2006   **Media GA 3: Written examination**

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 a narrative is developed in media texts, using both story and production elements. In 'Social Values' they had to explore how social factors affect and are reflected in media texts; and in 'Media Influence' students had to analyse claims made about the influence of the media and various media texts on the audience.

Many students engaged strongly with their narrative texts and the concepts being discussed; however, other responses did not reflect such an engagement. Many good responses reflected a sense that the teachers and students had enjoyed the excitement of exploring new texts together, learning how they tell their stories. On the other hand, some texts produced a greater number of weaker responses, or responses that did not reflect an engagement with the narrative. These included some of the most popular texts such as *Run Lola Run*, *Psycho*, *American Beauty* and *Shawshank Redemption*. Some students wrote on television narratives, such as episodes of *Neighbours* or *Police Rescue*, as though these were only small-scale versions of a self-contained cinema narrative rather than examples of differently structured narrative that was responding to the different characteristics of television.

It is important that students consider the wording of each question carefully. There were responses which read as though only one key term in the question was important whereas the focus needed to be on how two or more concepts interrelated.

The space provided for responses should be a guide as to the length expected for a good answer. Weaker responses often did not use all the space for their brief answers or demonstrate an ability to discuss an aspect of the study at length.

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	2	3	Average
%	10	21	35	33	**1.9**

Students were required to explain the concepts behind two story elements: cause and effect, and character motivation. It was not necessary to refer directly to the texts being studied, but it was important that students were able to accurately explain the story elements.

The following is an example of a good student response.

> *The story element 'cause and effect' refers to the chain of events throughout the narrative which begins with a 'cause' such as an event, motivation or problem and continues on with a subsequent 'effect'. This chain propels the narrative. 'Character motivations' are a character's reasons for their actions. They can include their desires, aspirations or problems, and are usually the 'cause' in a 'cause and effect' chain.*

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	4	7	17	22	23	15	11	**3.5**

This question required students to link several key concepts (one story element and one production element) with the narrative possibilities of the **opening sequence** of one of the texts they had studied. Many responses did not address the narrative possibilities, a key feature in a narrative. The following response, on *Psycho*, did.

> *After the credits audiences are introduced to the female protagonist Marion Crane and her secret boyfriend Sam Loomis. Their secret relationship invites the audience to expect the issues of secrecy and mystery throughout the narrative. The pair discuss marriage and having a respectable relationship, which introduces the possibility of marriage or separation.*

There were also problems in writing about the nominated production elements. Many students who wrote about mise en scène confused it with art direction, and did not show an understanding that the term refers to the way a director will use a number of elements, including shots and composition, setting, costume, lighting and camera movement, to construct a

meaning in a scene or a sequence. Good responses on visual composition reflected an understanding of the frame, and how a director could compose images within that frame in a way that allows extra meaning to emerge from effective compositions. Students who wrote on sound needed to refer to all aspects of sound as listed in the question, namely dialogue, music and sound effects. Weaker students often referred to only one aspect of sound, such as the dialogue.

Stronger responses acknowledged that the absence of a feature could be as important as its presence; for example, when a scene may be played with no background or non-diegetic music. Responses on television episodes frequently did not recognise specific aspects of this medium. For example, in the opening sequence of an episode in an on-going series, characters may not be established as such, but reintroduced to the audience.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	18	12	17	16	15	12	10	**2.8**

Too many responses to this question did not show an understanding of the concept of 'point of view' as it applies to narratives. It does not refer to an opinion – it refers to whether scenes or a whole story are seen by one character or an omnipotent, external observer. It recognises that a narrative can be from a single point of view, or may vary during the whole film or separate incidents.

Students were able to write about two of several production elements. Many found it difficult to write about acting, sometimes identifying the character as the actor. Good responses discussed the way that gestures, facial expressions, vocal inflections, costuming, and even casting all contributed to the overall impact of a performance.

The following response reflects a good understanding of 'point of view'.

> *'The Virgin Suicides', directed by Sofia Coppola, is a unique film in that its 'point of view' is not that of the main characters – the Lisbon sisters. Rather, it is narrated by a man representing the adult version of the boys who live in the Lisbon's street, and who desperately try to piece together the reasons behind the girls' suicides. This narration establishes the point of view of the neighbourhood boys – the audience will only know what they know, and, like the boys the audience will never know the intimate details of the Lisbon girls' motivations. This is particularly evident in the sequence where the narrator introduces the Lisbon sisters … In this same sequence, camera positioning is also used to establish the boys' point of view. We see the four of them in the street watching the Lisbon house. The camera angle is then behind them, also facing the house. It becomes clear that the story will be told from these boys' point of view, as both the non-diegetic narration and the camera positioned from the perspective of the boys establishes their place as the storytellers in this film.*

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	18	23	26	19	13	**1.9**

Students were asked to discuss the **structuring** of time in a narrative. This is not the same as the 'passing of time'. The starting point in responses should have been whether the narrative is told in a straightforward, chronological order of events. If not, how does it break this order? Do event happen in simultaneous time? Are there flashbacks? (Some films, such as *The Boys,* may even have flashforwards.) One element of time in film or television narratives is that in most cases it is in 'present tense', in contrast to most novels which are in past tense. Many students who wrote on *Run Lola Run* found it particularly difficult to describe the structure of this film effectively even though time is a strong element of its narrative. The way that time is structured in a narrative is important in how its audience is to understand it. One structure may heighten suspense; another structure may remove suspense so the audience concentrates on character motivation.

Many students also found it difficult to discuss editing effectively. Although the question asked for a discussion of the **editing** of vision and/or sound, many weaker responses wrote about sound with no discussion of how that sound had been edited in the construction of the narrative. It is important to develop appropriate ways of writing about editing.

The following excerpt does not explore all aspects of the question, but it does use appropriate editing terms.

> *In the narrative text Shine the production element of editing is used to structure time in a non-linear form, including flashbacks and forwards. Fades are used throughout the film to signify a change in time between scenes. Audiences acknowledge and understand this convention and recognise time and place has changed. Also sounds such as clapping, running or dripping water and the telephone are used to link scenes where time has changed…*

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	12	8	18	22	23	11	7	**3.0**

Although this question asked students to compare the use of either lighting or sound in the closing sequence of both of their texts, many students lost marks by writing about the use of lighting in one text, and the use of sound in the other. Many responses effectively described the use of lighting or sound.

An important aspect of this section of the study is to understand how story elements and production elements **work together** in the construction and development of a narrative. Better answers were able to show how the lighting or sound contributed to the resolution of storylines, communication of themes or ideas, or the audiences' response to the narrative. These responses reflected on the relationship between the closing sequence and the narrative that had preceded it.

In many responses, 'sound' seemed to refer only to a closing theme song over the credits, and the music was only described, weakly, as either sad or happy. Similarly weak descriptions applied to the lighting, which was sometime just 'bright' or 'dull'.

The following excerpt explores more of the concepts asked for in the question.
In both 'Amelie' and 'Being John Malkovich' the use of sound helped contribute to the resolution of the texts' multiple subplots, however the end for 'Being John Malkovich' had been left more open to interpretation. Firstly, 'Amelie' began with the non-diegetic soundtrack of bouncy French music and thus it's appropriate to conclude the narrative in the same manner. The introduction of this soundtrack once narration taken over allows audiences to sit back and enjoy the rest of the show. As Hipolite does a skip of joy the strings in the non-diegetic sound grew louder and finally once the camera reveals Amelie and Nino on the bike the music reaches its peak implying that their relationship is a happy, joyous, fun one. This leads to audiences being satisfied as the majority of the film was about them getting together...

Section B – Social Values
The four questions in this section allowed students to demonstrate their understanding of the key concepts of this part of the study. Each question addressed specific aspects. Weaker students often did not identify the key elements of each question, sometimes misinterpreting the question and giving a response that was more appropriate for another question.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	10	24	32	34	**1.9**

Question 1 asked students to show that they understood what is meant by a 'social value'. Overall, responses were better this year, but too many students confused a social value with an issue. There were also responses that confused the setting of a text with its production period. For example, *M*A*S*H* was set during the Korean War of the early 1950s, but its production period was during the Vietnam War. The original movie was released in 1970, and the television series some years later still. Similarly, *To Kill a Mockingbird* was set in the 1920s but the film was released in 1962 at the time of burgeoning Civil Rights movement in America. Where these differences were not appreciated, other aspects of the responses were impaired.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	11	14	22	25	17	11	**2.6**

This question allowed students to demonstrate their understanding that the social values of the production period **influenced** the text they had studied. Weaker responses only showed how a particular social value could be seen in a text, rather than exploring the way that many aspects of the text were actually affected by current social values. The ending of a text may endorse (or show disapproval of) a specific social value. Social values may affect whether one character is portrayed positively or negatively. An actual storyline may be a direct response to specific social attitudes. These issues are explored in the following excerpt, on an episode of *Gilligan's Island*.
One social value of the production period was the dominant value pertaining to democratic ideals and a growing sentiment towards communism. This value was present in America in the early to mid 1960s due to the ... longstanding Cold War and the USA's ongoing battle with communist Cuba ... In an episode 'Nyet Neyt – Not Yet' the Russian cosmonauts are portrayed as unintelligent and easily overcome through the storyline of them landing far from their planned spot and Ginger's ability to distract them enough to leave their ship. This represents the communist cosmonauts as silly and easily influenced which is part of the social value suggesting ant-communist sentiment. In this episode the professor uses his 'real American know-how' to overcome the Russians and this is suggested as being superior over anything the Russians have to offer, again suggesting American democracy is superior.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	19	14	22	21	15	10	**2.3**

Many students had problems with this question, although it reflects one of the key ideas in this area of study; that is, that a media text is not something that spontaneously appears, but is something that is very specifically constructed. During the construction there are many decisions taken which impact on the nature, meaning and reception of that text.

Many responses on animated texts (for example, *The Simpsons* or *The Flintstones*) failed to acknowledge that these were animated texts, and that the animation (including the style of animation and design of the characters) was the result of a deliberate construction. Other weak responses failed to acknowledge where a text's representations were satiric (for example, in *We Can Be Heroes*) and did not explore the meaning behind the satirical representation. Students who want to improve their understanding of representation in the media could revisit the material in Unit 1 of this study.

The following response on *The Flinstones* clearly demonstrates an understanding of the way that one character can be seen as a representation of certain social values, and that this is the outcome of deliberate construction.

> *Fred has been constructed to reflect the social value that men were expected to be dominant. Fred is the main character, he dominates storylines and scenes. For example in 'the blessed event' Wilma is having a baby but Fred claims that 'she is barely involved' and he act's like he has to do all the work. He is visually dominant, he is the tallest, largest character, he has dark hair and bright clothes. His voice is loud and sound effects are used to convey his emotion as he walks. Generally in the scenes that include Fred he is positioned at the head of the group. He drives the car and the car is shown from his side (Wilma's face only visible.) Generally Fred's shot durations last longer and he is shown in close up shots more regularly than the other characters.*

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	16	9	13	17	18	13	9	6	**3.2**

The key concept in this question is that a text can specifically support or challenge the social values of its production period. This goes beyond a scene where one character may, for example, say, 'I support racial equality'. If that same character is presented in the text in a negative way, then the text may actually be opposing the idea of racial equality by having those words said by that character. Therefore, students needed to show they can identify and understand the ways that a text may support or challenge social values.

Stronger responses showed a recognition that this support or challenge may be deliberate by the text's creators, but that it can also be unconscious. Some pointers can include whether a character is represented sympathetically or negatively and which characters or actions are 'punished' or rewarded by the text's conclusion. Students should not debate the social values themselves, but analyse the extent to which **their text** supports or challenges those specific social values.

The following excerpt responded well to this question.

> *…stereotypes that black people were working class or criminals were also attitudes held in the 1960s. 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner's' director Stanley Kramer attempts to tackle this stereotype with Sydney Poitier's character, Dr Prentice. Dr. Prentice is presented as a flawless human being in this film. He leaves money when he makes an overseas call, well-educated, attractive, well-mannered, well-dressed and compassionate. This makes it so that the only unlikeable thing about him is the fact that he is black. Stanley Kramer purposely made him perfect so that audience were confronted with a character that challenges all black stereotypes and really confronts the audience with the issue of unsubstantiated bias.*

Section C – Media Influence

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	19	10	26	46	**2.0**

Although this should have been a relatively straightforward question, too many students confused the two terms, or gave responses that did not convey the meaning of the two terms. The following is a good response.

> *An 'active' audience is receptive to texts and actively interprets their own meaning in their individual ways based on differing personal experiences and opinions. A 'passive' audience can be likened to a mass of 'sitting ducks' unable to create individual meanings from media texts, instead accepting the one uniform message sent by a media text.*

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	19	15	28	20	18	**2.0**

Although there were many clear responses to this question, many responses indicated that students had not considered the issue of media regulation, even though it is obviously important if the media does have the potential to influence different audiences. The study design clearly indicates that the key knowledge for this area of study includes 'arguments and the evidence surrounding the regulation of media content by, for example, codes of practice, government legislation and regulation, and self-regulation in the interests of protecting audiences'.

The best students clearly stated arguments in favour of and against regulation, and then explained the points to show their understanding. They showed that they could objectively outline a range of arguments that may come from many different areas of the community. Weaker students assumed the question was about theories they had studied, rather than aspects of regulation as outlined in the study design.

The following response addressed arguments for and against the regulation of media content.

An argument for regulation of the media would be to protect community members from harmful or offensive material. For example, restricting children's access to violent films or video games that they might be influenced to imitate, or regulate images/content shown that may be offensive to values held by different ethnic groups such as Torres Strait Islanders or Muslims. An argument against regulation would be that everyone should have the freedom to decide what they wish to watch/hear/read. In particular this would apply to the banning of certain films and literature.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Average
%	9	3	4	5	7	9	10	15	11	9	7	5	3	2	**6.2**

Many students showed a good working knowledge of several contrasting communication models or theories. At the same time, many answers seemed to rely on now almost antiquated research such as Bandura's Bobo Dolls, or the War of the Worlds incident. Given the relevance to questions of media influence, it was noted that many of the stronger responses were able to discuss more recent research and evidence. These students demonstrated an ability to engage with the different propositions. They clearly outlined the influence claimed and the evidence usually advanced in support of the theory. Then they evaluated that material, balancing its strengths and weaknesses, at the same time usually comparing it with the approaches of other researchers.