International GCSE

Media Studies

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To access the answers to all of the Practice questions and the Sample paper in this book, as well as the answers to the factual Getting started activities, visit www.oxfordsecondary.com/oxfordaqa-mediastudies or scan the QR code.

2.1 Communication and meaning

Objectives

You will be able to:

- understand that the media communicate a variety of meanings
- understand why we use the term 'media language' and what this refers to
- understand that the meanings of media products are influenced by form, language, and platform
- recognize that the medium influences the media message.

Getting started

▲ Figure 2.1

What is Figure 2.1? Do you agree that it's an advert? The more important questions are:

- What is advertising?
- How do you know what you are looking at is an advert?

Models of communication

In Chapter 1, we explained that the media are channels of communication. Every media product is created to communicate something to its audience, even if it's simply 'we think this is funny'.

Historically, media studies used a simple model to show the communication process called the **linear model of communication**.

Sender ⟶ Message ⟶ Receiver

In this model, communication happens along a line starting with the sender, who creates a message and pushes it out to a receiver, who engages with and understands the message. If any parts are missing, then communication will not take place.

For example, a television producer (the sender) creates a television programme (the message) and transmits it using a television channel to your television set, where you (the receiver) watch it. If the programme isn't created, or it fails to transmit, or you don't turn to that channel and watch it, then communication fails.

However, media communication has evolved and is no longer limited to one-way or one-off communication. Audiences today can interact with the media, communicate back to them, choose when they consume the messages, and influence what the media do next.

For example, we can comment on social media and YouTube videos, or below many news stories. We don't just take turns at being the sender and receiver, we can also provide feedback while we are receiving messages.

Sender → Message → Receiver → Feedback → Sender
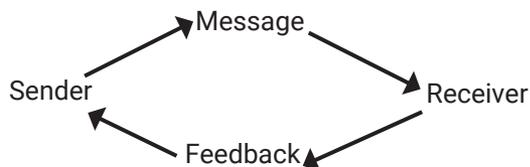
Media platforms

A **platform** or **media platform** is the method by which a medium is received, such as the cinema, free-to-air television, Blu-Ray/DVD, or an online streaming service. The platform on which a medium is presented also influences how an audience receives a message. Audience members are more likely to use some platforms – such as a website – individually, and so think about the message on their own. Other platforms, like the cinema, are more likely to be experienced with friends or family, giving opportunities to see how others react to the message.

The platform also affects how people can interact with the message sender. For example, with some television shows, you can vote and affect the outcome while you're watching the show. With many online news platforms, you can add discussion or even new information, to change the way the news is being reported. Radio presenters will read out social media posts and texts from the audience, or invite them on-air to contribute, making them part of the message.

Why we use the term 'media language'

Remember that the mass media communicate to very large numbers of people. They need to be able to communicate effectively, to ensure that all these different people understand the same message. To do that, they use **media language**. A language enables us to communicate with those who understand it.

Most of us have grown up surrounded by the mass media. We are so familiar with them that we don't even question how we understand them. You may have wondered why you were asked such obvious questions at the start of this topic. Of course Figure 2.1 is an advert, and of course it's for paint. But how did you know? Because you can read the language of an advert.

When we first learn to use language as babies and toddlers, we do so by picking up what other people are saying in context. We gradually work out what individual words are and how to put them into a sentence. Our sentences become more complex as we understand our language better. We learn to use the rules – or grammar – of our language without being formally taught it, so our sentences carry precise meaning.

As we encounter the media, usually from the same early age, the same process happens. We gradually notice the 'words'. These are the individual building blocks, called **codes**. They include images, colours, fonts, **layout**, sounds, and so on. We also see how they are combined into 'sentences' – such as a print advert – that communicate meaning because they use the same rules as other adverts. These rules are

Key terms

Platform/media platform: a media space, such as a social media network online, where content can be published and accessed

Media language: the codes and conventions used within different media forms and media products that enable an audience to 'read' the product and receive the message

Code: a sign that communicates meaning, such as an image, colour, font, layout, sound; the basic building blocks of media language

Layout: the arrangement of different elements in a media product in relation to each other; usually used to refer to the design of print and web products

Key terms

Convention: a repeated way of combining codes that an audience has learned to understand as an informal 'rule'

Slogan: an easy-to-remember phrase that is used repeatedly, with the aim of persuading people

Shared understanding: the common recognition among an audience of the meanings behind specific media codes and conventions

Influencer: a person in the media, usually social media, with a large personal following who they can persuade to buy, use, or do specific things

▲ **Figure 2.2:** This 1950s advert uses very different conventions to the 2020s advert in Figure 2.1.

called **conventions**. Just as with spoken language, we gradually develop an ability to understand more complex language.

Look back at the advert in Figure 2.1. How do you know it's an advert for paint and not a bed? What codes and conventions is the advert using to tell you this?

You may have noticed the company name at the bottom right of the advert, the product name twice along the bottom, and the image of the product at the end of the bed, and on the bottom left of the advert. The bed and the **slogan** are there to attract your attention and show you what the product can achieve.

All languages change and evolve. New words are invented, and old words are sometimes given new meanings. The same thing happens in media language, so codes and conventions change over time. For example, adverts used to include lots of text, but now they tend not to.

The 1950s audience of Figure 2.2 might find it difficult to understand the more modern advert. We understand the media of today very easily because we have experienced media products that use the same codes and conventions. Someone from a different period of time would have more problems. They would lack the **shared understanding** that allows us to 'read' the advert.

Today, advertising reaches a global audience. We are all likely to have experienced media products that use the same codes and conventions, so we recognize them and understand what they mean. An audience today has a shared knowledge of current events, thinking, and technology, which helps them to understand the context and content of the media products they encounter.

Types of media message

Different types of media message require different codes and conventions in their use of media language. These different types of message include those shown in Table 2.1.

Type	Examples	Common codes and conventions within media language
Persuasive messages	Adverts, posts by social media **influencers**, public service/health and safety announcements	Exaggeration, bright colours, smiling faces, music to create a mood
Informative messages	News stories, factual magazine articles, interviews, documentaries	Formal dress, formal language, clear explanations, illustrations
Entertaining messages	Comedy television shows, science fiction films, soap operas, music radio shows	Rises and falls in intensity, obvious emotion, clear narrative
Interactive messages	Social media posts, video games, radio phone-ins	Questions, tasks, puzzles, invitations, competitions

▲ **Table 2.1**

Each of these four types can be found across different types of media and will appear differently in each case. A persuasive advert in a magazine will use different codes and conventions – different media language – to a video post from a social media influencer.

LA PASSION AVAIT DÉJÀ UNE COULEUR, MAINTENANT ELLE A UNE FORME.

ON SE SOUVIENT TOUJOURS DE LA PREMIÈRE FOIS OÙ L'ON A VU LA
NOUVELLE RENAULT CLIO.

RENAULT QUALITY MADE

CHANGEONS DE VIE
CHANGEONS L'AUTOMOBILE

◀ **Figure 2.3:** The two media products shown in these photos have text written in French. Whether you can read the French language or not, you can easily read the media language to know which is the advert and which is the social media post.

[CONCOURS TERMINÉ] **UNE VOITURE OFFERTE!** 🚗 🎁
Pour fêter 250000 abonnés, je vous propose de gagner cette dinguerie de voiture en trois étapes seulement!

Pour tenter ta chance, c'est simple:
❶ **Identifie** deux personnes en commentaire et partage ce post en story
❷ **Follow** **@julien_mercedes_fan**, **@tropdevoiture** et **@je_conduis_everyday**
❸ **Clique** sur le lien dans la bio et remplis le formulaire!

316,278 likes
5 June

Add a comment …

Notice that both cars are presented from a three-quarters view, to show the front and the side. In each media product, the car is very shiny and casts a strong shadow on the ground, and each media product has bright colours. Red, the most-eye-catching colour, is a strong feature in both.

Building skills 1

Choose one of the four types of media message in Table 2.1. Think of one specific media product with that type of message in each of the four media forms: audio, video, print, and e-media.

Do your four examples share any common media language?

Synoptic link

We explored the four media forms in Chapter 1 (see pages 10–11).

The medium and the message

Marshall McLuhan was a Canadian philosopher and media theorist. In 1964, he said: "the medium is the message". McLuhan believed that the medium used to send a message affects the way the message is shaped by the sender and understood by the receiver. An audience member receives the same message differently, and reacts to it differently, across different media. McLuhan thought the effect of the medium itself should be studied, not just the messages it contained.

This can even be seen in one narrow area of the media, such as social media platforms. X (formerly Twitter) allows only 280 characters per post for most users, which means it's used for immediate and concise communication. Instagram is rich in images and videos, and is great for influencers or those who want to use visual storytelling. TikTok uses short-form videos, which encourages people to be creative with music and moving images, and share trends by speaking about them.

In all these cases, users don't just go to the social media platform to read or see one message. They expect to spend time scrolling through a variety of posts, making the medium more important than the individual messages it contains. However, there are concerns that this scrolling from one short post to another is affecting the attention spans of users.

Practice questions

1. Explain the phrase "the medium is the message" and how the choice of medium influences the way the message is constructed in two of your Selected Media Products (SMPs).

2. Analyse how the choices of media language create persuasive messages. In your answer, refer to any two of your Selected Media Products (SMPs).

Exam tip

You might only have studied one media product at this point. If so, try answering the questions using just one media product, and then come back and try the question again later in the course when you have studied more media products.

2.2 The semiotic approach to understanding meaning

Getting started

Look at the front page of the newspaper in Figure 2.4. How many of the different elements that make up a front page (such as the headline) can you name?

◀ **Figure 2.4**

Objectives

You will be able to:
- understand how the media use codes and conventions to communicate meaning
- recognize and label the semiotic codes used in a media product

analyse and evaluate media products.

Key terms

Semiotic analysis/semiology: the study of signs and their meanings

Sign: something that carries or expresses a particular meaning, such as an image, sound, colour, object, gesture, or word

Signifier, signified: all signs have two parts: the thing that we see or hear (the signifier), and its meaning (the signified)

Text: a media product that an audience are trying to understand

Reading: working out the meanings of any media product

Readers: the audience who are trying to work out the meaning of any media product

Semiotic analysis

We have seen how the media use the codes and conventions of media language to create meaning. Most people, immersed in the media of their own culture, will have a shared understanding of what these codes and conventions mean.

As a media student, you must do more than just understand the meanings. You have to know how these meanings are created, so you can analyse the codes. This is called **semiotic analysis** or **semiology**, which derives from the Greek word semeio, meaning 'sign'. The codes you will be looking for and interpreting are all examples of **signs**.

Semiology was first named by a Swiss linguist called Ferdinand de Saussure in the early 1900s. He said that all signs had two parts: the **signifier** (the thing representing a meaning, such as a word, gesture, or image) and the **signified** (its meaning).

When we are studying the media in this way, we often refer to media products as **texts**. Because we are working out the meanings of the media language, we are **reading** the texts, and we refer to the audience as **readers** of the media.

▲ **Figure 2.5:** The sign of a cricket bat being carried by a character in a film includes the signifier of the bat itself, and the signified meaning that the character plays a team sport or is athletic.

Key terms

Polysemic: having several different meanings

Ambiguous: having more than one meaning, which can lead to confusion

Anchorage: words that fix clear meaning to an ambiguous sign, such as using a caption for a newspaper photo

Ambiguity: the quality of having more than one possible meaning

Denotation: the literal or surface meaning of a sign or a media product; what you can see and/or hear

Denote: to name or show

Connotation: an implied meaning behind a sign or a media product; we understand it because we associate the sign with other cultural ideas

Synoptic link

We explored the contexts of the media at the start of this chapter (see pages 17–18).

Ambiguous messages and anchorage

When we analyse the semiotics of a media product, we notice and describe the codes and suggest their meanings. Just as words in a spoken language are **polysemic** (can carry more than one meaning), so are codes in media products. Think about the English word 'bat'. It refers to a flying animal, a piece of sporting equipment, and the action of swiping. The word could be **ambiguous** on its own, but in a sentence like "We watched the bat fly past the house" or "She will need to buy a new bat for the next match" it is given context and **anchorage**, which helps us determine the correct meaning. For this reason, we always look at codes in the context of the product, as there may be conventions that help to reduce the **ambiguity** and anchor the meaning.

▲ **Figure 2.6:** Gabriel Medina appears to have superhuman abilities in the 2024 Paris Olympics. However, captions and text to accompany this picture explain he had just jumped off a wave and was celebrating a high score.

Denotation and connotation

When a sign creates a meaning, it can do so in two ways. The first way is through an obvious surface or literal meaning of the sign – this is called **denotation**.

For example, in the advert in Figure 2.7, you can clearly see a man. His prominence in the image is increased by the use of the colour red, and suggests he is important. He is presented as a man sitting in a kayak. This is the denotation – the obvious meaning of this part of the image. The image **denotes** a man in a kayak.

However, there is more to the meaning than this. We have to look at the advert as a whole, seeing the man in context, to understand the second way a sign creates meaning through implied meanings, or **connotations**. To help understand the other meanings, we can see the following:

- The man is dressed in clothes that suggest action and adventure – a helmet, wetsuit, and buoyancy aid.
- Kayaking is something people do in their free time to experience both fun and excitement.

- The kayak is moving on white-water rapids that appear to be gushing from the back of a car, suggesting the car holds the ingredients for an exciting adventure.
- Everything around the car is part of urban life: an apartment block, a road, a pavement, a plant in a large pot, and a tree surrounded by buildings.
  The major words to anchor the image are 'Whatever. Wherever. Whenever.' and 'The 2017 RAV4',
- The Toyota logo and the slogan 'Let's Go Places' are in the
- bottom right-hand corner.

> **Key terms**
> **Connote:** to imply or suggest a feeling, idea, or meaning that is additional to a literal meaning
> **Dominant signifier:** the most
>
> important of a group of signifiers in a media product, which carries the most meaning

Together, these tell us that the context is an advert for the Toyota vehicle pictured. In this context, the man is signifying the sense of adventure and excitement offered by owning and driving the Toyota, and also lends the car a sense of freedom and spontaneity. These meanings are less obvious and are the connotations. These are meanings associated with the image and are what the advert could **connote**.

The advertising agency Saatchi and Saatchi called this advert "Adventure anywhere", which suggests our analysis of its meanings is in line with their intended message.

Dominant signifier

In an advert such as that for the Toyota RAV4, there are a number of signs. These include: the man in the kayak, the apartment block, the car, the water gushing out, the man's expression, the bright colours of the man and his kayak compared to the urban surroundings, and the company's logo. When there are so many signifiers, the media producers usually want you to notice and engage with one more than the others. The **dominant signifier** is the one that draws your attention and gives the product its overall meaning.

We would argue that the dominant signifier in this advert is the man in the kayak. Human forms catch our eye very quickly, and he provides the overall meaning of excitement that the advert tries to communicate. The car is larger, and size emphasizes it as the main product of the advert, which the man in the kayak is helping to sell.

Figure 2.7: A 2017 print advert for the Toyota RAV4

Key term

Target audience: the specific group of people a media product is aimed at

Building skills 1

Look at images a) to d). For each image, write down:

- what the image denotes
- what the image connotes.

For example, image a) denotes a seedling, and it connotes life, nature, and growth.

a)

b)

c)

d)

Targeting an audience

The choice of signifiers to be used by the media producer depends to some extent on their **target audience**. Because signs rely on a shared understanding, it's important to choose signs that the target audience is familiar with. This means including references to the culture and experiences of the audience, such as using a style of vocabulary and grammar that the target audience is comfortable with, or dressing characters in a way that the audience will understand.

For example, a funeral scene in a video aimed at an American or UK audience will have the mourners dressed in black, whereas a funeral scene for a Chinese or Indian audience will typically have the mourners in white.

It's important that the media producer understands the cultural codes of the people they are targeting. The cultural codes chosen allow a potential audience to know whether the product is something they should engage with. A simple phrase sums up this use of signs specifically related to the target audience: "If you don't understand it, it's not aimed at you."

Building skills 2

Copy and complete Table 2.2, which begins an analysis of the film poster for Turma da Mônica: Laços (Monica and Friends: Bonds) in Figure 2.8. You can choose any aspects of the poster to write about.

Sign	Denotation	Connotation	Potential audience targeting
Woodland in the background	Tall trees, gradually fading into the distance	The children are lost in the woods, as in many folk tales	Children who enjoy stories with some sense of adventure

▲ **Table 2.2**

▲ **Figure 2.8**

Signs, symbols, and icons

Within semiotics, there are three different types of sign. Semiotic theory gives them labels, using terms slightly differently to how you would normally understand them. The labels are the following:

- Symbolic: a **symbol** in semiotic theory isn't related to what it stands for, but through a shared understanding we know what it means. The words we speak are mostly symbols. For example, the sound of the English word 'bat' doesn't resemble anything about the animal or the sports equipment.
- Indexical: an **index** has some kind of link, usually by cause and effect. Smoke is an indexical sign of fire. The moon disappearing behind a cloud brings darkness and is used in horror films as an index of dark terrors to come.
- Iconic: this is not the same meaning as when we say a film star or singer is 'iconic'. An **icon** is a sign that physically resembles what it refers to. A photo of a bat is an icon of a bat. Many road signs are iconic, so we can easily read their meaning even if we're driving in a new and unfamiliar country.

Key terms

Symbol: in semiotics, a sign that doesn't resemble what it represents

Index: in semiotics, a sign related to what it represents

Icon: in semiotics, a sign that resembles what it represents

▲ **Figure 2.9:** This logo for New Regency Productions is symbolic as it has no obvious visual link with what the company does.

▲ **Figure 2.10:** This logo for 20th Century Studios includes searchlights, which makes an indexical link to the company's role in bringing new stories to light.

▲ **Figure 2.11:** This New Line cinema logo includes an icon of a filmstrip, as used in cinema projection.

Key terms

Symbolic codes: the use of different kinds of symbols within a media product to create deeper meanings; these can be analysed using semiotic theory

Verbal codes: the use of written or spoken language to communicate meaning

Non-verbal codes/communication (NVC): aspects of human interaction that do not involve spoken or written language, including body language, and appearance

Varieties of media code

There are four main types of code that you will come across in media studies: symbolic, verbal, non-verbal, and technical. As we have seen, semiotics is all about the use of **symbolic codes**.

Verbal codes

Verbal codes are the choice and uses of words, in both written and spoken language. These include the use of slang, abbreviations, complex and simple words, and sentence structure.

Words communicate ideas and content, but the choice of vocabulary and style also communicates a sense of who is talking; how friendly, educated, or authoritative they are; and how excited they are by the message.

Building skills 3

Compare the use of words on the magazine front covers in Figure 2.12. They are from the same month, but targeting very different audiences.

Consider which words are given importance, the use of punctuation, and the different choices of adjectives.
What do these tell you about their intended audience?

▼ **Figure 2.12:** Condé Nast Traveler and Radio Times magazines
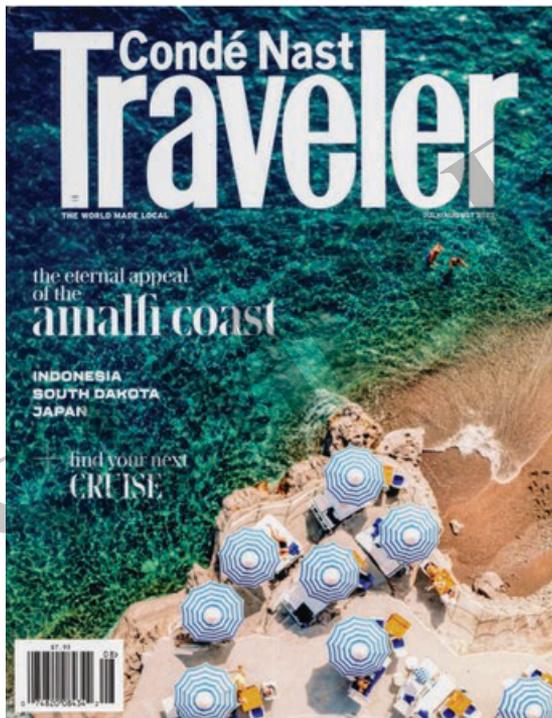
Non-verbal codes

We usually use the term **non-verbal codes (NVC)** to refer to the ways in which humans communicate, apart from written and spoken language. NVC can be chosen by media producers to deliberately communicate meaning to an audience. These include the following:

- Body language, facial expressions, and eye contact: we express a lot of ideas through the ways we act, and how we interact with others. One well-known study by Dr Albert Mehrabian from the 1960s shows that when we are talking about how we feel, listeners only get 7 per cent of the information from our words, but 55 per cent of the meaning from our gestures, pose, and facial expressions. Not all gestures are universal, however, and they may mean different things in different cultures. Again, media producers need a shared understanding with their audience.

- Paralanguage: in the Mehrabian study, the remaining 38 per cent of information comes from the way we use our voice. This is called **paralanguage** and includes the tone of voice, the use of hesitation, and the pitch, volume, and pace. There is a big difference in meaning between shouting, "Yes, of course!" and saying it gently, for example.

- Body movement and body space: the way people move can communicate a lot about who they are: whether they are young, old, confident, sad, or in pain, for example. The closeness of one person to another could communicate particular emotions when combined with other aspects of verbal and non-verbal communication, such as friendliness or aggression.

- Dress and appearance: selecting a different style of clothing, hairstyle, make-up, and accessories can transform a person completely. We base a lot of our initial understanding of others on their outward appearance, because of the **stereotypes** we have already formed. Non-verbal codes around dress and appearance can be culturally specific, and can communicate aspects such as age, status, social class, occupation, gender, religion, or occasion. If a media producer wants to communicate the sense of a character quickly, they will put a lot of thought into every detail of the outward appearance, suited to the culture of the intended audience.

Technical codes

Technical codes include signs created by the use of technical equipment, such as the choices of camera angle, editing style, sound mixing, or **lighting**. Technical codes are sometimes the result of choices during production, and some are **post-production codes** applied during editing. Some of these choices help to emphasize important aspects, such as heightened music or a beam of light in a dark environment. Others are symbols – signs we've learned to interpret such as a montage of shots of someone exercising and improving their performance, representing effort over a period of time.

Key terms

Paralanguage: the non-word elements of speech that create meaning, such as tone, speed, and volume

Stereotype: 1) a limited set of preconceived ideas about a social group; 2) to define a social group by a limited set of preconceived ideas about its members

Technical codes: signs created in a media product by using technical equipment, such as lighting, camera angles, or video editing

Lighting: the effect of the lighting equipment within a scene

Post-production codes: signs created during the editing process, such as moving image transitions, image cropping, or the addition of non-diegetic sound

Did you know?

In many media products, two characters will be much closer to each other than would be comfortable. This is to ensure they fit on the screen or photo, while keeping their facial expressions large enough to read. The actors must ignore this lack of distance so we don't notice it.

Synoptic link

Read more about stereotypes in Chapter 4 (pages 81–82).

Building skills 4

Match the type of code with the appropriate example of a sign.

A Technical code		**1** Newspaper headline
B Symbolic code		**2** Camera movement
C Non-verbal code		**3** Facial expression
D Verbal code		**4** Love heart

▲ **Figure 2.13:** Extreme close-up (ECU) presents one part of a face and shows small details.

▲ **Figure 2.14:** Big close-up (BCU) presents most of the head and shows facial expression, especially of the eyes.

▲ **Figure 2.15:** Close-up (CU) presents the full face and neck and shows facial expressions, speech, and emotions.

▲ **Figure 2.16:** Medium close-up (MCU) usually presents from the waist up and shows arm movements as well as facial expressions.

▲ **Figure 2.17:** Medium shot (MS) usually presents head to hips and shows movement, and often relationships.

▲ **Figure 2.18:** Long shot (LS) usually presents head to toe and shows whole body movements or the person in context.

Photographic and moving image codes

Photographic codes and moving image codes are created visually. Both media are made up of **shots**. There are many choices to be made over the shots themselves and how they are put together, all of which help to communicate meaning.

Shot types

Some of the major **shot sizes** are shown here using images of people.

There are also different **camera angles** that a photographer or filmmaker can choose.

Key terms

Photographic codes: signs created by the use of the camera, including shot sizes, camera angles, and composition

Shot: an individual photo or an individually filmed clip; a film sequence is made up of several shots

▲ **Figure 2.19:** Extreme long shot (ELS) or wide angle (WA) presents more background than person and shows the location or makes the person seem distant.

▲ **Figure 2.20:** In a high angle shot, the camera is slightly above the subject, tilted down. This suggests the viewer is more powerful than the subject and can make the subject seem inferior or insecure.

▲ **Figure 2.21:** In a low angle shot, the camera is slightly below the subject, tilted up. This suggests the subject is more powerful than the viewer and can make the subject seem superior or confident.

▲ **Figure 2.22:** In an eye level shot, the camera is at the same level as (the eyes of) the subject. This suggests equality between the subject and the viewer.

▲ **Figure 2.23:** In a bird's eye view shot, the camera looks straight down on the subject. As we don't normally see the world this way, this tends to alert the viewer to the position of the camera and may suggest the act of watching.

▲ **Figure 2.24:** A point of view (POV) shot is taken as if through the eyes of a character. A POV shot shows the viewer what the character is experiencing.

▲ **Figure 2.25:** For an over-the-shoulder shot (often used during **dialogue** scenes), the camera sits behind one character. It shows the relative positions of both people talking and brings the viewer into the conversation.

▲ **Figure 2.26:** In a canted angle shot, the camera sits on a diagonal slant. It is often used to suggest there is something slightly wrong or unpredictable about the situation.

Composition and framing

As well as choosing the shot size and camera angle, a media creator can choose which part of the scene to include in order to make the shot more appealing or to communicate more emotion. The composition of a shot is how the elements within it are arranged, while framing is how far the shot extends – its boundaries. Here are some of the most common framing techniques.

Leading room: if a subject is looking or moving across the screen, there is more room in front of them than behind, giving them space to look or move into.
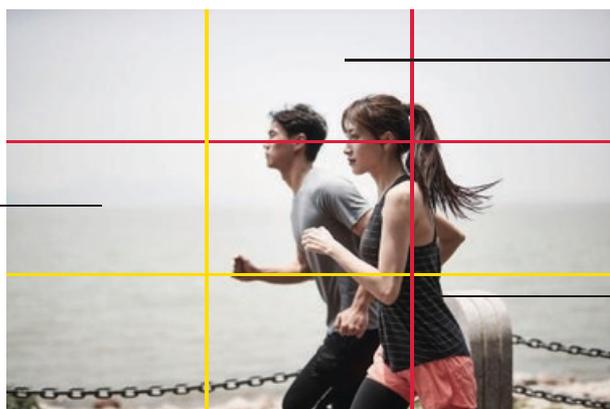
Headroom: there is room above the head of the person, or the top of the subject, so they don't look constricted within the frame.

Rule of thirds: the most important visual information is placed a third of the way across, or a third of the way up or down the image.

▲ **Figure 2.27:** Framing

Diagonals: as with the runners on each side of the photo, these suggest movement, excitement, and sometimes a sense of threat.

Horizontal lines: like the horizon in this photo, these suggest stability and calmness.

Vertical lines: like the middle runner, these suggest strength and hope.

▲ **Figure 2.28:** Composition

Focus

Through the different uses of lenses, camera operators can control the **depth of field** in a shot.

The shot in Figure 2.29 uses a shallow depth of field, putting the nearest trees in focus while the person walking is out of focus. In a video, the camera operator can pull focus, switching the area of focus between the two parts of the scene.

The shot in Figure 2.30 has a much greater depth of field, so more of the scene is in focus at the same time. This could make Figure 2.29 seem more disturbing, as there is always information being withheld from us, while Figure 2.30 appears to be showing us the whole truth and gains a sense of innocence or inclusion as a result.

In a soft focus shot, such as Figure 2.31, detail is slightly blurry, as if the subject has been shot through gauze. This is often used for dream sequences.

> **Key term**
>
> **Depth of field:** the distance from front to back within a scene that appears in focus

▲ **Figure 2.29:** Shallow depth of field

▲ **Figure 2.30:** Greater depth of field

▲ **Figure 2.31:** Soft focus shot

Mise-en-scène

Mise-en-scène is a useful phrase, borrowed into English from the French, that means 'placed on stage' or 'placed in the scene'. It refers to everything that is captured by the camera. You can use the mnemonic CLAMPS to remember the different aspects of mise-en-scène:

Composition/costume ⟶ **L**ighting ⟶ **A**ctors/actions ⟶
Make-up and hair ⟶ **P**rops ⟶ **S**et/setting

When you are analysing a photo or a filmed shot, it's useful to consider every aspect of the mise-en-scène, as these should have been chosen purposefully by the creators to communicate precise meanings. Nothing should have been left to chance.

Lighting

Lighting can be used to highlight areas of a scene and to create shadows, or to change the colours and mood of a shot.

There are two contrasting forms of lighting that are often used: high key and low key.

High key lighting usually has several different light sources so that all areas of the scene are well lit. It is typically used in quiz shows, soap operas, news studios, public service/health and safety announcements, situation comedies, sports programmes – any media product that wants you to be able to see and understand everything.

Low key lighting usually has one or a small number of light sources, creating dark shadows within the shot. It is typically used in genre-specific films and shows such as horror, science fiction, film noir, drama, and thrillers – media products that withhold information from you and want to create a sense of mystery.

Key terms

Mise-en-scène: the chosen elements of an image, which communicate meaning, including: composition, costume, lighting, actors/actions, make-up and hair, props, and set/setting

Prop: short for 'property'; object that is handled by characters within a television programme, film, or photo

Synoptic link

Read more about genre products in Chapter 3 (pages 48–55).

Did you know?

There is a set decoration department in a film or television production team, led by a set decorator and usually including set dressers. This team is responsible for all set dressing and **props** – the small items that make a set convincing, such as the cups on the kitchen shelf, the clock on the wall, or the cushions on the chairs. These are used to show the personality and lifestyle of the characters, just as much as their clothes and dialogue.

▲ **Figure 2.32:** High key lighting is used in this Al Jazeera newsroom.

▲ **Figure 2.33:** Low key lighting is used in television drama Three Ring Circus (1959).

Building skills 5

Use the terms you have learned so far in this chapter to describe the photos in Figure 2.34 and Figure 2.35.

▲ **Figure 2.34**

▲ **Figure 2.35**

Camera movements

In moving images, unlike photography, the camera or lens can be moved during a shot. This can draw our attention to, or keep us focused on, something specific. The following are the most used camera and lens movements:

- Pan (short for panorama): the camera mount remains stationary, but the camera rotates horizontally, from left to right or from right to left, to scan across the scene or to follow a character's movement.
- Tilt: the camera mount remains in one place but the camera tilts up or down to cover the height or depth of the scene, or to follow movement.
- Crane: the camera is mounted on a crane (or a drone), allowing it to change height in relation to the scene. This can deliberately create distance from the subject matter, or suggest a sense of isolation.
- Dolly: the camera mount is on wheels, and can move toward, away from, or with the action.
- Track: the camera mount is on wheels or tracks, or the camera is handheld, and moves with the subject, staying the same distance from the action.
- Whip pan: the camera pans very quickly, making the image appear as blurred streaks.
- Zoom: this is a lens movement. The camera stays in a fixed position, but the lens is used to enlarge or diminish the subject, making it appear closer to or further from the camera. As our eyes cannot zoom, a camera zoom alerts the audience to the fact that the camera is being used, which can destroy our immersion in the world of the moving image. For this reason, it's rarely used in fictional film and television, where a push-in or pull-out, moving the whole camera on a dolly, is often used instead.

Editing codes

When all the footage has been shot, a moving image product needs to be edited. This mostly uses digital technology and is done during the 'post-production' phase of filmmaking, meaning after the filming has been completed.

The most common editing style uses the rules of **continuity editing**. This shows time passing in a **linear** fashion, in a straight line from the start to the end of the film. Continuity editing is designed to make an audience understand the sequence of shots as a continuous flow of time, not noticing the **transitions** between shots.

Transitions join one shot to the next one in a sequence. The most common styles are the following:

Cut or straight cut: an instant change from one shot to the next.
Crossfade/mix/dissolve: a new shot gradually emerges through the current shot.
Fade in: an image appears gradually from a blank screen (usually black).
Fade out: an image gradually disappears and is replaced by a blank screen (usually black).
Wipe: a line (or several lines) moves across the screen, revealing the new shot and covering the old one. These tend to slow down the pace of the product, as the transition can be one to two seconds long. They suggest 'meanwhile/elsewhere' as both images are on-screen at the same time during the transition.

Editing allows time to be manipulated. Time can be slowed down by using shots that overlap in time or by using slow motion. Time can be compressed using **ellipsis** – leaving out insignificant moments. **Montage** sequences order shots without any sense of immediate continuity, but create a mass of information quickly in a short span of time. The 'training' montage is a common example of this, where a major character is shown training across a few weeks or months, with a soundtrack tying the shots together.

Other editing codes have been developed to enable the audience to understand **non-linear time** such as flashbacks, dream sequences, and showing events taking place at the same time. These might use some of the following techniques: black and white footage for past events, soft focus for dreams or memories, fading in from or out to white, or the screen being divided to show more than one image at a time.

Editing can also suggest a state of mind or an atmosphere. **Jump cuts**, where two or more consecutive shots are taken from the same angle, but with a jump in time between them, can suggest a disconnection from reality. The use of **slow motion** can make an action seem more dramatic. Fast-paced editing, with quick shots cut together, can suggest furious or chaotic action. Slow-paced editing, with lengthier continuous shots, can either communicate calmness or suggest that events are more real, with nothing disrupting the visual flow.

As well as basic editing, a film may also have **computer generated imagery (CGI)** effects added.

Key terms

Continuity editing: the most common editing style, following well-established conventions to make action seem continuous across a sequence of shots

Linear: progressing in one direction, from the start to the finish

Transition: a way of joining two shots together in the moving image editing process

Ellipsis: the omission of insignificant moments in a moving image sequence to compress time

Montage: the editing together of discontinuous shots or footage to create meanings by association

Non-linear time: when a narrative moves backward and forward through time to show events, for example, by using flashbacks

Jump cut: when consecutive shots have been taken from the same angle but with the action having moved on, showing a jump forward in time between them

Slow motion: a film or video is played back at a slower rate than it was captured, appearing to slow time down

Computer generated imagery (CGI): the digital creation of visual assets for an image or video sequence, such as characters, backgrounds, or special effects

---

Did you know?

The Star Wars films are famous for their use of wipe transitions.

Synoptic link

Building skills 6

Watch the prescribed television product from the end of the opening titles.

Use accurate terminology to describe the first ten shots you see and the transitions between them.

Print codes: design, layout, and typography

Apart from its choice of photos and verbal codes, the design of a magazine or newspaper includes decisions on other print codes such as:

- layout: where content is positioned, both within the product as a whole and within a single page
- use of white space: the volume of content on a page, including how much surrounding space (called empty or white space) words and images are given
  typography: the font style, colour, size, and placement of the words.
- Serif fonts suggest tradition, whereas sans serif fonts suggest something more modern
  colour palette: the choice and range of the main colours to be used.

▼ **Figure 2.36:** Example of print codes in a magazine

Masthead and logo

Serif fonts have small lines added to the ends of the strokes. Sans serif fonts, like the font used on this magazine cover, do not have small lines added to the ends of the strokes

Skyline

Coverlines

Cover story

Superimposition (the main image placed on top of the masthead)

Main image

Buzzword

Colour palette: red, black, white, and blue

Barcode, edition, and price

Elements within the design can be arranged using **juxtaposition** and **superimposition** to add more to their meanings. To juxtapose two items is to place them close to each other, so that they influence each other's meaning. To superimpose is to place one item on top of another, which tends to reinforce their connection. The placement of the coverlines on the magazine front cover in Figure 2.36 shows us that Barack Obama is the man featured in the main image, and the superimposition of his image over the masthead makes us connect his successful lifestyle with the magazine.

Masthead
Newspaper title
URL
USP/Sell line
Headline
Byline
Lead – the first paragraph that sums up the story
Cover story
Main image
Advert

Price
Dateline
Teasers/plugs
Small image
Standfirst
Caption
Body copy
Jump line

◄ **Figure 2.37:** Example of print codes in a newspaper

The newspaper front page in Figure 2.37 features five news stories and teases three more. Its masthead has all the main information you need about the newspaper at the top of the page, so it can be seen on a traditional news-stand.

Sound codes

Sound obviously provides all the signifiers in an audio product, but it also adds meaning to moving image products, many social media posts, and some websites.

Sound sources are divided into two main areas, based on the **diegesis** or created world of the product.

- **Diegetic sounds** are ones that the characters in the story, as well as the audience, can hear. They include dialogue, sounds made by actions, and wild sound (the noises in the environment itself).
- **Non-diegetic sounds** can only be heard by the audience, and not by the characters. These include voiceovers, background music, and some sound effects not caused by specific actions.

Key terms

Diegesis: the created world of a narrative/story

Diegetic sound: a sound in a story that a character hears, as well as the audience, such as dialogue from other characters

Non-diegetic sound: a sound that would not be present in the world of the television programme or film; it can be heard by the audience, but would not be heard by the characters

Foley sound: an everyday sound effect, such as footsteps or a creaking door, which is recorded in a studio and added to footage after editing

Did you know?

The sound team on a film or television production will include:

- sound recordists who typically work on set or on location and who capture wild sound and the guide soundtrack – this is the sound captured on set that will be replaced later, including dialogue and action sounds
- Foley artists who re-create and record the sounds of key on-screen actions, so they can be added later
- sound editors/sound mixers who blend the sounds required to communicate meaning.

The original sound from video footage is rarely used in a fictional piece, as it will contain too many sound sources. Dialogue is often re-recorded in a studio and added to the footage after editing, in a process called ADR (automatic dialogue replacement). **Foley sounds** are added for the key actions within a scene.

A skilled sound editor will include only the sounds they want the audience to hear, to avoid distractions. They will also heighten some sounds to draw attention to specific actions, such as approaching footsteps to increase tension, rain on a window on a miserable day, or a clock ticking as a deadline approaches.

Radio and podcast codes

Radio and podcasts bring additional sounds, such as:

- jingles: short music items advertising a station, programme, or product
- music beds: music in the background behind speech, used to create a mood
- idents and stabs: very short sound files that can be used repeatedly to give the name of the station or podcast, or to highlight a moment in the show
- phone-ins: when the audience can respond directly on-air, though usually this is controlled by the programme's producers.

Building skills 7

Listen to ten minutes of your favourite radio programme or podcast and identify the different sound sources and sound codes used within that time (the denotations). How does each one help the listener to understand or to enjoy the programme (the connotations)?

Going further

Choose a radio station or podcast that you would not normally listen to. Repeat the task from Building skills 7 and explain the effects of any differences, and any similarities, in the sound sources and sound codes used.

E-media codes

E-media codes, also called digital codes, are used within websites, social media platforms, and video games. They are among the newest sign systems used in the media industry. Despite being relatively new, conventions have become established that enable us to understand meanings quickly.

▲ Figure 2.38: Example of e-media codes on a website

Websites and social media

As most online sites are designed for use on mobile devices and computers, there are shortcut symbols, such as the three lines 'nav burger' menu icon, the three dots for 'more options', and the magnifying glass 'search' icon, that reduce the need for additional words in the design.

Social media sites each have their own media language vocabulary, but there are similarities across the platforms, so that new users can quickly find the features they need in order to take part in conversations.

Profile photo

Title of post

Carousel/slider of
visuals/image content

Carousel indicators

Copy/caption/text content

Timestamp

Home/search/add post/
video/profile icons

Action button to follow
the account

More options button

Username

Likes/comments/
reposts or shares

Clickable link to expanding
content area

▲ **Figure 2.39:** Example of e-media codes in a social media post

Lightbox/expanded content
area for comments

Username of commenter

Reply button

Close button for lightbox

Emojis

Number of likes

Clickable link to expanding
content area
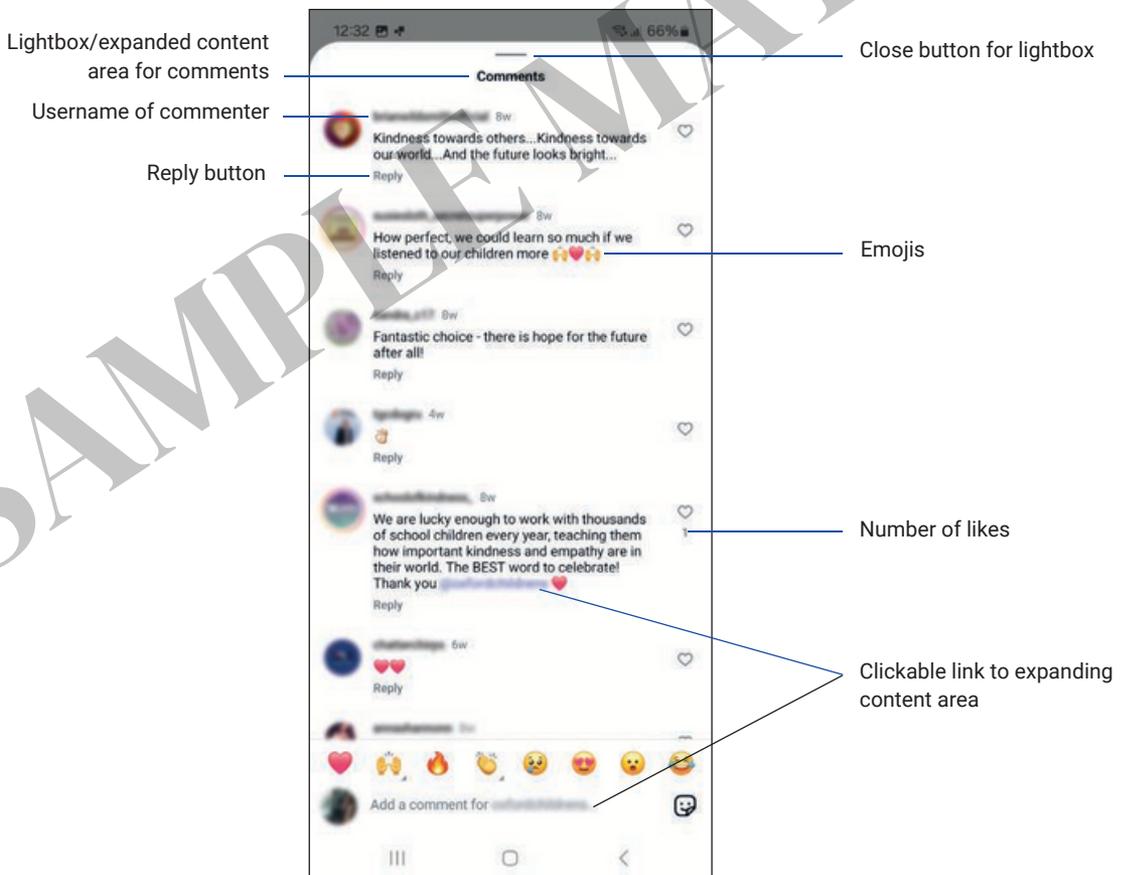
▲ **Figure 2.40:** Example of e-media codes in an
expanded content area of a social media post

Video games

Video games use some of the same codes as moving image products, but because they are interactive, they have distinct codes that game players learn to read through exposure to different types of games. These enable the player to engage with a new game quickly.

The different building blocks of the game are called the assets.

These include the characters, objects, visual and sound effects, and the environments. Some assets are interactive, adding to the gameplay, while others are background assets that give visual appeal and meaning, but no change to the gameplay.

There are often on-screen controls that a player needs to click on or swipe. These may be indicated through colour or effects, such as glowing, or may lack easy identification so users must search to find them.

Most games have clear objectives and are divided into levels, often with an on-screen indicator of the current level. Players are usually able to return to the start of their current level if they fail a challenge. All of this helps players to understand what they must achieve and to navigate their way through the game.

Sounds are often used to give clues about the gameplay, with specific alerts for bad decisions or approaching danger and brighter sounds for each successful decision.

Practice questions

1. Give two examples of technical codes from the opening sequence of the prescribed television product.

2. Analyse how symbolic codes create meaning. In your answer, refer to any two of your Selected Media Products (SMPs).

3. "Knowledge of codes and conventions is essential to fully understand the meanings in a media product." How far do you agree with this statement?

   In your answer, refer to:

   • At least two Selected Media Products (SMPs)
   • The codes and conventions of the media.

2.3 Media language: what choices are made?

Objectives

You will be able to:

- understand how the choice of media language elements can influence meaning
- understand how a point of view can be constructed.

Key terms

Selection: what is included

Omission: what is left out

Getting started

Suggest three ways that a video game communicates what to do next to a game player.

Selection and omission: examples of media language choices

So far in this chapter, you've been introduced to a wide range of different elements, codes, and conventions of media language. Now, we'll explore how these are combined to create meaning through **selection** and **omission**.

Newspapers: selecting information

When Queen Elizabeth II died in 2022, she was head of state in 15 countries (the Commonwealth realms), and Head of the Commonwealth, which encompasses a further 41 countries. It's no surprise that her death was reported in newspapers around the world. Each news editor chose a photo and a headline, and each reporter selected the facts they felt would be most suitable for their audience. They chose from 96 years of life and millions of available photos, often condensing this information into an article or a double page. It is easy to see in Figure 2.41 that both selection and omission are very important.

▶ **Figure 2.41:** This one event was reported in hundreds of different ways around the world, creating different points of view due to the selection and omission of different elements.

Consider the photos chosen by newspapers. Was Queen Elizabeth II portrayed as young or old, smiling or serious, in full regal dress or more down-to-earth clothes?

- Some newspapers, such as ABC (Spain), la Repubblica (Italy), and Público (Portugal), showed only the back of her head, wearing a crown, as if she was walking away.

- ABC and la Repubblica didn't include her name in their headlines. They decided that their readers would understand who she was from the back of her head and the word "majestad" (majesty) or "regina" (queen) in the headline.

Consider the name or title newspapers chose for their headlines:

- Queen Elizabeth, Queen E, sovereign, Elizabeth, monarch, Queen of Britain, Ma'am, the Queen, Elizabeth II, our Queen, icon, Queen, Elizabeth the great, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, Her Majesty. Each newspaper chose a name or title they felt their readers
- would understand.

Like all media products, each newspaper has an **ideology** that governs how it constructs its messages. In this news story, all news editors gave positive depictions of Queen Elizabeth II, but for different reasons.

- Through their choices of words, some presented an ideology in support of the monarchy and what it stands for (Daily Mirror: "Thank you"), some were reporting on the loss of a loved one (Daily Mail: "Our hearts are broken"), and others were remarking on her duty and service as a head of state (Arab News: "The rock Britain was built on"; Houston Chronicle: "A Life of Service").
- Some chose words that reported her death in a factual manner (The Wall Street Journal: "Queen Elizabeth II dies at 96"), others chose emotive vocabulary (Irish Daily Mirror: "We've lost a friend of Ireland"), and others used exaggerated statements (Cape Times: "End of an Era").

> **Key term**
> **Ideology:** the values, beliefs, and expectations of an individual, organization, or media product

> **Synoptic link**
> Read more about ideology in Chapter 4 (pages 77–80).

Building skills 1

Analyse the use of images and words in the magazine advert for Matzos in Figure 2.42. What does it communicate about the ideology of the brand? Remember to discuss denotations and connotations.

Eat Matzos to your heart's content

Now you can have an appetite that really is healthy. Matzos are the tasty crackers that are 98% fat free, low in calories and contain no added salt. They're generously sized too, so even if you're watching your weight or your cholesterol, you can add your favourite topping and enjoy a filling snack. So go on, eat Matzos to your heart's content.

98% Fat free. No added salt.

This product can only help to achieve weight loss when used as part of a calorie controlled diet.

▶ **Figure 2.42:** A magazine advert for Matzos

Video: constructing reality?

The viewers of a film or a television soap opera want to believe in the fictional world they are seeing. This allows them to understand cause and effect within the storyline. Comedy programmes and cartoons often enjoy creating the opposite – a world that is very 'unreal', where anything can happen.

Money Heist/La Casa De Papel is a Spanish crime drama television series, first released in 2017. Across the five series, the characters experience a series of improbable events during two heists of major financial institutions. The events are made believable by choices such as realistic locations, a voiceover explaining people's reactions, and clear cause and effect. Buildings were found that looked similar to the Royal Mint of Spain and the Bank of Spain. The printing press scenes in series one and two were filmed in the real printing press for the Spanish newspaper ABC. The mise-en-scène was well constructed throughout the series; the producers built 50 realistic sets and used major locations in central Madrid, such as Callao Square and the Nuevos Ministerios.

In contrast, the music video To Tansa by Tunisian rapper Vipa has a deliberate sense of unreality. The video was shot entirely within a studio, with three sets linked only by Vipa walking through a door from one to another. Each set has been filmed and treated in the same way, to give an overall colour palette of black, green, yellow, and brown. Each set reflects the idea of a dystopian nightmare, where there is great suffering in an imagined society, but with little continuity across the product. They are clearly constructed sets, with limited reference to the real world. The lighting is dramatic and artistic, rather than realistic. This all fits with the conventions of music videos, which are not expected to have a cause-and-effect narrative in the same way as a film or television series.

▲ **Figure 2.43:** Still from Money Heist/La Casa De Papel

▲ **Figure 2.44:** Still from To Tansa by Vipa

Video games: contrasting approaches

Action/adventure game Rise of the Tomb Raider (Square Enix, 2015) uses high-definition realistic environments, and a third-person view of the avatar being controlled by the player. An avatar is an image or a figure used to represent someone in a video game or in an online environment. Classic moving image shots of Lara Croft are used, from close-ups while she is thinking, to extreme long shots as she progresses through challenging environments. These are edited

▲ **Figure 2.45:** Scenes from Rise of the Tomb Raider

together into a flowing narrative controlled by the player. Game players rely on previous experience in Tomb Raider games and similar **franchises** to be able to guess where they can explore, how they can control the avatar, and what she's capable of doing. In addition, there are clear superimposed instructions and information on-screen, giving brief updates. Challenging events happen within the environment in real time, affected by Lara Croft's presence or actions.

In contrast, the puzzle game Monument Valley (Ustwo Games, 2014) is presented in one continuous extreme long shot per level, allowing the player to see the whole environment at once, and the position of the small, featureless avatar they can move. The environment lacks any sense of **realism**, being formed of stylized 3D artwork, where vertical and horizontal planes can be constantly manipulated. Raised buttons, circles, levers, and handles show the player what they can operate to change the environment, and the next goal is always to stand on a highlighted square button or to move through an opened doorway. Nothing changes unless it is manipulated by the player, or unless a goal is achieved.

The different choices made by the games' creators have a big impact on the experiences of those playing the games.

▼

Figure 2.46: Gameplay from Monument Valley
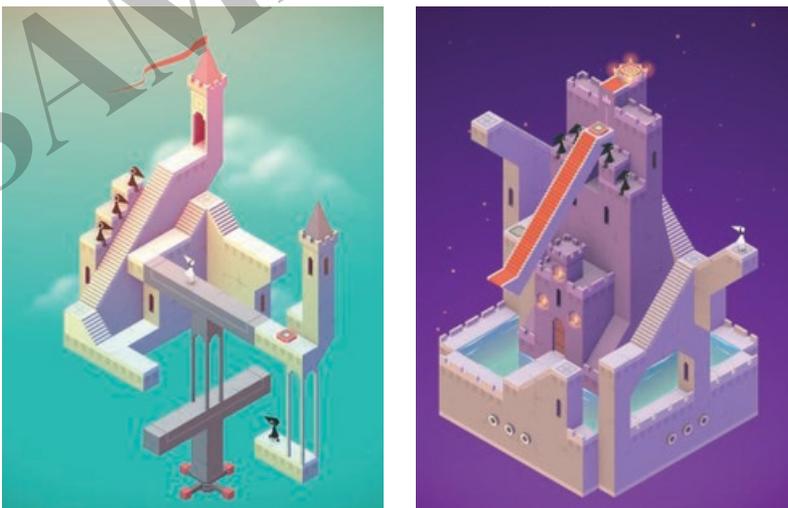
Key terms

Franchise: a media brand that is either a series of media products set in the same fictional world, or a distinctive media concept that is licensed to other companies to recreate

Realism: a sense that what the audience can see and hear could truly exist outside the media

Practice question

1. "Media products use familiar codes and conventions to shape audience expectations."

   How far do you agree with this statement? In your answer, refer to:

   • The use of familiar codes and conventions in the prescribed television product
   • The use of familiar codes and conventions in any one of your other Selected Media Products (SMPs).

2.4 Carrying out semiotic analysis

Objectives

You will be able to:

-
-   understand the process of semiotic analysis
    analyse a given media product.

Getting started

Watch the first two minutes of the prescribed television product.

What do you think are the most important signifiers in this sequence?

How to carry out a semiotic analysis

This chapter has already explained that, in a semiotic analysis, you must read both the denotations and the connotations of the signs you encounter in order to grasp the full meaning of a media product.

Some analysis questions in the exam give a specific focus, such as analysing how gender is represented, how stereotypes are used, or how an ideology is communicated. Some are more open-ended and ask how the media language creates meanings. Whatever the focus is, you can use the following steps to guide your analysis:

1. Consider who the target audience is, and what shared understanding they have.
2. You can never analyse everything, so decide on the dominant signifiers in relation to the task.
3. For each of these signifiers:
   - explain which codes (aspects of the denotation) are important
   - consider what has been omitted as well as what has selected, and why selections have been made
   - suggest the potential meanings for the intended aud

The following case study demonstrates how this analysis could be carried out.

Semiotic analysis: prescribed television product Doctor Who 'Kerblam!' – opening sequence

Case study

Table 2.3 explores the first ten shots in the opening scene of the Doctor Who episode 'Kerblam!'.

	Shot description	Content	Transition into next shot	Sound/dialogue
1	Extreme long shot	TARDIS in spinning time vortex	Straight cut	Explosive start to sound of fast mechanical movement.
2	Tracking long shot	Doctor at controls of TARDIS, seen through a glass hexagon	Straight cut	Movement sound dulls slightly but continues throughout the sequence. "Hold on." "We are holding on."
3	Handheld, medium shot, camera shaking	Doctor and three companions (Graham, Yaz, and Ryan) at the controls of the TARDIS	Straight cut	Slight explosion or impact sound. "Woah." "Well hold on −"
4	Close-up, slight tilt upward	Doctor's hand on controls, tilts up to her face	Straight cut	"− tighter." "Can you do −"
5	Handheld, medium shot, constant camera movement	Graham talking to the Doctor, across the controls	Straight cut	"− something about this turbulence?" Another explosion or impact sound.
6	Handheld, close-up, constant camera movement	Doctor adjusting controls	Straight cut	"I'm avoiding something."
7	Handheld, medium close-up, constant movement	Graham and Yaz holding TARDIS controls	Straight cut	Sound made by TARDIS when it moves.
8	Handheld, close-up, constant camera movement	Doctor showing frustration	Straight cut (jump cut)	"Agh. Can't get the hang of these new systems." Whoosh sound.
9	Handheld, medium shot, constant camera movement	Doctor reaching toward a different control	Straight cut	"What is it? Oh −"
10	Long shot, slight shake	Hexagonal screens showing a light in the time vortex		"− it's still coming for us." Whooshing continues.

▲ Table 2.3

There are more than 45 shots in the first scene, before the external shot of the Kerb!am buildings. This is a sequence that lasts only 1 minute 45 seconds.

1. The target audience is families with children from about eight years old upward. The full family age range is targeted. The show's creators know that most viewers will be existing Doctor Who fans, but each episode may also attract new viewers, especially children taking notice for the first time. Doctor Who is a British television series but has a long-established international audience in up to 200 countries. The existing audience would be aware of who the Doctor is, how the Doctor relates to their companions, the appearance and functioning of the TARDIS, and travel through time and space. For this episode, the audience would also be aware of contemporary retail and delivery firms, and the partially automated warehouses they operate.

2. The dominant signifiers we would consider in the whole opening sequence are:

    - the appearance and voice of the Kerblam Man, suggesting a large, efficient, but faceless organization

      the use of sound, light, and camera to communicate how the TARDIS is behaving

    - the sequence of shots and sounds that reveals the "Me" sign on the back of the packing slip

    - the facial expressions and dialogue of the characters in their reaction to the Kerblam Man and the message.

    For this analysis we will only address the first of these signifiers. The media language aspects being considered have been highlighted.

    The initial part of the sequence uses low key lighting with deep shadows and strong orange tones to the highlights, connoting a sense of danger. The colour palette is similar to fire, which suggests danger to life. There are strong blue accents in the mise-en-scène that evoke both outer space and technology.

    The actions within the TARDIS are filmed using handheld shots, with constant shaky motion. There are no static (motionless) shots. The camera acts as another member of the cast experiencing the same turbulence as the other characters. This allows the viewer to also experience this turbulence.

    There is no establishing extreme long shot within the TARDIS control room, but enough of the control panel (which is familiar to the audience) is shown to locate the scene firmly in the TARDIS. The only long shot in the initial section is from behind a hexagonal lens, so that the interior of the TARDIS can never be clearly seen; only glimpses are given. The editing at the start of the scene is fast paced, with quick straight cuts and the occasional jump cut, which is unconventional in continuity editing. The camera work and editing make it hard to focus on any specific detail or action, connoting chaos and disorder.

    The initial interior shot is seen through one of the hexagons, later revealed as screens to see outside the TARDIS. This could connote that the source of the problem is outside the TARDIS.

There are sounds of fast mechanical movement and explosions.

These connote that the TARDIS is moving swiftly but either is under attack or is starting to fall apart. This adds to the sense of danger. The normal TARDIS movement noises, familiar to the audience, are present but disturbed by the other noises, implying that movement is also being disturbed.

The characters are grouped around the control console, facing each other, and the three companions are holding on tightly to it. This connotes that the console is the centre of the action, and all four characters are facing the action together.

All the characters are talking or shouting in anxious tones, with a sense of urgency. The companions sound scared. The Doctor sounds frustrated at her lack of knowledge of "these new systems", which tells the audience that she isn't fully in control. She gives very little information to her companions (and thus to the viewer) but lets us know that she is trying to take action against "something".

This all suggests to the viewer that the Doctor and her companions are in danger because the TARDIS is out of control, and possibly under attack from something external.

In this analysis, we considered some of the technical, symbolic, verbal, and non-verbal codes. We also considered different aspects of the mise-en-scène, such as lighting, actions, and setting. For each aspect of the denotation, we gave a possible meaning or connotation.

End of case study

Going further

Take another of the dominant signifiers from the opening sequence of the prescribed television product and analyse how it has been constructed. Choose from those in point 2 in the analysis above.

Practice question

1. Analyse the study sequence to show how technical codes create a sense of tension. In your answer, refer to:
   - •
   - • Camera shots and movements
     Edits and transitions.

Exam tip

For the exam, you will be informed a few weeks before your final exam of the specific two- to three-minute study sequence from your prescribed television product. The first questions on the paper will require analysis of that study sequence. You can use this practice question to revise for that sequence, or to test your skills during the course using any two- to three-minute sequence of your choice.

Oxford Resources
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International GCSE
Media Studies

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- Full alignment with the OxfordAQA International GCSE Media Studies (9257) specification for first teaching from September 2024
- Specialist knowledge and opportunities to develop skills and build confidence with key concepts
- An international focus with a variety of media examples from around the world
- Build assessment confidence with practice questions at the end of each unit
- Key terms and specialist vocabulary clearly highlighted and explained

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Digital Student Book available for use in class or at home on Kerboodle.