



## GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2012 Media examination reflected changes to the *VCE Media Study Design 2012–2016* and was presented in a new format. The questions provided students with an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding in a variety of ways, and most students showed an understanding of many of the areas of key knowledge. The more successful students showed that they could use this knowledge and their understanding of underlying concepts in 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 examination specifications and sample questions on the VCAA website.

There were two key issues evident in students' responses this year. Firstly, it is important for students to use appropriate media terminology, particularly in the Narrative section. Specifically, please refer to the comments below on Section A, Question 3 about editing. Secondly, in Section B, a number of students referred only to one text. The revised study design clearly emphasises the word 'texts', which is a significant change to the way Unit 4 has been taught in the past.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

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

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what the answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

### Section A – Narrative

This Area of Study explores the way that narratives are constructed, using production and story elements. These elements are basic in this study, and students must know the nature and function of each and relationships between them as evidenced in the texts they studied. There were many students, however, who showed weakness at this basic level.

Students should be aware of all of the production and story elements identified in the key knowledge for Unit 3, Outcome 1 in the current study design and be able to refer to them by their correct names. Students who did not have a secure grounding in the language and terminology struggled to attain high marks. The application of narrative language did not need to be sophisticated, but it did need to be accurate and appropriate. This was not the case with many of the responses to this section.

Many students chose interesting texts in order to demonstrate their understanding of narrative. Some students, however, wrote about texts that were not effective in demonstrating an understanding of key elements. It is important that teachers choose texts that enable students to address all aspects of the study design.

#### Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	3	9	88	1.9

Most students answered this question correctly by accurately identifying two production elements, such as 'sound' and 'lighting'. Students were awarded two marks as long as the production elements were correctly identified. Some students incorrectly named elements such as 'visual composition', 'setting', 'costume' and 'shot types'.

#### Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	3	6	17	20	24	16	14	3.6

Generally, students understood that this question followed on from the previous question. Some students did not discuss the opening sequence of a film, instead discussing another sequence from the film.

The appropriate use of terminology distinguished between medium- to high-range responses.

'Sound' and 'lighting' were generally featured in better responses as a range of ideas from opening sequences were discussed. However, 'acting' was generally poorly discussed and students lacked an understanding of matters such as gesture, acting style, voice projection and body movement. Instead, the contribution of the actor to the character tended to be the most commonly discussed aspect of acting.



Mise en scène also appeared to be a less well-understood element. It is generally accepted that mise en scène refers to the combination of a number of elements ‘in the frame’ or, more specifically, the combination of the setting, costumes and make-up, lighting and staging, and possibly even sound and camera. It is not appropriate to discuss these elements in isolation, as any discussion of mise en scène requires an acknowledgment of how all of these elements have been organised in the frame to engage the audience. Many students used the term incorrectly, referring to it as a general term that then allowed them to discuss any element at all in isolation under the guise of mise en scène, when they should have been referring to a combination of elements.

The following student response addresses this question very well (this student also used the extra space at the back of the script book).

*In the opening sequence of Christopher Nolan’s 2008 film, The Dark Knight, the production elements of mise en scene and sound have been used to establish the character of the Joker and communicate to the audience that he is the antagonist. In the opening scene, the audience becomes associated with the Joker’s leitmotif. This distinctive sound is a single sustained note played on the cello, which is then followed by discordant strings that build to a crescendo. Composed by Hans Zimmer, it aims to sound like a taught string that gets tighter and tighter but never breaks. The non-diegetic sound is played numerous times during the opening bank robbery scene but only builds to a crescendo at the very end when the joker takes off his clown mask and reveals himself to the audience. This, in combination with his chilling dialogue and the previous sound effects of gun shots throughout the scene immediately establishes him as the antagonist and communicates to the audience that he is a frightening and sinister character. The audience are then able to associate this tense sound of the leitmotif with the presence of the Joker later on. The production element of mise en scene has been used to establish the Joker as the antagonist. When talking to the bank manager and taking off his mask, the Joker is framed in a close up in which his face covers most of the screen. The slightly lower camera angle reinforces his power and influence over the bank manager and the key light in the shot comes from the window behind the Joker’s head and this creates shadow on one side of his face while illuminating the other half. This exentuates his features, showing his bright and chaotic makeup and his scars. These aspects of mise en scene help to establish the Joker as a menacing and savage character.*

**Question 2a.**

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	5	35	59	1.6

This question was well answered, and the three story elements given were all selected by a similar number of students. Better responses reflected a deeper understanding of the meaning of these terms, again using appropriate terminology and language.

The following response adequately answers the question.

*The point of view... refers to whose perspective the audience is positioned to observe the narrative from. This could be from a particular character’s perspective or even from an object, omniscient point of view.*

**Question 2b.**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	7	17	35	24	18	2.3

This question provided students with an opportunity to discuss the combination of two elements along with how this combination engaged the audience and developed the narrative. The most successful students selected elements that complemented each other; for example, ‘point of view from which the narrative is presented’ combined well with ‘camera techniques’ (*Run Lola Run*), and ‘setting’ and ‘mise en scène’ (*Animal Kingdom*) were also effectively discussed. ‘Audience engagement’ could have included how the audience develops empathy for a character (*Rear Window*) and becomes absorbed into the world of the character.

The following student example effectively explained all elements of this question.

*The acting of Brad Pitt in his portrayal of Mickey in ‘Snatch’ is central to the scene in which his mother dies as her caravan is set on fire. Here, Pitt’s facial expression is initially one of devastation and immense sadness, and his body language screams desperation as he attempts to break the holds of his brothers... Pitt’s acting is imperative to exemplifying the shift in Mickey’s emotions, as he ultimately stops fighting to save his mother and his facial expression shifts to one of anger and exemplifies his desire for revenge. Here, the acting of Pitt is successful in evoking sympathy from the audience, and in demonstrating his character’s new focus in the desire for redemption. In this way the death of Mickey’s mother (the cause) leads to the development of the narrative in that he acts to seek revenge on his mother’s murderer (the effect).*



**Question 3**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	12	8	14	11	15	11	11	7	6	2	3	3.9

This question asked students to analyse how editing techniques contributed to the audience’s reading and understanding of both narratives studied. Students frequently confused ‘camera’ with ‘editing’; for example, references to a ‘close-up shot followed by a long shot’ were common. Most students did not address the editing part of the question, instead referring only to one or more of the dot points below the question. Alternatively, students who answered the question with the intent of discussing editing often did not use editing terminology to accurately identify techniques.

‘Cross cutting’, ‘parallel editing’, ‘ellipsis’, ‘temporal order’ and the ‘placement of visual and aural edits’ are some techniques employed in editing to organise and structure the narrative. References to these types of terms were seen in responses that demonstrated understanding of the editing function, but the majority of students did not demonstrate an ability to analyse editing. In addition, most responses included little or no analysis; instead many students simply detailed the storylines of the two texts they had studied.

The responses below incorporate examples of the use of editing techniques and language effectively.

*Run Lola Run is a circular narrative and after Lola’s first and second ‘runs’ through the streets of Berlin, match cuts have been used to return Lola back to her ‘starting point’. For example, at the end of Lola’s first ‘run’, match cuts have been used to show shots of both the bag of money falling and the red phone falling in Lola’s room. This editing technique, in combination with Lola’s dialogue which has been overlayed the vision, helps form the circular structure of the narrative as Lola returns back to her room.*

*In Strictly Ballroom, the montage sequence is edited in such a way as to communicate the progression of time – three weeks – in only a few minutes. It does this by editing between shots of Fran and Scott performing and practicing to shots of another day being crossed off the calendar... These interspersing of different shots and scenes is coupled with the sequences non-diegetic soundtrack – the song ‘Time after Time’... American Beauty... also uses visual editing to communicate the passage of time – similarly to the use of shots of the calendar in the montage in Strictly Ballroom, in the montage of Caroline Burnham cleaning her house pre-inspection, shots of her cleaning are interspersed with shots of the clock on the wall. This serves to establish the linear passage of time as Caroline cleans. It also shows that Caroline spends many hours cleaning, demonstrating the obsessive side to her personality that is so key to the way in which the narrative progresses.*

**Section B – Media texts and society’s values**

Responses to this section of the exam indicated that aspects of the revised study design need to be taught to students in a more detailed way with explicit use of appropriate terminology. Many students had a weak grasp of the difference between ‘social values’ and a ‘discourse’ or ‘social issue’ and this weakness was evident in answers to Questions 2a., 2b. and 3.

Students needed to be very clear about what a discourse is and how to write about it. As noted in the study design, ‘discourse in the media is the social process of producing and organising meaning through the interrelationship of media organisations, media texts and audiences within a culture’.

A discourse is not a social value; it cannot have a value judgment associated with it; for example, ‘that women are inferior to men’. A discourse is a wider-reaching discussion about an issue or idea in our society, and the values associated with it are reflected in a range of texts that reference and infer it.

Also of concern was the selection of texts. While responses to this section reflected a very wide range of texts that had been chosen for study, many students wrote about texts that seemingly had no connection to each other through a common discourse or social issue. Without this connection, responses to Questions 2b. and 3 suffered; these were questions where students generally did not perform well. Students should be very clear about the overarching discourse or social issue they have studied, and the associated social values that are reflective of it. Students should be looking across a range of texts in order to respond on the discourse or social issue, rather than analysing texts in isolation and being unaware of the discourse that connects them.

It also seemed that many students expected the questions in this section to be similar to previous exam questions and used terms that are not used in the current study design, such as ‘production period’. These students then struggled to answer questions referring to discourse.

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The inclusion of discourse into the revised study design has seen some interesting interpretations of what we perceive to be a media text. However, poor text selection severely impairs students and this was very evident in this section. The complex construction of reality TV shows continues to be very difficult for students to grasp (*Keeping Up with the Kardashians*) and satire is also problematic (*The Simpsons* and *Zoolander*). Some texts are too simplistic in content in order for students to analyse to the required depth (*Thomas the Tank Engine*) and others require a sophistication that some students are unable to adequately respond to (magazine advertising and song lyrics.) Again, the texts chosen for study should be covered equally and should have a very clear connection to one discourse or social issue.

Many texts studied this year focused on discourses revolving around the ways same-sex relationships and characters have been represented in media texts. This was done quite well, with many students responding on *Modern Family*'s representation of blended and same-sex families, along with the representation of same-sex relationships in films like *Philadelphia* and *American Beauty*.

Finally, many students only made reference to one text, or saw additional texts as being merely supportive to their 'main' text. This is not how the revised study design presents this Area of Study, as it asks for students to look at a range of texts within a specific discourse. The most successful responses came from students who knew a number of texts well and equally, and were able to reference between them.

## Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	10	30	60	1.5

Most students responded well to this question and were able to describe a value held in society. The response needed to include an acknowledgment of the value being held, rather than simply a general statement; for example, 'women are seen as inferior to men' is clearly stating a value held in society, whereas simply writing 'gender equality' is a statement bereft of value and could not achieve full marks in this question.

The following response is a good example of how to present a value held in society.

*A dominant social value ... of 1960s America was that a family should have a patriarchal order where the male is the head of the family and makes all the decisions ...*

## Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	15	33	52	1.4

This question was generally well done by students who were very clear about the values presented in their texts. Better responses, such as the one below, acknowledged the production context of a media text as compared to those that only referenced examples of plot lines and showed no connection to the production of the text at all.

*This value lead to the creation of the show 'Veronica Mars' and is reflected in both the show's premise and the way its characters are represented. Veronica is a capable, intelligent young woman who solves mysteries – something that is a reflection of the dominant value held in the 2000s, its production context.*

## Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	11	39	50	1.4

The question asked students to describe the social issue or discourse, and therefore students who simply stated it or explained it briefly could not achieve full marks.

This question distinguished between the students who clearly understood the difference between a discourse or social issue and a social value and those who did not. Some students confused the terms and this had ramifications in Question 2b. It was clear that many students were still unsure about exactly which discourse or social issue they had studied. Some students simply restated their values from Question 1a.

The following example describes a discourse well and acknowledges it beyond just one time period.

*The discourse on gender refers to the way in which gender, gender roles and gender equality is viewed. This discourse has evolved alongside the developments in gender roles – for example, a show like 'I Dream of Jeannie' portrays woman as less than*

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*men as is reflective of the discourse in 1960s, which still viewed women as inferior to men. Now female-centric shows like 'Girls' reveal the discourse currently assumes female equality.*

## Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	8	5	13	13	19	13	14	8	7	4.1

This question was difficult for students who were unclear about their discourse or social issue in Question 2a., and overall was only satisfactorily done. The question focused on how the social issue or discourse identified earlier was represented in two or more media texts, but many students did not compare the construction of representations, focusing instead on retelling parts of the plot from texts, or describing representations without any connection to the discourse or social issue nominated in Question 2a. If the student did not compare texts, they could not achieve full marks.

*... As of the 1990s, the discourse on gender assumed female equality and viewed feminism as almost obsolete – as reflected by a 1996 cover of Time magazine that asked 'Is Feminism Dead?' This post-feminist aspect of the discourse on gender is reflected in Buffy the Vampire Slayer in the representation of the titular character. She is a slayer, there to fight the vampires, the demons and the forces of darkness – in short, she is highly capable in stark contrast to Claire's (The Breakfast Club) need to rely on the Jock and Andrew for protection. This demonstrates the way in which the discourse on gender no longer assumed gender roles and instead examined people as individuals unhampered by gender inequality.*

## Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	9	5	15	18	24	14	15	3.5

Many students seemed to ignore what this question was asking and instead gave the type of response that previous exams may have required. The question asked students to identify and discuss a dominant and an emerging value, but it did not ask them to discuss how these values have been challenged or supported within the text. Students who did this were not disadvantaged, but this shows that many students did not read the question correctly, or had done many similar practice questions and did not adjust their application of knowledge to reflect what was on this year's exam.

Again, students who did not correctly understand the difference between a 'value' and a 'discourse' or 'social issue' had difficulty attaining high marks for this question.

The following example attempts to identify and discuss values held across texts.

*This episode of The Flintstones acknowledges an emerging social value of 1960s America that women deserve equal payment rights and employment opportunities through the representation of Wilma Flintstone ... this representation reflects the emerging value of 1960s America. However, due to the fact that Wilma gets fired and returns to being a homemaker with Fred once again becoming the primary breadwinner, it can be seen that this text ultimately rejects this emerging value ... however in The Jetsons this emerging social value of 60s America is completely ignored and not acknowledged as Jane Jetson does not attempt to gain employment and is simply represented as a homemaker while her husband is the primary breadwinner.*

## Section C – Media Influence

This section was well done by many students, with the majority showing a good grasp of major theories and models of media influence, together with a solid understanding of media regulation. 'Theories of audience' was also well understood. The questions in this section asked students to apply their knowledge to a new scenario This seemed to be a skill that many students lacked.

### Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	8	8	23	26	35	2.7

This question gave students the opportunity to compare two communication theories or models. Most students performed well on this question. Students who had difficulty comparing two communication models or theories of media influence generally had problems with other questions in this section, demonstrating the foundational role these theories and models have in discussions of media influence. Students could have drawn on a wide range of communication theories or models. Some students included more information than was needed by the question, and by the space and marks allocated.

The following response fully dealt with the question and demonstrated knowledge and comparison of the characteristics of two communication models.



*The Agenda Setting Function Theory of 1972 by McCombs and Shaw holds that the media does not have the power to tell audiences what to think, rather it has the ability to tell us what to think about. This is done through processes such as framing, gatekeeping and priming in which the media can dictate which issues are given more screen-time and what tone is to be set. It acknowledges that audiences have an active role in interpreting what media is given to them, and discredited popular beliefs of the media being an all powerful force. In contrast the Cultivation Theory of 1960, created by theorist George Gerbner argues that the media are indeed extremely powerful. The more one views television the more they are to perceive its representations as an actual reality. Gerbner argued that the media's influence was gradual, yet cumulative and significant. However, with the advent of modern convergent media, both theories are ultimately limited by their origins in the 60's and 70's. Gerbner restricted his theory to television, which is slowly losing its momentum to the internet, whilst the Agenda Setting Theory, which places an emphasis on newspaper journalism, which is a slowly fading industry.*

## Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	19	10	26	21	23	2.2

This question required students to describe the varying theoretical characteristics, behaviours, attitudes and/or consumption of two theories of audience. Many students merely named and briefly identified fundamental characteristics of 'passive' and 'active' audience theories. The more successful responses focused on audience theories rather than communication theories, though many students successfully introduced an audience theory via a relevant communication theory/model. This is evident in the following extracts from student responses.

*The Reinforcement Theory, established by Joseph Klapper in the 1960's, is a reception theory which positions the media as having very little power in shaping public opinion. Here Klapper theorised that the media only re-emphasises and reiterates to people, and audiences what they already believe, it also suggests that people are much more influenced by the family, friends and peers than they are by the media.*

*Audiences can be either active or passive. When audiences are active they actively engage with the media, deciding which content they wish to consume and how they wish to consume it. When audiences are passive they are influenced entirely by the media – they are usually unable to make objective choices or decisions in regards to media consumption.*

## Question 3a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	24	24	52	1.3

This question offered students an alternative way of showing their understanding of media theory by applying a suitable communication theory or model to the quote by Cheryl Olson. Most students performed well on this question by explaining various reception theories such as Joseph Klapper's 1960 Reinforcement theory, or the Uses and Gratification theory developed by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch in 1974.

A small number of students employed a communication theory that opposed the premise of the quote or misinterpreted what the question was asking them to do. Diagrams and sketches were frequently used to support a written response but offered little additional information and rarely provided a clear visual of a communication model in isolation.

The following example adequately applies a communication theory.

*The uses and gratification theory applies to this. Olson concludes that if you are 'generally respectful' media 'will not negatively impact you'. The children use video games for 'normal' behaviour. It does not impact their behaviour, they use the video games for personal gratification.*

## Question 3b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	34	27	39	1.1

This question gave students the opportunity to identify the premise of a communication theory mentioned in Question 3a. Some students were too concise, noting only a very brief assumption of what the theory is essentially based on. For example; the following response identifies an assumption correctly.

*The major assumption of the Uses and Gratification theory is that the audience uses the media for their own purposes. This consequently suggests that if audiences use media such as violent video games for entertainment purposes the only purpose and effect they will receive from this will be entertainment. This theory also makes the assumption that the media have very little power and influence over audiences.*

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## Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	18	33	48	1.3

This question was well answered by students, demonstrating an understanding of the two main forms or categories of media regulation in Australia: ‘government’ and ‘industry’ or ‘self-regulation’. Many students provided examples of two or more organisations to show their understanding of the forms, then went on to briefly mention what that organisation does in terms of media regulation. Limited responses listed inaccurately named organisations such as OFLC or merely stated ‘censorship’ as a form of regulation.

The following response answered the question well.

*There are two major forms of media regulation in Australia. The first is regulation of media at the hands of the government created bodies, to protect our society. (eg. ACMA who are responsible for online regulation and telecommunications regulation). As well as self-regulation (eg. Bodies such as the Advertising Standards Bureau, Free TV).*

## Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	18	19	34	16	13	1.9

Students were required to outline two arguments for media regulation together with relevant empirical or anecdotal evidence. Generally, arguments focused on protection of vulnerable groups such as children; for example, *many people in favour of media regulation comment that there is a need to protect children from violent and disturbing programs that could essentially have mental ramifications...* or civil rights and freedoms. Some students misinterpreted the question, which asked about arguments and evidence **for** media regulation, and instead answered generally or even argued against regulation. Little relevant evidence was provided to support the regulation of this, as it was largely anecdotal and very general. Use of appropriate empirical data, statistics or citing of case studies was minimal. Some students only provided two arguments with no evidence.

The following extract from a student response provides a clear argument along with relevant evidence.

*One major argument for the regulation of media is to protect vulnerable/susceptible audiences such as children from content which may harm them. The ARACY (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth) released a report which described how violent media can negatively effect and distress young children, upsetting their sleeping patterns and even leading to harmful and inappropriate thoughts. As children are seen as an investment in the future and brain development patterns in children mean that cognitive and thinking abilities are not fully formed, it is widely recognised that it is because of this, vulnerable audiences and in particularly children should be protected from material likely to harm them and hence it is necessary. Another major argument in favour of media regulation is to stop the monopolisation of the mass media. Many people believe that there should be a large number of opinions and ideas expressed in the media and hence just one person or organisation should not be completely in charge. ACMA aims to regulate this by ensuring that one person’s broadcasting licence does not reach more than 75% of the population and that there are a minimum of 5 ‘voices’ in metropolitan markets. This entails that there is a diversity in media, a reason why many believe regulation is vital.*

## Question 4c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	20	30	32	17	1.5

A wide range of examples of issues arising from the attempt to regulate media were mentioned in response to this question. These included the banning or censorship of materials, warnings or classification restrictions, filters or the timing and scheduling of programs, civil freedoms and rights. Most students were able to discuss an Australian media regulatory issue; however, fewer students provided any analysis. Though this was only a three-mark question, it still provided students with an opportunity to analyse their issue. The following response demonstrates this ability.

*In a modern society such as Australia, one issue in attempting to regulate the media is trying to find a balance between protecting vulnerable and susceptible audiences while still allowing adults to access material which they want to use. An example of this has been the regulation of video games by the Australian Classifications Board. Currently, there are only ratings for games from G (General) to MA 15+. As a result, any material deemed too violent for the MA 15+ category has been refused classification. One of the chief principles of the Commonwealth Classification act which the Classifications board adheres to is that adults should be able to see, hear and read what they want to while minors should still be protected from harmful content. As a result an issue has arisen as not all adults are able to play games which they want to because many can exceed this MA 15+ category and thus are illegal to buy or sell. As a result, as of 1st January 2013 the Classifications Board will introduce an R18+ category for video games. This resolves the issue of adults not being able to access content which they want to, but then creates the new potential problem of minors potentially being more easily able to access material which could harm them.*