



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. Several questions provided opportunities for students to demonstrate the extent to which they understood the concepts underlying the areas of study, rather than just repeating facts relating to the basic key knowledge. Many responses revealed when students had not fully grasped these concepts, and when they found it hard to apply their learning freely over the range of the areas of study. For example, in Section A – Narrative, students need to know the various **production** elements and **story** elements that are important in their texts. But it is even more important that they show that they understand ‘how combinations of these elements structure the narrative to engage an audience’ (*Media VCE Study Design*, page 21).

Many students seemed to have a strong engagement with their chosen texts; however, other responses had a dulling sense of a lack of engagement, or did not communicate an awareness of how that text exemplified the elements of the area of study. This weakness was most evident in some of the most widely used texts, such as *Run Lola Run* and *Psycho*, with many responses misinterpreting aspects such as the structuring of time or the implications of an opening sequence.

It is important that students explore all areas of key knowledge for each area of study. Responses to several questions this year suggested that some students had not done so. The comments below on Narrative, Question 3 address difficulties some students had because of this. Another weakness arose when students did not carefully read questions or assumed that this year’s examination would follow the exact format of previous years.

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	4	5	Average
%	4	16	29	27	16	8	2.6

It was expected that students would demonstrate an understanding of a setting and its function in the narrative. Many students, despite the clear wording of the question, did not **describe** a setting or did not show that they appreciated that, in its duration, a narrative may have any number of different settings. Each particular setting is usually carefully chosen or controlled for its potential impact on the audience’s response to the narrative. It is not correct to simply say that ‘*Run Lola Run*’s setting is Berlin’.

As well as describing a setting, students were expected to show how that setting worked in combination with one particular production element. Many responses only discussed the production element in isolation and therefore did not demonstrate an understanding of a key aspect of this area of study – that production elements and story elements work in a potentially infinite variety of combinations in developing the narrative.

One production element students could write about was Visual Composition. In film and television the narrative takes place within a frame – and so visual composition takes place within that frame. Good responses referred to the frame and the placing of people and objects within that frame, but too many responses did not do this.

The following extract from one response on *Delicatessen* effectively describes the setting as well as showing how elements of the setting have an impact on an audience’s response.

The setting of ‘Delicatessen’ combined with the production element lighting all infers the post apocalyptic and desolation of the area. The setting is dirty, broken down, sweaty, humid all with a sickly yellow haze light drifting over every element of space. The walls are brown-red and hold a resemblance to that of dried blood. These elements alongside the ominous lighting infer decay of this broken down setting. The buildings scene at the beginning and end are sharp, angular and destroyed. The lighting is dull and polluted creating a humid and sickening aura to this place. The lighting is light in only one area which is the Butcher’s shop. This affects possible audience responses as it hints at a narrative possibilities that this may be the only place in this desolated environment that occupies life.



Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	9	16	26	26	15	8	2.5

This question effectively allowed strong responses to demonstrate an understanding of the way that many items of the key knowledge combine and interrelate. Students demonstrated that a particular genre usually revealed itself in the ways that the narrative used and combined specific aspects of story elements and production elements. Weaker responses claimed that a particular production element was a genre element, when it was more likely simply an example of effective use of a specific element with no particular relationship to a genre. For example, jump cuts may be an aspect of many different types of narrative, whereas lighting using strong shadows may be very much part of the ‘Film noir’ genre. Where this was relevant, strong answers were able to identify and illustrate how a particular narrative used a mix of genres, with the resulting mix of typical genre elements, or how some narratives worked by subverting specific genre conventions, styles and expectations.

There were also too many misidentifications of the genres of particular narratives. *American Beauty*, for example, is not an example of a horror film.

This extract of a response on *Dead Calm* effectively identifies key genre elements, although it does not specifically identify some of the story elements it writes about.

The film ‘Dead Calm’ is commonly associated with the genre of Thriller. This can be seen through the representation of good characters i.e. Rae and John, and the representation of bad character Hughie. The element of ‘good versus evil’ is typical to the thriller genre. There is the setting on the Saracen which is clean, tidy and brightly lit in comparison to the Orpheus which is chaotic, sinking and dark and gloomy. This reinforces the difference between good (Saracen) and evil (Orpheus). The story line has many moments of climax such as when Rae overpowers Hughie and throws the motor key for the yacht overboard, only to be retrieved by the dog. This is also common to the thriller genre as it keeps the audience on the edge of their seats. The thriller genre usually includes short, highly intense scenes which surprise the audience combined with anti climaxes. For example when John is aboard the Orpheus and the rope swings at him the audience presumes he will be hit and severely injured however he dodges the rope and is unharmed.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	7	2	3	4	6	6	11	13	11	9	8	7	6	4	2	2	7.3

This extended response focused on a key story element, that of character, and, specifically, how characters are established and developed. Many weaker responses did not display an understanding of character development in the context of narrative analysis. An important focus should be the way that knowledge and understanding of that character is revealed to the audience, rather than a growth of the character’s own self-knowledge. In this context, ‘character development’ is undertaken by the text’s creator(s), gradually revealing to the audience’s aspects of a character, perhaps through a very specific piece of dialogue, a camera angle that comments on the character, costuming, or the use of environment that reflects aspects of this character.

The idea of ‘character development’ is just as relevant in a text where the action takes place over a period of only two hours as it is in a text which covers many years. A text covering a greater period may focus on a theme of growth in the self-awareness of a particular character; this theme is not the same as the story element of character development.

Too many responses relied on simply retelling the storyline rather than only referring to it when it was relevant to demonstrate one way that the director developed a character for the audience’s understanding.

One student used *Rear Window* as one of the texts to discuss. This opening paragraph indicates how the focus is clearly on those elements that the director uses to begin developing his lead character.

In ‘Rear Window’, Jeffries is established as a classically exciting protagonist. The opening sequence shows his action photographs, as well as broken cameras and a picture of a beautiful girl, presumed to be his girlfriend. The audience is then shown his cast suggesting (as is later confirmed) that he injured himself during his thrill-seeking and risk-taking job. However, he is also shown as living in a middle-class block of flats. This, in combination with the casting choice of Jimmy Stewart, America’s patriotic ex-soldier (similar to the character of Jeffries) ‘everyman’, allows the audience to relate to the protagonist, thereby engaging the audience through a ‘this could be me’ scenario.



Section B – Social values

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	21	25	23	19	12	1.8

This question asked students to explain how the attitudes in a society are linked to the media texts produced by that society. This went to the heart of this area of study and allowed students to sum up their understanding of the basic tenets.

Following is an extract from one high-scoring student's response.

Attitudes and values held in a society affect media texts produced by that society by influencing what is included in the media text. The director, producer and writer of a media text will all themselves be affected by certain attitudes within their society, and thus, in deciding the characters, narrative, setting, dialogue, and other elements of a text, will consider these values. Target audience is also important, as often media producers will positively represent values or attitudes which are held by the target audience, and negatively represent or challenge those which are not in order that the product appeals to the audience.

Many responses to this question revealed the dangers of preparing responses in anticipation of a question similar to that on an earlier examination paper. Examples seen here included answers more appropriate to Question 2, responses which only wrote about a specific text (though this question could be accurately answered without actually referring to a specific text) and answers that failed to show the actual **link** between social attitudes and media texts.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	8	32	40	20	1.7

Students who had incorrectly answered Question 1 found they had already used material which would have been more appropriate to this question. This shows the necessity of using the reading time wisely to determine the specific elements of each question. Overall, however, many students were able to identify and outline at least one relevant social value. Many students still confused concepts (for example, materialism, racism and feminism) with more appropriately expressed social values.

The following example succinctly states a dominant social value at the time of production of the text used by the student in the other questions in this section (*Australian Rules*, 2002). It includes an additional comment immediately relevant to this social value, identifying factors that indicate it is a dominant value. It is also focused on the social value itself, rather than containing comments about the text, which were not asked for.

During the late 90's the view that 'women should be treated as equals to men, neither is superior' was finally becoming a dominant view throughout Australia. Women were now receiving equal pay and the view that they were equal to men was held by the majority of society.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	11	12	20	23	18	10	6	2.8

This question focused on one of the key concepts used in identifying and analysing the effect of social values on the development of a narrative, the concept of **representation**. The large number of low scores for this question reflects the number of students who did not display an understanding of this basic concept. Instead, story lines were repeated without analysis. Many of these responses did not do as asked by the question, that is, present a **description** of a chosen representation. This problem also meant that they were unable to then explain how that representation had been constructed by the maker of the text. In this question, students were **not** asked to interpret, analyse or comment on that representation, which was the focus of the following question.

The following extract refers to *The Rage in Placid Lake*. Note that it identifies the representation to be discussed, and demonstrates ways that the representation has been constructed.

The insurance company (institution) in 'The Rage of Placid Lake' is represented as a big and imposing setting where monetary success is paramount. The sound and lighting all infer pseudo-happiness in this business by the cool fluorescent lighting and soft musical score. Costume in this representation is all very similar with women in work shirts and men in suit, ties and shirts. The camera shots are all the same generally and shots to infer that all the characters in scene are alike.



Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	12	11	15	22	19	12	6	3	3.0

A text can support and/or challenge the social values of its period of production. This is a key concept in the analysis of social values for this area of study. This support and/or challenge can be seen in a variety of ways, such as the ending, in the various representations (see Question 3) and in the particular story itself. What one particular character may say is often only a superficial clue to the text's attitude to specific social values. That character may in fact be seen negatively, and so their words are intended to be taken negatively.

This question also asked students to link their response to the social value(s) identified in Question 2. Where students had not appropriately identified and correctly expressed a social value in the earlier question, they had difficulty responding adequately to this question.

Section C – Media Influence

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	13	23	29	22	13	2.0

In this area of study, students study a range of approaches to determining to what extent media can and does influence its audience. This question provided an opportunity for students to demonstrate that they had understood the ideas underlying this section of the course. Rather than asking for a rote answer on one or two theories or models, the question allowed students to demonstrate that they could apply what they had learned in developing a statement of their own attitudes. Some students, unfortunately, showed serious misunderstandings. An 'active audience' is not one that listens to an iPod while exercising. Nor, in assessing media influence, is it relevant that an audience member is watching a documentary program or a soap. A number of students responded carelessly, interpreting the question as though it referred only to Homer Simpson. Such responses indicated that these students were not able to apply the material studied in this section to their wider experiences and understanding of the world and its media.

The following response came from a student who demonstrated that they had synthesised what they learnt and that they could use this new knowledge to argue a position.

I believe that while some audience members engage in media for the purpose of relaxation or entertainment, it is by no means 'mindless'. Communication theories propose types of audience members 'passive' and 'active'. Active audience members engage with the media and create different interpretations based on past experiences and beliefs. In this case they actively seek out meaning and while the media can tell them what to think about they cannot dictate what to think. In contrast, 'passive' audiences absorb the same meaning like a sponge. The message is supposedly inherent within the text, waiting to be uncovered. While this may seem 'mindless' the audience must interpret the message and so are still engaged mentally at some level.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	10	7	13	24	26	13	6	3.1

Generally students had learnt the basic concepts of a number of communication models or theories, and this question was, overall, well handled. Most students used the Bullet (or Hypodermic) model and the Uses and Gratification theories and were able to provide a satisfactory explanation of each. Some students wrote about the Bullet theory and the Hypodermic theory as though they were two contradictory theories, rather than a single theory known by two names. Others, in claiming that a particular theory was 'proven', showed a misunderstanding of the nature of theories, and of the way that they are developed and used in addressing issues of media influence.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	20	8	10	12	12	13	10	7	4	2	1	3.5

The low mean score for this question suggested that many students were not adequately prepared to respond to it. It is, however, very clearly one of the areas of key knowledge required for this area of study. It is also a logical step in the study of media influence. If the media does influence its audience, then what are the implications for society? Do we need to curb or control the media, or harness the power of the media for the good of society? Or do we have to balance the need to protect possibly susceptible audiences with the rights of others in society?



Although the question specifically asked about issues relating to the regulation of media content in Australia, many irrelevant examples were cited. The Bobo doll research, *Bowling for Columbine* and the Bolger/*Child's Play* incident are all overseas examples, as well as being problematic in other ways for addressing issues of regulation in Australia. Some students wrote about 'self-regulation' as though it was self-control (one individual turning off their TV set) rather than, for example, one part of the industry policing itself instead of having government-imposed control.

Generally, the best answers were able to give a good, general description of how media content can be regulated in Australia. The extract below is an example of a response that handled this section satisfactorily. It is good to see a response recognising video games as part of the issue of media influence.

In Australia ... media content is regulated through a system of checks and balances provided by specific organisations. [A] body which is government run which upholds the views and values of Australian Society is the Australia Office for the Classification of Film and Literature ... Media content before being imported in Australia must be sent to and assess by this body who give it a classificationRegulatory bodies may still restrict young audiences from viewing content deemed too violent or abusive. However, the Australian Office of Film and Literature classification may deny a media product a classification on the grounds it is too violent or may incite or encourage extreme violence. If a product cannot receive a classification it cannot be imported into and sold in Australia. Examples of this are rampant with video games Doom, Grand Theft Auto 3 and Manhunt all recently denied classification. However, media organisations in Australia are Self regulating. Corporations such as Channel Ten [and] Fairfax Newspapers ... all have their own particular codes of practice which they subscribe to.

To fully respond to the question, the above description could have been used to lead into the issues surrounding the debates on media regulation. Teachers are required to support students' understanding of the debates concerning the regulation of media content as outlined on page 33 of the *Media VCE Study Design*, which requires students to examine and demonstrate the following knowledge and skills:

- arguments and evidence surrounding the regulation of media content by, for example, codes of practise, government legislation and regulation, and self-regulation in the interests of protecting audiences
- analyse the rationale for, and effectiveness of, measures designed to control media content.