

# 2019 VCE Media examination report

## General comments

Students responded well to the 2019 VCE Media examination. Most students attempted all questions, writing in depth and filling the spaces provided for them. Generally, students had prepared effectively and were able to craft responses appropriate to each question.

A few students appeared to have memorised prepared answers for last year's examination, which meant that they lacked the agility required to respond appropriately. Students are reminded that examination questions are drawn from the key knowledge and skills associated with all outcomes in Units 3 and 4. While preparation should include previous examination papers and sample questions provided by their teacher or commercially available material, the focus should be on developing knowledge and skills to respond with precision to any question arising from the key knowledge and skills.

Students who scored highly demonstrated knowledge of both the content they had studied and explicit use of the language of media. They could elaborate on their understanding using terms appropriate to the key knowledge and skills and cross-study specifications.

Some students did not make effective use of reading time to break down the requirements of each question. Many did not differentiate between the instructional verbs (e.g. identify, describe, analyse, explain, outline, discuss and evaluate). These terms are drawn from the key knowledge and skills and point to how students should be able to manipulate their knowledge.

Students are reminded that extended response questions do not require answers in essay form. Students may respond in any appropriate form.

For narrative and ideology questions, students wrote predominantly in the area of film but photography, sound (including podcasts) and print narratives were also represented. Online availability has clearly had a positive effect on the range of narratives available for study. Students engaged with contemporary media narratives in terms of the ideologies that frame them and their characteristics and construction, as well as audience reading and engagement. It was clear that students found these narratives relevant and appealing. Most responses on narrative and ideology questions were written on narratives released in the past five years. While students did write well on older narratives, answers revealed a tendency to rote responses and a weaker grasp of the ideological underpinnings of their creation and especially of audience engagement and readings.

When selecting narratives for study, it should be noted that all narratives are framed by ideologies in society and that it is not a requirement to study those that are overtly ideologically based. Students should be able to identify and evaluate the impact of one or more ideologies that inform any narrative selected for study.

Students responded with greater assurance to questions about their media production process. Preparation for questions on this area of study was evident although some students did not make an explicit link between the key knowledge and skills and their practice during production development, pre-production, production and post-production. It is important to develop these links in preparation for the examination.

Questions on agency, and control in and of the media, revealed engagement with current issues and examples. It was clear that students enjoyed the currency that this area of study allows and wrote authoritatively on wide-ranging topics, including the economic effects of Alan Jones's comments on Jacinta Ardern, the ethics of gaming loot boxes, Facebook live streaming, audience agency in relation to the creation of the new Sonic the Hedgehog character, press coverage of Cardinal George Pell's trial, reality television, deep fake videos, contemporary issues in protecting vulnerable audiences, TikTok, changed audience viewing patterns as a result of streaming services, the impact of We Chat on Australian Chinese users, Cambridge Analytica and social media. There was a wide range of contemporary subject matter and genuine engagement with these topics. Students were well equipped with a range of case studies and examples, with few writing on the same subjects across multiple questions.

## 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 1a.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	19	81	0.8

This question required students to identify an ideology that shaped one media narrative studied. Ideologies are systems of ideas and beliefs that form the basis of a society.

Responses included feminism, racial equality, environmentalism, national identity and black lives matter. Many students were unable to correctly identify an ideology, instead using terms that were vague, imprecise or too narrowly focused.

#### Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	7	28	40	25	1.8

This question required students to describe how the ideology identified in Question 1a. shaped the media narrative.

Successful responses described the influence of, for example, funding of a media narrative, scripting, casting, production design, location, plotlines, mise en scène and the construction of relationships between characters.

Higher-scoring responses explicitly described the complexities of how an ideology can shape a narrative, as is evident in the following response:

*The ideology of egalitarianism greatly influenced Tarantino’s portrayal of interracial relationships within his film ‘Django Unchained’. Tarantino epitomised the ideals of racial equality through his characterisation of the character Dr King Schultz. Symbolic of the notion that all people should be regarded as equal, the character is shown to treat all races with equality through the construction of his mannerisms and dialogue throughout the film. His eloquent vocabulary and optimistic vocal tone is supported by eyeline match in framing. The character acts as a catalyst for the empowerment of oppressed African Americans, allowing them to exert their own justice, as opposed to fulfilling the trope of white saviour.*

### Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	17	28	36	18	1.6

This question asked students to describe one characteristic of a media narrative they had studied. Students interpreted the term ‘characteristic’ in a variety of ways. Characteristics could be interpreted as the features or quality of a media narrative in a specific media form that have a particular impact on how audiences interpret, read, or engage with the media narrative. Characteristics differ widely not only between media forms (for example, film and photography), but also between similar media forms (such as film vs. video). For example, the characteristics of a widescreen film shot on location are different from those of a sitcom shot in video on a set. The characteristics of photographic and print media narratives will differ according to the physical form in which they exist. All approaches were acceptable. Some responses ignored the prompt and question and instead related storylines or descriptions of a scene.

High-scoring responses tended to integrate different approaches, as is evident in the following response:

*Music is a characteristic of film narrative. It is used to delineate genre and narrative structure in Get Out, a social thriller directed by Jordan Peele. The use of the common horror convention of suspenseful music (Swahili voices and black musical references composed by Michael Abels) and the strangely familiar strong beats, minor key and rising strings suggestive of a chase in the music composed by Timothy Williams together with ironic pop references in the form of Run Rabbit Run and I’ve Had the Time of My Life builds tension to explore the horror genre whilst communicating messages of racial discrimination, violence and oppression in America.*

### Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	3	4	16	30	26	16	6	3.5

Students generally wrote well in their analysis of the function of two media codes and/or conventions used to convey meaning, making effective use of the question to structure their responses. Some students chose to analyse each code and/or convention separately; others analysed a particular scene or shot to demonstrate their understanding of the function of codes and/or conventions in conjunction with one another.

High-scoring responses were comprehensive and insightful analyses, making effective use of highly relevant and detailed examples and evidence together with accomplished use of relevant media language, as the following example demonstrates:

*In Battle of the Sexes (2017) the function of colour as applied to the media codes of set design and costuming contribute to the construction of a mise en scène designed to convey the meaning of a changing society in 1973 America. Characters with traditional beliefs and values such as Jack Kramer and Bobby Riggs often wear white and are surrounded by white backgrounds demonstrating both their refusal to move forward and a lack of diversity. In*

*contrast characters such as Billie Jean King and Rosie Casals are often costumed in bright, flamboyant and diverse colours to represent their progressive beliefs. This symbolism is evident when Ted Tingling, a homosexual character, designs uniforms for the newly founded women's tournament. He exclaims that he is bringing colour to tennis for the first time while his partner jokes that the colour in these costumes will give the traditionalists a heart attack. This constructs the idea that the women's tournament is changing tennis to be more diverse and exciting.*

#### Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	9	8	14	20	20	16	9	4	3.4

This question asked students to analyse the relationship between one media narrative and the ideological context of its production. Students were required to refer to a narrative released in the last five years. It should be noted that when using television series that span a period longer than the last five years, students should be careful to write on those episodes that have been released within the designated time frame.

This question focused on the link between ideology and production, although many students ignored this link, instead writing about audience response and readings. This points to the value of breaking questions down before crafting a response, to ensure that the focus is appropriate to the question.

Effective responses demonstrated sophisticated and insightful analysis, with effective use of highly relevant and detailed evidence and examples, as was the case in the following example:

*Surrounding the release of Ex Machina (2014) there was increasing anxiety around the fear of surveillance due to the reports of individuals like Edward Snowden who revealed that the NSA was spying on American citizens by hacking their devices. This led to increased distrust in the government as citizens came to realise that such technology could be applied to anyone. This ideological context is reflected in the production of Ex Machina. The motif of surveillance is established through the code of editing as a digital scanning effect is composited on Caleb's face. Additionally the camera takes the perspective of Caleb's webcam, reinforcing the idea that he is being watched and alluding to the idea that no one is safe from surveillance. This idea is cemented through the code of lighting during power outages in the film. Caleb believes that the outages are moments of privacy however the red filtered lighting symbolises that he is still in danger. Thus Caleb is constantly being watched, directly paralleling the ideological context of the film's creation. Caleb, like all American citizens, is only given a sense of privacy whilst in fact is under constant surveillance.*

## Media production process

#### Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	12	12	22	25	20	10	2.6

Students were asked to explain how a structural and/or aesthetic quality that was evident in one or more media products that they had investigated in the developmental stage of their media production design could be read by audiences. The wording of this question, designed to elicit an explanation of student learning at a particular point of time in work undertaken for Unit 3 Area of Study 2, pointed to the value of students developing a sound approach to analysing what a question requires. Many students ignored the last part of the question, which dealt with audience readings. Instead they wrote about the media products they investigated but did not link this information to audience readings.

Students wrote on qualities evident in particular narratives studied, their study of genre or style and/or the body of work of particular practitioners and auteurs. A number of students did not identify the title of narratives referred to, which, while not a requirement of the question, did make it difficult to fully understand the context of their learning.

It was noticeable that students creating short films did not study the structural qualities of that form, relying instead on qualities of feature film for their learning. It is suggested that students working in film spend some time examining the short film form. Many issues identified in response to Questions 6 and 7 could be avoided with a better grasp of the structural and aesthetic qualities of short film form.

High-scoring responses made explicit reference to all parts of the question, making a clear link between structural and/or aesthetic qualities and audience readings, as is evident in the following response:

*In the development stage I investigated the aesthetic qualities of magazines such as Bikini Kill, Frankie and Riot Grrrl which created a distinct style for feminist political zines with images that possessed strong connotations (eg Riot Grrrl + black fist for black liberation). Therefore I researched the grunge qualities possessed by feminist zines in the 70s in an attempt to ensure that my zine would pay tribute to the historical lineage of producing alternative magazines. The aesthetic qualities of the media products I investigated could be read by contemporary audiences as dated as a lot of the images were in black and white during that time. However the use of black and white images which add to this grunge aesthetic could allow audiences to view my zine as revolutionary with an alternative style when compared to mainstream magazines.*

### Question 6

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	5	11	26	30	20	7	2.7

This question required students to explain how they had planned to engage their proposed audience through one media code or convention. The question required students to write about a specific time in the media production process, the production design. Many students ignored the specificity of the question, writing instead on the production process, for which they could not be awarded marks. All key knowledge and skills associated with media production in Units 3 and 4 are examinable and students should be prepared for questions specific to each outcome.

Students who identified audiences that were very broad or general such as ‘teenagers’ or ‘young people between the ages of 18–25’ were generally not able to respond with specificity. It is suggested that students spend time during their media design process focusing on the specific characteristics of their proposed audience and how media codes and conventions can be crafted to appeal to that audience.

High-scoring responses provided a thorough explanation that addressed all parts of the question, as is evident in the following response:

*I planned to engage my audience through a focus on character development within my 3 protagonists. My photographic series, ‘Here lies suburbia’ was targeted towards a demographic of teens aged 14-18. The characters were the main focal point of my piece and I attempted to have the audience empathise with them more by casting models within the same age bracket. This heightened level of empathy allowed for a deeper sense of engagement within my photographic narrative as the audience would be able to witness the characters moving out of their bad familial situations and to connect with their individual narratives more. Character development allowed for a clear pace and sense of intrigue, building to a level of anticipation in the audience as they asked themselves how each character would cope with further challenges.*

**Question 7a.**

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	7	43	50	1.4

This question, drawn explicitly from the key knowledge and skills associated with Unit 4 Outcome 1, required students to outline the method(s) used to document the development of their media product during production and post-production. Students are required to 'document the development, refinement and resolution of a media product' (refer to Media Study Design page 26).

Responses revealed a variety of methods, including journals, vlogs, blogs, spreadsheets, Google Docs, annotated designs and records of progressive feedback. It was clear that some students did not document the development of their media product as it occurred, instead adding notes after the production was completed. This is not the intention of the study design and students who did so were generally unable to respond effectively to Question 7b.

High-scoring responses integrated multiple methods of documentation, including time management and conceptual development, as the following example reveals:

*I used annotated screenshots of my audio workshop, a calendar, compilations of drafts of scripts with notes, feedback and self-reflection to document the development of my media product.*

**Question 7b.**

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	6	29	47	18	1.8

This question required students describe the effectiveness of the methods outlined in question 7a. Students who had a clear grasp of the concept of resolution and/or refinement and had employed multiple methods of documenting their process were well equipped to respond to this question. The question did not explicitly refer to feedback, but many students chose to make it the focus of their response, as the following example reveals:

*The draft screenings were particularly effective in helping me refine my product. The main feedback I received in the first round of screenings was that my attempts to exaggerate genre clichés weren't clear enough. In order to refine this I introduced a surrounding commentary track, depicting me, the creator, showing the original film so someone else. Therefore I was able to pause the film intermittently and directly comment to camera on the clichés and tropes. This highlighted these tropes leading to a greater sense of self awareness in the film, making it clear the clichés were intentional.*

**Agency in and control of the media****Question 8**

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	7	25	42	26	1.9

Almost all students who attempted this question could identify a challenge for the Australian Government in regulating the use of media products by Australian audiences. Examples included preservation of an Australian voice in an online media world, the issue of industry self-regulation by streaming media services, audience agency in the selection of media appropriate to age groups, the volume of material the Classification Board and the Australian Communications and Media

Authority handles, delays in dealing with media consumer complaints, virtual private networks and ongoing debates about age-appropriate classification.

High-scoring responses demonstrated a strong understanding supported by the considered selection of examples and/or evidence, as shown in the following response:

*In regard to regulating the media Australian Government regulation was initially created to handle a smaller and simpler media landscape. The challenge of retaining an authoritative stance in terms of media regulation in a world of technological advancement as epitomised by the popularity of streaming platforms such as Netflix and Stan means that the power to regulate and classify media content once held by bodies such as the Classification Board has dramatically decreased. Therefore Australian audiences consuming content provided by international streaming services now lack the advice and direction once provided by the Australian Government.*

### Question 9

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	10	16	35	27	11	2.1

Students were asked how media institutions have been affected by the agency that contemporary media users now exercise. Students mostly chose to respond to this question using an example, generally streamed media services. Few students chose to write on the demise of traditional media institutions such as broadcast TV, radio or print, instead focusing on the impact of audience agency on digital media through social media platforms.

It should be noted that this question was focused on contemporary media users. A number of students chose to include broad, unsupported and often incorrect statements based on assumptions about how media was consumed in the past. These statements were often accompanied by irrelevant and out-of-date communication theories.

High-scoring responses were detailed and addressed all parts of the question with a clear consideration of the impact of user agency on media institutions and effective use of highly relevant examples and/or evidence. The following response is one example:

*The agency possessed by audiences through globalisation of the media has led to the developments of fandoms- individuals who share an interest in a product or content (film, TV show, etc) who come together to celebrate that product and are able to directly influence the media they are fans of. After the cancellation of the US TV show Brooklyn 99 by Fox in April 2017, fans took to social media platforms including Twitter and Instagram to express their dissatisfaction and urge other broadcasting institutions to save the show. They created a viral hashtag #save99. In only 24 hours NBC announced that they would be renewing the show due to audience demand. As explained by media researcher Jenkins, this was an example of media spreadability, people joined the campaign because the message stuck with them, they valued the show and spread the message to their social media friends. This is a clear example of how agency is possessed by audiences who can now directly influence the behaviour of institutions, thus becoming a bi-directional relationship.*

### Question 10

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	9	9	20	27	21	11	3	2.9

This question asked students to analyse one example of how the use of media by globalised media institutions has had an impact on the dynamic and changing relationship between the media and its audience. Student responses were various and their engagement with the subject was evident. The term 'media institutions' was interpreted broadly. Few students wrote on traditional media

institutions. Some students attempted to apply inappropriate and outdated communication theory in their responses to this question. Responses discussed examples including live streaming, trust, social media algorithms, parasocial relationships, binge watching, geoblocking, audience empowerment, pseudo agency, media influencers and advertising.

High-scoring responses were comprehensive and insightful, as the following sample response shows.

*In the modern age many giant media institutions no longer rely on creating content, instead building and supporting platforms for audiences and often other media institutions to create and consume content of their own. This has created new forms of media content that often forms a much more personal and intimate relationship between media and its audience. Previously most media was created by media institutions for audiences to consume. The audience may develop opinions on certain actors, musicians or directors but there was a very clear understanding that the content they were consuming was the creation of media organisations and did not reflect a genuine and natural moment in that creator's life. The relationship between media and audience was clear cut. However on social media platforms consumers are often also creators. Lacking the resources to create an entire album or movie their content is much more intimate, amateur and mundane. It is often produced by one person and gives a glimpse into their daily lives and unfiltered thoughts. Therefore people consuming this content feel more in touch with the creator. Instant communication, live stream and daily vlogs allow the audience to have real time conversation directly with the media creator. However content creators can end up with millions of subscribers and despite the personal nature of their works, the relationship between creator and consumer must be parasocial.*

#### Question 11

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	11	10	17	22	20	13	6	2	3.0

This question asked students to discuss the capacity of the media to influence its audience(s) in the contemporary media landscape. Most students correctly identified the focus of the question: the relationship between the media and its audiences in recent times. However, some students misread the question and wrote on historical examples of media influence.

Students wrote on a range of topics including particular media products, advertising campaigns, political advertising, issues of contemporary influence such as social media influencers, algorithms, the filter bubble, the impact of social media on elections and the issue of gaming including in-app purchases and loot boxes in games played by minors. A number of students made unsupported claims that media influence is less prominent than it was last century, without recognising that issues of media influence are understood and theorised differently today.

High-scoring responses demonstrated an insightful discussion of the capacity of the media to influence its audience(s) in a contemporary context as the following excerpt reveals.

*The media arguably has greater capacity to influence audiences in the contemporary media landscape than ever before. As a result of personalisation features on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, audiences now consume media that is very specific to them. However these personalisation tools limit opposing news and beliefs and have created what Eli Pariser has termed a 'filter bubble'. Essentially everything on a Facebook or Twitter feed has been filtered specifically for the individual user and the media has the power to directly target audiences. For example, the Trump 2016 campaign used Facebook to show news and advertisements that existed in a filter bubble where opposing news was filtered out. Online filter bubbles mean that audiences can be continuously exposed to targeted media messages and, without any opposing views, this may make them more susceptible.*



## Section B

### Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	6	6	10	15	18	15	12	9	6	2	1	4.4

This question required students to discuss the relationship between one media narrative and its audience(s). Students were directed to refer to both how the audience engages with and reads the narrative. Most students demonstrated the ability to do so effectively. The question allowed students to respond using a variety of approaches, including a direct analysis of the selected narrative, focusing on specific aspects as an example of the narrative as a whole, or more broadly in terms of contextual, social and/or political engagement and reading of the narrative. Both approaches were appropriate, allowing students to access the full range of marks.

It was apparent that some students did not understand the difference between audience engagement and reading. In particular, these students considered engagement only in terms of pleasure or displeasure to the exclusion of discussion of the impact of other factors.

Some students made claims about how audiences would have read the selected narrative at the time of its release, often including simplistic statements outlining claimed impacts of viewing narratives on different devices. While it is a valid approach to consider the contexts of a narrative's initial release and of consumption, it should be supported by authoritative and accurate evidence.

High-scoring responses were able to integrate all aspects of the question in a cohesive discussion of the relationship between the narrative and its audiences, as is evident in the following excerpt.

*Jasper Jones (2017) by Rachel Perkins was targeted to a widespread and largely Australian audience ... who read and interpreted the film with preconceived notions of its content and style because it was an adaptation of an acclaimed novel. Many members of the audience had already established positive connotations due to familiarity with the film's storyline. Advertising and trailers emphasised suspense in order to draw in audiences who may also have been influenced by the film's social media and score on Rotten Tomatoes.*

*The film was read by reviewers and audiences with critical acclaim, as a 'feel good' film. Perkins constructed the narrative to encourage sympathy towards certain characters, thus promoting emotional gratification and a positive reading. The film aligned with the ideological context of the decade, that people of colour should be treated as equals, the racism experienced by Jeffrey and Jasper was framed in a negative light. The resolution of the film revealed that the protagonists were successful, reflecting a positive world view for audience members who are progressive on social issues and creating that 'feel good' feeling audiences enjoy.*

### Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	8	6	10	15	18	14	12	8	5	2	1	4.2

For this question students were asked to evaluate the extent to which one or more ethical or legal issues have an impact on the consumption of media products. Again, responses reflected genuine student engagement and used a wide range of case studies and examples ranging from the personal to the political. Examples included evaluation of issues of intellectual property, the balance between free speech and suppression, privacy, data aggregation and theft, advertising on social media, political advertising, self-regulation, difficulties in enforcing laws across territorial boundaries, copyright, access to age-inappropriate media by minors, the difficulties created by realistic deep fake videos, the dark web and the Christchurch shooting. Most responses were on

contemporaneous issues, with some students evaluating issues that arose in the days prior to the examination, illustrating the ability to apply learning to current real-world situations.

High-scoring responses were insightful and highly relevant, with perceptive and cohesive evaluation, as in the following excerpt.

*The consumption of new media across emerging platforms is often impacted by ethical considerations that the audience's use of new technology raises. The format of live streaming, while presenting audiences with the opportunity to consume media containing the ideologies and opinions that they desire is vulnerable to widespread misuse, and lack of regulation and can be detrimental to users. In 2019 Facebook live was employed by a gunman to publicly stream the Christchurch massacre. The stream, which remained publicly accessible alongside the gunman's profile until Facebook was notified by the police, was consumed by a global audience. It failed to be regulated or stopped by any of the platform's human or AI regulatory processes. Moreover the subsequent spread and reuploading of the footage over 1.5 million times to other social media sites reflects the audience's questionable maturity in choosing the material they wish to consume and share. Despite objections from police, audiences continued to consume the footage, many arguably ignorant of the terrorist's intent to spread extremist ideologies. Further audiences often neglected the ethical consideration of the impact on those directly affected by the massacre, representing the consideration that media portrayals of violent acts may desensitise or trivialise the impact of horrific events. The stream resulted in the creation of 'one strike' policies on Facebook if offensive content is notified by its audience, entrusting the audience with the role of gatekeepers who determine what is culturally appropriate for consumption in the modern media landscape.*