Media Studies

Society and Environment Learning Area

Government
of South Australia

SACE
Board of SA

MEDIA STUDIES

2010 ASSESSMENT REPORT

GENERAL COMMENTS

The trend for growth in Media Studies continued this year, with almost 20% more students undertaking the subject compared to last year, resulting in an expansion of the team of support moderators, markers, and central moderators. This added expertise will make the transition to the new 2011 subject much smoother. Also, the inclusion of an external assessment component three years ago similarly means that the move to the new subject involves teachers having only to adapt to minor changes from the assessment components to the new assessment types.

As workshops for teachers new to the subject were not run this year, the role of the support moderator in assisting teachers in developing their assessment plan and tasks was more prominent. Certainly it appeared that more teachers maintained contact with their moderator this year and, as a result, had a better understanding of the requirements for the subject. It was pleasing to see the South Australian Association for Media Education (SAAME) undertake the role of providing some professional development for teachers and offering a workshop that focused on the media investigation. This was a useful resource for teachers that will probably be offered again in 2011. Active membership of this professional association by teachers is encouraged to build a community of expertise.

It must be emphasised that it is always important that teachers keep up to date with the administration of the subject by referring to the relevant section of the learning area manual, paying attention to the information sheets that are provided to schools, and regularly visiting the SACE website. In particular, these actions will avoid confusion over the date that the students' media investigations are required to be submitted to the SACE Board. This will be crucial in the new structure in 2011.

The online community for Media teachers was less active in 2010, perhaps due in part to the new format of the Online Forum (Media Studies) as the SACE Board launched a new website to reflect the new SACE. The forum can be a useful tool for seeking guidance, getting Media Studies information, and establishing contact with other teachers. However, the forum needs more participants to work effectively and it is strongly recommended that teachers subscribe by visiting the web page at http://www.sace.sa.edu.au/web/media-studies/enter.

The Media Studies course offers considerable flexibility to teachers and, as a result, their assessment plans covered a wide range of topics and used a range of assessment forms. Many teachers continued to explore more innovative approaches, as encouraged by the 2010 curriculum statement, while others continued to offer their established programs. As in previous years, the more successful and engaging programs tended to focus on contemporary, rather than traditional, aspects of the media and encouraged more contribution from students.

Once again, the development of sophisticated media literacy and production skills was apparent in the overall quality of work produced by students. This quality learning was most evident when their school course connected all of the assessment tasks. Teachers are encouraged to make sure that student work submitted for moderation clearly reflects this, that details of each assessment task are included and that the appropriate SACE Board assessment summary sheet for each component is used.

DVDs were used to submit the majority of student materials for moderation. Digital formats enable the moderation processes to be completed efficiently and thoroughly, with even fewer technical problems from uncommon codecs or file types compared with previous years. However, it is still important that teachers should check their students' work before submission to ensure that is has actually been saved on the disk, and that necessary links and media have been organised appropriately. As with last year, the final moderation process was efficient because very few students submitted folders filled with superfluous material. It was pleasing to note that fewer USB drives were used.

The final (central) moderation process established that, in the majority of instances, the marks students were awarded by their teachers were appropriate. Changes due to clerical or arithmetic errors occurred in only a very few situations. When marks were adjusted, this tended to happen more frequently in classes that required a decrease in the top range of marks, rather than an increase in the bottom range. Very few adjustments were made to marks in the middle band. However, it should be emphasised that the majority of teachers' assessments of their students' achievements were both valid and reliable. Once again the moderation panel noted the value of teachers submitting assessment plans and task sheets for feedback to support moderators early in the year.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 1: MEDIA EXPLORATIONS

Most media exploration tasks undertaken by students were predominantly analytical or research-oriented. Most assessment activities were designed to enable students to show high-level analysis and synthesis; in a few cases, simplistic activities where students produced short answers to a set of questions limited student success. It must be reiterated that short-answer activities are best set as formative tasks rather than summative tasks.

Usually, the students who achieved greatest success with the media exploration had been given tasks that encouraged them to investigate a media topic or issue more deeply, or to observe and analyse media products more closely. This helped students to create responses that contained a more comprehensive reflection of their topic. Similarly, students who employed primary sources as well as secondary ones generally presented explorations of a higher standard than those who limited themselves to secondary sources.

As happened last year, Wikipedia articles and uncritically accepted materials found using web search engines dominated the secondary sources. Successful students were able to examine media texts and contexts in a critical, analytical, and reflective manner as required by Learning Outcome 2. Less successful students were not prepared to go beyond simple acceptance of text. With the Internet being an integral part of public media, the information it provides needs to be scrutinised as much as any other media text for reliability and authenticity.

Successful explorations tended to be referenced appropriately and it was apparent that teachers had reinforced this practice to a greater extent this year. The drafting phase appeared useful in providing teachers with the opportunity to address technical and stylistic matters, as well as helping check the validity of the sources used and verifying the authenticity of student work.

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ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 2: MEDIA INTERACTION

As in previous years, the media interaction was the main assessment component about which teachers sought clarification. The curriculum statement states that this assessment component gives students the opportunity 'to reflect on their interactions with media on a topic of their choice.' Therefore, students are able to choose their own topic that is particularly relevant to their own personal media experience. The majority of teachers allowed this, although, unfortunately, a few teachers still presented this assessment component to students as a task with limited choices. Support moderators were able to provide assistance and help teachers frame valid assessments for this component.

The more successful examples of students' work were generally due to students having greater choice with their topic and being encouraged to follow their interests. These students were supported by teachers who undertook an active role by assisting them to identify and outline the topic for their study, and then scaffolded the process of choosing an appropriate form for presenting their findings. Clearly evident was the passion these students exhibited for their topic and this was without doubt a motivating factor that contributed to higher levels of achievement.

Many of the successful media interactions used a variety of forms (including a mix of oral, multimedia, and text) rather than writing alone to effectively present their report. As in past years, some students took the opportunity to use this task to increase their personal interaction or involvement with the media. This can be particularly useful if the student is interested in the media industry as a possible career pathway.

As in previous years, the least effective presentation form was the purely oral presentation. It was also less frequently used. Certainly, teachers tried to ensure that their students presented strong content and delivery, but it was clear that many of these students do not exhibit the level of passion cited earlier.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 3: MEDIA PRODUCTION AND PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

This component is the highest weighted of the four assessment components, accounting for 40% of the student's final mark. Students are required to demonstrate their competence in production using audio, electronic, visual, or print media. The trend noted in the 2009 Media Studies Report continued, with students preferring electronic and visual media for their productions; these forms comprised the majority of work that students submitted. Fewer students undertook any radio production work, while print and photography appeared to build further upon the resurgence that began in 2008. Many professional-looking magazines and glossy full-page advertisements were published and this is certainly an area that could benefit from support materials that present assessment guidelines similar to those that exist for video and audio production. Portable media devices, such as mobile telephone technology or podcasting, yet again remained largely overlooked.

Many of the electronic and visually-based productions were highly original and engaging. However, animation, which was once a popular production form, for the second year did not feature largely.

Video again dominated this assessment component. There was clear evidence of outstanding use of video-editing software and the development of creative, experimental skills in some productions. However, while many productions were very accomplished technically, it was not always evident that the students had explored a variety of

production techniques or that they had a clear understanding of media conventions. Apparent in the most successful productions was that the teacher's role had been to scaffold learning experiences and actively monitor the progress of the production, thereby ensuring that the students explicitly identified relevant production techniques and styles to be employed. Student productions at Stage 2 level ideally should communicate some insight or in-depth perception, apart from being well crafted.

This year the content of productions became more of an issue, underlining the need for teachers to closely supervise production work. If a production contains adult content of an explicit nature, it is important that the teacher both talks with their school hierarchy and contacts the SACE Board. A reference in the SACE Operations Manual titled 'Rules for Undertaking SACE Board Assessments That Are Indirectly Supervised' is useful for teachers and students to avoid potentially difficult situations.

The producer's statement is evidence of the student's reflection on his or her production in no more than 150 words and, as such, should be a highly polished, concise piece of writing. Successful students included details in their producer's statement about the central idea of their production, the production techniques they used, the intended audience, the suitability of their production to the audience, and the ways in which the production used or challenged conventions. It would seem that the requirements for this task are now clearly understood by the majority of teachers and students. Please note that the word-limit has been raised in the 2011 subject outline.

The use of pre-recorded content from other sources was not a major issue this year. The issue is addressed in the 2011 subject outline.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 4: MEDIA INVESTIGATION

This assessment component is a report of an independent investigation of a current media issue concluding with the student's presentation of their findings. A 'current issue' is defined in the curriculum statement as one that would have been the subject of public debate or coverage within the previous 12 months. It is clearly one that is about the media, rather than simply a recount of how the media reported an issue, or the topic itself. A range of issues were investigated, including the media's role in the Australian elections, representations of celebrities and sporting identities (especially Ben Cousins), the federal government's position on the classification of video games, and the effects of social networks such as Twitter and Facebook. Without doubt the most successful media investigations researched very topical issues and, as a result, the sources they used were both varied (including both primary and secondary sources) and up to date. As in the previous two years, violence and the media, the media's role in the construction of female body-image, and music piracy via the Internet were topics being investigated far too frequently. As noted in previous assessment reports for this subject, while these issues can be current, they are also recurrent issues; consequently, much of the research cited by students in their investigations was not recent and needed to be more relevant.

Most teachers recognised that, as an 'independent' investigation, this assessment component is not particularly suited to having the whole class research the same issue. Instead, they encouraged students to 'negotiate a suitable topic' (as suggested in the curriculum statement). Some issues and focus questions, however, did not lend themselves particularly well to a media investigation and, once more, this is where the role of the teacher and their support moderator became crucial. For example, the issue of bias was covered in some investigations. However, if a student did not fully understand this concept, it would become very obvious in their writing and should be addressed in the drafting stage.

The outstanding investigations were clearly focused on the media and avoided producing a report that became more about a topic than an issue. The currency of the issue was also clearly established and referenced by these students in their introduction.

The report of the investigation could be in a multimedia format but, as in the past two years, the majority were text based. Visual elements such as graphs, tables, charts, or images were incorporated in many investigations. In a few cases, these appeared to be added to make the presentation simply look more appealing, but unless these elements relate directly to the investigation, they should be avoided. Similarly, presenting work bound rather than stapled does not add any value to the student's work. Most students used an appendix to provide evidence of correspondence, questionnaires, and the like. This certainly helped to support their investigation more than those cases that referred to an appendix that had not been attached. However, no new content or argument can be developed in the appendix, as this will then be included in the word-count.

Last year, it appeared that using the key media concepts as content headings for the investigation proved useful, and this was certainly the case again. However, this does not mean that all concepts must be addressed, and the astute students identified which concepts were relevant to the issue they were investigating. Nonetheless, the key media concepts should underpin all of the students' study of the media as they provide an investigative framework to support students' critical analysis and production tasks.

Primary sources were used in many investigations, generally interviews, online surveys, or questionnaires. The more successful investigations attached a copy of the questionnaires they had designed (with names removed) and the questions they posed were thoughtfully constructed, although this is an area that should be better scaffolded by teachers. These students ensured that their sample size was more substantial than 5 or 10 respondents, and they also used an appropriate representative group that extended beyond family and friends. Details of the sample were also clearly evident in the text. Successful analysis of this data occurred when it went beyond using raw data and summarising totals, and extended to identifying variables and trends. In the case of interviews, transcripts were included in the appendix.

The most successful investigations consistently used referencing within the body of their text and the corresponding full source details in a bibliography at the end. The paragraphing technique generally followed a structure of pointing, explaining, giving an example (such as a specific quote from the media or a media expert), and then a link. Similarly, in the best investigations, students considered alternative views, made reasoned judgments on their findings and presented this articulately and logically. By employing this strategy, they avoided creating an opinion piece that would probably be more suited to being an interaction task.

The word-count was conformed to in most investigations and only a very few students went over the limit. However, there were some instances where students would have profited from writing more, especially as their concluding statements were very brief.

An overwhelming majority of teachers ensured that only the candidate's number appeared on the submitted work, that all identifying references to the student or school had been removed, and that the appropriate cover sheet for the media investigation was used.

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