

Media Studies

2013 Chief Assessor's Report



Government
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SACE
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MEDIA STUDIES

2013 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

OVERVIEW

Chief Assessors' reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

Fewer students studied Media Studies in 2013, and it will be useful to monitor enrolments in future years. There was an increase in the number of teachers new to the subject. New teachers are encouraged to attend the SACE Board's clarifying forums, which are held in terms 1 and 2 each year. These forums help teachers to understand the requirements of each assessment type and to interpret and consistently apply performance standards when assessing student work. They also provide the opportunity to network with subject experts.

In 2013, Media Studies again offered flexibility to teachers and as a result their learning and assessment plans covered a wide range of topics and used a range of assessment tools. The most popular topics continued to be documentaries, cult television/film and photojournalism, with many schools submitting tried and true learning and assessment plans. Although a range of topics was evident, some sites need to offer more diversity in topics, in keeping with the spirit of the subject. As the subject outline states, 'The focus of Media Studies is on exploring the *dynamic* role of media in Australian and global contexts' (p.1). The more successful and engaging programs focussed on contemporary rather than traditional aspects of the media and encouraged greater participation from students.

Most teachers had a clear and accurate understanding of the topics covered but a lack of understanding was particularly evident in photojournalism. Successful teachers undertook professional development to further their knowledge about the topics offered and to refine their understanding of production techniques. The overall quality of work produced by students this year was again evidence of the development of sophisticated media literacy and production skills. This year the percentage of students achieving results in the 'A' and 'B' bands remained stable compared with 2012, and reinforces the notion that this a subject that recognises and rewards those who meet the upper bands of the performance standards.

When the school program connected all of the assessment types to the assessment design criteria in a coherent and seamless manner, the students' learning was clearly demonstrated.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Folio

Media Exploration

Exploration tasks were well completed, and those that were most successful placed more emphasis on insightful, meaningful research and analysis throughout.

Task design where students were given ownership of the format and content generally produced personally relevant and authentic work. On occasion, explorations were formulaic and this hampered students who would otherwise have achieved at the highest levels..

The use of exhaustive referencing, in text referencing, and quotations was clearly evident in the A – A+ grade bands, and a broad, relevant range of sources, including primary sources, were used to create links to the key media concepts.

Word counts were generally well adhered to, and there was evidence of drafting being honed beforehand. There were several samples that allowed students to generate 1500 words per task. It should be noted that the requirement is 1500 words for the assessment type, regardless of whether this is presented as two or three tasks.

Media Interaction

While some media interactions were outstanding with students creating personal and reflective work that clearly addressed performance standard RA3, 'Analysis of interactions with media', this task once again stood out as the most problematic. There seems to be some misinterpretation by students and teachers. As stated in the subject outline this is a study 'on a topic of [the students'] choice'. It is distinct to the exploration and should offer students the opportunity to be reflective and respond in a highly personalised manner.

The 800-word limit was adhered to; however some of the more successful examples were presented in multimodal form.

Assessment Type 2: Product

This assessment type is traditionally done well by most schools and students, and this year was no exception. Evidence continues to suggest that many students choose media studies for the opportunity to create media productions and there was generally a more consistent and considered approach by both students and teachers. As occurred last year, while many student grades were unaltered during the moderation of this assessment type, more discrepancies appeared in this type than in the folio. Again, this tended to be where teachers had been over-generous and perhaps not calibrated their marking more closely to the performance standards. This usually resulted in more differentiation between students and avoided a situation where a cluster of students sitting in the same band could possibly have their mark moderated to the detriment of the high achievers.

It is useful for teachers new to this subject, to seek out exemplars of products that were previously marked in the upper bands for a point of comparison. Attendance at a clarifying forum is one way to achieve this.

Students were successful when they were engaged and committed to their work, supported by their teacher, and were provided with a range of production skills, techniques and processes. As in previous years, students who were the most successful created highly authentic productions that resembled 'real world' media products. Less successful samples displayed a lack of understanding, limited design and planning as well as minimal use of production techniques or technologies. These samples were rushed, lacked consistency, and limited the potential for student excellence. This was no more apparent than in the use of GoPro style cameras, undoubtedly this year's top trend. High achieving products incorporated vision recorded on these that complemented other shots that when edited together created an effective sequence. At the other extreme, use of vision taken from a head-mount then used as one long unedited shot provides scant evidence that performance standards have been met.

Successful products demonstrated a planned 'body of work' that had been developed over a period of time, usually a term or more, as opposed to those that had been hastily constructed over a weekend.

Short film remained a popular topic of study, as was documentary and both of these were generally covered well. However, some productions gave students little opportunity to demonstrate specific feature P2, 'Use of appropriate production techniques and technologies, and media conventions'

Some task designs for the topic photojournalism still need development, particularly, as several samples misinterpreted the reproduction of the structural and conventional features of photojournalism and therefore, were unable to fully demonstrate specific feature C1, 'Reproduction of the structural and conventional features of different media texts, to convey meaning'.

The producer's statement was used by the most successful students as a contextualising document that effectively provided evidence of their learning and achievements in creating their product. Within the 500-word limit, these students discussed the role they played if working in a small group and the authenticity and success of their product against the conventions of that media type.

Needless to say, the less successful samples either omitted the producer's statement or simply used it as a step by step journal of the production, limiting their success when placed against the performance standards.

Teachers should ensure that students complete the producer's statement in the format described in the subject outline and emphasise the importance of addressing its context.

Overall, the 2013 school assessment moderation process confirmed that there was consistency, reliability and validity in the grade levels that teachers had awarded.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 3: Investigation

As in previous years, the majority of these independent investigations of current media issues were text based. However visual elements such as graphs, tables, charts, or images were incorporated in many of the investigations. In most cases these elements related directly to the research but in a few instances they were added to make the presentation simply look more appealing, and this should be avoided

Popular topics for 2013 included: the impact of social media; portrayal of asylum seekers; Wikileaks; and gun violence and media (with reference to Sandy Hook, Aurora, and the Boston Bombing). Trolling, internet bullying and the use of social networking during the federal election were also studied. As in previous years, the most successful investigations researched controversial issues and as a result the sources they used were both varied (including both primary and secondary sources) and contemporary. These students demonstrated, 'Comprehensive and sustained knowledge and understanding of media structures, issues, concepts, and interactions' (KU1) as well as 'Insightful and informed understanding of facts, opinions, and bias in media texts or products' (KU3). In the introductory paragraphs, these students clearly established and referenced the currency of the issue of their investigation.

As in previous years, the media's role in the construction of female body image, music/DVD piracy via the internet and violence in the media remained popular issues for researching but these areas still need to be undertaken with a high degree of caution.

The subject outline states that students have 'the opportunity to undertake one independent investigation . . .' (p. 34), and therefore, this assessment type should not be designed for a whole class to research the same issue. Students should be encouraged to 'negotiate a suitable topic'. However, some issues and focus questions did not lend themselves to a media investigation and this is where the role of the teacher is important. For example, investigations that focused heavily on content analysis of media texts often tended to become simplistic discussions of 'representations' with less opportunity for students to show comprehensive knowledge or insightful and informed understanding.

Framing the focus question was an important part of the research process and some questions needed more clarity, particularly with respect to place and time. The use of qualifying words helped clearly define the question. Carefully crafted questions allowed students to be more exacting in what they were investigating and resulted in more sophisticated and considered answers. In the better responses, students were able to make reasoned judgements while others did not actually answer the question the student had set for themselves.

Once a question had been formulated it was evident that some students had a lack of primary sources to support their discussion and this at times called into question the currency of their issues. Some responses also relied far too heavily on American sources and information that resulted in an investigation in an American context rather than an Australian one. More interesting and engaging pieces dealt with issues at a more local level. Some responses became a discussion essay rather than an investigation. To help them in this area students should link their question or aim to a

newspaper or media report to make sure that their chosen issue is up-to-date and contemporary. The better responses also provided a variety of alternative views to their Investigation before summing up and coming to their own conclusion. They were also able to sustain their argument/point of view as they worked through their investigation. In contrast some of the weaker responses did not focus enough on the media. They tended to focus on the social implications and engagement with media rather than media itself per se.

An all too common starting point of the investigations was an assumption that the media can strongly influence an audience's opinion. Colin Stewart's text book, 'Media: new ways and meanings' (2007), discusses ideas about media influence and national economics correspondent for *The Age*, Peter Martin, recently added to this discussion (<http://www.petermartin.com.au/2013/09/rupert-moves-minds-sure-if-you-already.html>) Investigations would be strengthened by quick references to similar sources which support or challenge ideas about media influence.

Using the key media concepts as content headings for the investigation has proved useful in the past but once again few students appeared to adopt such an approach. More focus on the key media concepts would be developed if teachers guided students in asking questions about the degree to which these Concepts aid in the analysis of a topic. To achieve 'comprehensive' and 'perceptive' analysis it is important to use theory in critical manner. The concept of media representation also presented difficulties for some students to address and thus give evidence of their understanding.

Similarly, to achieve at a high level, a student needs to show that they use 'consistently clear and appropriate media terminology'. Again, there should be greater use of media terms relevant and specific to their investigation and it should be clear that student's use of any terminology is evidence of their understanding of its meaning. Too often the use of terminology around 'bias' tended to be simplistic without the use specific quotes to support their case or without noting how bias is identifiable through the sequencing of news items.

Many investigations used interviews, online surveys and questionnaires as their main primary sources. One very thorough investigation into the use of social networking during the federal election included interviews with two high profile politicians. An appropriate representative group that extended beyond family and friends was targeted and the sample size was larger than five or ten respondents. Details of the sample were clearly evident in the text. Online tools such as Survey Monkey remained popular but students should be made aware of the limitations of these free services; for example, the inability to filter responses against independent variables such as age or gender. Insightful analysis of this data went beyond using only raw data and summarising totals and extended to identifying variables and trends.

Even though students used on-line tools and sources competently it was also good to see that not all students relied exclusively on the internet for their information. Within their reports and bibliographies the successful students used up-to-date and applicable sources that referred directly to their chosen topic.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

Teachers need to be vigilant when preparing material to avoid missing pages from the student's work especially with the investigation.

Some samples submitted for moderation were well-packaged with student work clearly labelled. Others were not as well prepared, creating a time management issue for moderation teams. The use of the learning and assessment plan addendum is also important as it enables moderators to easily locate changes to the assessment design and the corresponding student material.

Teachers should keep up-to-date with the administration of the subject by referring to the Subject Operational Information, and regularly visiting the SACE Board website. All forms, including the current cover sheet for the investigation, can be located on the Media Studies minisite.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The students undertaking Media Studies this year have maintained the higher achievement levels that were apparent last year. The better integration of the key media concepts into the curriculum design and a more discernible effort by teachers to impart knowledge of contemporary media theories continues to be a contributing factor. There are still areas that need further refining and improvement. While more detailed guidelines for print media products were provided this year in an attempt to achieve better consistency in this assessment type, this was not fully realised. This appears to be a 'work-in-progress' and teacher feedback about this is most welcome. Also the need for teacher workshops for those new to this subject area has become an increasing priority especially with the loss of the old vanguard.

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Chief Assessor