

Media Studies

2012 Chief Assessor's Report



Government
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MEDIA STUDIES

2012 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

OVERVIEW

Chief Assessors' reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

There appeared to be growth once again in Media Studies, particularly at the start of the year. However, during the course of the year, attrition accounted for the final student number being only marginally up from 2011. It will be useful in future years to monitor not only the overall trend in the number of students undertaking Media Studies but also the retention rate.

Attendance by teachers at the clarifying forum run by the SACE Board early in the year is highly recommended. Low attendance of teachers in 2012 was of concern. The forum would have helped those teachers who seemed unaware of changes in the assessment types and, in particular, the use of performance standards. Those teachers new to this subject who attended benefited greatly from the forum and were able to network with subject experts. It would be wise for any teacher who is delivering this course for the first time to make sure they attend any forums offered next year.

The South Australian Association for Media Education (SAAME) again provided professional development for teachers by offering a workshop focused on the investigation.

While the Online Forum for Media Studies had an increase in activity last year, this year its use tapered back to the low levels of earlier years. The Online Forum can be a useful tool for seeking guidance, getting Media Studies information, and establishing contact with other teachers, but it needs more participants to work effectively. It is strongly recommended that teachers subscribe to the SACE website Media Studies Online Forum.

Media Studies in 2012 continued to offer flexibility to teachers and, as a result, their learning and assessment plans (LAPs) covered a wide range of topics and used a range of assessment tools. The most popular topics were again documentaries, photojournalism, and cult television/film, which might be expected, as many approved LAPs were used for a second year.

The development of sophisticated media literacy and production skills was apparent in the overall quality of work produced by students. Indeed, this year there was a small increase in the percentage of students achieving results in the A and B bands, with a corresponding decrease in the lower bands. The more successful and engaging programs tended to focus on contemporary rather than traditional aspects of the media and encouraged greater contribution from students. The students' learning was most evident when their school program connected all of the

assessment types to the assessment design criteria in a coherent and seamless manner.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 1: Folio (30%)

For the folio, students undertake two or three media exploration assessments, and one media interaction study. The media exploration assessments and interaction study use the investigative framework provided by the four key concepts of media representations, conventions, organisations, and audiences. The combined word length of the media exploration assessments should be a maximum of 1500 words if written or a maximum of 10 minutes if oral, or, if in multimodal form, a maximum of eight linked pages or screen shots, with an average of 200 words per page or screen shot, or a 9-minute video/documentary report. (For more information, see the Media Studies 2013 subject outline available on the SACE website.)

Folios were generally well completed. The standard of assessment tasks in the folio was generally consistent and allowed students to meet the performance standards set out in individual schools LAPs. Slightly more students gained results in the A band and fewer achieved D or E grades compared with 2011. This indicates that more students utilised the key media concepts in each task, allowing them to meet the requirements and scope of the course. The moderation process supported the majority of teachers' marks and grades, with only a small number of instances where these were moderated down.

Media Exploration

The media exploration assessment task was once again the best performing task within this assessment type. Teachers' task design was strong and well considered, and the best examples provided students with the opportunity to reach or, in some cases, achieve beyond the performance standards. Students who were given ownership of task format and content generally produced more personally relevant and authentic assessment tasks.

In some cases there was confusion over the nature of the exploration tasks, with several samples possessing attributes resembling a media production. Teachers should note that knowledge and understanding, research and analysis, and communication are the assessment design criteria utilised in the design of the folio. The most successful students planned and, importantly, referenced their exploration tasks. A wide, relevant range of sources, including primary sources, were utilised to create links to the key media concepts in the best samples.

Students and teachers alike should be mindful of the assessment criteria and ensure that they are attainable and practical. Best practice was evident when the student was aware of the requirements that were linked to task design based on the performance standards.

Word-limits were typically adhered to; however, there was again a tendency for students to creep beyond the maximum of 1500 words for the exploration tasks, regardless of whether this was presented as two or three tasks.

Media Interaction Study

The media interaction study continues to be misinterpreted by teachers and students alike. Too often this task became a de facto media exploration due to the lack of interaction. The importance of personal interaction needs to be emphasised in this task and, as stated in the subject outline, this is a study 'on a topic of their choice'. Task design limited the scope of students in many cases, allowing them only to analyse a media product, process, or concept, rather than analysing their interactions.

The best examples were produced by teachers engaging as an active facilitator in students developing a topic of relevance, interest, and access, and assisting them in the process of creating an appropriate, engaged format to present the media interaction. These samples were highly personalised and had evidence of perceptive analysis of interactions with media products or concepts.

Assessment Type 2: Product (40%)

This assessment type is designed to give students the opportunity, either individually or as a group, to plan, produce, and reflect on a media product. Students undertake two media products, each of which is supported by a producer's statement. Where students decide to complete one or both media products as a small group, protocols need to be clearly documented and agreed at the beginning of the task. (See the Media Studies 2013 subject outline available on the SACE website for more details and guidelines on production constraints.)

This assessment type was generally well attended to by most schools and students. The popularity of this assessment type continued this year with evidence suggesting that many students choose Media Studies for the opportunity to create media productions. Consequently, there was generally a more consistent and considered approach by students and teachers. However, while many student grades were unaltered during the moderation of this assessment type, more discrepancies appeared in this type than in the folio. This tended to be where teachers had been somewhat over-generous and perhaps had not referred closely enough to the performance standards. It is useful for teachers, particularly those new to the subject, to seek out examples of products that were previously marked in the upper bands for a point of comparison.

The best student work was created when students were successfully supported and were provided with a range of production skills, techniques, and processes, coupled with student engagement and commitment. Importantly, students who created highly authentic samples that resembled 'real world' media products were the most successful. With digital processes being accessible in most schools, the creation of realistic products is achievable and favourable.

Less successful samples displayed lack of understanding, limited design, and incomplete planning, as well as minimal use of production techniques or technologies. These samples were rushed, lacked consistency, and limited the potential for student excellence. Successful products demonstrated a planned 'body of work' that had been developed over a period of time, usually a term or more, as opposed to those that had been hastily constructed over a weekend.

Once again short films was a popular topic of study, as was documentaries. Both topics were generally covered well; however, some short films fell out of scope, with several lacking a premise or the use of conventions.

Some photojournalism samples also required development, particularly in task design, as several samples displayed a limited awareness of media structures and a misinterpreted reproduction of the structural and conventional features of photojournalism.

The most successful students utilised the producer's statement as a contextualising document that effectively conveyed their learning and achievements in the product. They discussed the role they played if working in a small group and the authenticity and success of their product against the conventions of that media type.

Unfortunately, less successful samples either omitted the producer's statement or simply used it as a step-by-step journal of the production, limiting their success when placed against the performance standards.

Teachers should emphasise the contextualising importance of the producer's statement and ensure that students complete it in the format presented in the subject outline.

Overall, the 2012 school assessment moderation process confirmed that there was consistency, reliability, and validity in the grade levels that teachers had awarded.

EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment Type 3: Investigation (30%)

This assessment type is designed to give students the opportunity to undertake one independent investigation of a current media issue and to present their findings. The focus of the investigation is the cultural, political, or economic impact of media on contemporary society. Through the investigative process, students develop skills in selecting and synthesising information from a range of primary and secondary sources. Students use their skills of critical analysis to review, interpret, and evaluate information and viewpoints. Students use data from these sources to reach a logically developed conclusion. The report should be a maximum of 2000 words if presented in written form or the equivalent if presented in multimedia form. For this assessment type, students provide evidence of their learning in relation to the following assessment design criteria: knowledge and understanding, research and analysis, and communication. (See the Media Studies 2013 subject outline available on the SACE website for more details.)

This is an independent investigation of a current media issue concluding with each student's presentation of their findings. It may be presented in a multimedia format. As in previous years, the majority were text-based; however, visual elements such as graphs, tables, charts, or images were incorporated in many of the investigations. While most often these elements related directly to the research, in a few cases these elements seemed to be added to make the presentation simply look more appealing — this approach should be avoided. Most students used an appendix to provide evidence of correspondence, questionnaires, and use of other sources. This is a useful strategy that certainly strengthened their investigation.

A 'current issue' is clearly defined in the subject outline as one that was the subject of public debate or coverage within the previous 12 months. It is one that is either about the media directly or the role the media played in representing the issue, rather than simply a topic reported by the media. This year marked an improvement in students' understanding of this definition and only a small number of investigations were based on a topic instead of an issue. Of note also was the increase in the number of students who achieved a result in the A band while the lower bands had an equivalent decrease.

A wide range of issues were again investigated, with social networking such as Twitter and Facebook being much favoured for researching. Kony 2012, the Leveson Inquiry, and Wikileaks also proved popular. The most successful students, as in previous years, researched controversial issues and, as a result, the sources used in the investigations were both varied (including both primary and secondary sources) and contemporary. These students showed 'comprehensive and sustained knowledge and understanding of media structures, issues, concepts, and interactions', as well as 'insightful and informed understanding of facts, opinions, and bias in media texts or products' (see the performance standards for the A level). The currency of the issue was also clearly established and referenced by these students in their introduction.

Again, the media's role in the construction of female body image, music and DVD piracy via the Internet, and violence in the media were also popular issues for investigation. This year, more students who researched these issues accessed some new perspective or analysis of the way in which the media engages with such issues and made certain that their information was more up to date and relevant. However, due to the sensitive nature, these areas still need to be undertaken with a higher degree of caution.

As an 'independent' investigation, this assessment type should not be designed to have the whole class research the same issue; instead, students should be encouraged to 'negotiate a suitable topic'. Using a template with a whole class is best avoided and while scaffolding basic expression is helpful, students then need to be encouraged to explore the topic in their own way. Investigations should not be similar variations of a common theme. However, some issues and focus questions did not lend themselves to a media investigation and this is where the role of the teacher is important. For example, investigations that focused primarily on content analysis of media products often tended to become simplistic discussions of 'representations' with less opportunity for students to show comprehensive knowledge or insightful and informed understanding.

The key media concepts should underpin all of the student's study of the media, as they provide an investigative framework to support the student's critical analysis, and this was more clearly evident in many investigations in 2012. As mentioned in previous reports, using the key media concepts as content headings for the investigation has proved useful in the past, but few students appeared to adopt such an approach this year. More emphasis on the key media concepts could be developed if teachers were able to guide students to ask questions about the degree to which these concepts help in the analysis of a topic. Critical use of theory is important in high-level analysis. Similarly, to achieve at a high level, students need to show that they use 'consistently clear and appropriate media terminology'; again, there should be greater use of media terms relevant and specific to their investigation and it should be apparent that students' use of any terminology is evidence of their understanding of its meaning.

Interviews, online surveys, and questionnaires were the predominant primary sources used in many investigations. The higher-graded Investigations attached a copy of any questionnaires (de-identified) and the questions asked were thoughtfully constructed. Sample size was more substantial than five or ten respondents and an appropriate representative group that extended beyond family and friends was used. Details of the sample were also clearly evident in the text. Online tools such as SurveyMonkey were again popular, but students should be made aware of the limitations of these free services; for example, the inability to filter responses against independent variables such as age or gender. Insightful analysis of this data went beyond using only raw data and summarising totals, and extended to identifying variables and trends.

Other hallmarks of successful investigations included consistent referencing within the body of the text, with the corresponding complete source details in a bibliography at the end. Also present were considered alternative views and reasoned judgments on findings, which were presented articulately and logically.

OPERATIONAL ADVICE

It remains important that teachers keep up to date with the administration of the subject by referring to the Media Studies 2013 subject outline and Stage 2 Media Studies — Subject Operational Information for 2013, reading information sheets that are provided to schools, and regularly visiting the SACE website.

Most teachers were aware that the inclusion of a table indicating the specific assessment features on the investigation cover sheet was there for reference and did not imply that some assessment specific features were to be ticked off as being optional. The subject operational information clearly indicates that all of the specific features KU1, KU2, KU3, RA1, RA2, C2 should be addressed in the investigation for Media Studies.

It is also essential that any variations to the approved LAPs be noted using the LAP addendum form. This especially applies when a LAP is used for a second year by a different teacher who varies the tasks. Including such alterations on the addendum form aids the final moderation process, as time is not wasted trying to match student work with tasks.

Print and DVD were the dominant media used by most students for presenting materials for moderation. The use of digital formats continues to enable the moderation processes to be completed efficiently and thoroughly, with again fewer technical problems due to uncommon codecs or file types being used. However, it is still important that teachers check their students' work before submission to ensure that the correct student files have been written to the disk. The majority of work submitted from the student sample was presented in accordance with Stage 2 Media Studies — Subject Operational Information requirements and thus contributed to the efficiency of the final moderation process.

For the external assessment, teachers ensured that only the student's SACE registration number appeared on the submitted work, that all identifying references to the student or school had been removed, and that the appropriate cover sheet for the investigation was used.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The students undertaking Media Studies this year have achieved higher levels than in previous years and this appears to be the result of better integration of the key media concepts into the curriculum design and a more discernible effort by teachers to impart knowledge of contemporary media theories.

Chief Assessor
Media Studies