

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2011 VCE Media examination provided students with an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of a variety of ways of responding to a range of texts. Most students showed a general understanding of many of the areas of key knowledge. The most successful students showed they could use this knowledge and their understanding of basic underlying concepts in an effective analysis of the ways that media texts are constructed and interpreted. Students are advised to familiarise themselves with the assessment criteria outlined in the Assessment Handbook.

This report is based on the *VCE Media Study Design* accredited for 2005–2011. A new study design was published in 2011 and will be implemented in 2012. The examination specifications for the new study design are published on the VCAA website.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

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

Section A – Narrative

This Area of Study explores the way that narratives are constructed, using production and story elements. There were many students who showed weaknesses in this section. It is not appropriate to abbreviate this to ‘opening sequence’ and ignore the rest of the definition. Many students chose interesting texts to demonstrate their understanding of narrative. Some students, however, used texts that were not effective in demonstrating an understanding of key elements.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	27	28	45	1.2

A simple definition of a story element was required but some students gave examples without offering a specific definition. High-scoring responses defined a production element or defined a key word from a full story element (e.g. ‘character’, ‘plot’, ‘setting’ or ‘closing sequence’).

The following is an example of a high-scoring response that defines the element relating to the structuring of time.

Structure of time: refers to how time is presented in a narrative. It includes temporal order – the order in which events occur such as chronological, flash-back, non-linear; temporal duration – the progression of time in a narrative such as real or foreshortened; temporal frequency – the amount of times a scene is shown to an audience.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	32	25	42	1.1

This question took the understanding of a story element a step further, exploring how an example chosen by the student worked together with the production element of sound. It was important for students to explore the way the elements combine and to explore an accurately stated story element.

The following student example recognises the other story element is ‘character’. The response adequately explains how character works together with sound to convey meaning to the audience.

*The sound establishes the character of Laurel, the leading lady of *In a Lonely Place*, through the melodious, dreamy use of non-diegetic music, a theme that anticipates her presence and follows her throughout the narrative, imbuing the same qualities of beauty and elegance onto her character. The dialogue also gives her charm with some edge, through scenes where Dix keenly asks her to dinner, and she replies, ‘I’ll have dinner but not with you!’ The diegetic sounds of the city, the phone’s ring, the sound of the beach also place her character in her particular setting, 1950s Los Angeles.*



Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	11	15	20	18	16	11	8	2.8

This question explored the story element, ‘the point(s) of view from which the narrative is presented, including character or other viewpoint(s)’. Many students responded only to the term ‘point of view’ and so distorted the special meaning this term has in the construction of a narrative. It does not refer to an opinion or to a single (point of view) shot. A narrative can be constructed from a tightly controlled single point of view such as in *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954) and *[500] Days of Summer* (Marc Webb, 2009); from the viewpoints of a number of characters, such as in *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941) and *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006); or by an external omniscient narrator, perhaps incorporating some scenes which favour one character’s point of view, for example, *American History X* (Tony Kaye, 1998) and *Shawshank Redemption* (Frank Darabont, 1994). It may be necessary to recognise that an unreliable narrator is controlling the narrative, such as in *Shutter Island* (Martin Scorsese, 2010).

The following is an extract of a high-scoring response that kept a focus on the role of one character’s point of view in structuring the whole narrative.

The visual composition and editing in [500] Days of Summer combine to firmly establish the point of view of Tom, whose eyes the audience sees through 99% of the time. Tom is always prominent in the frame as he falls in love with Summer, the audience never alone with his lover, rather bound to Tom. In specific scenes, like in a fantasy sequence where Tom dances through L.A..., the audience sees Tom in the centre....thereby asserting his point of view. This is then extended by the editing where any day in the 500 is juxtaposed, continuous vision sacrificed to create a fluctuating structure of time, the only thread stringing them together being Tom. Constantly he is the one the visual composition favours as the editing juxtaposes his most happy day, the dance sequence above, with one of his worst, the day Summer leaves the office.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	7	4	8	9	11	12	12	10	9	6	4	3	3	2	1	0	5.6

This question aimed to draw students’ attention to the relationship between the opening and closing sequences in the way that a narrative is structured. Students needed to be able to show the dynamic relationship between these two sections of a narrative in two texts. Many responses did little more than retell events from the narrative’s beginning and ending, without drawing links or showing how events, possibilities, genre or themes were established at the start and how they were employed through the rest of the narrative. The key aspect of ‘narrative progression’ was ignored by too many students. Responses on *Psycho* generally ignored the way Hitchcock structured his narrative by using a carefully calculated **disjunction** between opening and closing, while many responses on *Run, Lola, Run* needed a stronger analysis of the narrative progression and interconnectedness of the whole film, rather than of the conclusion of the three segments. Students writing on episodes of ongoing television narratives needed to explore the special aspects of the end of an episode versus the end of a whole series. The question did not ask students to compare their texts, but rather to use their two texts to explore this dynamic relationship between the opening and the closure of a narrative.

In this extract the student clearly establishes important and relevant story and production elements that were subsequently developed in the discussion of one of their texts.

The opening sequence of a film is vital in establishing the themes and narrative possibilities prevalent throughout the text, and are often represented through a number of production and story elements. ‘Slumdog Millionaire’ opens by cutting between Jamal being interrogated by Mumbai police and first going on ‘Who Wants to be a Millionaire’ as the structuring of time works to present the journey and experience of the main character. This raises the questions of who he is, how he got on the show, why he is being interrogated and who is the girl in saffron glimpsed in a brief flashback? The lighting in the scene is also important as the police station is brightly lit to create an uncomfortable and hot environment...The saffron tint over the scene has the symbolic effect of representing hope, which becomes a motif throughout the film...

The closing sequence of a film should then resolve the questions and plot points introduced in the opening. When Jamal runs to Latika at the end of ‘Slumdog Millionaire’ the film flashes back to the events in his life that led up to that moment...The structuring of time in the closing sequence serves to highlight that Latika has been his motivation all along...These elements combine to effectively wrap up the love story that made up the main plot of the film, so that the audience is satisfied.

Section B – Social Values

Media texts have a dynamic two-way relationship with the social values of the period and place of their production. Responses to this section showed that students had explored this relationship using a variety of texts, especially from television and cinema. Some responses used single newspapers or single episodes of some current television programs



that generally made it more difficult for students to explore the concept of the influence of social values on their creation and reception. Contemporary programs or films (such as television's *Mad Men*) were frequently misread, and students found it difficult to distinguish between the social values of the time of production and those of the period setting.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	9	29	62	1.5

In this Area of Study an understanding of the basic concepts is essential, and most students were able to provide a clear definition of the term 'dominant social value'. Some students only defined the term 'dominant'. Some responses provided general terms such as 'racism' or 'gender roles' without clearly linking them to the specific dominant social value of the production period.

The following student response is comprehensive.

A dominant social value refers to a belief, attitude, opinion or ideal held by the majority of a society. During the production period of Samson and Delilah 2009, a dominant social value held was the Aboriginal communities require assistance to reform and escape underprivileged conditions.

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	14	22	64	1.5

A social value is a belief, attitude, opinion or ideal. There were many responses such as 'materialism' or 'family' that did not define an attitude. Even a response such as 'disrespect for authority' does not indicate whether society approves or disapproves of this. This question did not ask for storylines or a discussion of the values, but rather a response as direct as the following example, which refers to *Alien* (USA, 1979).

1. That technology and science would advance but not necessarily provide answers.
2. That women are equal to men, so should therefore be paid equally.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	8	15	29	24	23	2.4

An understanding of the concept of 'representation' is essential in undertaking an analysis of the relationship between a text and the social values of the period and place of its creation. However, many responses resorted to nothing more than retelling the storyline. The most successful answers showed an appreciation of how, for example, a character in a narrative may also function as a representation, and in fact may be specifically created for this function in some cases.

The following response on *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (USA, 1967) clearly explains how one character is constructed and operates as a representation of a particular social value.

The value of interracial marriage being okay is represented through John Prentice. As a man who wishes to partake in an interracial marriage, he is constructed as perfect through his costume of suit and tie and occupation as a doctor. Shown in bright light and close-up smiling, the value of interracial marriage is associated with happiness and success...

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	17	16	19	17	15	9	6	2.5

It was expected that a thorough and coherent response would show that the student understood the link between production context and two clearly identified social values revealed in a text. The response could draw on how the social values are reflected within the text storylines, themes, representations, resolutions and characters. The focus needed to be more on how the text (and the social values therein) had been affected by the production context.

The following extract clearly shows how aspects of the year and country of production affected the way particular attitudes and social values were presented in the television series *M*A*S*H*.



*The social value that 'America has no place in a war that is not their own' is evident in M*A*S*H as a result of the growing discontent with America's involvement in Vietnam at the time the show began production. In 1969 this one time emerging value was demonstrated to be dominant as millions took the streets in America in protest of America's interference in the Vietnam War. As a result M*A*S*H, which first screened in 1972 though set in the Korean war is imbued with an anti-Vietnam war sentiment both as a result of the social climate & as a means of playing to the dominant values of the show's audience.*

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	14	13	17	19	18	12	7	2.8

This question revealed that many students could not explore how a text could support or challenge contemporary social values. A single incident or line of dialogue was sometimes used as proof of support. However, films such as *The Defiant Ones* (1958) and *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) are crowded with racist incidents and dialogue as a means of **critiquing** such attitudes. A text may **support** a particular social value by having a character who challenges that social value, but that character is presented in a negative light or is 'punished' by events in the text. The role of humour in supporting or challenging particular social values was often unnoticed. In the TV series *I Love Lucy*, for example, storylines often seem to challenge dominant social values, but they are presented humorously and the episode resolution usually returns to a conservative position, fully endorsing the status quo. This question asked for an exploration of the **extent** to which a text supported or challenged certain social values, but many students ignored this, writing as though it was always an 'all or nothing' situation.

The following extract from a student response discussed *They're a Weird Mob* (Australia, 1966).

They're a Weird Mob totally supports the value that migrants are a good thing, and that upon arriving to Australia, they should assimilate and become 'New Australians'. This is shown through the explicitly positive representation of Nino Culotta, the Italian migrant who embodies that value and the wholly negative representation of the drunk on the boat, who wields the oppositional value, that 'dagos' should go back where they come from. Nino is always prominent in the frame and appealing through looks and costume, shown to embody the 'good migrant' as he appropriates Australian slang like 'whaddya do for a crust?' and 'mulga'... He then falls in love, rewarded by the film with an Aussie girl...therefore fully supporting the above value...

Section C – Media Influence

This section was generally well done by most students, with students having a good grasp of the major theories and models of media influence. Some students did not demonstrate awareness of particular examples that have been used to illustrate claims of media influence.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	9	9	18	22	43	2.8

This was a straightforward question and was well done by many students. Those students who had difficulty in describing two communication models or theories of media influence generally had problems with other questions in this section also, demonstrating the fundamental role these theories and models have in discussion of media influence. Some students included more information than was needed by the question.

The following response fully dealt with the question, demonstrating a clear understanding of two models.

The hypodermic needle model is a theory which suggests media has a strong, direct and immediate effect over audiences. Audiences are passive, which means they let a media's message wash-over them without trying to engage or interpret it. Texts are closed which means all audiences receive the message the same way, personal differences irrelevant to reception. The media is said to be more powerful than Audience. The uses and gratifications theory suggests audiences use media to gratify social and psychological needs. Audiences actively engage with a text and messages are open to interpretations. Audiences are more powerful than the media.

Question 2

This question highlighted the point that media influence is not always to be regarded as negative. An interesting and wide range of positive and appropriate examples were given, from the TAC and Quit campaigns, the 'Kylie effect', the 'Grim reaper' AIDS campaign, through to Remission – a video game designed to support sick children. However, some students could not identify one such example. In part b, students could refer to a range of evidence, though it was expected to be specific to the example. The Bobo doll experiment, for example, was not relevant but was the only evidence provided by some students. Evidence could be statistical, laboratory, or even anecdotal. The question did not require students to discuss or elaborate on the evidence used.

2011 Assessment Report



2a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	21	24	55	1.4

The following response provides a clear description of an example of a claimed positive effect.

The TAC ad campaign has had a positive effect on society through the use of drink driving, speeding, lack of sleep ads & showing people dieing it has reduced the amount of people that take part in the above behaviour, reducing the amount of deaths on the road.

2b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	30	32	38	1.1

The example in 2a. is developed in the following response, where an example of evidence is not only described, but presented with an explanation as to why the evidence is considered as appropriate justification of a positive effect.

The TAC campaign is shown to be successful through the road toll. In 1989, the year the campaign started, the road toll was 776 deaths on Victorian roads and in 2010 the road toll was 202. This shows a huge decrease in deaths, partly as a result from the informative ads, showing people that drunk driving is no longer an accepted culture.

Question 3

Similarly to Questions 2a. and 2b., Question 3 asked for an example of a perceived negative effect to be described. This question asked for the evidence to be subjected to some evaluation. Many responses identified concerns about the impact of violence (in both film and video games) and distorted representations of body image. Some, however, explored interesting relationships with examples generally considered positive, such as the impact of TAC advertisements on people who have been affected by cases of road trauma. An appropriate response required a description of a negative effect.

3a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	18	30	51	1.4

This response clearly describes an example of a claimed negative effect and includes specific instances.

A negative effect is said to exist in the playing of violent video games and the result in increased aggression in the player, perhaps therefore resulting in more aggression in society in general, and in extreme cases being the cause of mass shootings like the recent Norway disaster or the Columbine School shootings.

3b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	25	26	25	15	9	1.6

This example, through the use of several studies, provides clear examples of evidence used in the debate, along with an appropriate evaluation of this evidence. Some responses outlined relevant evidence, but did not provide any evaluation of it.

Various students have been implemented over the years in an attempt to prove the consumption of video games has a negative effect on the individual. A longitudinal student completed by Leonard Eron from 1960-1971 targeted a group of nine year olds, one group who consumed violent media and one which didn't. Eron returned 11 years later when they were 20 years old and found those who consumed media from a young age were more likely to commit violent acts as a 20 year old. However, a study by John Freedman from the University of Toronto found that there was no correlation between violent media consumption and violence. All in all it is hard to confirm a point of view one way or another because of the various external factors such as family or social attitudes, that could impact on the findings

Question 4

There was a wide range of examples of media content regulation, including the banning or censorship of materials, warnings or classification restrictions, filters and the timing and scheduling of programs. Most students were able to provide one such example in part a. Discussion in the second part of the question was generally more limited. Many students discussed the arguments for the restrictions. However, the question focused more on whether the restrictions were effective. For example, new technologies may make it easy for audiences to access restricted material.

2011 Assessment Report



4a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	14	30	56	1.4

Students were asked to give a specific example of media content regulation. It could be an example of governmental regulation or industry self-regulation. A good response needed to clearly identify a body or organisation involved in the process, such as in the following example.

One measure undertaken by ACMA and the Dept. Of Communication is to filter the internet, blacklisting and thereby prohibiting access to certain websites, like those containing hardcore exploitative pornography, child pornography, and websites that promote euthanasia.

4b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	19	24	30	18	9	1.8

This question asked students to address the effectiveness of a specific act of regulation, not whether specific media content required or justified regulation. This approach is clearly addressed in this response on the banning of a particular film from screening at a local film festival.

Whilst this method of regulating content was effective in protecting audiences at the film festival the film is still available on dvd from other countries, and downloadable on the internet. The highly accessible nature of the media often renders classifications useless in a technological world. Many patrons of the festival, along with other individuals argue that adults should be allowed to see what they want, that a government body such as the [Classification Board] should have the right to pick and choose the media products available to society.