

No Time to Die

(2021)

GCSE Component 1: Exploring the media

Focus areas:

- **Media language (Section A)**
- **Representation (Section A)**
- **Media industries (Section B)**
- **Media contexts (Section A & B)**

THE PRODUCT

- *No Time to Die* is a James Bond film that was released in the UK on 30 September 2021, after a global premiere at the Royal Albert Hall on 28 September 2021. Starring Daniel Craig as 007, this is his fifth and final performance as the fictional MI6 agent. The release was significantly delayed from April 2020, following a change in director and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The film was produced by the British company EON (Everything or Nothing) Productions and distributed in UK cinemas by Universal Pictures. *No Time to Die* is available to stream on Amazon Prime.
- The film's budget was an estimated \$250-301 million, making it the most expensive Bond film to date. So far it has grossed over \$774 million worldwide at the box office.
- The poster was designed by Empire Designs, a British film promotion agency. The first teaser poster for the film was released on James Bond Day, 5th October 2019, as part of a global marketing campaign for the film. The typographical logo of the film title, *No Time to Die*, is in Futura Black.

PART 1: STARTING POINTS – Media language

Consider the codes and conventions of media language and how elements of media language influence meaning:

- The dominant image is a mid-shot of James Bond, smartly dressed. This suggests that he is the film's protagonist. According to Vladimir Propp's theory, he would be considered the 'hero'.
- This is reinforced by the action shots of him on a bike and in a car, which connote he is on a quest.
- Guns are commonly used as props in the action/thriller genre therefore audiences can expect violence, action, and danger. Each gun is casually pointed, connoting that the figures are alert and ready for action.
- Nomi is wearing a military costume with an earpiece, which connotes her role as an active agent. Like Bond, as a 00 agent, she is a trained assassin. Her calm and focused facial expression connotes that she is in control. This reflects the shift in the Bond narrative towards more contemporary depictions of women. However, Paloma's (Ana De Armas) costume is a glamorous, revealing, navy-blue evening dress cut to her waist. This type of dress would be historically more typical of how 'Bond Girls' have been depicted by the franchise.
- Safin (Rami Malek), Q (Ben Whishaw) and Swann are looking directly at the audience, seemingly making eye contact. This is a common convention in film posters and helps give a more personal approach to this format.
- A common convention for film posters is to have the names of the actors placed in quite a prominent position as another way to entice the

audience, but this poster does not do that. This may be because the producers are confident that the audiences will recognise Daniel Craig and any text may detract from the visuals.

- This poster uses plenty of visual ‘star appeal’, as Lashana Lynch would also be recognisable to fans of the Marvel Cinematic Universe given her role in *Captain Marvel* (2019).
- The large iconic 007 logo at the top of the poster is eye-catching and bold. The choice of a worn, aged, blue tone for the typography hints at the content of the film, which shows a more experienced Bond. The colour also creates a sense of cohesion with the blue tones of the El Nido bar, the villain’s suit, and the glamorous dress of CIA agent (Paloma).
- Towards the bottom of the poster, the title of the film appears along with another smaller 007 logo. The gold font for 007 represents luxury, wealth, aspiration, and exclusivity—all traits that are associated with the Bond franchise. The capitalised title suggests power and strength.
- The title *No Time to Die* can be read in several ways – either that Bond could be so active that he doesn’t even have the time to die, suggesting that the film will be fast paced and exciting, or it could be read as a bad time to die, suggesting a more sombre tone to the film. It also suggests there are going to be some significant deaths in the narrative.
- Beneath the title are more typical conventions of film posters – release date, social media, production companies and distributors. The latter are much smaller so as not to divert the audience’s attention away from the main image or the rest of the poster.

Intertextuality:

- The montage design, where separate images are laid over each other, references previous Bond films, providing a sense of familiarity, nostalgia and pleasure to fans who recognise the link. The 007 gun logo acts as an intertextual link between *No Time to Die* and previous Bond films. It has become synonymous with Bond.
- It is significant that there is no intertextual

reference to Ian Fleming (the author of the James Bond books) on this poster – this is a departure from previous Bond films, signifying *No Time to Die* is not based on one of his original books.

Narrative:

- The exotic locations that we expect for a Hollywood spy thriller and Bond film are shown in the background shots. Italy and Cuba are contrasted by using warm daylight and cold neon lights at night for Bar El Nido. This opposition echoes other oppositions in the poster, making for a more cohesive design.
- There is an image of a man wearing a mask and carrying a gun – this character would be Propp’s ‘villain’. There are connotations of death and danger here. The mask is covering up his identity, suggesting that he wishes to remain hidden. This acts as an enigma code for the audience (Roland Barthes) as we want to find out who this character is and his role in the plot.
- The denotation of the motorbike and Aston Martin suggests that there will be action sequences and excitement within the narrative, both of which are conventions of action films.

PART 2: STARTING POINTS – Contexts and representations

Social and cultural context:

- James Bond is an action hero who, since the 1960s, has been constructed to embody historical masculine stereotypes such as strength, skill, independence, etc.
- The representation of women in the franchise has also historically been stereotypical: ‘Bond Girls’, who are the beautiful ‘love interest’ for Bond, are often insignificant to the narrative and ultimately disposable (Propp’s ‘princess’).
- The representation of gender in the Bond franchise has evolved over time, to an extent, in a bid to reflect the changing social context. It would be useful to consider the poster for *The Man with The Golden Gun* (1974) here.
- Craig’s Bond is not as sexist and overtly stereotypical as the earlier incarnations of

the character and reflects some contemporary notions of masculinity as his Bond is older, more thoughtful and shows signs of vulnerability.

The poster, however, needing to communicate the genre and franchise quickly, only lightly reflects some of these character developments and continues to represent Bond as the familiar action hero.

- Hollywood’s representation of race and ethnicity has shifted significantly over the decades. Mainstream audience expectations have changed because of numerous events and individuals. Two of the most significant events to prompt audiences to question what they are seeing in Hollywood was the #OscarsSoWhite campaign in 2016, and the killing of a black, American man, George Floyd, by the police force in 2020. The latter ignited a wave of US and global protests, which challenged long-established symbols of racism (e.g. flags, statues, buildings), calling on corporations and institutions to change.
- Aston Martin has a longstanding brand relationship with the James Bond franchise. In *No Time to Die* several different models appear, but on the poster, Bond can be seen in a DB5. This model was the first ever Aston Martin used in the films, when Sean Connery drove it in *Goldfinger* in 1964.
- Dr Madeleine Swann (Léa Seydoux) is pictured twice on the poster. A French psychiatrist and one of Bond’s love interests, she would be recognisable to fans, as she also appeared in *Spectre* (2015).
- James Bond has retired to Jamaica in *No Time to Die*, and his 007 title is reassigned to a new MI6 agent, Nomi (Lashana Lynch). This was widely reported before the launch of the film and the announcement of a black, female 007 led to a minority of racists trolling the actor Lashana Lynch online. On being cast, Lynch stated “We [Black women] know how it feels to be mis- and underrepresented and we know how it feels to yearn for someone, anyone in the world to speak our truth for us when we feel like we don’t have a voice. And I’m hoping that my career and my choice in roles and me just being me, authentically, is shining a light on our power.”

(<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/movies/story/2021-08-26/no-time-to-die-lashana-lynch>)

- There are three gun props used in the poster. The Advertising Standards Agency (ASA) states that “ads for computer games, films, TV programmes, should ensure that they do not promote violence or anti-social behaviour by depicting weapons in a threatening context or in a manner that could be seen to be glamorising violence”. (<https://bit.ly/310Ga7W>). Therefore it is significant that each of these weapons are relatively small or partially seen, and are not actively being used.

Representations of gender

- Bond is pictured three times in the poster and in all instances, he provides an image of masculinity that connotes skill, intelligence, and strength. In the larger image, although facing side on, Bond’s posture is strong, relaxed, and dominant, acting as a frame for the rest of the characters. His facial expression is thoughtful and care-worn, reflecting more contemporary ideas of masculinity. In the smaller images, he is represented as calm, skilled and determined while driving at speed – all traits that we would expect in a hero and a spy. Interestingly, he is not represented with a weapon, which is unconventional for masculine representations in spy thrillers.
- The second most dominant character on the poster is also a male – Rami Malek as Lyutsifer Safin. His size in the poster could reflect the male-dominated nature of the franchise – the main protagonist and antagonist who drive the narrative are both male.
- The use of key light and make-up on all three women on the poster represents them as beautiful, which is what we would expect for a Hollywood blockbuster. Two women on the poster are given agency through their use of weapons – the guns suggest danger, but their posture connotes confidence with a relaxed attitude toward such dangers. Arguably, Nomi and Swann are more than the ‘Bond Girls’ of the past within the film. Nomi’s military costume and earpiece suggest her actions are central

to the plot, and her presence is not merely for the development of the male characters. Each woman is independent and not shown as a ‘damsel in distress’ or ‘Proppian princess’, reflecting the shift in Hollywood to represent women more equally to meet the expectations of a modern mainstream audience.

Consider representations of ethnicity and race

- The cast is predominantly white, which is typical of both Hollywood movies and the Bond franchise. Lashana Lynch as Nomi is British Jamaican and is represented as skilled and determined by using the military costume, earpiece, and gun. Very few people of colour have been represented on Bond posters in the past and the majority have been cast as villains or ‘Bond Girls’, therefore a black woman taking on the role of 007 is a significant piece of Hollywood and franchise history. Representations of Grace Jones, Gloria Hendry, Halle Berry and Naomie Harris on previous theatrical release posters could provide some good exploratory talk/activities.
- Safin, the centrally pictured villain, is played by Rami Malek, an American actor of Egyptian heritage. Bond villains typically stand in opposition to Bond, and not just morally, as this often extends to ethnicity too.
- There is a villain pictured in a parka jacket wearing a Japanese Noh mask, which are often used for ghostly or demonic characters in Japanese theatre.

Consider representations of age

- The use of light on Bond’s main image highlights his older age, constructing a representation of wisdom and experience. Most of the characters are represented as youthful, in contrast to Bond, and as a result less experienced and skilled.

Possible areas for further investigation:

- Ben Whishaw’s Q and the representation of stereotypical ‘geeks’ or LGBTQIA+ characters.
- Safin is represented as having facial scarring with disfigurement makeup conforming to the historical (and widely criticised) Hollywood

stereotype of villains having some form of physical difference.

PART 3: STARTING POINTS – Industry

Historical and cultural context

- Hollywood is the oldest film industry in the world, originating in the 1890s. The first motion pictures were less than a minute long, due to the limitations of technology, and sound was not introduced into films until 1927. Hollywood is considered the ‘film factory’ of the world and exports its products to most countries. The first Bond film was released in 1962.

Consider the nature of media production, by large organisations who own the products they produce, and by individuals and groups:

- Film production consists of five major stages: development, pre-production, production, post-production, and distribution.
 - Development – This is when the ideas are created, if necessary, the rights are bought, the screenplay is written and financing is sought from producers, partner studios and (for big budget productions) product placement relationships.
 - Pre-production – During this stage cast and film crew are found, locations are chosen, and sets are built.
 - Production – This is when the film is shot.
 - Post-production – This stage is when the film is edited. The crew work on the sound, images, and visual effects.
 - Distribution – This is when the finished film is distributed. The film is marketed and promoted. Big budget Hollywood films are screened at the cinema and released for home viewing.
- While the poster above is set for Section A, and does not need to be analysed textually for Section B, it can be used as a starting point for exploring industry issues:
 - Company names: universal, United Artists Releasing, MGM, EON can be researched in terms of production and distribution, ownership issues, including conglomerates.

- Actors – exploration of previous roles, ‘star’ appeal.
- Hashtag, website – role of new technology and social media in marketing film products.

Other areas to research:

- Director, writers, other crew e.g. DOP, Costume Designer – exploration of these roles and their position in the production process.
- IMAX – the role of technology in the distribution of products.
- Soundtrack by Billie Eilish on Interscope (owned by Universal) – ‘star appeal’, synergy and convergence of different platforms to promote the film.
- Synergy with other brands (e.g. Nokia, Triumph, Omega) to fund production and/or market the film.

Consider the effect of ownership and the control of media organisations, including conglomerate ownership, diversification, and vertical integration:

- The James Bond series is produced by EON productions, a British film production company based in London. It is the first Bond film to be distributed by Universal Pictures, which acquired the international distribution rights following the expiration of Sony Pictures’ contract after the release of *Spectre* in 2015. Universal also holds the worldwide rights for physical home media (DVD/Blu-Ray). United Artists Releasing (owned by MGM) holds the rights for North America, as well as worldwide digital and television rights. Amazon bought MGM in 2022 and with it the rights to stream the whole James Bond catalogue on Amazon Prime, a video on demand subscription service.
- Bond has always been well known for its exotic locations across the globe and *No Time to Die* was no exception, using locations in Italy, Jamaica, Norway, and the Faroe Islands. Pinewood studios in London was also used for the scene which needed big sets.

Consider the functions and types of regulation of the media:

- Film and video releases in Britain are amongst the most tightly regulated in the Western world.
- Age restrictions are placed on all commercially released films by the BBFC and some are even expected to make cuts or alter the film in some way to conform to the guidelines.
- To secure a wide audience, *No Time to Die* had a 12A UK rating for its cinematic release and 12 for its physical media and VOD/streaming release.

Consider how the media operate as commercial industries on a global scale and reach both large and specialised audiences:

- The long-running Bond franchise has an established fan-base and *No Time to Die*, a US/UK co-production, received global distribution (theatrically, on DVD/Blu-ray and VOD/streaming) to reach a mass audience.
- *No Time to Die* is clearly intended for mainstream audiences and has great commercial appeal:
 - Bond as a character is iconic and has universal appeal – he is skilled, charming, good looking and, arguably, in Craig’s version of the character he has more depth.
 - The narratives of the films provide familiarity and comfort (‘bad guy’ does something wrong, ‘good guy’ catches him and wins the day) which reinforces dominant messages and values about ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘duty’ and ‘loyalty’.
- *No Time to Die* can be seen as making an active effort to appeal to a contemporary audience that is less likely to tolerate the flimsy gender and racial stereotypes of past Bond films. Producers hired Phoebe Waller-Bridge, only the second ever female scriptwriter to work on a Bond film, to develop the female characters and make their dialogue and characterisation more convincing. However, the specialised audience of core Bond fans are still reached using nostalgia and typical narrative conventions.