

Component 2: Section A

In this component learners will gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of media language and representation, as well as extending their appreciation of these areas through the study of media industries and audiences. Learners will do this through the study of Episode 2, Season 4 of *The IT Crowd* (2010) and compare this to Episode 1 of *Friends* (1994).

Learners will also develop knowledge and understanding of how relevant social, cultural, political and historical contexts of media influence media products.

For this topic it is necessary to have access to both of the episodes of the products that are being studied. There are some references to clips available through activities in this resource, therefore requiring a class copy of each episode.

Learners will develop the ability to:

- analyse and compare how media products construct and communicate meanings and generate intended interpretations and responses
- use relevant theories and theoretical perspectives and relevant subject-specific terminology
- respond through discursive writing to show knowledge and understanding of media issues
- construct and develop a line of reasoning which is coherent, relevant, substantiated and logically structured in an extended response.

This resource aims to step through a 12-week plan of study which can be reduced according to the knowledge of the learners based on prior learning. The aims are to look at the following areas:

- Introduction to the Genre of Sitcom
- Media Language
- Representations
- Media institutions
- Audiences
- Media contexts

Teachers' Notes

1. Introduction to the Genre of Sitcom

Introduction activities:

Use the resources [1. Sitcom introduction](#) and [2. Difference between US and UK sitcoms](#) to discuss the history and differences between US and UK sitcoms with the learners. Adapt where necessary to introduce the glossary of terms for discussion of this topic moving forward.

Sitcom Activity

Use the interactive resources [3. Revising key terms](#) and [4. Sort the sitcoms](#) to allow students to demonstrate learning from this introduction.

Ask them to define the word 'Sitcom'

Dictionary Definition

*A television or radio series in which the same set of characters are involved in various amusing situations
The abbreviation sitcom is used.*

https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/situation_comedy

2. The IT Crowd

Use the resource [1. IT Crowd introduction](#) to discuss some of the background of the programme. This context will be referenced regularly throughout the unit. Identify the rich history of sitcom success through the writer, lead actors and original production company.

At this point it would be wise to screen the episode of *The IT Crowd* in its entirety without taking notes. This will allow students to fully concentrate on the episode.

Use the interactive quiz [2. ITC multichoice quiz](#) about the episode as a plenary or starter.

Continue with the resource [1. IT Crowd introduction](#) and continue analysing Media Language.

This resource is now designed so that you can teach the areas of mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing and sound in whichever order you feel is appropriate for the learners. Each task is individual and uses resources from different parts of the product.

Mise-en-scène.

Print out the template [3a. ITC handout – mise-en-scène](#)

Access the Activities [3. ITC mise-en-scène](#) and [3b. ITC image bed](#) and allow students time to explore the mise-en-scène elements.

Activity or Homework opportunity

You may choose a screenshot and give them out to the students, or you could allow the students to choose their own. A few are available on the link [3c. ITC image beds](#).

Teachers' Notes

Sound & Music

Allow learners to discuss the opening music and consider the connotations of this music. How the music links to the title and jobs that the character have could be an interesting topic for discussion.

It is worth recognising that *The IT Crowd* is filmed in front of a live studio audience and there are regular instances where we can hear the laughter. Other uses of sound that are significant include the use of the *Countdown* clock at the start and then again after the battle outside, the sound stings that are snippets from the opening music to signify the passing of time and the club music at the 8+ event.

The episode is primarily full of diegetic music, with just a few examples of non-diegetic samples from the opening sequence and the key scenes below.

Compare two sequences from the options below and analyse the use of music and sound:

Sequence 1 – Roy attempts to remove the bike from his apartment

9.56 – 10.25

Sequence 2 – Moss enters the club with Roy

12.49 – 13.02

Sequence 3 – The Street Countdown battle

19.33 - 20.18

Cinematography & Framing

Each of the 3 main characters has a mini narrative arc running through the episode and we see the different challenges each of them face. It is quite typical of sitcoms to have their characters come up against a problem and look to resolve them over the course of the episode. Consider how each character is framed and how each shot is composed when they are away from the IT office (the central location). It is recommended that you consider carefully the multiple locations that both Roy and Moss go to within this episode.

Editing

The episode has a rich range of techniques that help progress the narrative very quickly in this 23-minute episode. When exploring the examples the learners can talk about how traditional editing techniques (montage, invisible, continuity) are used regularly. There should be some discussion about how this sitcom does not use the typical 'fade' or 'dissolve' to connote a flashback and instead relies on *mise-en-scène* elements (colour and costume). Each of the 3 characters goes through their own narrative arc and each time they return to their base of the office before they head back again on their 'quest'.

3. *Friends*

Use the resource [1. *Friends introduction*](#) to discuss some of the background of the programme. This context will be referenced regularly. Identify the amateur status of this sitcom during its first year of production.

At this point it would be wise to screen the first episode of *Friends* in its entirety without taking notes. This will allow students to fully concentrate on the episode. The resources that have been created focus on the first 10 minutes as the selected extract as learners are only required to study a 10-minute extract.

Use the interactive quiz [2. *Friends multichoice quiz*](#) about the episode as a plenary or starter.

Continue with the resource [1. *Friends introduction*](#) and continue analysing Media Language.

Mise-en-scène

Print out the template [3a. *Friends handout – MiseEnScene*](#)

Access the Activities [3. *Friends MiseEnScene*](#) and [3b. *Friends MiseEnScene image bed*](#) and allow students time to explore the mise-en-scène elements.

By mimicking the activities that you have already carried out with *The IT Crowd* you are encouraging learners to make active comparisons.

Activity or Homework opportunity

You may choose a screenshot and give them out to the students, or you could allow the students to choose their own. A few are available on the printable resource [3c. *Friends image beds*](#).

Sound & Music

In this section we truly have our first opportunity to allow learners to compare *Friends* to *The IT Crowd*. The first activity allows students to listen more closely to selected clips of the comedy and make considerations on the impact.

The timecodes for these two clips are (remember to play without images):

04:22 – 04:45

10:33 – 11:14

- Comic timing, the jokes are more obvious with strategic pauses, while *The IT Crowd* relies on off-beat humour and visual signals to generate laughs from the studio audience.
- A Studio creation (NBC) does give this programme very high production values (even though learners may dispute the 1994 quality of the programme).
- The music over the montages is designed around the original opening song.
- **Extension opportunity** – ‘I’ll be there for you’ by the Rembrandts could make for an interesting comparison to *The IT Crowd* theme tune.

Teachers' Notes

Cinematography, Framing and Composition

In this section, there should be a healthy discussion about how much of the cinematography allows for the mise-en-scène to be included in the shot. The various wide angles that are cut between close-ups allow lots of movement for these cameras in the studio. This is key for learners to understand.

Activity (Extended)

Play the episode and pause at random places to investigate the images and what the images might communicate to the audience. It would be good to allow students to make notes to embed their understanding of cinematography.

If you have time, try looking at the resource in [Appendix 3](#) to create a handout for students to independently access activity [5. Friends cinematography](#) quiz.

Editing

The editing is very traditional and typical of a multi-camera production filmed in a studio. The sequence is comprised of many quick cuts, motivated cuts and continuity editing to make the scene seem very natural and realistic. There are more traditional dissolves and fades used between scenes to represent the passing of time or change of location.

Suggested Teaching Tip: Students could now choose their own sequences to compare using the 4 areas of textual analysis. What differences can they identify in narrative set-up and character development?

4. Narrative

Students should be encouraged to read the resource on narrative. They could investigate one keyword and look for examples in each of the programmes and compare how the director handles them.

There are opportunities to combine textual analysis of costume and body language to help determine character types too.

Teachers' Notes

Key Terms for use in class

There is a version that can be downloaded and used as an additional resource [1a. Table](#) in class.

Key Term	<i>IT Crowd</i>	<i>Friends</i>
Hero		
Villain		
Hero's Journey		
Enigma		
Linear		
Set-Up		
Conflict		
Resolution		
Episodic		
Narrative Arc		
Flashback		

5. Genre

It is really important for learners to recognise the changing style of sitcom as a genre from the 1980s through to now. This gives extra opportunity to embed context too. Learners should use their textual analysis skills from their Media Language and Narrative sections to understand the changes in the conventions.

A list of the key conventions are in the activity [1. Genre](#) and it should provide opportunities for you to screen clips of a variety of sitcoms to allow the discussion of Genre.

Key Terms

Repetition and Variation	Successful comedies will repeat codes and conventions of sitcoms that have come before them and then try and add new variations on the style.
Familiarity	Audiences rely on the familiar structure, including the audience (or canned laughter) and even the studio camera set up. Audiences know what to expect.
Genre Cycles	Genres often go on a cycle of popularity over time and even the format and structure can go out of fashion and then be revisited many years down the line.
Genre hybridity	Sitcoms often become hybrids as they look to tackle other genres in a comedic way. <i>Friends</i> borrows aspects from both 'Drama' and 'Romance' throughout their narratives, but mostly done in a comedic way. <i>The IT Crowd</i> is primarily comedy, but some of it is done in an 'off-beat' way.

6. Intertextuality

Access the resource [1. Intertextuality](#) - Intertextuality is key for discussion in multiple areas of the unit and should be regularly referred to after the Context Section, Institution Section and Audience Section as the references to Intertextuality will be regular and help weave the sections together.

You can use the PowerPoint to explore each key term and then ask the students to investigate.

Key terms to possibly use

- Homage
- Parody
- Satire

As an extension to learning you might find the links and extensions to how each sitcom itself has been used as an intertextual reference in later media examples. You could encourage the learners to look for things like gifs, memes or references in TV to show how much of an impact each sitcom has had on popular culture. More can be found on this later on in the resource.

7. Construction of Meaning

This section is very much designed to be a synoptic section for all the Media Language sub-headings.

Teaching Ideas include

- use the SAMs to create practice questions for the learners and look at the mark scheme together so they recognise the areas of media language that should be referenced
- choose specific sequences and ask students to explore the different areas to analyse and make notes on to understand how meaning is constructed
- access the resource *1. Constructing meaning* as a possible starter, plenary or individual assignment. This resource is aimed to generate 16 possible questions per clip to help learners develop analytical skills

It is important to familiarise yourself with *Appendix 1* and *Appendix 2* so you know what the clips are. Consider providing students with a copy of the Appendix in their notes so they know what clip they will need to refer to.

Further possible reading for Media Language Section

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1676563/?ref_=ttep_ep2

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0583459/?ref_=ttep_ep1

http://www.therobotsvoice.com/2011/09/the_10_nerdiest_things_in_the_it_crowd_office.php

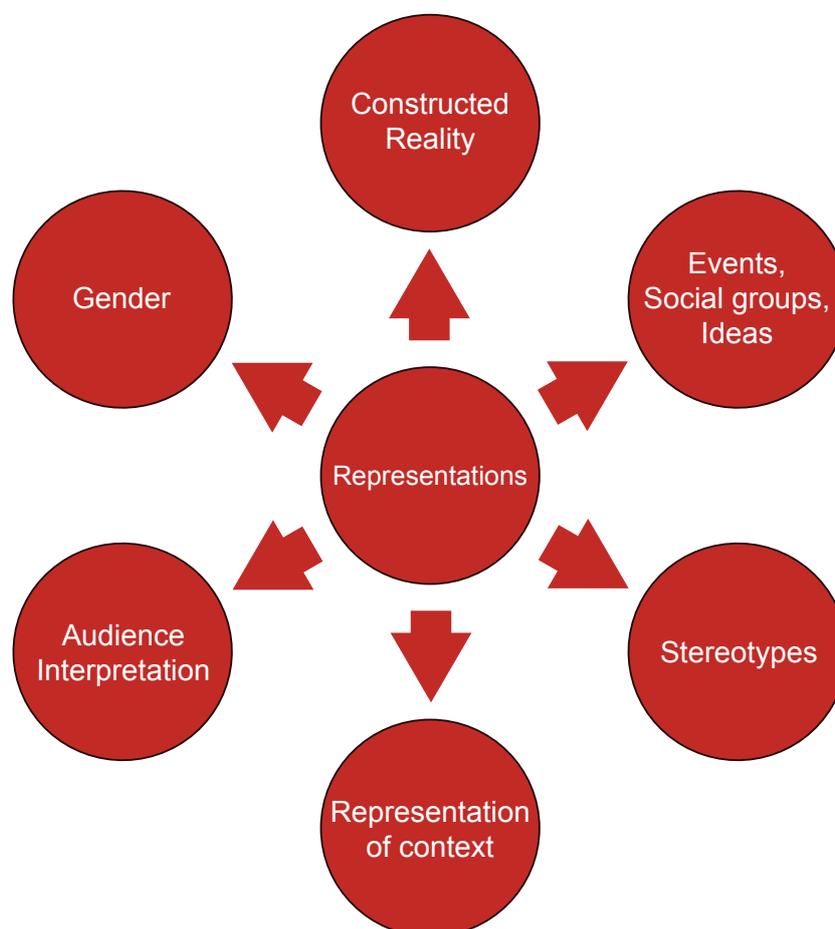
(please note that the links should be checked for appropriateness)

8. Representations

The area of representation as a study area is intrinsically linked with the other areas of theoretical framework. It would be mindful to consider that regularly throughout this section you will be making references to

- The **media language** used to construct the **representation**
- The **audience** perspectives and interpretations of these **representations**
- The **media industry** decisions in constructing the **representation**
- The **context** of the time and place in which the text is made directly impacting on the **representations**

These activities are designed to help you explore the following areas for the learners.



1. Representation of New York City

A good place to start is with the representation of New York City in *Friends*. You could play some key sections of *Friends* when we are first introduced to the city and then use the activity to get students to explore some of the possible representations that *Friends* presents.

The activity references other sitcoms that use New York as a location and it might be worth covering, in a very brief way, the sitcoms *30 Rock*, *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* and *Brooklyn Nine Nine* that represent a modern day New York.

The content at the end could then be used to help students continue their discussion of representation of other settings and locations:

- The Café
- Monica's Apartment
- Ross' Apartment (if you have chosen a later extract)

Then you need to look at the limited locations on offer in *The IT Crowd*. This can be explored more in the

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resource [1a. Other locations](#) that also takes three key locations used in the episode of *The IT Crowd*.

Character Representations

As you move on in discussing the representations of the characters as they first appear it may well be good to use tasks from Sections 2 and 3 to discuss *mise-en-scène* again to help talk about the representation. There is a considerable cross-over between these activities and the activity [2. Character representations](#). The activity can provide students with an opportunity to study independently or allow teacher-led discussions about the analysis and look for further discussion points.

Consider then making direct comparisons between *ITC* and *Friends*

- Rachel vs Jen
- Monica vs Roy
- Chandler vs Roy
- Phoebe vs Moss

Events, Social Groups and Ideas

There are many key events, ideas and social groups that could be discussed and this is the key to the success of this section. Once learners can carry out analysis and deconstruction of key scenes they should now be able to engage in argument and discussion about key events. Using [3. Events and ideas](#) you should be able to encourage learners to argue their opinions by looking for evidence in the clips. The resource could also be used as a comparative tool when looking at marriage vs. divorce as an example in *Friends*. You could also look at evidence in *The IT Crowd* for social mobility with Roy and his old friend Alastair.

Extension discussion points

Social Groups

- Young people in the city (*Friends*)
- Geeks/Nerds (*IT Crowd*)
- Parents (*Friends*)
- Management vs Workers (*IT Crowd*)

Ideas

- Be yourself (*IT Crowd*)
- The American Dream (*Friends*)

Teachers' Notes

Stereotypes and Audience Interpretation

There are plenty of opportunities to discuss stereotypes throughout Sections 1-8 of this resource. However it is important, through microanalysis of *The IT Crowd* in particular, for learners to pick up on the subtleties that the producers of this product embed in their narrative.

Representations of Ethnicity

The IT Crowd has a more diverse representation of different ethnicities in this episode but does not make explicit reference to them. Moss is portrayed by Richard Ayoade who is mixed race and Prime's character is played by Benedict Wong, who is of Chinese descent. In Prime's first scene with Moss he appears inscrutable and potentially threatening, reinforcing some East Asian stereotypes familiar from action films, however as the episode progresses that image changes as he is revealed as another *Countdown* champion. The inclusion of these characters, however, does show and accept the multicultural nature of London where the programme is set.

Child-like Innocence

The adult characters of Moss and Roy play out their lives very much like young teenagers looking for validation in their lives from each other, Jen and friends around them.

- A. Quiz Show – Moss' reaction to his acceptance on to the show *Countdown* is almost childlike as he celebrates and is (according to Jen) visibly shaking with joy.
- B. Roy's Flat – Roy seems to be happy that he is independent and grown up in his flat, but still struggles to deal with social situations such as the window cleaners and Alastair.
- C. Drinks – The asking for drinks in the club shows the innocent culture that these adults are in – even when Roy asks for a beer it brings about a complete silence.

Representations of Context

A key part of discussion will come up later in the teacher guide when we look at the context section.

Representation of Gender

In *The IT Crowd*, the producers challenge the typical sitcom expectations that UK audiences would be used to, and makes the female character the boss of the two male characters. The male characters do not fulfil any traditional 'heterosexual male' stereotypes and the writer Graham Linehan is particularly known for creating these diverse and comedic characters. The characters are pushed to the extremes of their representation for these offbeat comedy moments – especially seen through Douglas Reynholm.

In *Friends*, we have a split balance of male to female characters. Each of the characters has their own personality type and this provides a sense of equality across the programme. It is clear though that each of the characters is further defined by their relationships with the other gender within the sequence.

Teachers' Notes

- Rachel and her ex fiancé Barry and her father.
- Ross by his ex-wife
- Monica by Paul 'The Wine Guy'
- Phoebe by her past relationship
- Chandler by his mother
- Joey by his lust for women

Friends is particularly good for discussion when it comes to looking at Feminist approaches and how other female characters support each other. Rachel, through Monica, receives advice on how to be strong and independent. Learners could use resources [4a. Independent women](#) and [4b. Independent women](#) to look at this clip in the programme where the central female characters discuss their independence away from male control and what is expected in society. The final table on Slide 3 could be used in multiple ways:

- Learners could add a third column to find evidence to 'Support'
- Learners could be given the table with missing information in the 'Challenges' column and be asked to find evidence
- A discussion or debate could be crafted around the ideas that these society expectations are of course very out-of-date and the female representations in these episodes are much more developed from sitcom and television programmes in history.
- Learners could look to see how the relationships between Jen and Douglas, Jen and Roy and then Moss and Ivana could support or challenge some of these representations.

9. Media Industries

As you move into studying industries you should be able to pick up on some of the learner's prior knowledge of production processes but it is key to explain the US production processes. Using the resource [1. Production processes](#) you can ask the students to carry out a research project on production processes with a view to completing the document [2. Key terms](#). An extension to this could also be to link an example of these processes to *The IT Crowd* or *Friends*.

The task on Production Processes gives a very American style of getting a sitcom to air and there should be an attempt to drill down how different it is in the UK. *The IT Crowd* did not have to go through any piloting or green-light processes. Linehan was asked to write the sitcom for Channel 4 based on his previous success with *Father Ted*.

On completion of these tasks the learners should then be aware of the many companies involved in the production and distribution of *The IT Crowd* and *Friends*. This will allow you to then explore the activities in [3. Industry](#) and [9. Industry multichoice quiz](#) allowing you to provide [4. Industry glossary](#) as a learning and revision tool. This should now give you an adequate introduction into the media industry practices.

Teachers' Notes

You may feel it is necessary to link some of these activities to the section on Context (12) as they are intrinsically linked.

Learners need to be able to apply a range of key terms consistently to both sitcoms and these can be found with the resource [6. Industry factors affecting our sitcoms](#) where you may be able to lead the class through these terms or create activities around them researching further links. Again, once you later link to Context and the SAMs that will further enrich their knowledge of the media industry factors around these two programmes. It is also very important to understand that much of this information considers all seasons of each product and to remind learners that they may well be asked just to look for industry factors in the specific episode/extract that you are studying. You may find links back to [Unit 6 - 1. Intertextuality](#) to help understand how the producers were engaging its audience.

10. Audiences

With the grounding of the prior sections, you should be well prepared to discuss the relationship between each text and its audience. Some of the key terms that learners should be comfortable discussing in this section can be taught through the activity [1. Audience gap fill](#).

A key element of discussing audience is to consider the different ways in which the programmes are released to their audience. With both *The IT Crowd* and *Friends* being weekly broadcast programmes there is a specific audience that both Channel4 and NBC were trying to cater for. Since they have both stopped broadcasting they have now been released on streaming platforms. *Friends* in the US is on Netflix and *The IT Crowd* is now on Netflix in the UK. The contract for *Friends* in the UK is currently held by Comedy Central UK and consistently play on their channels every day. Streaming gives audiences access to their content all at one go and therefore the audience accessing the content could be more fluid and less fixed by a schedule and commercial strategy. *The IT Crowd* would therefore still be picking up an audience many years after it completed broadcast.

It might be good to give learners some wider reading to look at this:

<http://www.stylist.co.uk/life/why-friends-was-and-still-is-a-tv-phenomenon>

Targeting the Audience

To understand the background behind *Friends* for example it is important to be able to take a look at the schedules for 1994 and NBC. You may wish to use this to help discussions around scheduling. There is a link below that looks at this across the 90s. You can then try the task [2. Fact validator](#) to get students to investigate some of the factors that help target the correct audience.

<http://www.inthe90s.com/prim9495.shtml>

In the UK Channel 4 successfully ran a campaign, that is still present today, called 'Friday Night Comedy' where they have broadcast a considerable number of home-grown comedy programmes such as *The IT Crowd*, *Father Ted*, *Black Books* and *Green Wing* as well as US imported comedies like *Friends*, *Will and Grace* and *South Park*. As a channel they had a remit to offer diverse and challenging programming to attract mainstream audiences into appreciating niche sub-genres of comedy.

Teachers' Notes

Why do we watch programmes?

The key theory that we should look at with the learners is that of the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Once you have helped the students develop an understanding of the theory you could use resource [3. Uses and gratifications](#) to get the students to consider key scenes, characters or locations that might be evidence of each aspect of the theory. The resource can be used in the classroom or be downloaded and printed for the students to carry out an extended activity.

Marketing Strategies & Technologies

To understand the relationship between institutions and audiences it is important to understand the marketing strategies they may have undertaken to draw in their target audience. One of these is the use of 'Friday Night Comedy' campaign discussed above that both programmes were a part of.

It is also important to use Context (12) to help understand the differences between the technologies available to the audience for each programme.

Extension Opportunities

To really allow the students to understand the convergent nature and additional platforms they engage to market the programme even beyond its broadcast end. Pages for Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are below and Blank PDF's from August 2017 are available as additional downloads if there are problems accessing these sites in your centre.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/ITCrowdChannel>

<https://twitter.com/ITCrowdSupport>

<https://www.facebook.com/The-IT-Crowd-494637910144/>

Themes, Issues, Responses and Interpretations

When you are considering how audiences may react to the situations dealt with in just the individual episodes, it is again very important to consider the Context (12) of the programme too.

The activity [5. Themes](#) should provide you and the learners with plenty of opportunity to discuss the potential reactions and interpretations the audience may have to certain themes. The resource could be used as a card sort, or an opportunity for students to try and find evidence from each text to match the options in each table. The options in the table are not exhaustive and do not provide a full range of themes, reactions or interpretations and these can be added upon as your class study the product in further detail.

Suggested Keyword Glossary for 10. Audience

Branding	Convergence
Credentials	Dialogue
Diversion	Hype
Identity	Marketing Strategy
Narrative Enigma	Personal Identity
Personal Relationships	Platforms
Star Appeal	Surveillance
Target Audience	Uses and Gratifications
Visual humour	Word-of-mouth

11. Context

With many of the sections through 1-11 the use of context is key to helping construct full answers and getting a deeper understanding of each product. Some of these areas of context are direct comparisons between each product. The examples below are not exclusive and are just a taster of where you may wish to investigate when discussing context.

For the teaching of this unit you have 2 key resources that you can use. Prior to delivering the content you may wish to use 1. Articles to gather some background or wider reading on some of the topics you may want to refer to. These resources could then be used in the classroom for students to read, annotate and select evidence to demonstrate the use in the episodes.

Then as a class resource or revision activity you can access resources 2. Friends context and 3. ITC context that looks at some of the key discussion topics that you can create with the class. There are also slides which provide learners with more resources that could help you pick apart the context.

Teachers' Notes

Opportunities to cross-reference with earlier learning.

Earlier Unit	Context	Opportunity for learning
2. <i>The IT Crowd</i>	Channel 4 Comedy, Graham Linehan	Look at clips from <i>Father Ted</i> (*advisory caution)
3. <i>Friends</i>	NBC	Promo Trailer, Articles from 10. Institutions
3. Sound and Music	Theme Tune	Look at Rembrandts song and compare to <i>ITC</i> Theme song.
6. Intertextuality	Audience, Institutions, Genre	Revisit section 7 again now that you have a deeper understanding of context.
8a. Representation of NYC	The City	Look at the photography links and music video from the Context document to help explore the city.
9. Industry	Institutional Practices	Use the early promo advert and compare to the schedules in 10. Audiences
10. Audience	Audiences and their homes	Consider the creation of technologies such as laptops, iPads, streaming, smart TVs, digital TV
10. Themes, Issues, Responses and Interpretations	Audiences	Ways in which they can express their feelings of a programme. How they can react, respond and use the media.

*advisory caution on *Father Ted*.