

### GENERAL COMMENTS

In 2001 the examination paper consisted of two sections. Section 1 required a response to one text, while Section 2 required completion of three different tasks in response to given material. In Section 1, there was an overall improvement in the quality of responses this year, with very few students submitting no response, more than one response or a very short response. Responses were limited to a small number of texts, most being concentrated on three texts. In Section 2, most students responded to all three tasks.

### Marking policies

Assessment is holistic, using the published criteria. The process requires assessors to relate student performance directly to these criteria. These judgments are assisted by the use of a set of descriptors. Both the criteria and the descriptors are fully explored and directly related to the range of student responses during intensive assessor training before, as well as during, the marking process. Teachers and students should be aware of both the assessment criteria and the descriptors. For 2001 these were published in Supplement 2 to the December 2000 *VCE Bulletin*, pages 25–27.

### SPECIFIC INFORMATION

#### Section 1 – Text response

Students were required to produce one piece of analytical or expository writing in response to one text. There were two topics for each of the prescribed texts. The layout of the English (ESL) paper remained similar to previous years. The English paper layout has devised text questions into Part 1 and Part 2. This does not appear to have created any misunderstanding about task requirements for the many ESL students who are taught in mainstream classes.

Students' understanding of the task and confidence in writing appeared to be comparable with previous years. More successful responses were carefully crafted to respond to the key words in the question and supported with appropriate use of examples from the text. Most students limited the use of direct quotes to short phrases which were appropriately chosen to support their responses. Students generally displayed very good knowledge of the text even when they had difficulty writing to the requirements of the question set.

Almost two thirds of responses were on three texts, *Montana 1948*, *Dead Letter Office* and *Medea*, with 30 per cent of responses on *Montana 1948*. All three texts produced both average and excellent responses. *Only the Heart*, *The Divine Wind*, *Cabaret*, *Night* and *The Outsider* accounted for a further 22 per cent of responses. There were no ESL responses to *A Choice of Emily Dickinson's Verse*, *Bearbrass* or *Frontier*.

The most popular texts and their mean scores were:

<i>Montana 1948</i>	30%	5.73
<i>Dead Letter Office</i>	19%	5.11
<i>Medea</i>	16%	5.83
<i>Only the Heart</i>	7%	5.60
<i>The Divine Wind</i>	5%	5.95

Both questions on *Montana 1948* produced a range of responses. Less successful students struggled to engage with the idea of 'finally'. Others discussed Wes' 'right action' of taking legal steps against his brother without any comment on 'wrong reasons'. Some responses argued the case for Wes taking the 'right action' for the right reasons. Question 2 produced better responses and, as the topic goes to the heart of the text, students seemed better prepared for this type of question. Students had plenty to say about 'loyalty' and 'justice'. A few extended their discussion to whether only 'loyalty' made justice difficult and commented on other things like racism, the status of women and the position of power. For some students there was a tendency to use prepared material which dealt with loyalty and justice generally rather than addressing this topic specifically. Some were even quite simplistic, e.g. Wes was protecting his brother from justice because Frank had 'saved his life' as a child.

The questions on *Dead Letter Office* were challenging to a number of students. Both questions produced a lot of story telling. Many responses to the first question ignored the word 'images' and did not write about film technique at all. 'Images' is a fundamental term in studying film as text and those who could write about them produced very good responses. Some students confused 'images' with 'symbols' or 'looking like'. Many students failed to address all three parts – 'images', 'understand the characters' and 'emotional needs' – to this question, let alone discuss links between them. In the second question some students had problems dealing with the positive outcomes of Alice's meddling. Many students accepted 'always dangerous' without challenging it and just listed ways in which Alice meddled in people's lives.

Both questions on *Medea* gave students plenty to discuss and produced very good responses. However, there was a tendency to overuse quotes in response to this text. Question 2 was a simple but challenging topic and more successful answers were able to respond beyond just agreement. 'Innocent victim' was mostly well answered

through a discussion of Medea's guilt both past and present. However some ignored 'victim' while others ignored 'innocent' and just argued that she was/wasn't a victim. Students needed to explore these concepts in relation to Medea's actions in the text and to distinguish between being a genuine victim of someone else's actions and looking for an excuse for your own avoidable behaviour. There was a number of passionate defences of Medea who 'only murdered her children, but we understand why'. This question allowed students of all levels of competence to argue a case and provide evidence from the text. The question was uncomplicated linguistically but still challenging to write about. Responses to the first question often missed one of the four key words. Some interpreted 'reason' as 'reasons' and a couple of students confused 'selfishness' with 'selfless'.

There was a range of responses to *Only the Heart*; many answered at a basic level, e.g. discussing examples of when the Vo family cared for each other without any commentary on how that helped them survive or whether anything else helped them to survive. The second question for *The Divine Wind* was generally well answered with a good focus on the nature of the crisis and how this affected the various relationships. Students wrote about a range of relationships. Some saw only the war as a crisis – more successful responses looked at betrayal, racism, and social status as also creating crisis. Responses to Question 1 were generally disappointing. Students were able to expand on how and why Hartley 'stands back and observes life' but could not discuss the second part – 'does not participate in it'.

Assessors commented on the students' strong knowledge of the texts and engagement with the topic. A significant number of responses showed a good understanding of themes, issues and characterisation as well as an ability to think laterally and avoid stereotypical value judgments. However, there were prepared introductions which stood out from the inferior essay that followed and seldom engaged with the topic. Less successful students used informal language, e.g. gonna, 'cos. Some students still struggle with essay structure. In addition, ignoring or missing a key word in a question affects the whole response. Some responses displayed obvious weaknesses such as over reliance on story telling, particularly with *Montana 1948* and *Dead Letter Office*, or flirting with both questions, again with *Montana 1948* and also with *Only the Heart*.

This response to *Montana 1948* Question 2 addresses all the prompts in the question:

Larry Watson's *Montana 1948*, clearly proved that justice is impossible to achieve when at the same time trying to be loyal to family. As an example of Wes in *Montana* tries his best to serve justice as being a sheriff and be loyal to the 'Hayden' family. Due to the 'weight of the Hayden name' and the communities' attitude towards the Indians as 'red meat', it is so difficult for Wes to prosecute his brother.

At first when Wes hears about the accusation made about Frank against the Indian women, he tells Gail that he wished she 'would not have told the sheriff'. This is a clear indication that Wes is torn between his loyalty to his family and his job as a sheriff. With Julian's love towards 'his son', Frank, a respected man, a doctor, a war hero, proved that Julian will do anything to save his beloved son.

The response continued to use selected text references to explore the turning points for Wes as he tried to juggle his responsibilities as sheriff and his loyalty to his family in the context of a community which did not treat the Indians equally, concluding with an awareness that even Frank's death does not achieve justice:

Wes made a decision to move Frank to the jail. It finally seems that justice is to be conserved, but Frank escapes by committing suicide. Frank is still remembered as a respected man, a war hero and a doctor by the 'whitewash' of the Hayden family. It is only Gail who cannot live with the 'lies concocted with the aftermath of Frank's death'. Wes has lost both his family and his hometown, it seems that Wes has suffered more than Frank did. Though Frank died as painfully as Marie lost her life, but the justice was never served upon the other Indian women whom Frank has raped and molested. Justice has never taken upon Frank as he escapes the proper action for his crimes. *Montana 1948* demonstrates that there are no solutions that could serve both loyalty to family and achieve justice at the same time.

Familiarity with the assessment criteria and how to develop the skills to meet them is essential. Thorough knowledge of the text is critical so students need to read or view their texts many times before the examination and complete lots of activities designed to help them become aware of the major themes and issues. Study guides can provide ideas for discussion but students need to develop their own response to the themes and issues and be able to express it in their own words. In the examination, students demonstrate their knowledge of the text by the way they are able to select examples to support the key points of their essay. Choosing texts that have concrete issues for ESL students to grasp and discuss, is a major reason why assessors reported that *Montana 1948*, *Medea* and *The Divine Wind* all worked well for ESL students.

As well as knowledge of the text, students need to understand the requirements of a well-structured essay, in particular how to develop a point of view with one main point in each paragraph, directly linked to the topic and supported by text examples. Teach the basics of analysing the question, focusing on key words, awareness of words you might modify, e.g. 'always', 'impossible', and planning the response. Teach students to 'unpack' the prompts

and to take into account all parts of the question. ESL students will often need assistance in acquiring a range of vocabulary appropriate for discussing the text they have chosen and which they can draw on to write expressively and effectively in examination conditions. Students also need to be taught how to recognise and decode the different types of questions asked on texts, e.g. Discuss, Do you agree?, questions which include 'why' or 'how'.

## **Section 2 – Writing task**

Students were presented with a number of items related to one topic. They were required to complete three tasks in response to this unseen material. The tasks are:

- a note form summary of a section of the material
- an analysis of language used in one of the given texts
- a response to the main issue raised by the texts.

Each task is of equal value and three separate scores are given. In 2001, the instructions to students and the tasks were printed before the task material.

Assessors commented favourably on the topic and the layout of this task on the paper. As in 2000 the banner above the material to be used for each task resulted in very few students completing tasks on the wrong section of the material. The subject matter gave students the opportunity to make connections with the reality of their everyday lives and this was reinforced by the use of email. Most students seemed to understand the issue clearly but there were a few odd ideas about what the card could do. Some students struggled to understand the purpose of the card and thought it was replacing Medicare cards or bankcards.

There was a lot of variation in approach to the note-taking task. Students had little difficulty selecting five main points and there were obvious links for students to identify between the two pieces of writing. Nevertheless, many students still do what is effectively two separate summaries and miss the fact that there is an overriding topic covered in both responses. However, others successfully went beyond the two-column layout. There are still some responses using whole sentences as well as weaker responses merely listing all the information without selecting the main points or showing any categories or links.

Students seem to have been well prepared for the note taking task but it was easy to pick those who had little idea of how to approach it. Students need to be taught the skills of note taking before entering Year 12 and encouraged to use these skills as a regular part of their work. Developing more than one strategy for making notes, learning to link ideas and show relationships in notes are skills that need lots of time and practice to acquire.

The best answers showed evidence of processing the material, capacity to select the main points made about the issue and to link the material (students are asked to write one note form summary) rather than attempt to summarise each article separately. These examples show different approaches students have used to successfully complete the task. (*Note*: these are copies of the students' work, including any errors in spelling or grammar.)

**Example 1**

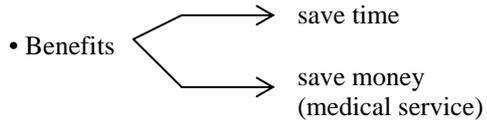
YES

Michelle Le Grande:

• response positive → community trialled

• saved lives

• Overseas experience



Cost of health care → lower

• secure card

• risk of information



misused



very small



good for health

NO

Christina Singh:

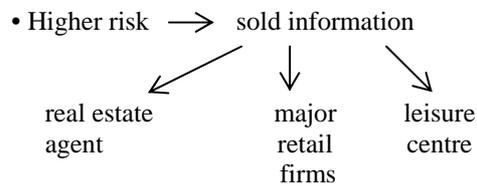
• privacy issue → alarm everyone

• lostcard  
- no treatment

• Being used →  
- identification process  
- applying jobs  
- tertiary institutions

• Discrimination

• Insecure



• Health insurance company



refuse

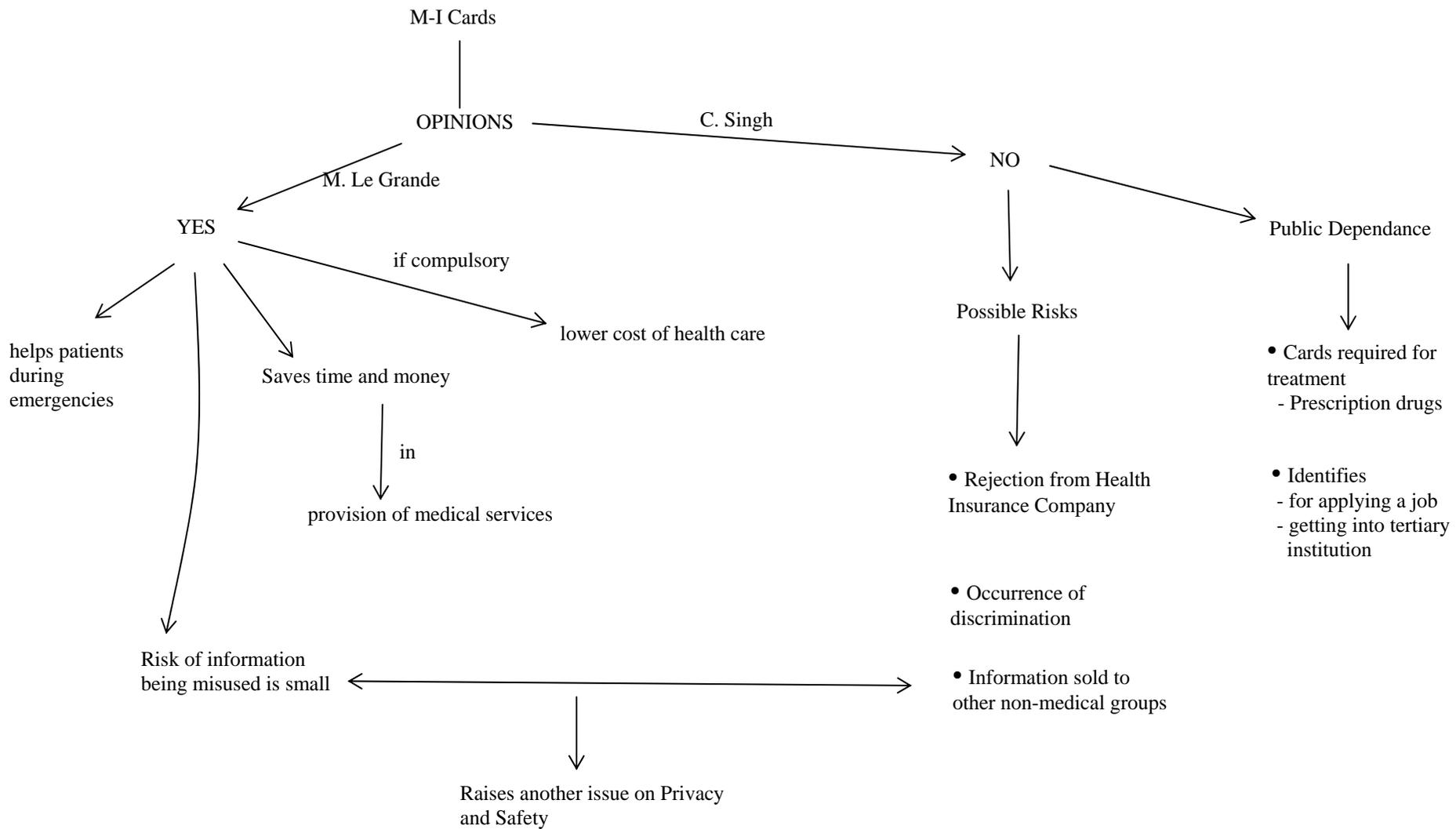


insure people



oppose proposal

## Example 2



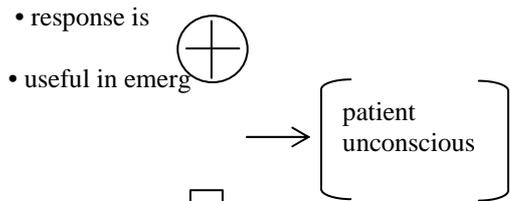
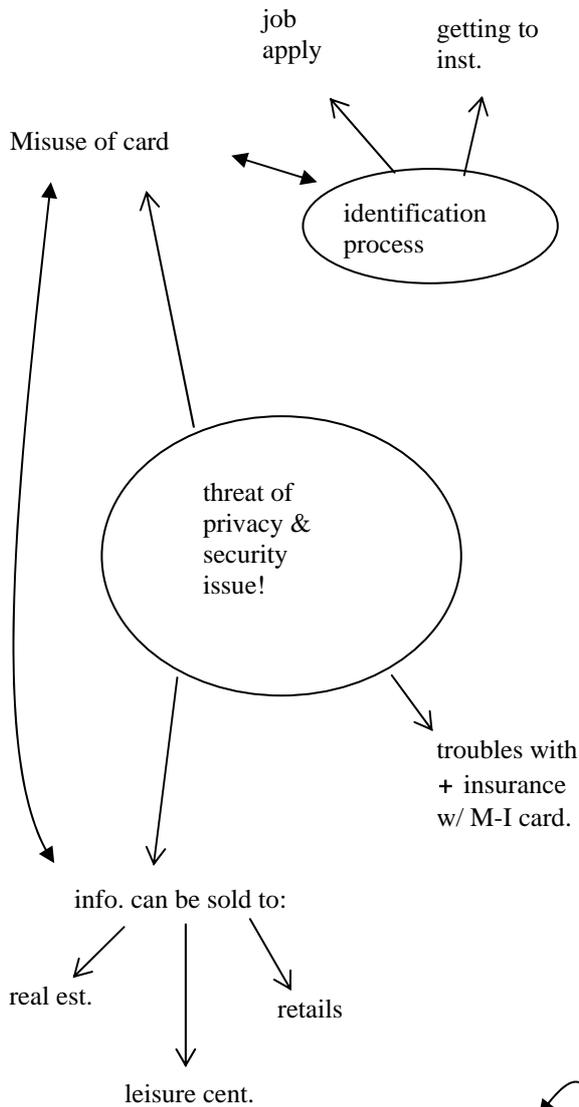
**Example 3**

“WILL MEDI – INFO CARD BE INTRODUCED AS A COMPULSARY HEALTH ID.”

X /DISAGREE

✓ /AGREE

- imp. To get + treatment/presc. w/o card.



• SAVE LIVES!!!

- overseas proved, M-I card saves:

⊖ & \$\$\$

- misuse of inf. → risk is ↓

- we carry: ✓

- bankcards
- driving lic.
- library cards

∴ why can't M-I Card???

↔ shows links!

Student responses indicated a greater understanding of Task 2 this year, demonstrating awareness of audience and the manipulative language of the writer. More students were tackling the ‘effect on the reader’ successfully. However some students copied large slabs of the text rather than just identified the specific examples and too many students still just explain what has been written rather than how the example persuades. This year there also appeared to be less labelling of techniques and fewer responses written in essay form.

Assessors suggested slightly longer task material could have produced more versatility in the selection of examples as weaker students seemed to run out of examples to cite. Students were required to select five examples of different types of persuasive language use, and to explain how each example works to persuade the reader. How does this language make the reader feel and why does this persuade the reader to agree with the writer’s point of view? Students are not asked to comment on the success or failure of the examples or present an argument for or against the point being made. The example given here includes, for authenticity, the student’s grammar and spelling errors.

Language used	Explanation
1. ‘I know what it is to ... I know what it is ...’	By stating his knowledge and experience in emergency services, Dr Brown’s emphasis on his expertise easily wins trust from the readers. Therefore the sense of trust will stay with them and they will tend to believe whatever Dr. Brown has to say later in email.
2. ‘How would they feel if he had died?’	By introducing a feeling of guilty, Tom is able to get his audiences to think about the possibility of devastating consequence if a person’s vital medical information is unknown in times of an emergency. As a result his audience will feel a strong need of the use of the M-I card.
3. ‘We can all feel sorry ... no longer feel confident ... not receive appropriate medical help.’	sympathetic statement appeals for sympathy from readers for the poor boy. Once people sympathise with him, they’ll support the M-I card in hope of restoring his confidence of going out.
4. ‘All Australians ... have the right ... right from anxiety.’	The writer appeals to the commonly held view that everyone has the right to be safe. By saying ‘all Australians’ and listing examples of the people of Australia the writer intends to include all of the audience in the issue. He is also subtly suggesting that M-I cards can help achieving the ‘right’ and tries to gain the audience’s support.
5. ‘It’s just the same as using a bankcard ...’	Brown associate M-I card with a bankcard to get common sense of convenient and time saving from the readers. Once the readers develop the same feeling over the M-I card they are more likely to support it.

Students need to know exactly what is expected of them in this task. Students must explain the persuasiveness of the language, not the example itself. Students should be taught sentence stems which will lead them to do this, e.g. ‘the speaker/writer persuades the audience by ...; the audience is persuaded because they ...; The rhetorical question persuades because ...; When the writer/speaker uses “we”, the audience feels ...’ Teach them to put themselves in the audience’s shoes and think about how the language makes them feel rather than just labelling techniques. Teach students a framework to use with each example, with sequencing and appropriate connectives between the examples, why the writer uses the language and the effect on the audience. The most effective presentation has the numbered example in one column and the discussion of persuasive effect in the second column. ESL students in mainstream classes also need to be taught this format. Students writing in continuous prose are more likely to stray from the requirements of the task. Students who have good analytical skills are able to meet the requirements of the task, even if their expression skills are basic.

Task 3 asked students to write a speech. Responses generally showed an awareness of audience and incorporated speech-like qualities. The speech form allowed students to tell anecdotes and be rhetorical without sounding ridiculous. Most students wrote substantial responses, with stronger ones using the material for inspiration to develop their own arguments. Stronger responses also addressed the wider aspects such as privacy versus public good or ‘technological progress’. Some assessors saw a connection with the ‘issues’ School-assessed Coursework which may have helped students to be comfortable with the format. Less successful responses showed some misunderstanding of the material, e.g. assuming this card would replace all existing cards or missing the fact that it was for over 18’s. Most responses agreed with the proposal. This may have been because the task material provided less information about the ‘no’ case.

A significant number of responses copied/wrote out large slabs of the task material. Students must learn to answer this task in their own words. They should be aware of the assessment criteria printed on the examination paper. In this task they are being assessed on their ability to present a point of view. ‘Knowledge and control of the material presented’ does not mean writing out the task material. It does mean understanding the information and using ideas from it to support the point of view the student is presenting. In addition teach students the value of rebuttal.

Students should be encouraged to use the planning skills they apply to the text response task to plan before writing in this task.

This example shows the student's understanding of the task, control of the material and effective use of language to express a point of view in his/her own words:

Good morning, fellow classmates. I am sure that all of you, as up-to-date, high tech students are well-informed about the proposed introduction of the Medi-Info Card. But it worries me that some of us cannot see the benefits of this revolutionary technology through fears planted by out-of-date old-fashioned and computer-illiterate people.

Many people go on and on about how the Medi-Info card could breach our security and privacy. Believe or not, through the use of internet, bankcards and credit cards, we have nothing to worry about our security and privacy because we are already fully-exposed! Whenever we log on to the internet or use credit cards, any hacker can squeeze into our PCs and get our personal information. And the reason why many of us receive so many junk mails in our email is because our email addresses are secretly being sold to private companies. By introducing the Medi-Info card, nothing will be changed to our current level of security and privacy. It will only strengthen it through the use of state-of-the-art microchips.

Furthermore, all of us can benefit from the Medi-Info card. It can literally 'save' lives in emergency situations as doctors can quickly learn about your medical history and your allergies to certain medications. This means less waiting in emergency rooms and this will certainly reduce number of medical accidents and unnecessary deaths.

Also, in overseas, this cutting-edge technology are already in use. I heard on the radio that cards similar to Medi-Info cards are saving time and cost overseas. Do we really want to reject this proposal and be left out?

Concluding, I'd like to stress that Medi-Info cards can only bring benefit to our lives. It saves time and money and most importantly, Medi-Info cards can save lives! Thank you very much for listening.