



## GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2010 Media examination provided students with an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to use their understanding of media as a manufacturing process in analysing a range of texts. Most students were able to show a general understanding of many of the areas of key knowledge. However, when questions focused specifically on some of these details, some students were unable to show a clear grasp of the basic, underlying concepts. Students are advised to familiarise themselves with the assessment criteria outlined in the Assessment Handbook.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

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

### Section A – Narrative

The key knowledge requires students to understand the range of production elements and story elements that the creators of a media text, such as a film, can call upon in making their product. Using examples from their chosen texts, students were able to show how specific production elements and story elements work and combine in the construction of the product. Many students cited texts that provided them with a rich range of clear examples. Texts that relied on one or two singular elements for effect (such as *Run, Lola, Run*) were frequently not well used by students. It is important that responses show an understanding that production elements and story elements **combine** to create the narrative. If a text is notable mainly for its effective use of only one or two elements (for example, solely graphic photography or a seeming unusual structuring of time), demonstrating how the elements combine may be difficult. Some responses reflected a refreshing sense of excitement and understanding as students presented responses that drew on new or previously unused texts.

#### Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	27	35	38	1.1

Students were expected to define acting as a production element. Some confused acting with character or gave vague comments such as ‘how an actor acts’. Students should be able to clearly describe all production and story elements as a starting point. Successful responses showed an awareness of the qualities and techniques an actor calls upon to create their character. This is evident in the following simple yet satisfactory answer.

*The production element of acting refers to the way an actor portrays his or her character on screen. Things like gestures, expressions, body movement and voice all contribute to establish a character in the actor’s portrayal.*

#### Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	21	24	25	17	13	1.8

This question allowed students to demonstrate their deep understanding of the production element of acting by showing how it combines with the story element of character. The more successful responses showed an understanding of how these two elements need to coexist for the narrative to be developed credibly. Weaker responses, however, ignored this important aspect, and wrote about either a character or about an actor in a way that reflected no understanding of an actor’s technique.

In this extract, the student demonstrates an awareness of the actor’s techniques, how these techniques help to develop a character, and how a character can contribute to the development of the narrative.

*In Psycho the character of Norman Bates is portrayed as a unusual and disturbed character. This is seen through the actors adoption of characteristics e.g. shifty eyes as he stares at Marion through a peep hole ..His gesture of reaching out and touching one of the birds (he has stuffed) is likened to his need and dependency for his mother....This therefore helps define his character for the audience allowing them to understand how the character thinks, giving an odd and eerie feel to the character. By use of this character being defined by acting, he furthers the narration as he generates the cause and effects in the film....The audience want to watch him to see what he does next in the film.*

#### Question 2

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Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	12	15	29	26	13	6	2.3

‘Cause and effect’ is an important element in structuring a narrative. Some students were able to discuss how a cause (for example, an incident) had a particular effect on a character. However, they were not able to demonstrate that one event becomes a cause for the next event and so on. Students needed to show an understanding that a media narrative has been constructed deliberately and consciously, and that ‘cause and effect’ is a basic way of constructing a narrative. Successful responses showed a clear understanding of the nature of these links, and how they become an effective framework for structuring the whole narrative. It was disappointing that some responses did little more than tell the story, neither explaining ‘cause and effect’ nor demonstrating how it contributes to the development of a narrative.

The extract below shows an awareness of the nature of cause and effect and its relationship to other story elements.

*In Ferris Buellers Day Off cause and effect helps generate a chain of events for the storyline. An example of this is the (cause) weather “how can I be expected to go to school on a day like today” and thus the effect is Ferris skipping school. This creates narrative possibilities for the narrative and as Ferris continues on his voyage he draws more characters into the film i.e. Ed Rooney (the dean of students) which creates multiple storylines which have all generated and are linked to Ferris’ parrallell storylines....*

### Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	7	8	19	23	21	13	9	3.2

Genre is an important concept in analysing media texts. Successful students showed knowledge of the particular features of the genre of their text; for example, film noir, western, romance, thriller or musical. They were able to demonstrate how the features of their text’s genre were discernible in their text, and how the genre itself had affected the creation of the narrative. Other students showed very little appreciation of ‘genre’ or the particular essence of their text’s genre. Their responses simply discussed several production elements without showing how those production elements were used to create or reveal the film’s genre. ‘Film noir’ was often discussed as though it was nothing more than ‘dark lighting’. An appropriate way of responding to this question was to explore the opening scene where the narrative possibilities were established, along with the genre that the audience could expect.

Some of these aspects are addressed in the response below. The response recognises that texts can combine elements of several genres.

*In the film Dead Calm the manipulation of the camera and sound combine to establish the genre as thriller with elements of horror. Thriller films often take place in a ‘real’ environment so the audience believes this could happen to them. This ‘real’ setting out in the ocean is enhanced by the constant diegetic sounds of wave crashing and yachts creaking. Horror films deal with the idea of isolation and that there is no help, which is established by the long camera shots and bird’s eye views as the camera pans past the yacht, enhancing the loneliness of the ocean and how it is devoid of human contact.*

### Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	15	9	13	16	15	12	11	6	4	3.4

High-scoring responses showed a clear understanding of themes, issues and/or motifs, demonstrated a deep knowledge of the text and made appropriate use of media terminology.

It was not enough for students to just identify themes, issues and/or motifs in their text; they also needed to analyse how these contributed to the narrative. Some students did little more than talk about the plot, or wrote about one production element or one story element, with no sense of how all the elements must link and work together in the construction and development of a narrative. Many themes or issues can be present in a text, but students needed to explore how these themes, issues or ideas contributed to the text, perhaps how they influenced the structuring of the text as discussed in this extract from a response on *The Shining*.

*Stanley Kubrick explores the issue of the dispossession and genocide of the native Americans in his film The Shining ...As Danny plays with his toy trucks on the carpet, Kubrick also suggests this theme through visual composition. Danny pushes the trucks over what is a representation of Native American artwork, symbolizing how progress has ground over this culture. This connects with what Mr. Ullman tells the family at the start, that the hotel was built on top of an Indian burial ground. Kubrick’s choice of a high angle shot mimics this crush and building on top of what is a part of native American culture.*



## Section B – Social values

This section allowed students to show their understanding of the dynamic relationship between any media text and the social values of the place and period of its creation. Once again, an interesting range of texts was evident in students' responses. Popular texts of their period often provided rich material for exploration: television series such as *I Love Lucy* or *Bewitched*, or hit movies such as *Thelma and Louise* or (in an Australian context) *They're a Weird Mob* or *The Castle*. More problematic were some documentaries, such as *Bra Boys*. Current films or television programs often seemed to be more difficult to analyse for their social values, as social values are often easier to study in retrospect. In this light, some answers misread the current television series *Mad Men*, seeing it only as representing the values of the 1960s because that is when the series is set, and consequently missing the way it has been influenced by current social values.

### Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	5	7	20	23	24	12	9	3.3

Because this area of study looks at the relationship between a text and aspects of the society at the time in which the text was created, students must be able to show a clear understanding of relevant social attitudes in that society. An attitude is clearly more than a one-word concept such as 'racism' or 'women'. Successful responses showed an awareness of important social values and attitudes from the period of their text's production. Moreover, they were able to write about these attitudes in a way that did not suggest those attitudes or values suddenly appeared. For example, a belief in the importance of family has been a significant value for a long time. However, attitudes on the family have changed slowly over time. Few students acknowledged the enduring or continuing aspect of many values.

The following extract is an example of an effective description of one attitude in society at the time the film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) was made. As this response shows, it was not always necessary to refer directly to the text for this question.

*The dominant value that interracial marriage is unacceptable existed in America in 1967, Interracial marriage had only recently being legalized in all states of America, however it was still frowned upon in many states – particularly those in the south. Civil Rights was also relatively new in American society, and was introduced only a decade earlier.*

### Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	19	12	16	18	14	11	6	4	2.7

Many students were unable to respond appropriately to this question. Some students wrote as though the prompt in the question was in fact the question, and gave what often read like prepared answers on how media texts reflect their society. Students often struggled with the production context (although the question gave suggestions of areas that were important elements of that context). Strong answers were aware of the length of time that could be involved in the production of a film. For example, the animated film *Wall-E* was started five years before its release. Its creators have acknowledged that social attitudes to the environment changed considerably in that period (which had seen the release of *An Inconvenient Truth*), so that oppositional values at the time the project started were widely accepted at the time of its release – a change that may have contributed to the film's reception.

This question expected students to not only be aware of the social context of their text's creation, but how that context affected content. This may have been seen in the inclusion of a particular story line, the casting of a sympathetic actor in a particular role or the way that the story ends. Responses usually showed an understanding of the text as a product specifically and deliberately crafted, rather than simply something organic that emerged on its own.

Aspects of this requirement can be seen in the following extract from a response referring to *The Defiant Ones* (1958).

*Another emerging value held in society in 1958 was the Black and White people are bound in society, where one cannot have freedom without the other. This has shaped The Defiant Ones as seen in the plot, where Noah jumps off the train to freedom because Noah cannot make it, and also a symbol of the chain which binds Joker and Noah. The ending of the narrative also has been shaped by the production context because the ending is not happy, both men return to jail, this shows that the problem is going on in society.*

### Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	14	7	15	21	17	13	8	5	3.2



‘Representation’ is a basic concept in understanding and analysing the relationship between a text and the social values of its period of production. Some responses suggested that students did not understand or know how to use this concept. Some students interpreted ‘representation’ as an incident in the plot. Stronger responses were able to discuss aspects of their text that could be read as representations, perhaps how a specific character could be seen as a representation of a larger group, or idea. Again, these stronger responses reflected an understanding that the text and many of its features were the result of deliberate choices, as identified in the following extract from a response on *Rock-a-Bye Baby* (1958).

*One representation shown throughout the film is Sandy as a homemaker, supporting the social value women were expected to be homemakers. Sandy is constantly shown as a typical 1950’s woman. She consistently wears a long dress and is constantly lusting after the life of a housewife. When Clayton calls her over for help to take care of the three babies, she arrives wearing an apron and holding a laundry basket and is placed in the kitchen, all roles a typical homemaker performs. Sandy supports the dominant social value of women expected to be homemakers in the 1950s.*

## Section C – Media Influence

Overall, responses showed a good grasp of basic knowledge of theories. However, the area of research into media influence is dynamic, and ongoing, due to much new research and in response to the impact of new media forms and technologies, including video games and the Internet. Although references to examples such as the *War of the Worlds* broadcast and the Bobo doll experiment are often appropriate, there is far more current and relevant material that students can refer to.

### Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	12	27	60	1.5

Given that communication theories and models are the basis for an understanding of issues of media influence, it is good to note that most students were able to describe one theory or model clearly and precisely. However, some responses included unnecessary details that did not help to describe the chosen theory.

The following is an example of an appropriate response that presents the basic principles of a theory clearly.

*The Agenda-setting function is one communication theory which argues that all texts are open to many different interpretations and that the audience is actively interacting with the text. It advocates that while the media does not tell its audience exactly what to think about it, it sets the agenda for discussion among its audience.*

### Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	19	13	26	19	23	2.2

This question was generally well handled, with most students able to provide two specific examples of the evidence used to support their chosen communication theory or model. Students were not asked to discuss or evaluate the evidence they provided, but to show that they were aware of evidence that has been used to justify a theory or model. Some responses provided evidence that was not relevant to the theory described in Question 1a. Anecdotal evidence, such as this excerpt provided for the agenda-setting function, was appropriate.

*When Sam Newman had his operation for prostate cancer aired on ‘60 Minutes’ it was believe to be a large influence in getting an extra 30,000 men to have cancer tests in the next months. It ‘set the agenda’ and got men thinking about the possibility of having cancer.*

### Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average
%	8	3	5	5	7	8	10	10	11	11	8	6	5	2	1	6.6

In this extended response, students were able to show that they could apply their learning and understanding of all aspects of the media influence debate. While some students went through each dot point meticulously, the more successful students were able to discuss the links between each of the areas in the question. Very high scoring students demonstrated clear understanding of media influence through an insightful and in-depth discussion of how the influence has been assessed. These students showed a mature knowledge of various communications theories and/or models, and how these have been used to understand the impact of the media on its audiences. They were aware that the influence may be positive or negative, temporary or more enduring, and were able to refer to a wide range of appropriate evidence for different positions. They also showed an understanding of how various forms of media content regulation are related to beliefs about the potential of media influence.

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Some students limited their response to discussing only negative effects of the media, misunderstood the concept of self-regulation, or perhaps in relying too much on a prepared answer, only discussed one media form. Others wrote as though various media theories had definitively proved there was influence, or claimed examples of influence were incontrovertible. These selected openings indicate that a more questioning, exploratory response was required.

*To propose that the media can have any affect whatsoever on audiences is to firstly propose that the media exerts influence over its audience. That is to say the media has the power to influence the behaviors of its audiences which can be either positive or negative effects. There have been communication theories and models developed to explain the media's influence over audiences...*

*The extent of media's precieved influence over its audience is something that has never been proven in a reliable way. Media regulations have been put into place to protect audiences precieved to be more vulnerable to the media's message, such as children...*