

# Media Studies

2011 Assessment Report



Government  
of South Australia

**SACE**  
Board of SA

# **MEDIA STUDIES**

## **2011 ASSESSMENT REPORT**

### **OVERVIEW**

Assessment reports give an overview of how students performed in 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.

The number of students undertaking Media Studies this year declined for the first time in the past four years, with 36% less students undertaking the subject compared with last year. This trend appears related to changes to the subject selection patterns of students. The adoption of an external assessment type five years ago meant that the move to the new subject this year required teachers to make only minor changes in the assessment types. This may account for the limited attendance of teachers at the clarifying forum run by the SACE Board earlier in the year. However if these sessions are held again next year, attendance is highly recommended given that there were some teachers who seemed unaware of changes, for example the increase in word limit for the producer's statement as a part of Assessment Type 2: Product.

The new Media Studies online forum was operational from early in the year and was more active than in previous years. This too can be a useful tool for seeking guidance, obtaining Media Studies information and establishing contact with other teachers. It is strongly recommended that teachers subscribe by visiting the web page.

The 2011 subject outline offered flexibility to teachers, and as a result their learning and assessment plans covered a wide range of topics and used a range of assessment tools. The most popular topics were: Documentaries, Photojournalism, and Cult Television/Film. The development of sophisticated media literacy and production skills was apparent in the overall quality of work produced by students. Some teachers explored more innovative approaches encouraged by the 2011 subject outline, while others continued to offer their established programs with minor variations.

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-BASED ASSESSMENT**

### **Assessment Type 1: Folio**

The standard of work in 2011 was generally consistent with that of the previous subject with a range of interesting and challenging task designs. Successful students were provided with tasks that allowed them to explore the key media concepts as well as the requirements of the task. These students were given some creative latitude in terms of options and task design. Folios were generally well completed.

#### **Media Exploration**

The media exploration assessment was consistently undertaken with both teachers and students possessing a solid understanding of this task. The most successful included a range of sources and importantly, primary sources, while the less successful explorations generally lacked evidence of research and analysis. Most assessments were designed with a degree of difficulty built into them. However in a few cases simplistic activities (where students produced short answers to a set of questions) were evident. These are best set as preparatory activities rather than assessment tasks. In addition, the successful explorations tended to be referenced appropriately, and it was apparent that teachers had reinforced this practice to a greater extent this year. The drafting phase was useful in providing teachers with the opportunity to address referencing, to check the validity of the sources used, and to verify the authenticity of student work.

Google and Wikipedia still dominate, and when using secondary sources, students should be reminded that 'thorough and well-informed research into, and analysis of different points of view, bias, values, or intent across a range of media texts' is the expectation at the highest level of the performance standards.

Word limits were generally observed but it must be reiterated that there is no extension to the word count; some samples exceeded the word count by up to 400 words. The subject outline clearly states that the 1500 word limit applies regardless of whether the media exploration is undertaken as two or three assessments.

#### **Media Interaction Study**

The media interaction study is still problematic in terms of task design and student interpretation. 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'. While the majority of teachers did this, some presented this assessment to students as a task with few choices and thereby limited opportunities for students to perform at all levels of the performance standards. Those students who displayed a strong personal connection and interaction with a media product or process were more successful in this task.

One performance standard for high achievement in this study clearly indicates that students need to provide evidence of 'perceptive analysis of interactions with media'. Students had greater opportunity to achieve this when teachers undertook an active role by assisting them to identify and outline the topic for their study, and then assisting them in the process of choosing an appropriate form for presenting their findings.

## Assessment Type 2: Product

This assessment type has the highest weighting of the three assessment types, accounting for 40% of a student's final grade, and it gives students the opportunity, either individually or as a group, to plan, produce, and reflect on a media product. This is a popular assessment type and was well completed by many students. The most successful products used a range of media production techniques that closely simulated authentic media products. There was evidence of scaffolding and an application of skills learnt in these successful pieces.

Several video productions exceeded the five-minute time limit, and some productions lacked depth and provided scant evidence of any media-based skills or use of technology. A balance between video and print media was achieved in the most successful products. Less successful products were often simplistic and provided little opportunity to show evidence of 'design and planning of media products for selected audiences', as well as the 'use of appropriate production techniques and technologies, and media conventions'.

The producer's statement is an opportunity for students to support their final product with written evidence. Following consultations with teachers and students, the word limit was changed to 500 words so that students could more comprehensively discuss their learning against the assessment criteria. However, some students confined their response to 150 words. Producer's statements should be more explicit, and be reflective of the student's products, whilst addressing the key points of the statement task.

Overall, the 2011 the school assessment moderation process confirmed that, in the majority of instances, the grade levels awarded by teachers were appropriate, valid, and reliable. When grade levels were adjusted, this happened more frequently with the higher grades. Very few adjustments were made to grades in the middle band.

## EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

### Assessment Type 3: Investigation

This assessment type is an independent investigation of a current media issue concluding with each student's presentation of their findings. This may be presented in a multimedia format, but as in previous years, the majority were text-based. Visual elements such as graphs, tables, charts, or images were incorporated in many of the investigations, but in a few cases these appeared to be added in to make the presentation look more appealing. Unless these elements relate directly to the investigation, they should be avoided. Most students used an appendix to provide evidence of correspondence, questionnaires, and other sources, and this certainly strengthened their investigation.

The word count was observed in most investigations, with only a few students exceeding the 2000 word limit. The SACE Board's Word Count Policy is clear that, 'assessors do not assess beyond the word-count'.

A 'current issue' is clearly defined in the subject outline as one that was the subject of public debate or coverage within the previous twelve 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. A range of issues were investigated including Wikileaks, the News Corp phone-hacking scandal, social networking such as Twitter and Facebook, the Royal wedding, and the media's role in promoting social trends such as 'planking'. Clearly the most successful investigations researched current topical issues, and as a result the sources they used were both varied (including both primary and secondary sources) and up-

to-date. Further, as stated in the performance standards, 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'.

Highly graded investigations were clearly focused on the media and avoided producing a report that became more about a topic rather than an issue. The currency of the issue was also clearly established and referenced by these students in their introduction.

As in previous years, the media's role in the construction of the female body image, music/DVD piracy via the Internet, and violence in the media, were popular issues for investigation. While these can be current, they are best avoided unless the students have access to some new perspective or analysis of the way in which the media engages with such issues.

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'. Some issues and focus questions did not lend themselves to a media investigation. Once more, this is where the role of the teacher became crucial. 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, but this was not clearly evident in many investigations. Using the key media concepts as content headings for the investigation has proved useful in the past, but fewer students appeared to adopt such an approach this year. Similarly, to achieve at a high level, a student needs 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. For example, while the issue of bias was covered in some investigations, it was often only noted that bias existed; higher level investigations were those that discussed the forms that bias might take.

Primary sources were used in many investigations mainly through interviews, online surveys and questionnaires. The higher-graded investigations included a copy of the 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. While online tools such as Survey Monkey were popular, 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 occurred when it went beyond using raw data and summarising totals, and extended to identifying variables and trends.

Consistent referencing within the body of the text, and the corresponding complete source details in a bibliography at the end, were also hallmarks of successful investigations, as were considered alternative views, and 'reasoned judgments' on findings, which were presented fluently and logically.

## **OPERATIONAL ADVICE**

While the new Media Studies subject was not substantially different from the previous one, it must be emphasised that it is still important that teachers keep up-to-date with the administration of the subject by referring to the relevant section of the *Learning Area Manual*, reading information sheets that are provided to schools, and regularly visiting the SACE website. In particular, this will avoid confusion over the date that the students' investigations should be submitted to the SACE Board. It is also important that where any variations to the approved learning and assessment plans occurred that this is noted using the addendum form.

Print and DVD were the dominant media used by most students for presenting materials for moderation. The use of digital formats enabled the moderation processes to be completed efficiently and thoroughly, with even fewer technical problems, because of uncommon codecs or file types being used, than in previous years. However, it is still important that teachers check their students' work before submission to ensure that it has actually been saved on the disk. As was the case with the previous Media Studies subject, most of the work submitted from the student sample was presented in accordance with the *Learning Area Manual* requirements and thus contributed to the efficiency of the final moderation process.

In submitting the external assessment, the majority of teachers ensured that only the student's number appeared on the submitted work, that all identifying references to the student or school had been removed, and that the appropriate coversheet for the investigation was used.

## **GENERAL COMMENTS**

While the transition to the new Media Studies subject has been a relatively smooth one, there are still areas that need further refining and improvement. The development of more detailed guidelines for print media products, similar to the current ones listed in the subject outline for video and audio, would provide greater consistency in this assessment type. Similarly, teacher workshops designed to demonstrate how to better integrate the key media concepts into the curriculum design, to impart knowledge of contemporary media theories, and to provide strategies for improving skills in survey data analysis would undoubtedly be of benefit.

Media Studies  
Chief Assessor