



GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2009 Media examination gave students the opportunity to demonstrate not only their grasp of the key knowledge and key skills as outlined in the *VCE Media Study Design 2003–2011*, but also their ability to apply such knowledge and skills in studies of media texts and issues. Students needed to be able to evaluate the key knowledge, understand how different areas interact and relate, and show that they can use this knowledge to develop new ideas or analyse media products. Most students showed good basic awareness of the areas of key knowledge, but many had difficulties evaluating or analysing aspects of it as required in the key skills.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

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

Section A – Narrative

Students were able to demonstrate their knowledge of production and story elements and how these elements work together in the construction of media texts. They were able to select examples from their own texts and many students used this opportunity to ensure the examples chosen clearly demonstrated how an element worked in constructing the overall text. Again, *Run*, *Lola Run* and *Psycho* were texts not well used because students focused on how one element was used in one specific example, rather than on how it was used in film as a whole. For example, some students wrote about the shower scene in *Psycho* as though it was the only example of editing in the film.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	4	30	66	1.6

Students were required to define two production elements in this question. Most students were able to identify two production elements; however, some had problems defining them. Acting and mise en scène in particular were often poorly defined. Mise en scène includes setting, lighting, costume, and the behaviour of figures, and implies the director’s control over what appears in the frame – the way the director stages the event for the camera. At times, aspects of an element were defined as though they were the whole element, or students named aspects of a product that were not production elements as identified in the *VCE Media Study Design*. Examples of wrong aspects included setting, costume, CGI or camera angles.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	5	11	27	30	17	9	2.7

This question required students to show how the production elements defined in Question 1 were used to enhance the audience’s engagement with a character. Students who were unable to identify and define two production elements satisfactorily usually produced poor answers. Many students did not respond to the whole question and instead wrote about one or two key words in the question. Many simply discussed a major character. These responses did not explain how the chosen production elements worked together in the text or how they affected the audience’s engagement with a character.

The following response discusses visual composition and lighting in *Noise*. It uses analytical language successfully and shows an understanding of the text as something that has been consciously constructed.

In ‘Noise the character of Graham McGan is introduced lit in neon lights, framed within a tunnel, appearing initially center frame and then to the left of frame. The neon lighting expresses to the audience that this character exists inside a no nonsense world. Neon lights reveal all dirt and wash out the features of Graham. His humanity is apparent, but also a darker side a dirty side. The tunnel in which Graham is framed in reveals to the audience that Graham is trapped metaphorically in a liminal place in his life, waiting for something. Placing Graham to the left of the frame makes him appear visually significant in frame Both elements together construct Graham as someone at odds with his environment and ready to something more in life.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	9	15	28	26	15	7	2.4



This question focused on the production element of ‘setting and its function in the narrative’; however, many responses wrote about a setting without demonstrating an understanding of how and why a particular setting functions in a narrative. That is, any setting in a narrative has been specifically chosen for a range of creative reasons, and it has been specifically constructed to support and enhance those reasons. This applies even with ‘natural’ settings, such as a riverbank setting for a Western. The question asked students to write about a particular setting rather than the location of the whole film.

Some responses on lighting did not discuss the element in enough detail, such as a spotlight, or a ‘red’ filter, and gave comments such as ‘Lighting is seen at the end of the scene.’ A setting could have a range of functions, for example, as part of the establishment of a character, to reveal important aspects of the narrative, or to change the narrative’s directions.

The following extracts from three different responses illustrate how several students have addressed the way that the setting functions in the construction of their texts.

In No Country For Old Men, the combination of lighting and sound portray the desert setting as a harsh, unforgiving environment and produces a narrative possibility as well as a symbol of death.

(on Psycho, when Marian has decided to return the money.) ...reinforcing the idea is the way the space behind Marian is a blank, white wall whilst behind Norman the room is cluttered with dark objects & long shadows engulf the room. The dark, looming house on top of the hill links in with the genre of horror of the film as its function is to increase the anxiety of the audience.

The mise en scene also contributes to the establishment of setting as we see meticulous wide open spaces, sanitized and in perfect condition. Technology is also fundamental as we see its dominance in Gattaca and the underlying themes of genetic and technological advancements in the narrative.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	5	16	40	27	12	2.3

In this question, the concept of ‘developing the narrative’ was important and is a key concept in this area of study. However, many students seemed unsure of its meaning. Some responses discussed how sound elements were used to convey an emotion in a character, but were unable to demonstrate why it was important in the overall narrative. Too often students did not seem to have the vocabulary to discuss different aspects of sound, relying on terms such as ‘fast paced’ or ‘orchestral’. In particular, ‘absence of sound’ was often misunderstood.

The following extract on *Gattaca* indicates how the aspect of developing the narrative can be addressed successfully.

In ‘Gattaca’ the use of voice over narrations develop the progression of the narrative, walking the audience through the life of Jerome Marrow. The use of voice over narrations in the twenty-five minute flashback establish the nature of Jerome’s character and his past being Vincent Freeman the ‘borrowed ladder’. The use of sound effects in the closing sequence of the narrative is also vital to the development and closing of all loose ends as the audience is positioned to sympathise with Jerome for his determination and persistence.

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Average
%	7	5	11	15	18	17	11	10	5	2	4.2

In Question 5, students were asked to analyse how a story element was used in their texts and were expected to write more than just a description of that element. However, many responses addressed only one aspect of the question in a very limited way. As detailed in the key knowledge, opening sequences are important for the ‘narrative possibilities, issues and/or ideas established’. Instead of discussing the opening sequence in these terms, some students did little more than describe the scene. Others used the title sequence only, often over-interpreting aspects of the sequence which were ultimately not significant. Students who wrote about multiple story lines often did not display an understanding of the concept. For example, some wrote about *Run, Lola Run* as an example of a film with multiple story lines, when it is one story told three times.

More successful answers were able to address specific elements using examples from their text and indicate how those examples were representative of the text’s characteristics and construction. Weaker responses failed to do this. Some students wrote about cause and effect and included an example of how one action caused a simple reaction, but did not show how this was part of the whole chain of events that structured the narrative.



The following opening extract indicates how the wider aspects of the question will be addressed by the student.

In 'Gattaca' the opening and closing sequence of the narrative is vital to the audience's engagement. In the opening sequence we are introduced to the genetically perfect Jerome Morrow whom the audience follows into Gattaca. It is through voice over narrations that the audience learns of Jerome's true identity and his desperation to travel to Titan. In the opening sequence Jerome's narrations are vital to the narrative establishing possibilities as well as the use of establishing shots which create a sense of voyeurism as the audience shares in Jerome's journey.

Section B – Social values

The area of knowledge required to respond to this section of the exam involves two major concepts – what is a social value and what is a 'representation'. Students who were not able to demonstrate an understanding of these concepts were unable to score highly.

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	21	79	0.8

Most students were able to provide a satisfactory definition of the term social value.

The following is an example of a good response.

A social value is a value which a society or [parts of] a community believes to be important and will influence the way they live their lives. Values may be dominant, emerging or oppositional.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	19	81	0.8

In this question students were asked to provide an example of a social value from their period of study such as 'When *The Defiant Ones* was made in 1958, there were many people in the southern states who believed that African Americans should not be given the same civil rights as white people'. Some students struggled to express a social value correctly and had difficulties responding accurately to other questions in this area of study. Although this task was done better than in previous years, a number of students still confused a concept (for example, feminism) with an attitude (for example, 'in society women are equal to men').

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	15	28	36	21	1.7

This question required students to address the key concept of representation to show an understanding that a character, an institution, behaviours, or even an object can be constructed or interpreted in a narrative as a representation of social values. However, there were many students who were unable to identify or describe a representation in their text. A representation is not a line of dialogue or a brief moment in a film. A character on his or her own is not a representation, but may function as a representation, especially when specific value-laden behaviours are seen as positive or negative in the text.

The following response looks at how one character in *The Defiant Ones* has been constructed as a representation, as well as clearly identifying the social value being reflected.

The dominant value that whites were uncomfortable with equal rights for African Americans is reflected through the character of Joker for the majority of the film. He is constructed to represent a typical white man of the time, relatively ignorant as to the nature of black people as a whole, yet still prejudiced despite lacking the motivation. Joker is uncomfortable when pressed to explain his viewpoint, finally saying 'it's just the way it is.'

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	9	3	5	5	8	8	11	11	9	8	6	6	5	4	2	1	6.5

Many students gave brief answers to this question that did not demonstrate their understanding in depth. In some cases, this may have been as a result of students choosing to write on a text that did not provide sufficient or clear material. Examples of such texts included single-page print advertisements, television advertisements and the films *Bra Boys* and



Bowling for Columbine. Again students struggled with current satirical texts including the *Simpsons*, although older television series such as *The Flintstones* and *Leave it to Beaver* provided appropriate material for students to reference when responding to this question.

The question focused on the extent to which the text supported or challenged contemporary social values; however, some students limited their discussion to what a single character said. A film's attitude to various social values is not embodied in what a character may say or do, but in the way that the film presents those words or actions. For example, in *Wall Street* (1987) when characters say 'Greed is good', these characters are presented in a negative way so that the film is challenging and ridiculing this value. The question did not ask about characters who may support or challenge social values, but about the position of the text.

The following extract on *Shame* (1988) overcame these problems. There is an understanding of the complex ways in which the social values of the time can be reflected, represented, endorsed or challenged by the whole fabric of the text.

Furthermore, the value of mateship as a positive commanding idea was challenged through the issue of rape within the community of Shame being seen as a harmless 'boys will be boys' type of action. As is ultimately shown by the 'triumph' of Asta over the culture of the town, this is a mentality which Shame represented as wrong. The young men of the town are seen [as] foolish for partaking in such behaviour.

Section C – Media Influence

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	26	17	29	28	1.6

A study of media influence should develop an awareness of claims for both positive and negative impacts. This question focused on possible positive influences. Students used many examples in response to this question, ranging from the impact of the media coverage of Kylie Minogue's breast cancer to specific campaigns such as TAC advertisements. In some cases, it appeared students could only recognise negative media influence, or misinterpreted 'positively' – a key word in the question.

Question 2

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	23	38	39	1.2

This was a direct question that was generally well handled. Overall, most students noticed that the question did not ask them to present an argument for or against media content regulation, but simply to demonstrate that they could outline the position of one side, even if they did not endorse it.

The following is a good example.

One argument in favour of media content regulation is a ban on junk food advertising to help prevent obesity in children. Many health groups argue that advertising junk food during children's programs by cartoon characters or celebrities influences children to eat more of that product.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	22	19	33	20	7	1.7

The second part of this question asked students to demonstrate their awareness of real examples, rather than simply theoretic arguments. It was interesting to see the large number of students who discussed examples of the regulation of video games. This question asked for a specific example. In such cases, it would be expected that the discussion would include details of the authority or organisation responsible for the regulation, such as in the following response. In similar responses, students commented on the effectiveness of this action, for example, noting that it could be circumvented by gamers buying games online.

The Office of Film and Literature Classification have refused classification on many video games in the past. Most recently was the refused classification of 'Left For Dead II' a game where players violently kill zombies. Refused Classification means that the game cannot be bought, sold, hired or played in Australia. This type of media control is [claimed as] necessary as the interactive nature of video games renders them more influential on susceptible audiences, however, it continuously raises issues regarding freedom of speech.

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Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	13	10	25	31	17	4	2.4

Many responses showed a satisfactory knowledge of communication theories, but there was little specific comparison. In many responses students simply used 'on the other hand' or 'however' to introduce a straightforward outline of a second communication theory. High-scoring responses were able to compare and contrast different attitudes to audience, levels of 'interference' with a message, differences in data and research methods used to support the theory.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	27	15	20	19	11	5	2	2

As well as knowing the major theories on media influence, it is important that students can evaluate these theories or models and assess the strengths of research and/or evidence used to support them. This question gave students the opportunity to show how well they could do so, but overall this task was not well done. Many responses simply retold the *War of the Worlds* example, or a detailed account of the Bobo Doll experiment, with no evaluation. There was often no detailed awareness of examples of research or evaluation of any research. It was evident that some students misunderstood this area of study as they stated that various media producers used a specific theory to create their products and hence influence their audience.

The following extract is from a student who evaluated the use of case studies used by advocates of the 'bullet' theory.

Case studies cannot incorporate extraneous variables into its analysis e.g. the personal backgrounds and other socialising factors such as religion and workplace. The results may also be biased depending on what the analyst may want.... An example of this is the Nazi propaganda film 'Triumph of the Will' which was claimed to highly influence Germany but extraneous variables such as the economic crisis of the time were not taken into account. Thus the evidence supporting the 'bullet' theory is false and unreliable. It can only be safely said that the media will have some influence on some people some of the time.