**Developing a SACE Stage 2 Media Investigation notes**

**This document is to be read in combination with the subject outline, Media Studies investigation deconstruction and possible Investigation topic questions on the SACE website**

1. Identify a topic and suitable resources. Select at least two (RA1 - *range*) media texts that focus on the same current media issue. State the names of the texts, creator and where and when each was broadcast, published or posted. The media texts and issue should allow you to address the assessment design criteria at the highest level. Define the issue as contemporary by finding a comprehensive range of primary and secondary sources published in the last 12 months.
2. Decide on the topic question. This question should allow you to demonstrate an understanding of the course concepts. Develop some clarifying questions which will become key sentences for each paragraph. The clarifying questions should contain terms such as: *(dot pointed, bolded)*

* ***Media structures (organisations), issues, concepts, interactions (KU1)***

Analyse what the media texts are saying and then ask yourself these questions:

* What are the dominant values of the organization that produced it?
* Who created the media text?
* Who is saying what to whom and for what purpose?

**Background knowledge**

A media organization will usually seek to expand its market influence. *The primary goal sought by most media organisations is economic profit (Shoemaker & Reese 1996).* The media text an organisation creates will be influenced by the structure of the organisation, the technology the organisation uses and influences from outside the organisation.

The nature of messages that might attract an audience could include:

An intrinsic belief that good will come from sharing an issue

It is an important issue for people to be aware of

To share in the tragedy of life

Bad things can happen and we should care about others and help

Bad news stories sell

Emotion on a current affairs program results in larger ratings

Keep in mind that 83% of predictable narratives fall into the categories “man decides”, “suffering” and “villain caught” *(Shoemaker and Reese p.29).*

The manipulation of media content by producers, writers and editors will influence the behavior of media consumers. Decisions made to manipulate content can be dependent on the cultural and political beliefs of the media organization – the *structure* of the organization. For example, the political orientation of an editorial in *The Australian* (News Limited)can be remarkably different to that of the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Fairfax).

Keep in mind that small organisations have the ability to be as visible as the large organisations e.g. *Crickey.com* v *News Limited*. Why does *Crickey* choose to run media texts about issues that News won’t report?

* ***Audience, influence, forms, content (KU2)***

Some questions that you might ask could be:

* What do you know about the intended audience of the article?
* How might the intended audience influence the content of the text?
* How might the intended audience be influenced by the content of the text?
* What alternative audiences might exist?
* In the editing process, what decisions had to be made?
* How does form influence the content?
* What alternative meanings might come from the text?

**Background Knowledge**

Media content is the basis for media impact. How an individual or a group of people read or make sense of a media product will vary as individuals and groups bring their own opinions and interpretations and make meaning. An individual or group may challenge the ideas or reality represented in a text. Audiences are able to resist messages.

Form can vary. It can be television, print, or internet based. Form may influence content so the extent to which an audience can access different forms of content will affect their perception of social reality.

Given the nature of the product, *“What’s news?”* is a more difficult question than *“What sells?”* In the entertainment industry, there is more of a link to audience in the shape of ratings, box office takings, audience research and surveys.

* **Facts, opinions, bias (selectivity, sequencing, space, opinion) (KU3)**

For this assessment design criteria, you are being asked to critically discriminate fact, opinion and bias by identifying specific areas of the media text that use fact, opinion and bias to express the point of view of the creator or media organisation. Discuss why there is exclusion or inclusion of views represented in the media text. What is deliberately omitted and why?

**Background Knowledge**

A ***fact*** is something that is established as true

***Opinion*** is the expression of a point of view that is not established as true

***Bias*** is the favouring of one side or viewpoint over the other.

An opinion needs facts, or evidence, to be credible (believable). Writers use facts (as well as logic, emotional appeals etc.) to persuade an audience to agree with their opinion or point of view on an issue *(p.148 Persuasive Language in Media text 2012).*

You must be able to identify the elements in an article which reveal bias. Bias is the favouring of one side or viewpoint over the other. Media bias moves beyond a single article or story and is a lack of balance in the presentation of news and opinions. It may mean favouritism when it comes to a certain political party, or it may mean prejudiced treatment of certain groups in the community. Political parties, trade unions, women’s groups, indigenous groups and individuals, migrants and unemployed youth are some of the groups that accuse media organisations of bias.

*“Bias can be seen to take the following forms:* ***selectivity, sequencing, space or opinion****….”* *(Avieson, J.)*

It is important to analyse the media texts you have cited for your topic in terms of:

* selectivity
* sequencing
* space
* opinion

These are key words to use in your report, so you need to understand their meaning.

It is relatively easy to analyse opinion but you must do more. This is where sources are important. A primary source could be someone who has worked on the issue actually making media e.g. a journalist. You might also contact politicians, scientists or other experts in the field.

The problem with measuring bias is that there are no suitable references with which we can compare media content *(Shoemaker & Reese p.41).* Some measures a student might use to measure bias could be:

* number of stories,
* average length of stories,
* proportion of soundbites used,
* percent of reinforcing remarks used and
* types of images used.

Within a media text, attributes such as persuasive language could be measured *(Breuer and Napthine 2012).* A discussion of the measurement of persuasive techniques can be found in “Persuasive Language” here: <http://www.ipawareness.com.au/education> .

You should also understand the significance of .com, .gov, .org, .edu – not all websites are created equally. Blogging should also be evaluated critically.

* **Points of view, values, intent (RA1)**

By asking the questions below you are trying to establish the intended and unintended purpose of the media text. You need to be aware of what standards audiences or media critics have used to judge the quality of the media text.

* What was the intended purpose of the media text? **(Intent)**
* What else was being discussed and what other media issues were current at the time? **(Intent)**
* How is it influenced by community or industry values? E.g. in AFL, journalists cannot criticize umpires. **(Values)**
* How does this issue rate in importance? **(Values)**
* Who was the media text aimed at? **(Values)**
* What reaction was the article attempting to elicit from the audience? **(Intent)**
* What persuasive language was used? **(Bias)**
* What structuring strategies were used? **(Bias)**
* What were the unexpected reactions to the article? **(Values)**
* Can you find advertising associated with the issue anywhere in the publication? **(Intent)**
* How is the content of the media text influenced by legislation or the journalist’s code of ethics? **(Values)**

**Background knowledge**

News values are fairly predictable. What people find interesting depends on the importance, interest, controversy, unusual nature, timeliness and proximity that people assign to an issue.

* **Groups, individuals, representations (RA2)**

To analyse how groups and individuals are represented in a media text, ask these questions:

* What processes of selection and organization of images, sounds and words took place to produce the media text?
* In making the text, what choices were made by the creator? (Is the creator one of your primary sources? Can you ask him / her?)
* Was the creator male or female, what ethnicity, do they hold political or cultural beliefs that might result in bias?
* Who did they interview? Who was left out? How other sources did the author use?
* What decisions had to be made in the editing process?
* Analyse the soundtrack, symbols or images used, editing of video and any innovative parts of the media text.
* How would a report about the issue on the ABC differ from a report on Channel 7?
* How would a TV report differ from a newspaper report or blog on the same event or issue?
* How does the article meet the expectations of the audience?
* What stereotypes are represented?
* Other concerns that might influence representation are: protection of children, right to privacy, court orders, and beneficence.

**Background knowledge**

Media texts must be readable, images must be arranged appropriately and headlines composed to direct reader attention. Internet and television texts must be visually appealing and hold audience attention. The story must have inherent appeal and preferably tell a story. As a story, a media text might display the attributes of fiction or drama. It should have a structure and conflict, problem and conclusion, rising and falling action and a beginning, middle and end – all the essentials of a narrative. The creator needs to decide which facts will be packaged into the commodity.

A possible reference you could use is here: <http://theinspirationroom.com/daily/australian-stereotypes/>

You are trying to determine to what extent is each media text a valid representation of objective reality.

***These terms dot pointed above and bolded are tools for analysis. If you work on a paragraph for each dot point, this will make up the discussion section of the investigation. The questions ticked can be used to focus your thoughts.***

1. You should be aware of investigations that have been done before e.g. “Violence in the media” or “Girls and body image”. To investigate such topics you really need to have a new way of investigating the topic(s), or new research findings.
2. The **introduction** should be written in paragraph form and have no more than 4 parts, with a maximum of seven or eight sentences.

* The scope of the research (it must be an important issue from the last 12 months)
* The line of the investigation or hypothesis. State an argument
* The main organizing idea (media theory)
* Major sources used as evidence – primary and secondary

**For example:**

* **The scope of the research.** This is an investigation into the impact of a voluntary code of practice for advertising food products directed at children as reported in an article or story dated ………… (last 12 months)
* **The line of the investigation or hypothesis.** This study suggests that self-regulation of media activities has little impact on the targeting of children. Overseas approaches to the issue have been based on law.
* **The main idea is** that commercial media *(name of organisation*) emphasise parental responsibility *(the audience)* and use terms such as the “nanny state” or political correctness while critics *(media organisations or audience interactions)* of the advertising industry *(media organisation)* suggest that protecting children *(the audience)* from unethical advertising is more important than individual freedoms *(media ecology theory – Neil Postman et al - media ecology looks into the matter of how media of communication affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival).*
* **Sources** are from mainstream media reports on research into the impact of a voluntary code as well as blogs such as Crikey.com and Croakey
* **Wrap up:** the topic developed more urgency this year as experts have warned of an obesity epidemic in children

**The function of an introductory paragraph:**

1. Focus the reader’s attention. You can do this by making a bold statement. Use a great quote. Cite a selection of headlines (with sources and dates).
2. Explain to the reader what they are about to read.
3. Explain what evidence will be used. How you will use the evidence. Ensure that you have a primary source: someone who is closely involved in the topic that may be able to comment on the accuracy of the secondary sources.

**So the introductory paragraph could read:**

The reported failure of a voluntary code of practice to do with targeting children with food and drink messages has been analyzed to show that there is a problem in advertising to children by the media. The consequence of this is that it contributes to health issues related to teenage identity. The main idea is that self-regulation has allowed the advertising of food products which create health problems to continue. Competition between food companies and arguments about parental responsibility might be two reasons why the issue persists. This investigation is based on a review of the recent articles on the content of food and drink advertisements, a comparison with how the issue is treated overseas and a small survey of food adverts from children’s viewing times. A second theme developed is about how journalists rely on press releases to shape their reports. This theme is about the influence of lobby groups in the media and the role of smaller organisations in the way issues are represented in the media. (7 sentences, 177 words)

* To what extent does the paragraph focus attention?
* To what extent does the paragraph tell the reader what they will be reading in the report?
* To what extent does the paragraph give a reason to read the report?

1. Checking your draft

* Is the issue current and a media issue?
* Are the media texts relevant to the issue?
* Do you understand key media terms and words and used them throughout your investigation?
* Have you addressed the relevant assessment design criteria?
* Is there a logical development of ideas?
* Are all sources cited?
* Are primary sources used?
* Are secondary sources used?
* Are surveys used appropriately using an appropriate sample size and demographic?
* Have you completed a word count?
* You should not place anything in appendices that you expect to be read.

Acknowledgement: T. Burns, 2011 (source document)

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**References cited or useful:**

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No author “Persuasive Language: a guide to understanding persuasive language” @ [www.ipawareness.com.au](http://www.ipawareness.com.au)

<http://lessonbucket.com/category/vce-media/>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Media_issues>

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