



GENERAL COMMENTS

The Media examination focused on three areas of study, allowing students to demonstrate their understanding of several different ways of interpreting and understanding media texts. In the 'Narrative' section, students had to analyse ways that media texts are constructed and developed; in 'Social Values' they had to analyse how social factors can affect the way a media text is created and interpreted; and in 'Media Influence' students had to explore claims made about the influence of the media and various media texts on the audience.

Overall, assessors remarked on the broad general competence of many responses. Media has specific terminology that is clearly outlined in the statements on key knowledge in the *Media VCE Study Design*, and students who could not use these terms did not perform well (see below for specific comments on 'point of view', 'story element' and 'social values'.) Choice of text is also important. Many interesting texts were selected for study, allowing students to analyse the many elements used in constructing a narrative; however, some students wrote on texts such as *Baraka* and *Animatrix* that are not considered fictional narratives for the purposes of this study. Teachers should refer to page 36 of the *Media VCE Study Design* when selecting texts. In particular, student films, documentaries, advertisements, cartoons, video clips and news and current affairs programs are excluded. Animations such as *Finding Nemo* posed difficulties for students trying to address issues of lighting or acting and some television texts also caused difficulties, as mentioned below.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

Section A – Narrative

Question 1

Marks	0	1	Average
%	30	70	0.7

Too many students confused a story element, which is specifically identified in the key knowledge for Unit 3, Outcome 1, with a theme or an event. This mistake also affected their ability to answer Question 2.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	11	15	22	22	17	12	2.6

Good answers clearly linked the ideas in the text with the production elements the student chose to write on through the story element they nominated in Question 1. Weaker students tended to reproduce prepared answers about how one of the production elements worked, or interpreted the term 'motifs' as 'motives' and wrote inappropriately about the motivation of a character, for example. Of the production elements listed, students who chose 'acting' frequently had difficulty in exploring elements of acting, tending to comment only on the delivery of lines.

The following answer explores facets of acting, at the same time relating these to the ideas that lie behind the text.

Anthony Perkins successfully creates the two-sided mind of the psychologically deranged Norman Bates. Perkins lanky body posture and continuous fidgeting illuminates Bates' childlike nature. His placid facial expressions and constant twitching of his jaw reveals Bates' inner conflict that is not always expressed in his dialogue. Perkins' shaky voice and constant smiling successfully creates one side of Norman's personality...

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	6	9	20	28	22	14	3.0

The development of characters and relationships was the specific focus of this question, and good answers clearly showed how the specified production elements worked to this purpose.

Answers that used television texts were generally less satisfactory. Many students were not able to explain/discuss character development as it related to the genre of the text they were writing about. For example, in television, character development often takes places over a whole series. Although a single episode may be studied, students need to be able to explore how a character or a relationship may be introduced in an opening episode and gradually developed over a



whole series. Consequently, it was difficult to explore this aspect in detail if an episode of a series such as *Water Rats* was used, where students no longer had access to the whole series.

Similarly, some production elements have different characteristics for different genres. In particular, lighting for television ‘soaps’ such as *Home and Away* is often deliberately flat so that production can be fast. Few responses using television texts reflected this understanding.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	14	15	21	24	17	9	2.4

This question focused on the structuring of time in creating a narrative. Better responses acknowledged that while a direct, forward-moving chronological narrative may be the norm, many interesting variations can be used in constructing a narrative. A film such as *Sunset Boulevard* is essentially one extended flashback that, at the end, returns the viewer to where the film began. At the other extreme, a film like *Memento* fractures time, telling the story in a complex structure of forward moving arcs and flashbacks.

Too many students confused the passing of time with the structuring of time, saying little more than that editing ‘cuts out the boring bits so we don’t have to spend eight hours watching a person sleeping’. Better answers recognised that the way a story is presented to the audience has an effect on how it is received and interpreted.

As instructed, most students referred to the other text they had studied when responding to this question.

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	13	5	8	11	14	14	13	11	7	4	4.3

A key aspect of this question was audience engagement. Better responses, such as the example below (a response on *American Beauty*), clearly showed how elements of a narrative had an impact on the audience.

‘In less than a year, I’ll be dead...In a way I’m dead already.’ Bang. Your hooked. Right from the opening scenes of American Beauty the voice over has you engaged. You know the ending, yet it contradicts what we are seeing on screen. Mise en scene and lighting point to happy suburbia – the audience has been sucked in and wants to know what happens.

Students were required to discuss this sense of engagement by exploring several specific points. One was to discuss the point of view from which the narrative is presented. This is different from the way a person’s point of view or opinion in a discussion is talked about, but many students confused the two. For example, in the response above on *American Beauty*, it is clear that the story is being told from the point of view of the narrator. This will affect what the audience is shown and the way it will interpret events in the film. Other films are told from the point of view of an omniscient ‘story teller’ who is able to present all aspects of the story. In other cases, such as *Rear Window*, the audience is only shown exactly what one particular character would see or know. These structural choices obviously have an impact on how the audience understands and engages with the narrative.

In response to this question, narrative progression needed to be explored in a more analytical way than simply retelling the story.

Few students chose to explore the relationship between the narrative text and its genre. However, those who did were able to explore the way that the audience has expectations that come from previous understanding of the way that a genre works. A viewer will go into *King Kong* and *Look Both Ways* with different expectations. These expectations can be a source of pleasure and engagement as a director meets the expectations, or perhaps plays with them in ways that may startle or surprise – for example, Hitchcock ‘killing off’ his star half way through *Psycho*.

Section B – Social values

Again, this year, too many responses indicated that students were still not able to describe or identify a social value. This was usually clear in the answers to Question 1, and subsequently affected further questions in the section. There were also problems when students confused the setting of the narrative with the period and place of production. Some texts that students had problems writing about included *To Kill a Mockingbird* (set in the 1920s, but made in 1962 in the middle of the Civil Rights movement), *The Power of One* (set in South Africa, but an American film) and *Titanic* (made in 1997, but about events in 1912).

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Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	20	35	46	1.3

Students were asked to describe a social value. Too many students confused 'social value' with 'social issues' or 'social characteristics'. The following excerpt, referring to *Leave it to Beaver*, which was made in America in the early 1960s, is an example of a clear statement of a social value.

The social value held within American society during the 60s was that there should be a clear distinction between gender roles. Women should be mothers, wives and care takers, while men bring home the income.

By contrast, the next passage is an example of a response that does not indicate what the value or attitude is, therefore the reader does not know what the attitude is that is prevalent.

*A social value that existed in the period and place of production in *Thelma and Louise* is attitudes towards the roles of women in society.*

Single word responses (for example, family, love or racism) are also inadequate as they do not show an understanding that a social value embodies an **attitude** towards these concepts or institutions.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	10	17	28	25	20	2.3

Most students were able to demonstrate their understanding of the concept of **representation**. The best responses used specific, detailed and relevant representations; for example by highlighting specific characteristics that allowed a character to be read as a representation.

The following response, on *They're a Weird Mob*, captured an element of representation in discussing the social value that 'women belonged in the kitchen'.

Women were rarely seen in high powered jobs, if they were even seen as working at all...Mrs. Chapman the cleaner hired by the Kellys in one scene is seen to be simply filing her nails perhaps showing how bored she is by the job and signifying how she would so rather be beautifying herself for her husband.

This shows an understanding of the way that certain elements of a character have been highlighted or emphasised in a way that takes on a further or representational meaning. It also put the student in a good position to answer Question 3 in this section.

Weaker responses tended to simply retell the narrative. Sometimes representations are coloured by the form of the narrative, and elements that were frequently missed by weaker students were irony or satire. The Simpsons and Daria were often written about as though they were flesh and blood, not animated caricatures.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average
%	11	4	5	7	7	8	9	9	11	7	7	6	5	3	2	6.4

The best responses indicated that the students had considered this question's requirements when identifying a social value in Question 1, as here students were asked to write about that nominated value in depth. In cases where a minor value had been nominated, the student often struggled to explore it in detail in this extended response. Some students who chose to write about one single episode of an ongoing TV series did not have enough material to explore.

The question focused on several of the key concepts involved in analysing the influence of social values on media texts. Good responses clearly discussed the steps involved in such an analysis, and showed an understanding of the social values of society at the time of the text's creation and an awareness of the way that key elements of these social values could be seen in the text. The relationship between a text and the current social values at the time of its production can be complex. The text can reflect those values at the same time as being affected by them. It can reflect dominant, oppositional and/or emerging values in a subtle, involved way, and in ways not necessarily intended by the creators of the text.

Section C – Media influences

This section was generally handled well by most students. Question 1 required students to demonstrate some basic knowledge of theories of media influence. Questions 2 and 3 asked them to show that they could evaluate aspects of these theories. If media does have an influence then there are implications for society, particularly in areas such as

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regulation and control. Question 4 allowed students to show they understood this, but a significant number of students had difficulty with this question, indicating that their understanding of media influence was still not complete.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	11	9	20	28	32	2.6

Most students were able to outline two contrasting models or theories of media influence. This is basic key knowledge, and students were prepared to respond simply and directly. Discussion or analysis of the theories or models was not required.

The following answer is an example of a high-scoring student response that does as asked – that is, it simply outlines the two theories and leaves any discussion of evidence or credibility for further questions.

Hperdermic/Bullet Theory – Suggests that audiences are passive to media. There is only 1 meaning behind each text and everyone absorbs this meaning and reacts the same. Media Influence is extreamly high and audiences absorb information like a sponge – accepting what they are told and not forming independent opinions.

In contrast to this the Agenda Setting Function suggests that audiences are active and texts are open, meaning that different people obtain different meanings from the same text based on their experiences. The ASF argues that while the media may set the agenda for what we think about, it can not tell us what to think. If we have no opinion on a subject, ASF considers that we may be influenced by media through select omission or repetition of ideas.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	15	10	15	21	18	13	8	2.9

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	24	13	19	19	14	8	4	2.3

Most students developed the objective description they had provided for Question 1 in their responses to Questions 2 and 3. This allowed them to show that they knew the claims made by a certain theory or model and the nature of the arguments and evidence used to justify those claims. Better students clearly evaluated these arguments and evidence, understanding the differences between various kinds of studies, or ways of collecting evidence for media influence.

It was not expected that any one theory or model could be proved completely right or wrong; rather, certain evidence or studies may lend weight for or against that theory. Better answers reflected this understanding. Meanwhile, there were still students who wrote as though it was the theory or model that was having an influence, rather than the theory being a way of understanding the nature of any influence.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	31	18	27	15	10	1.6

A significant number of students misunderstood this question. It is a logical follow through that if media has an influence then there may be calls for it to be regulated if groups in society see such influence as negative. These calls may arise because of concerns about copycat behaviour from susceptible groups in society, the potentially desensitising impact on an audience, or the possibility of causing offence. The following response effectively explored one of these arguments.

It is claimed that the media has a profound effect on its audience and if they feature explicit violence or coarse language then the audience may become desensitised and may believe that violence and swearing can be used in the real world to solve all their problems, thus a negative effect, in not being able to tell right from wrong.

This question did not ask students to argue for or against forms of regulation such as censorship or self regulation; rather, they needed to clearly and simply present (briefly describe) the arguments of people who may have different attitudes.