much freedom can lead to them not prioritising tasks. Asking the candidates to design a media product, for example a new toy, and then creating a media text to advertise it can result in candidates spending too long on creating a consumer product, rather than the media content. In addition, it must be made clear to candidates that it is the *media* product they are researching, planning and developing, not the consumer product.

Candidates should carry out clear research before making planning decisions. Candidates must include a description of a finding, rather than a statement of a survey result, and a clear link to a planning decision to ensure they achieve marks in this section.

It is crucial that candidates write up their notes on planning as they work through the assignment, instead of tackling this at the end. If they do this, they will demonstrate full understanding of how research into audience, internal and/or external institutional factors and key aspects has influenced their plans, rather than simply reverting to describing the media content they produced.

Centres should take care with group productions to ensure individualised work, particularly with research in the planning section. Candidates should have a clear idea of their role.

Successful assignments have a clear brief (for example a 12-panel storyboard for a trailer) with some institutional constraints relevant to a school production or professional context. This gives candidates a good deal of scope to be creative within certain parameters.

Finally, in the development section, candidates do well when their four chosen examples allow them to draw on a good range of codes, for example a storyboard that includes lighting, colour, shot type, or costume, or a sequence of several shots from a film.

It would be helpful to remind candidates to number the pages of their assignment and to make sure to correctly label shots and provide timestamps so that their work can be credited appropriately.

Some candidates still do far more than necessary, for example writing about internal and external institutions and analysing five parts of their media product in part 2, rather than the required four. Teachers and lecturers should follow the requirements laid out in the [course specification](#).

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject, at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- ◆ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in [March 2024](#) and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).