



GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2008 examination gave students the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the key knowledge as outlined in the *Media VCE Study Design*. Many responses suggested that students had not focused on these basics, or had focused on only one or two aspects of an item of key knowledge. These weaknesses were exacerbated when students used only one or two words of a question as the prompt for a response, rather than looking at what the whole question asked them to do. Details of these problems were also noted in last year's Assessment Report.

Many responses used texts that did not always give students the best opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge. In Section A, the focus is on an almost forensic dissection of how a media text constructs its narrative. This is different from an aesthetic or critical review. For this reason, many of the better responses used well crafted narratives rather than artistic or innovative texts. Again, *Run Lola Run* and *Psycho* were texts used inappropriately or poorly by many students. Students who used the same texts in Sections A and B also had difficulties demonstrating the different abilities required for each section, as did those who used texts from different media formats (for example, cinema and television) in Section A.

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	Average
%	7	31	38	24	1.8

Students were asked to demonstrate their understanding of how one of three nominated production elements contributed to the audience's engagement with the text. Many students who chose to write on acting too often wrote about the actions of a character, rather than the acting techniques and skills employed by the actor. Similarly, many students who chose to write on sound saw this in very limited terms. For some, the sound seemed to be little more than a pop song on the soundtrack. More developed answers showed that students were aware of all the potential elements of the soundtrack – dialogue, a narration, sound effects, the impact of sound mixing, diegetic and non-diegetic music, as well as sometimes the effective use of silence. The third element students could write about was 'camera/film/video techniques and qualities.' Again, too many responses suggested that students had not been guided by the terminology of the key knowledge in the study design in analysing their texts. Some responses confused this production element with others such as visual composition or editing.

It was expected that responses would also address the issue of how the element **engaged** the audience. This was best done by a specific example, rather than general statements that could have applied to any number of texts.

The following extracts explored acting and sound, and clearly linked examples with the effect on the audience.

The acting of Hugh Jackman in X-Men 2 as the character of Wolverine portrays him with anamalisitic tendencies. He is portrayed with a heightened, heavy gait, allowing the audience to see the power invested in the character. Jackman also uses physical motifs in his facial gestures such as sniffing his nose and raising his ears, communicating anamalisitic heightened senses. This engages the audience with his character allowing them to observe the characters inner self through his physical stature and nuance.

Noise (2007) directed by Matthew Saville uses sound to contribute to the audience's engagement in a number of ways. The opening sequence depicts the character Lavynia Smart walking through a train station underpass. The sounds of construction work and trains can be heard as well as the sound of her MP3 device playing music through headphones. Diagetitc sound is used to position the audience in the perspective of a witness, rather than hear what the character herself is hearing. This production technique immediately creates an eary effect and sets the audience, so they feel on edge.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	9	14	22	24	16	10	5	2.7



This question allowed students to demonstrate their understanding of how production elements and story elements are combined to establish a relationship between characters. Students were able to nominate the elements they wished to explore. This gave them an opportunity to choose the strongest possible examples from their particular texts. However, it also exposed students whose exploration of their texts or of the key knowledge was inadequate. Too many students were unable to identify appropriate elements correctly, or confused story and production elements. Often a small part of an element was discussed as though it was the whole element, showing a misunderstanding of the essential nature of that element. For example, one story element is the ‘establishment and development of the character(s) and relationships between characters.’ Some weaker responses collapsed this to mean only ‘characters’ and wrote in a way more appropriate to a literary appreciation of a story, rather than an objective deconstruction of the fabric of a narrative.

Plot or storyline are not elements, however these terms are parts of elements. ‘Cause and effect’ is a story element, but it is a chain process, not a single motivating event. Costume is another example of an aspect chosen by some students as a separate production element. (It could be discussed as one aspect of mise en scene.)

Some students wrote adequately about one or both elements, but were not able to show how these elements **combined** to establish the relationship between two characters. The following extract suggests how the student’s chosen production element (visual composition) and story element (setting) were effectively combined.

The use of setting and visual composition is combined in Shopgirl to construct the initially awkward, imbalanced relationship between Mirabelle and Jeremy. Their inability to appear in the same frame due to their vast special relationship complements the cold, vast and entirely unromantic setting of the Laundromat in the scene when they first meet, dispelling any notions that the two could be ‘counterpart[s]’. As Jeremy is initially sat on a chair when he converses with the standing Mirabelle, there is an obvious uncomfortableness in their spacial relationship that translates into the hierachy of their relationship in reality – Mirabelle seems ‘above’ him. Also, after their first date, the setting of outside Mirabelle’s door reflects that, like her door, she is ‘closed’ to the idea of allowing Jeremy into her life....

Question 3

Question 3a.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	66	34	0.4

Question 3b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	65	14	11	10	0.7

This question asked about one of the items of key knowledge, ‘the relationship between text, reception context and audience experience, expectations and response...’. The number of incorrect or blank responses was disturbing, and points to the necessity for all students and teachers to be aware of all aspects listed as ‘Key knowledge’ in the study design. The second part of the question gave students the opportunity to use their personal experiences to explain the concept.

A high-scoring response demonstrated an insightful understanding of reception context and the potential effect of this on audience experience or understanding. Relevant examples were used to illustrate and broaden the discussion.

The following is a strong response.

(a) (Reception context is...) The way in which a media text is received/viewed. For example in a cinema, at home on a small television with interruptions, or at a different time period to when the text was made.

(b) When watching ‘psycho’ by Alfred Hitchcock our teacher tried to get us to watch it as was intended but some unavoidable things affected the context of reception. Because we watch the film during school hours bells to indicate the beginning of class time interrupted our viewing and we were required to watch over a number of different lessons/sittings. Hitchcock intended for ‘psycho’ to be screened at a cinema and once inside nobody was aloud to enter or leave the room causing a dissrupation. Another affect on our reception of this film was the time in which it was viewed. In 2008 the values, quality of films and technology is more advanced than in 1960 when ‘psycho’ was made ...

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	8	4	7	10	10	14	11	12	9	7	5	3	1	5.3



Students who scored well composed an integrated discussion incorporating all the elements of the question. These responses showed a thorough and accurate grasp of all production and story elements, and an understanding of how these elements combine to create and sustain a narrative. They could dissect their texts to reveal the structural practices used by the directors. Again, it is important to recognise that this study of narrative is focussed on how a narrative is structured, rather than an aesthetic response to cultural or psychological themes. It is the architecture that is being explored.

Many responses suggested that students did not understand the range of story and production elements that a director can call upon. ‘Cause and effect’ was often described as though it was a single event, rather than as a chain structure. Often the important opening sequence was not seen as the foundation on which the whole text was constructed. For some students, it was no more than the film’s establishing shot. Tiny moments were sometimes written about at great length, without showing any understanding of how they may demonstrate principles used in constructing the text.

This question also asked students to **compare** the use of the elements and the opening sequences. Too many students wrote about one text, and then about their other text. A good comparison would be able to show how different directors perhaps used different elements to develop their narratives, or would show ways in which different narratives still used particular elements in similar ways.

The following extracts are from one student’s response and show how comparisons can be integrated to produce a high-scoring result.

The opening sequence in Clint Eastwood’s ‘A Perfect World’ begins with a fairly close-up shot of Butch lying in the grass, with a Casper mask lying next to him and money being blown across his face. There is a very subtle score, and no diegetic sound other than the rustling of the wind. This scene sets up a number of questions as to who the character is, what the significance of the mask and money are, why he is lying in the grass (dead or sleeping?) among others. The next scene in the opening sequence is a sharply contrasting dark, dirty-looking breakout sequence, where Butch (and his co-escapee) is introduced. On the other hand ‘Blow Out’s opening sequence does not introduce any of the main characters for a number of minutes although it does provide information about Jack

In terms of narrative/story effects, both opening sequences provide information about cause and effect. However, A Perfect World provides the effect first (Butch dead – the ultimate conclusion of the film) then the cause (escaping from jail. On the other hand, Blow Out provides a cause (the need for a new Scream) and an effect that in turn is another cause (recording the murder.)

In terms of technical elements, they are starkly contrasting in each film, reflecting the nature of its closing. A Perfect World is bright and sunny, with an almost calming score, demonstrating that even though Butch is dead, Phillip is now home and safe with his family. On the other hand, Blow Out is dark, dingy and ultimately hopeless....whilst the sound includes that of Sally’s dying scream.

Section B – Social values

In this section of the study, it is basic that students can accurately identify the social values in their text. However, the marks for Question 1 indicate that many students could not do this and this problem usually fed into the responses for the rest of the section. Responses showed that an interesting and wide range of texts is being used to explore the relationship between a text’s production period and the resulting texts. These included vintage television series, comics, advertisements and contemporary movies. Some texts, however, again caused problems. Interestingly, texts that seem to be specifically exploring social **issues** are sometimes more problematical, making it difficult for students to separate the social values of the time from the political or social statements that the text may be making. It must be clear that the period or location of the story is not always the period of its production (although students did not confuse *The Flintstones* with its production period). Students using very recent texts frequently had difficulties in seeing emerging values, in the way that as a society we sometimes do not recognise new social values until some time after they have emerged. Also, some texts (for example, single page advertisements) frequently did not provide students with enough material to explore the required responses for this question in depth.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	28	28	45	1.2

Many students were able to articulate the social values in their texts. Acceptable examples included:

- that physical appearance is more important than intelligence
- that family is important
- that knowledge is power.



However, again there were too many responses that used terms that were not acceptable as the statement of a social value. In other words, no actual attitude could be discerned. Terms such as ‘roles of women’, ‘materialism and wealth’, ‘globalisation’ and ‘national security’ do not reflect a social value, although these may be areas where social values can be seen. In regards to the roles of women, specific social values required articulation, for example, ‘A woman’s role is in the home as a housewife’ or ‘It is important for women to have the opportunity for a career outside the home’.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	16	38	32	15	1.5

It was expected that students would be able to show the **causative** influence of contemporary social values on their chosen text. Too many responses only provided an example of how a social value could be seen in their text. Students could have shown how the storyline was a response to attitudes, or how a character embodying certain values was presented positively or negatively, or how the ending provided an outcome in which people with certain values were seen as being rewarded or punished.

The following is an observation made by a student writing about the 1967 film, *In the Heat of the Night*, and shows an understanding of the connection between the social value and the way the text represented various characters.

The social value that African Americans are equal to white people influenced the content in the representations – Virgil Tibbs – main African American was depicted as smarter, more professional than white people in the film e.g. Bill Gillespie e.t.c. and also succeeds despite adversities – thus the storyline was influenced – African American succeeds against white people. Also the way in which Virgil gained respect of white authority figure – Bill Gillespie (police chief) was influence by this. [Director] Norman Jewison specifically made these this way due to social value.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	7	10	19	23	18	13	6	4	3.2

A text can reflect the social values of its period in many ways, and good responses were alert to this. Some students showed how the story line was a direct response to particular values, or how a certain actor was cast to reflect attitudes to their role and the values represented by that character. Where appropriate, these students understood that the tone of the text was also important in understanding how it reflects the values of its era. Weaker students frequently missed the satirical edge or sense of irony in their text. This was especially noticeable in responses where students wrote about animated texts (for example, *Daria*, *The Simpsons*, *The Flintstones*) as though they were documentary films. It is often not what a character says that reveals the social values, but the way it is presented. For example, in *They’re a Weird Mob*, the person who makes racist, anti-migrant comments is presented as a drunk and is ‘punished’ for his comments by falling into Sydney Harbour so the audience can laugh at him and reject his comments.

The question obviously needed reference to important elements of the production period. Surprisingly, many students neglected to do this. Or, where their text was set in a period other than its production period, they did not explore this.

The following extract deals with a text from the 1960s, but set several decades earlier (*Bonnie and Clyde*). Its strengths include the ability to differentiate clearly between the values of the era when the story was set, and the values of the period when the film was made.

[in Bonnie and Clyde] the so called ‘generation gap’ of the 1960s between youth and their parents is embodied in the relationship between C.W. Moss and his father. This relationship also demonstrates that adults cannot be trusted, when C.W.’s father sets up Bonnie and Clydes capture and execution. An emerging social value in 1960’s America was that people should rebel against the establishment be it government or institutions. America’s involvement in the Vietnam War provoked mass questioning and rebellion of and against the American government by the youth movement. In Bonnie and Clyde, blatant disregard for rules, laws and establishment is shown through the fact that the Barrow gang rob banks and fight authority. They make a living from rebelling against set law and authority, an act synonymous with the anti-war and establishment rebellion among American youth.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	14	9	15	17	17	11	9	5	3	3.3

Many students scored poorly on this question. Many responses did not show an understanding of the concept of **representation**, but it is a key analytical tool in exploring the relationship between a text and how its creation is affected by the social values of its era. Although these responses may have identified appropriate dominant and



emerging social values, the response was considered inadequate where it did not show how these values were reflected in various representations in the text. This may have meant exploring the way in which a particular character may also have operated as a representation of a particular value. Or how a family in the text may have been presented as a 'typical' family, thereby representing what was seen as the ideal family in that period.

Society is often not aware of new emerging values at the time they begin to emerge. For this reason, students using very current texts (for example, *Choir of Hard Knocks*) had some difficulty with this element of the question. The following response used the 1970s television sitcom, *Good Times*, and clearly examines how dominant and/or emerging social values are reflected in the representations contained in the text.

Good Times includes a number of representations that reflect the dominant and emerging values of the era in which it was produced. The Evans family for example is a representation of the dominant social value of the importance of the family unit; while the son Michael is a representation of the emerging social value of criticising authority. The strong nuclear family unit was clearly a dominant value in the 1970'.... This value of the family is strongly represented in the Evans family. While they fight and encounter conflict (as is convention in sitcoms) eventually they all come together at the end, usually shown as one in a 5-shot, such as at the end of 'Getting Up the Rent' which reinforces to the audience the importance of the strong family unit.

[The importance of criticising] the government and authority was an emerging social value at the time of production after the Watergate Scandal in 1973. This value is represented in the character of Michael who at various points gets suspended from school, criticises Nixon and regularly stands up to his parents. While these views are represented in the show through the character of Michael the show doesn't completely support these emerging values due to the fact that Michael is only a child, giving his views less importance...

Section C – Media Influence

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	8	21	35	36	2

Media researchers usually develop theories or models as a way of exploring any perceived influence on audiences. As these theories or models are the basis for students to develop their own understanding of media influence, it is essential that students can accurately and succinctly outline the essential elements of the major theories. This question gave students the chance to demonstrate this, and overall, showed that many students have this ability. These responses were able to present an outline of a chosen theory, in a way that made it clear that this was a theory, not a proven (or disproved) idea. Following are two examples of this.

The agenda-setting function theory focuses on what the audience does with the information being sent to it. The theory suggests that while a media text can't tell an audience what to think, it can suggest or tell them what to think about, raising an issue so that they can make up their own mind.

The hyperdermic/bullet theory was developed ...in the 1920s/1930s... It suggests that media texts are closed – only have the one desired interpretable meaning and audiences are passive – take the media message in without interference or question – often referred to as 'sitting ducks'. This theory suggests that audiences receive the message like a bullet or needle (note the name) and thus only get one meaning without interference.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	20	29	30	15	6	1.6

The remaining questions in this section expected that students would have explored the possible implications of media influence. Strong responses showed an awareness of current, relevant debates in the media. Weaker responses tended to rely only on data from research on the theories (for example, the Bobo doll experiment or the broadcast of *War of the Worlds*.) Some of these responses suggested that students had not read the question carefully, or were answering a question they thought would be asked.

Examples cited included: the possible influence of media on childhood obesity, the potential impact on children of violence in television, even the potential impact on possible jurors of the *Underbelly* television series case. The following example explored concerns about video games and offers a response that identifies groups who have criticised media content and details how the opinions and values of audiences have been influenced.

The release of violent video games such as 'Grand Theft Auto' and 'Doom' have been claimed recently to have encouraged and provoked violent acts by gamers. The repeated exposure to violent situations has raised concern amongst groups, from religious parties to mothers, that these games are in fact causing replications in real-life scenarios, such as the 1990s Columbine shooting.



It is of concern to some that gamers are accepting the content of games as almost true-to-life, blurring the line between artificial and realised violence and causing real-life turmoil.....

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	19	14	22	20	13	8	3	2.3

This question did not ask students to give their opinion on any form of regulation. However, it gave them the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of various calls for regulation, and to show their ability to present a range of arguments objectively. Many students were able to show this ability, presenting a clear picture of how their chosen media form is regulated, and the reasons advanced by various interest groups and lobbyists for maintaining or changing this regulation. Weaker responses often only presented the argument for regulation, without addressing the frequently used counter arguments, such as ‘freedom to view or choose’.

The following excerpt from a response on video games includes data on the current situation, and arguments for and against that regime.

Currently the maximum game rating a video game can receive in Australia (from the OFLC – Office of Film and literature classification) is MA15+, games decided above this are refused classification (RC). One such game is Fallout 3, due to its use of drugs in a positive light (as powerups/energy)... While some see this as censorship others see it as merely protecting those who need protection. Those who are against the current gaming classification laws suggest the average gamer age is 28 and this is old enough to decide, furthering their arguments by suggesting that there is no irrefutable proof that media does in fact influence us. Those who support the law suggest that the immersive nature of games require more stringent constrictions than that of film and argue that we are merely protecting those who need protecting and preventing another Columbine.....

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	10	16	22	22	14	9	5	2	2.7

This question identified students who were very comfortable using their knowledge about a range of models and theories about media influence to explore and present their own ideas. Weaker students tended to see this as a question only about ‘susceptible audiences’, not seeing that perhaps even susceptible audiences create their own (albeit perhaps erroneous) understandings of a text.

The following extract is from a basic response, but it clearly uses knowledge about a range of theories to explore the student’s own ideas.

I believe that this is an accurate description of audience’s relation to the media, as different texts can be interpreted very differently by different people. The post-modern theory of communication states that the media maker cannot endow the product with any meaning, that only the consumer can do this. Bullet theory on the other hand is quite the opposite, stating that the audience can and will understand the message the producer is claiming to send, that there is no room for interpretation. I believe that the truth lies between these two extremes that the product maker can confer a specific meaning to be understood, but that it is possible for some people to miss that message and come away with their own interpretation.