



Set product factsheet: *The Times*

AS Component 1: Investigating the media / A level Component 1: Media products, industries and audiences

Focus areas

- ✓ Media language
- ✓ Representation
- ✓ Media industries
- ✓ Audiences
- ✓ Media contexts

AS Section A: Investigating media language and representation / AL Section A: Analysing media language and representation

For Section A, there is a set front page from a specific issue of *The Times* published on 23 July 2025. This will be the focus of questions that may be set in relation to Component 1, Section A of the examination paper.

Product context

- *The Times* newspaper is a British, national, 'quality' newspaper, first published in 1785. This and similar newspapers can also be referred to as 'broadsheets', derived from their original larger size. *The Times* has been published by Times Newspapers since 1981 – a subsidiary of News UK which is wholly owned by News Corp, a mass media publishing company. News Corp was run by Rupert Murdoch until his retirement in 2023 when he passed over the running of the company to his son, Lachlan Murdoch. News UK also publishes the *Sunday Times*, *The Sun*, *The Sun on Sunday* and until 2011, the *News of the World*.
- Politically, *The Times* adopts a more neutral position compared to the explicit political allegiance of the tabloid press. However, it does have a right-wing allegiance and supports the Conservative Party at key times, such as when there is a general election. *The Times* is famous for having a range of journalists with varied political viewpoints which allows the newspaper to offer a more neutral and balanced political stance on some issues. It upholds News Corp's key principles: 'Passionate, Principled, Purposeful'.
- The newspaper describes itself as: '*A faithful recorder of the times for more than 200 years. The Times is authoritative, credible, responsible, trusted and a part of the nation's cultural heritage....It is an informer, an entertainer, a campaigner, an innovator and an agenda-setter that has always the capacity to surprise*' (Gallagher, n.d.)



- The set front page of *The Times* was published on 23 July 2025 and focuses on three news stories. The main story is Keir Starmer's concerns over potential summer riots and community tensions as a result of rises in the cost of living and immigration. There are two other stories; the BMA (British Medical Association) doctor's strike and France's concern over work absenteeism referred to by the newspaper as 'le sickie'.
- The main **standalone image** is of footballer Chloe Kelly's signature celebration of her goal that took the England women's football team into the Euro 2025 final.

Part 1: Starting points – media language

Front page – How the combination of elements of media language influence meaning

Newspapers share a repertoire of elements, such as layout and design, use of language and mode of address, which are recognisable to audiences. These reflect the style of the newspaper and its readers and may differ slightly, for example, between popular and quality newspapers.

Consider the different ways in which the **paradigmatic choices** of media language, including visual codes, written language and mode of address, communicate meanings on the set front page of *The Times*.

- The page is divided between the three news stories, the central image and a **plug** featuring an article on the death of Black Sabbath frontman Ozzy Osbourne, and an article by *The Times* fashion director Anna Murphy featuring in *Times2* – the newspaper's standalone lifestyle and culture supplement. Both are accompanied by images designed to arrest the attention of the reader. The choice of stories reflects the style of the newspaper, its political allegiance and the interests of the readers. The **gatekeepers**, in their selection of content, have ensured that there is something to appeal to all readers on the front page.
- The layout and design is conventional of this style of newspaper which is generally text-rather than image-led. The **masthead** is bold and recognisable and effectively signifies the ideology of the paper, suggesting that it reports upon the issues of the time. The typography chosen is strong and commands the front page and is placed either side of the crest and logo. The crest including the lion and the unicorn is part of The Royal Coat of Arms of the United Kingdom. The overall aesthetic suggests tradition, Britishness and reliability.
- The **slogan** within the masthead 'Dieu et Mon Droit' meaning 'God and My Right' is the motto of the monarch and further reinforces the idea of the newspaper as part of British tradition.
- The front page also includes the claim 'Daily Newspaper of the Year' at the top of the page. The newspaper won this prestigious honour at the 2025 Press Awards where the judges said of the newspaper, '*Excellent all round. The Times continues to value and invest in its news product which makes it the go to newspaper. In addition it has a skilled set of writers in features and comment plus the extension into audio and radio brings in a more diverse audience.*' (News UK, 2025)
- The **image** is a standalone picture of Chloe Kelly, a member of the England women's football team; behind her is Michelle Agyemang, the other goal-scorer in that game. Newspapers like *The Times* that focus on **hard news** on their front pages will often include a powerful, colour image that is not related to a news story to break up the text-led



page and attract the attention of readers. The image exists independently of the other content on the front page and is able to tell its own story. The meaning is communicated clearly through the **visual codes** of sports clothing, other players and the setting of a football stadium. There is a contrast in the **codes of expression** of the two players that also contribute to the meaning. Michelle Agyemang is smiling broadly and looks elated, whilst Chloe Kelly assumes a more calm, confident expression as she faces the crowd. Her gesture codes of a hand on her hip and one on the corner post will be recognisable to football fans but those readers who are not familiar with her signature pose will still be able to understand the meaning. The image is anchored by the **caption** 'Strike a Pose' and a brief description.

The way media language incorporates viewpoints and ideologies (A Level)

The selection and combination of media language elements and the use of **anchorage** to communicate meaning is important in the construction of newspaper pages. The layout and design of the pages and the resulting **syntagm** will generally reflect the concerns, viewpoint and political ideology of the publication and its readership.

- The **language and mode of address** used for the stories on the front page of *The Times* is formal, reflecting the expectations of the audience demographic who expect comprehensive, informative news. The **copy** is compact and thorough; subheadings are not generally used to split up the stories into sections, suggesting that the readers are comfortable with detailed information and analysis.
- The **headline** of the main story is informative, as would be expected on this style of newspaper, and differs from the more dramatic and enigmatic headlines employed by tabloids. 'PM's fears for summer riots in 'fraying' UK'. However, there is subtle, implicit criticism of the government and its policies through the selection and use of language conveying a particular viewpoint.
- A second story also serves to implicitly criticise the government and specifically Wes Streeting's (the Health Secretary at the time) battle with the doctors over pay.
- The third, smaller story is more light-hearted using a linguistic hybrid 'le sickie' but its inclusion serves to demonstrate that the newspaper also covers global issues and in particular ones that concern our near European neighbours.

Theoretical perspectives

Semiotics – Roland Barthes

- The newspaper front page uses **signs and codes** that are recognisable to audiences and connote meanings.
- The meanings constructed by the newspaper can come to seem self-evident. The right-wing political viewpoint of *The Times* will be regularly reinforced through the stories that are chosen and the way in which they are mediated and re-presented. This will generally be accepted by the readers who share the newspaper's political ideology.



Think!

Consider how **signs and codes** communicate meaning and reinforce the ideas and viewpoint of the newspaper on the front page.



Structuralism – Levi Strauss (A Level)

- Newspapers are recognisable to audiences by their form; they have a repertoire of elements that communicate meaning, regardless of their style or political allegiance. Newspapers, like other media products, create meaning through the way in which they are structured. Their use of typical codes and conventions fulfil audience expectations and appeal to loyal readers. However, the way in which the conventions are employed across newspapers will communicate different meanings; for example, the use of headlines, language and mode of address differs between popular and quality newspapers.
- Newspapers also communicate meanings through constructing **binary oppositions**, for example *The Times* presents a right-wing viewpoint and is in direct and obvious opposition to the left-wing Labour Party. The newspaper, in the way that it mediates the stories it selects, constructs an implicit good/bad opposition between right- and left-wing parties. Meaning is dependent on pairs of oppositions; the way these oppositions are used and resolved reflects the ideology of the newspaper.
- However, *The Times* demonstrates less explicit political allegiance compared to a tabloid publication and, therefore, may offer more than one viewpoint on an issue. The resolution of oppositions may only be evident and more explicit in something such as an editorial or an opinion piece, where the political allegiance of the paper may be more obvious.

Part 2: Starting points – representation

How representations invoke discourses and ideologies and position audiences (A Level)

Newspapers have access to the same stories daily but will choose how to represent events and issues, reflecting the **values, attitudes and beliefs** of the paper and their readers. The stories that make it on to the **news agenda** of a particular newspaper will be determined by a range of factors, including the readership and the ideology of the newspaper. Although newspapers represent real events, they are not a window on the world; a process of mediation will have occurred. *The Times* will usually represent stories through the lens of their centre-right agenda and will present the Conservative Party and their policies positively and will be critical of the Labour and other left-wing parties as they do not share their political viewpoint. The way in which the event/issue/social group is represented will affect the audience response. Newspapers are **opinion leaders** and may influence how audiences respond to an issue/event.

The way events, issues, individuals and social groups are represented through processes of selection and combination

Consider how issues, events and social groups are represented across the set front page from *The Times*.

- The construction of the representation of the main story and the choices made by the newspaper regarding how to re-present and mediate this story for its readers will construct a specific representation. The main story is constructed through the selection of the headline, subheading and language. Although the way the story is presented is largely informative, the choice to use this particular story on the front page is implicitly critical of the government through the selection and use of language. The headline includes emotive terminology, 'fear', 'riot' and 'frayed'. They also quote from Angela Rayner who was Deputy Prime Minister at the time, highlighting her concerns about social cohesion.



- Other language choices made by the newspaper construct a more negative discourse whilst not being explicitly critical, for example '*alarm has been mounting at the top of government*' and '*warnings from Downing Street officials*'. References to '*officials*' and '*sources*' suggest the newspaper has intelligence without them actually giving specific evidence. '*Sources*' can refer to a person who does not want to be named or a relevant publication or document. The newspaper has therefore constructed a **version of reality** that matches their right-wing viewpoint.
- Similarly, the choice to run the story on the doctors' strike uses a quote '*See You On The Picket Lines*' to catch attention and largely focuses on Wes Streeting's battle with the doctors. The newspaper has chosen language to illustrate this problem, reflecting what they see as the severity of the situation, for example '*accused doctors*', '*attempt to avert strike action*', and whilst it presents the viewpoint of the government and the doctors, there is a suggestion that the Health Secretary has lost control of the situation.
- The response of the readers to the representation of the event and issues chosen to be reported would be to accept the newspaper's view as it reinforces their own ideas about the government.



Think!

To illustrate how the same story may be represented differently by different newspapers, it may be useful to look at a range of newspapers from the same day and consider the choices that have been made about how to represent the stories they have selected for the front page.

Theoretical perspectives

Representation – Stuart Hall

- Hall's idea is that representation is the production of meaning through language, defined as a system of signs. All newspapers, in particular front pages, use signs and codes, the meanings of which have been established over time, to communicate messages to their readers. These will differ according to the style of the newspaper but will be recognisable to readers.
- The front page of *The Times* produces meaning through the language used by using recognisable signs that will be interpreted by the audience, for example, headlines, image choices, language and mode of address.
- These choices contribute to the construction of the event and **encode** meanings that are to be **decoded** by the audience.

Contexts

Political context

- Newspapers reflect the political context in which they were made through their ideology and the way they represent certain stories. This context is also evident through aspects of their ownership, political orientation and readers. The media mediates issues and events in the news, particularly more complex stories including international relationships. These can be represented by the newspaper through, for example, what is selected and what is



left out, the sources referenced and the way in which language is used. It is important to be aware of how different newspapers re-present their stories and their view of the world in different ways and how this may reflect an ideological viewpoint.

- The choices made in the construction of the set front page of *The Times* to be studied reflects an implicit political allegiance and a right-wing ideology through the way in which it represents national issues and the Labour government of the time.

Social and cultural contexts

- All newspapers, including *The Times*, reflect the social and cultural contexts of the time in which they were produced. *The Times* largely targets a well-educated, middle class readership with a centre-right political viewpoint. This is evident through the **news values** of the paper, the selection of stories and how particular social groups are represented.
- The choice to focus on these particular stories also reinforces a common social theme for this newspaper – its role in presenting national and global news that is of interest and concern to their readers. The inclusion of the central image illustrates the newspaper's awareness of important cultural events that may be of interest to their readers.
- The newspaper's plug also reflects a cultural context advertising more soft news stories with a lifestyle focus that will appeal to a broader audience.

Component 1 Section B: Media industries and audiences

For this section, you will be using the issue of *The Times* and pages from its online edition that you have studied in class. This will be **different** from the set pages studied for Section A.

AS Section A: Investigating media industries and audiences / AL Section A: Understanding media industries and audiences

Part 3: Starting points – media industries

The following points should be considered in relation to the complete issue of *The Times* and the online pages you have studied in class.

Industry context

The significance of patterns of ownership and control, including conglomerate ownership, vertical integration and diversification.

- *The Times* was first published in 1785 and is the oldest UK national newspaper still in existence. It is part of The Times newspaper group which is a subsidiary of News UK. News UK is a British-based, American-owned newspaper publisher and a subsidiary of the American mass media conglomerate News Corp. News UK produces multi-format brands; their news brands include *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Sun*, *The Sun on Sunday* and *The TLS*. National broadcast brands include *talkSPORT*, *Times Radio*, *Talk* and *Virgin Radio UK*.
- News UK's mission states: '*Driven by passion, guided by principles and acting with purpose, we exist to promote a fair society, freedom of speech and a little bit of fun. Rethinking continually the business of storytelling, we represent, reflect and reach the nation, telling the stories that matter. We inform our audiences so that they can make decisions based on trusted information.*' (News UK, n.d.)



- News Corp is a mass media and publishing company whose global brands include Harper Collins publishing, *The Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*. The company has demonstrated a predominantly right-wing political allegiance through *The Sun* newspaper, backing the Conservative government in recent elections. However, *The Times*' political allegiance is centre-right but this is often less explicit; as a quality newspaper, it usually maintains a more neutral stance. A more explicit political allegiance can usually be found on comment and opinion pieces on the inside pages and online. However, at certain times, the newspaper's political allegiance is more obvious; after the July 2024 general election where Labour had a landslide win, *The Times* warned: '*However strong the desire for change, voters will quickly turn against a government that appears powerless to effect it in the face of turmoil.*' (*The Times*, quoted by Ponsford, D., 2024). There was also a backlash from readers when the newspaper's election day 'Comment' piece failed to support any party and when the 'Comments' page on the online newspaper was turned off after the election result was declared.

The impact of digitally convergent media platforms on media production, distribution and circulation (A Level)

- Recent technological change, in particular the popularity of online media, has largely been responsible for the downturn in newspaper print sales; newspapers have had to address changes in consumption habits and to remain economically viable. *The Times* responded to this challenge by launching its website, establishing a presence on social media sites. This move gave the newspaper the ability to produce more up-to-the-minute national and global news and to update this content regularly. *The Times* group was one of the first companies in the UK to introduce an online newspaper but also introduced paywalls requiring readers to pay a subscription to use the site. In 2016, *The Times* and *Sunday Times* launched a combined website and made the decision to move from a **rolling news** to an **edition-based digital format**, updated three times a day to match the reading patterns of their audience more effectively. In 2020, News UK launched *Times Radio* in an attempt to increase the take-up of digital subscriptions for the newspaper. After research and feedback from subscribers, *The Times* app was redesigned and launched in April 2025.
- Producing content for online platforms is advantageous for newspapers, as it is cheaper to produce and distribute than the print version and the multimedia and interactive content attracts a broader audience, some of whom may have rejected the print form as it does not suit their lifestyle. *The Times* website offers a range of online content, including the more traditional 'World', 'Money' and 'Business' as well as non-news content, including 'Culture', 'Travel' and 'Life & Style'. The *Times View* features opinion pieces where the political leaning of the newspaper can be more apparent, for example, '*Starmer was either reckless or naïve in appointing Mandelson*'.
- The Times* is part of a regulatory framework known as the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) – an independent body which is not backed by the government and is fully funded by the industry itself. This is a regulatory body whose aim is to maintain press standards but is anti-Leveson in its approach. It is not obligatory to join IPSO but the majority of newspaper publishers choose to be regulated by this organisation.



Think!

Consider how the website for *The Times* (www.thetimes.com) has addressed the changes in technology and audience consumption of news.

Theoretical approaches

Power and media industries – Curran and Seaton

The newspaper industry is dominated by a small number of powerful companies. *The Times* is part of a **horizontally** and **vertically integrated** company (News UK) and more broadly, a large multi-national conglomerate in the form of News Corps. Being part of a huge press organisation could limit or inhibit creativity and journalists' freedom. Rupert Murdoch and his successor have been accused of controlling the newspaper content and editorial teams which would support this point. However, it could also be suggested that by having a more diverse pattern of ownership, a more pluralistic approach could create conditions for more varied and adventurous media productions.

Regulation – Sonia Livingstone and Peter Lunt (A Level)

The Times Newspaper Group and News Corp continue to face increased pressure alongside the rest of the UK press industry to adhere to strict rules and regulations on industry practice. This has arisen after the phone hacking scandal and subsequent Leveson enquiry into the industry. There is an underlying issue of protecting citizens from harmful, or more recently, 'fake' material while maintaining choice and the freedom of the press to expose wrongdoing and injustice through responsible journalism. The increasing power of companies like News Corp and their expansion into digital media has also placed traditional approaches to regulation at risk.

Cultural industries – David Hesmondhalgh (A Level)

The Times newspaper group is part of a vertically and horizontally integrated company with a wide range of titles on offer in order to maximise audiences and minimise risks. The reach of News Corps spans a range of different cultural industries enhancing their global power. By association, *The Times* benefits from access to other cultural industries and is therefore financially protected. Rather than seeing digital media as a threat, the company has embraced its digital expansion and introduced paywalls to allow for online content to be viewed while still generating income. As part of News Corp, the company is part of a wider organisation responsible for different cultural industries. This can benefit the newspaper greatly in terms of production and promotion.

Part 4: Starting points – audience

Consider the following points in relation to the edition of the newspaper you have studied in class.

How audiences are grouped and categorised by media industries

The Times' target audience, according to past ABC data, is predominantly ABC1, over 35 and has a centre/right-wing political stance. This well-educated and middle-class audience take an interest in national and global affairs and can understand and engage with detailed political reporting, news analysis and comment. The readers of *The Times* are more likely to be in the 'Succeeder' psychographic group and of high social status.



The Times, similarly to some other national newspapers, has kept its ABC data private since 2020. However, the News UK website offers the following useful data about *The Times* in 2025:

- 15.1 million readers each month
- 17.5 million monthly unique visitors
- 640,000 digital only subscribers
- 416,000 app users (highest average engagement in overall newsbrand market)
- 47 million listeners to *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* podcasts in the last year (2025).

The News UK sizzle reel gives more information about audience for *The Times*.

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8-YvXH7_iY&t=22s)



Think!

Consider what evidence you have found in the issue and online pages you have studied that supports the suggested audience profile of *The Times*.

How media industries target audiences through the content and appeal of media products, and through the ways in which they are marketed, distributed and circulated

- The front page of the newspaper is important in attracting an audience. The choice and style of the main headline and central image are important in hooking the reader and communicating the viewpoint the newspaper may take on the particular story featured. For example, *The Times* headline from February 2026 reporting on the result of the Gorton & Denton by-election, '*Starmer on the ropes after by-election humiliation*' accompanied by, '*a bruising night for the government*' and '*haemorrhaging votes to both the Greens and Reform UK*', uses emotive language and is more explicitly critical of the Labour government. This is accompanied by a large, colourful photograph of Hannah Spencer, the Green Party candidate who was successful in the by-election. The political allegiance of quality newspapers like *The Times* tends to be more explicit at key political times, for example, elections.
- The **plug** is another important convention that *The Times* front page uses to appeal to the audience. It is eye-catching, in colour and uses images, suggesting that this more traditional paper also covers stories related to lifestyle and popular culture, so broadening the audience appeal. For example, '*How to Be Good at Small Talk*' (Jan 2026, featuring an image of Kate Middleton), '*Men, It's Time to Suit Up in the Office Again*' (March 26, featuring an image of Harry Styles) and '*Glamour, booze and brawls – A day at the races*' (March 26, featuring two stylish young women).
- Other aspects of the paper that suggest the target audiences are the features that appear on the inside pages. These are **soft news** items relating to, for example, the arts, lifestyle or human interest stories. They are lighter in tone but still address the target audience. In *The Times*, these articles are included in a lifestyle supplement, *Times2*, which is separate from the **hard news** items. For example, in May 2025, *Times2* ran a feature on fashion choices at the Met Gala '*Was this the most wearable Met Gala ever?*' and one on the troubles in the Beckham family, '*The trouble at brand Beckham*', demonstrating the newspaper's range of content targets different audiences.



- Whilst the front page of the newspaper may often be less explicit in its political allegiance, other pages in the newspaper and on digital platforms should be studied to explore the ideology of the newspaper, including the online opinion pieces, for example, '*The Times View*', the editorial, political cartoons and 'Comments' sections. *The Times* letters page in the print newspaper is culturally iconic and offers readers an opportunity to air their views and interact with the community of the newspaper.
- Newspapers have had to adapt to survive; *The Times* has achieved this using new technologies to attract and maintain audiences. Digital platforms enable the readers to interact with the newspaper and they are encouraged to post comments on the stories featured. Website users are encouraged to submit their stories, pictures and videos, encouraging **citizen journalism**. Distributing the publication across digital platforms which allows it to be interactive and immediate may also broaden the audience of the newspaper as suggested by the increase in app users.
- The values, attitudes and beliefs of the newspaper and the way in which they represent particular stories will resonate with like-minded readers who may have chosen this newspaper because of its centre-right stance. Readers will be made to feel part of the newspaper's community and that the stories and articles reflect their views. This audience will accept the **preferred reading** of the newspaper.

Theoretical approaches

Cultivation theory – Gerbner

Gerbner asserts that audience exposure to repeated patterns of representation, such as that of the UK post-Brexit, the economy or the government in power, by newspapers may shape and influence their views and opinions of the world around them. Gerbner went on to say that this is not like a 'hypodermic model' but rather depends on what the audience already believes. Newspapers function as **opinion leaders** and **mediate** the news for the readers with their political allegiance in mind. These views will therefore be cultivated and reinforced by the newspaper, its content and its focus.

Reception theory – Stuart Hall

The producers of newspapers **encode** ideas in their publications that are to be **decoded** by their readers. Active audiences who agree with the ideology of the newspaper will accept the viewpoint of the newspaper that is evident in its approach to stories, the editorial and opinion pieces. Those readers who have a different political allegiance will have an **oppositional response**, disagreeing with the messages constructed by the newspaper and may not buy/read a publication that does not reflect their ideas and opinions.

End of audience – Clay Shirky (A Level)

There has been a significant change in recent years in how audiences consume newspapers. The concept of audience members as passive consumers is no longer tenable in the age of digital technologies that offer a range of platforms through which news can be delivered. This technological development has enabled the rise of the **prosumer** who can create their own content submitting stories as a **citizen journalist**, offering an immediate perspective on news stories. Consumers can also actively engage and 'speak back' to the news media. *The Times* newspaper and website offer interactive opportunities for readers to comment on stories and features, which gives them a voice as part of the newspaper's community.



Contexts

Social and cultural

Newspapers reflect the society and culture in which they are produced. *The Times* is a centre-right-wing publication in a largely right-wing press environment. Issues and events will be represented differently in different newspapers according to their ideology and the expectations of their audience. *The Times*, although generally neutral in its stance, will tend to implicitly favour the Conservative Party and its policies. Their content will also reflect the needs of their ABC1 audience demographic. News UK and *The Times* also recognise the need to offer broader content addressing social and cultural issues to appeal to a broader audience demographic.



Think!

Consider how social and cultural context is evident in the issue of the newspaper you have studied.

Economic

The newspaper industry has faced economic pressure in recent years as the sale of print copies has steadily fallen. Ownership is hugely significant in relation to the newspaper industry, particularly when print sales are on the decline and advertising revenue is falling. Newspapers such as *The Times*, which is part of larger, powerful conglomerate, is more protected from economic risks. Some newspaper titles, including *The Times*, have introduced subscriptions to access their digital products and to secure an income.

Political

The political context of newspapers shapes the product and is reflected in the way in which stories are selected and how issues, events and social groups are represented. Although the political allegiance of *The Times* is often less explicit on its front page, it is usually evident in the editorial, letters pages, opinion pieces and political cartoons. As a largely right-wing publication and a quality broadsheet, *The Times* will select stories and present them in a way that reflects their political ideology and appeals to their right-wing readership. The news agenda will reflect the needs of the readers for detailed, informative reporting.



Think!

What evidence is there of the newspaper's political allegiance in the print and online pages you have studied?



Acknowledgements

Quote from Gallagher, T (n.d.) The Times, News UK

Quote from News UK (2025) 'Times Media Wins Big at National Press Awards'

Statement by News UK (n.d.) 'Our Mission'

Quote from *The Times*, quoted by Ponsford, D. (2024) 'Daily Mail gracious in defeat as Fleet Street reacts to Labour landslide', Press Gazette