

2018 VCE Media written examination report

General comments

The 2018 Media written examination reflected the *VCE Media Study Design 2018–2022* and was in a new format. Questions provided opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills drawn from the Areas of Study in Units 3 and 4 as well as the cross-study specifications applicable to all units of study.

Students generally found the examination accessible, with most attempting all questions. The breadth of approaches to this study facilitated by the study design was evident in the range of media products, topics and issues referenced in responses. The effective use of explicit media terminology was evident in high-scoring responses.

Students are advised to familiarise themselves with the language and terminology of Units 3 and 4 as contained in the study design, the cross-study specifications published on pages 8–11 of the same document, together with the examination specifications and advice, and other material published on the VCAA Media webpage.

The year 2018 saw the reintroduction of the school-assessed task in the end-of-year examination. It was apparent that students had not adequately prepared for questions on this Area of Study. Responses were overly general and did not address the preambles, the outcome statements and the key knowledge and key skills associated with Unit 3, Areas of Study 2 and 3, and Unit 4, Area of Study 1 with the specificity required.

It is particularly important that students respond specifically to the questions asked. Many questions required students to discuss or explain how an aspect of media works. Most students were able to demonstrate an understanding of the subject of the question but were unable to explain how it worked. Students should spend time unpacking the requirements of each question to ensure that they respond appropriately and include either all or only that material required. Crafting a response to a question is a skill that comes with practice. Students will generally have a range of possibilities from which to choose when considering their responses and should use reading time to consider which are the most appropriate in order to write to the best of their ability.

Students are reminded to indicate in the question and answer book if they have continued writing a response in the extra space for responses.

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 answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A

Narrative and ideology

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	4	26	45	24	1.9

Most students were able to outline an example of how a media code or convention has been used to convey meaning in one media narrative. Some students who wrote about film or television narratives confused the difference between acting, casting and characters, referring to characters as acting rather than the actor playing the role. Low-scoring responses named a code or convention but did not address how it was used to convey meaning.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Andrew Goldie's 2017 photographic narrative Laid Bare features 30 digital colour stylized portraits of a range of people from different cultural backgrounds shot on Bondi Beach. One image features a character of African descent shot from a low angle, posed proudly, hand on hip, with the iconic Bondi beach in the background. Lighting has been utilised through the combination of warm natural light with artificial magenta and blue frontal lighting conveying the idea that Australia is a positive and successful multicultural nation where citizens of all races live together in harmony.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	5	12	15	20	17	14	11	6	3.5

Students referred to a wide range of codes and conventions in their responses and were generally able to select an appropriate part of a narrative on which to write. Parts varied according to the media form the student had studied (e.g. the opening, an act, the introduction of a character or establishment of relationships between characters, the climax, a page, scene, image or shot). Some students struggled with the requirement to write about one part of a narrative, instead discussing two or more parts, such as opening and closure or an entire character arc, which hindered their ability to score highly. Students did not always select codes and conventions that were appropriate to the discussion of one part of a narrative.

This question required students to discuss how codes and conventions worked together to convey meaning in one part of one narrative. Many students wrote about the selected codes and conventions separately rather than focusing on how they worked together. Students who scored highly were able to explicitly discuss their understanding of how the selected codes and conventions worked in conjunction with one another to suggest or construct meaning, as is evident in the following high-scoring response.

In Bruce Miller's 2017 dystopic television series The Handmaids Tale the codes camera techniques and sound together with conventions story arc and point of view are utilised to convey sympathy for the main character June Osborne. The opening scene features June, her daughter Hannah and husband Luke fleeing from the authorities of Gilead. Beginning with a bird's eye view shot on an abandoned highway, the car veers off as June runs holding Hannah and leaving Luke behind. The two run aimlessly and the bird's eye view cuts to a handheld tracking shot suggesting panic, which is reinforced by an ominous low-pitched asynchronous foreboding sound portraying danger. A close up of June together with an asynchronous diegetic sound of a gunshot begins a sequence where the sounds in June's surroundings become muffled displaying her disoriented point of view. The camera cuts to an extreme close up of June's fearful eyes prompting audiences to sympathise with June and setting up numerous

story arcs and narrative possibilities as the fate of June and Hannah leave audiences in suspense.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	6	21	40	25	8	2.1

This question required students to explain how a media code and/or convention was used to create audience engagement in one media narrative. Audience engagement is the key to narrative success and may occur in a range of physical, intellectual, emotional and psychological forms. Students were generally able to provide responses that identified a media code and/or convention and a form of audience engagement, but fewer students were able to explain how one was used to create the other.

The following is an excerpt from a high-scoring response.

In Loving sound is introduced in the form of a musical theme to engage the audience as it evokes emotions and appeals to the audience's empathy for the characters through the recurring score 'Loving' by Ben Nichols which is inspiring and uplifting though its use of major chords and slow tempo. This evokes a level of sadness, despite the hope it suggests, which serves to emotionally engage the audience with the film and its characters.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	5	10	20	31	20	10	4	3

This question asked students to explain why audience readings made by the intended audience may be different from readings made by present-day audiences. It was evident from student responses that many students were unable to distinguish between the consumption and reading of media narratives.

Students generally demonstrated a limited understanding of the notion of a reading and how audience readings are a product of the time and place of consumption.

Many students were also unable to differentiate between literal and symbolic readings. This was evident in responses to older narratives that were wholly or partially satirical in nature such as *The Stepford Wives* and *Bewitched*.

A number of students misread the question and wrote subjective and unsupported suppositions on how a modern narrative might have been interpreted by audiences in the past. These responses were the result of students making a poor judgment about the narrative they would use to answer the question or, in the case where they had studied two contemporary narratives such as *House of Cards* and *Get Out*, an understanding that readings can change over a very short period of time.

Some students writing on narratives that were set in a different time from that of their production, such as *The Dressmaker* and *Hidden Figures*, were unable to express an understanding of how these narratives reflected or commented on the context of the ideologies of the society in which they were produced.

Media production process

Question 5a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	7	38	37	18	1.7

Responses indicated that this question challenged many students. Responses generally did not address the question, which required students to explain how the exploration of style and genre undertaken for Unit 3, Area of Study 2 informed their media production design. Students were able to write about what they had done but often did not address how this learning informed their production design. Higher-scoring responses were able to draw the link between the two, as the following high-scoring response shows.

In my exploration of style and genre I examined the framing and use of colour by photographer Loretta Lux as well as the development of genre in Taika Waititi's short film Two Cars, One Night, which was 'happy sad cinema'. This informed the development of my design for my short film 'Pulse Checking' as it inspired the development of a style that focussed on colour to evoke emotions such as the use of selective colour to evoke loneliness and also enabled storylines and narrative to be developed based on the context of exploring tragedy through humour.

Question 5b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	5	38	41	17	1.7

This question allowed students to demonstrate how their research and experimentation informed the development of their production. While students mostly wrote about the impact of their research and experimentation on their production design, others revealed the impact of this work during production and post-production.

As in Question 5a., responses tended to state what students had done but did not address how experimentation with media technologies and production processes informed the development of their media production. Responses were overly broad, lacking the specificity required by the question.

Some responses indicated approaches to Unit 3, Area of Study 2 that were more aligned to those of the previous study design rather than addressing the outcome statement and key knowledge and skills required by the study design.

High-scoring responses were able to demonstrate a clear link between student research, experimentation and the development of a media production, as is illustrated by the following response.

During the experimentation for my comic I developed skills in animating as my comic was an animated webcomic. In experimentation I trialled Adobe Flash and Photoshop timelines to create animations. I decided that Photoshop had the flexibility of illustrative live work therefore used this in the development of my production. After trials I established a technique to animate efficiently by making frames out of layers.

Question 6

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	7	37	39	18	1.7

This question allowed students to write about how their understanding of audience informed any aspect of their production design. Most students wrote about audience engagement, with a few discussing matters of consumption or reception. Again, responses tended to be overly general,

both in terms of students' understanding of their audience and their explanation of how their production design was crafted for this audience. Higher-scoring responses were explicit in both, as the following excerpt demonstrates.

As my film encompassed heavy cultural themes and my intended audience was the children of parents of South East Asian descent I made several conscious decisions to enhance the viewing experience and engender engagement by incorporating many aspects that my audience would be familiar with and would resonate with them. I included Sinhalese dialogue and cultural music and also placed appropriate props as would be found in the homes of those of Sri Lankan descent in the mis en scene so that the audience could relate to the plot through their personal experience and feel a deeper connection with the story.

Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	3	10	19	28	23	13	4	3.2

Students were asked to explain how reflection and feedback processes helped them refine or resolve their media product. Most students focused on post-production, although reflection and feedback may occur at any stage of the production process. Students wrote about improving the quality of sound, narrative rhythm, editing and cutting of scenes, colour grading, timing, titles, text placement and spelling, page layout, the selection of typographical elements, image enhancement techniques, printing issues and anomalies, and the need for reshoots of particular scenes or shots.

Students tended to write at length about what they had done in terms of self-reflection and seeking feedback, which was not the focus of the question, but struggled to explain how this helped them refine or resolve their media product. It was clear that students had not adequately prepared for questions on this area of study.

Of concern were responses in which highly formalised feedback techniques resulted in students losing control over their production. Such feedback was in the form of surveys or voting about what should be included in the production and what should not. It is in the nature of feedback that the recipient reflects on the information they have received and chooses the approach that best suits their creative intent, audience and skill level. Students should, at all times, retain control of their own production.

The following excerpt from a high-scoring response reveals one approach to using feedback.

The feedback and reflection process allowed me to build a clearer narrative context with my audience as well as making the character intent behind my protagonist much clearer. After feedback I added in voice-overs from my protagonist, presenting his emotions in a given scene. Prior to this my audience had struggled to understand his emotional connection to the main location of the narrative, which led to the film's closure being moderately received due to its lack of emotional resonance with the audience. Adding the voiceover gave the character more emotional depth.

Agency and control in and of the media

Question 8

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	25	46	21	6	2.1

This question included a prompt, asking students to describe what two images suggested about changes in the relationship between the media and its audiences. A wide variety of approaches were possible when responding to the question, with students writing about how technological changes had affected access to media, the ideas of consumption, context and reading of media

products, the demise of traditional notions of mass audiences, changes in social and family dynamics as a result of the development of individualised media technologies, programming in a post-broadcast environment and changes in the relative power of media proprietors and audiences.

While most students were able to respond to the question, a large number misread its intent and simply described the content of the images, interpreted them as suggesting an erroneous dichotomy between so-called passive and active audiences, or wrote on the death of family relationships despite the family in the second image sitting together and smiling. Students are reminded that discussions of media issues are rarely black and white. Higher-scoring responses took a more balanced approach, writing that the images suggested individuals have very personal and individualised experiences with the media, as the following response shows.

The image on the left suggests that in the broadcast era of the 1950s audiences took their information from a single source and therefore receiving the same message (although they may not read it in the same way), whereas the image on the right signifies the shift to multiple sources suggesting that over time audiences have gained agency over both the media form and the messages they consume and that they now have the power to be prosumers, producing and consuming at the same time.

Question 9

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	7	10	20	27	20	12	5	3

This question asked students to evaluate the impact of one ethical or legal issue on at least one of the following: production, distribution, consumption or reception of a media product. The breadth of this question saw a range of topics used as the basis of responses. These included: user-generated content, Netflix, privacy, Cambridge Analytica, #metoo, piracy, copyright, body image, the power of social media and the use of tracking apps. Most students were able to identify and discuss the effect of an ethical or legal issue but fewer were able to evaluate its impact. The evaluation of issues related to media agency and/or control is an important skill that students should practise in preparation for assessment. The following high-scoring response demonstrates this skill.

Through virtual voice assistant Alexa Amazon is able to curate content to appeal to its customers, relying on data aggregation and predictive analytics to forge a marketable identity. Amazon overrides the suggestion of invasiveness that the product embodies through ads that are light and innocent. 35% of Amazon's revenue is driven by recommendations alone, this has proved to be a compelling enhancement to marketing techniques. However, as the recommendation process is comprised of a key chain of personal details, credentials and bank information, the risk of exposure to identity theft may become a harsh reality. In 2011 Sony was affected by an external hack that breached the privacy of its PlayStation users. Sony failed to take action for 7 days by which time the users were unable to take sufficient preventative measures against the threat. This raises the question of the integrity of corporations to protect the user base they rely on and a concern for the willingness of companies to exploit the growing societal dependence on these media products and services.

Question 10

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	15	22	35	21	7	1.9

This question asked students to describe one rationale for regulating the relationship between the media and its audiences in Australia. Students generally referenced the Classification Board, ACMA, Ad Standards, the Broadcasting Services Act, Free TV, the Australian Content Standard

and various industry codes of practice. However, many responses did not directly address the question and instead simply mentioned one reason for regulating the media, such as ‘to protect vulnerable audiences’, rather than explaining the rationale. Higher-scoring responses responded specifically to the question, as in the following example.

One reason for the regulation of the media and audience relationship in Australia is to protect the cultural identity of Australia. The Australian Content Standard (part of the Broadcasting Services Act) mandates that 55% of content shown on TV in Australia be Australian produced to help ensure that the film and television industry in Australia is maintained and reduce foreign cultural influences on Australian audiences through the prevalence of mainly American programs. This regulation reduces the cultural power and influence of other countries on Australian audiences.

Question 11

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	9	12	21	27	18	9	4	2.8

For this question students were required to identify and describe one issue relating to the way in which the media is used today by globalised media and individuals. Most students were able to identify and describe a relevant issue, such as Netflix regulation, YouTube programming and regulation, fake news, advertising on social media platforms, geoblocking, intellectual property theft through the use of VPNs, or the power of Facebook. Fewer students wrote about both global institutions and individuals, which affected their marks for this question. It is important to address all aspects of a question. Higher-scoring responses chose an issue appropriate to describing the relationship between globalised media and individuals. The following high-scoring response demonstrates this integrated approach.

In today's globalised society with institutions and individuals using media for their own ends the issue of illegal downloading and streaming has arisen. The introduction of Web 2.0 technologies in 2005 saw easy access to media texts available throughout the world. Therefore, if an individual or institution does not have access they may turn to illegal streaming or downloading, an issue clearly prevalent as it is estimated that 25% of internet users use VPNs to avoid geoblocking or to access films and other content. Individuals are primed to expect instant access to media by using legal tools such as BBC's iPlayer and other streaming services. The success of 123movies before its deletion also demonstrates the widespread and globalised nature of the issue with 98 million monthly visitors to the site. Closure of these sites is usually temporary as their creators make a lot of money from advertising and as a result the film industry suffers through lack of legitimate revenue.

Section B

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	8	6	11	15	20	12	10	8	5	3	2	4.2

This question gave students great scope in terms of the selection of subject matter for their response. Students could analyse how narrative texts are shaped by either or both the ideological and institutional context of their production, distribution, consumption or readings. Students were expected to refer to more than one media narrative; those who wrote on only one did not score highly, again pointing to the need to break down the requirements of a question when planning a response.

Higher-scoring responses demonstrated a sound understanding of the ideological beliefs underpinning media narratives and how these impact every aspect of production, post-production,

distribution, consumption and audience readings. It was clear that many students struggled with the concept of ideology – a system of ideas and beliefs that form the basis of a society’s values, economic or political theory and policy and therefore the actions of those who believe in that ideology.

Many students demonstrated a limited and often erroneous understanding of the time and place in which the narratives they had studied were produced and/or consumed. While VCE Media is not a study of history, all media are informed by the historical contexts in which they exist, so broad statements about topics such as gender roles, persons of colour, interracial relationships or governments do not demonstrate an understanding of the finely tuned relationship between media narratives and society. This was particularly evident for those students who had studied narratives that were set in a time other than that of their production such as *Blade Runner* and *The Dressmaker*. Particular care should be given to equip students with the language to discuss such texts.

High-scoring responses used textual examples and media language precisely in support of analyses that demonstrated a sound grasp of the relationships between narratives and the context of their creation, distribution and reading. The following excerpt demonstrates this skill.

The TV series The New and Original Wonder Woman (1975) was produced in America when patriarchal ideology remained dominant yet second wave feminism, which focussed on reducing inequality between genders, was growing. At the time the women's liberation movement was occurring and feminist ideology was becoming a more widespread belief. Producers saw this as a new market due to an increasing demand for a female superhero protagonist. The series is shaped by this ideological context due to the production having to appeal to both feminist and patriarchal ideologies. To appeal to feminists Lynda Carter, a strong looking actress, was cast as Wonder Woman. To appeal to men she was costumed in a strapless and skimpy outfit. Camera work represented the male gaze but her dialogue and even the theme song 'Wonder Woman ... in your satin tights fighting for your rights' undercut the dominant ideology. A development of feminism is evident in the film Wonder Woman (2017) in which Wonder Woman, while still dressed in a skimpy outfit is told to 'Be wary in the world of men' and when learning about the work of a secretary comments that 'Where I come from that is called slavery'.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	8	6	11	13	15	16	13	9	6	2	1	4.3

This question allowed students to discuss the changing relationship between the media and audiences in one or more of globalised media institutions, governments and/or the individual. Students were able to write an in-depth response using any material pertaining to the dot points. A range of topics were used, including social media, the difficulty of administering government controls in an internet dependent world, the use of algorithms to direct audiences to content, the power of celebrity, propaganda, YouTube influencers, fandoms, gatekeeping, filter bubbles and changes to audience behaviours such as binge watching.

High-scoring responses were able to demonstrate a nuanced approach in which agency and control were not characterised as a dichotomy and in which media institutions and audiences both exhibit varying degrees of agency and control at different times and under different circumstances.

There was evidence of pre-prepared responses in which students did not respond to the question but wrote about everything they had learnt for this area of study. Many of these responses included irrelevant, erroneous and overly long descriptions of material that was better suited to the previous study design. These included descriptions of long out-of-date communication theories and media events such as *The War of the Worlds*. While such material can be used effectively in a discussion, memorising this material will not prepare students to respond to questions focused on

contemporary media agency and control. Communication theories, if used, are a tool for the analysis of agency and control in and of the media rather than the learning in itself, as was the case in the previous study design. Similarly, media events from the mid-twentieth century are better treated as curiosities of a time when our understanding of the media was less complex. Higher-scoring responses demonstrated the ability to select and analyse contemporary examples with authority and evidence, as is evident in the following excerpt.

An example of the dynamic and changing relationship between the media and its audiences is the 2107 Kylie Jenner tweet to her 125 million followers, ‘Does anyone use Snapchat any more?’ commenting on her dislike of a new update. This led fans to negatively review the app both on social media and the app store. The market value of Snapchat plummeted by millions of dollars. Some would call Jenner an ‘opinion leader’ and she is, but her behaviour is more like that of Seth Godin’s sneezer, she ‘sneezes’ her opinion on the internet and her followers catch the message like a virus. This is the power of media influencers in a social media world where likes and dislikes can have almost instantaneous and unexpected results.

New devices and technological developments have given audiences new ways of accessing and controlling the media. In Fortnight’s recent dance competition a failed competitor was ‘meme-ified’ all over social media and dubbed ‘Orange Justice’ to force the game developers to include him in the game, which they did after a substantial social media onslaught. Henry Jenkins’ spreadable and stickable media theory explains this outcome as a result of the meme being so sharable that it went viral as individuals shared with their friends to build social capital and the message stuck, which led to Fortnight players directing their agency towards a common goal and the developers realising that it was in their commercial interest to add the dance. The relationship between the media and audiences in this case is that the developers need the players just as the players need the developers and whilst this has always been the case, today this relationship is a dynamic and changing one.