

2015 NZ Scholarship Assessment Report

Media Studies

Part A: Commentary

Comment on the overall response of candidates to the 2015 examination.

There was an obvious bias by candidates towards a specific question type in the examination, namely that of using genre/close reading in candidate's responses.

There were many quotes/statements that provided various avenues for candidates to respond to. However, candidates often failed to connect the quotes/statements provided with the actual question being asked.

Overall candidates were very focused on only a handful of quotes/statements indicating a very narrow approach to Media Studies.

Part B: Report on performance standard

Scholarship with Outstanding Performance	<p>Candidates who were awarded Scholarship with Outstanding Performance commonly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> developed a clear, convincing argument that addressed the quote Included well considered, thoughtful analysis with considerable insight and/or originality had a strong understanding of historical context and could make connections between the past and current trends/events were able to "unpack" the question statements and argue from a range of points and positions demonstrated considerable understanding of ambiguity and subtlety in their argument wrote succinctly and to the point expanded on their thinking by providing convincing evidence to back it up. provided thinking that went beyond classroom learning could unpick, analyse, and put the quote/statement into the context of the Media landscape, isolate key developments, refer to historical context and trends, and predict future developments based on current directions and movements. used media theory in a knowledgeable and appropriate way.
Scholarship	<p>Candidates who were awarded Scholarship commonly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> were able to translate the core meaning of the quote/statement and draw an argument using their subject knowledge included well considered analysis with some insight expanded ideas beyond pre-learnt content used evidence from a range of sources in support of their argument demonstrated some understanding of ambiguity and subtlety in their argument had an understanding of historical context in relation to the quote/statement and how it fitted within the context of the question used media theory where appropriate.
Other candidates	<p>Candidates who were not awarded Scholarship commonly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> stuck largely to a pre-learnt canon of content and argument applied pre-learnt answers to questions that were not reflective of the question raised wrote an argument that clearly was not of their own making and therefore were unable to convey their thinking past a rote learned response fail to address the question correctly developed simplistic arguments made sweeping claims with out clear supporting evidence used inappropriate or insufficient evidence

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spoke from one narrow point of view • provided historical content that was narrow and that tried to argue its significance without reference to other historical points of view • did not attempt or complete both essays.
Standard specific comments	<p>There was an obvious bias towards a specific question type in the examination, namely that of using genre/close reading in candidate's responses. There was an overwhelming trend for candidates to select Question 1E and to answer it as a genre/close reading question rather than as a relationship between media and society question. Whilst good candidates were able to incorporate representation and relationships into their answer, the majority used genre as a means to answer this question. For a lot of candidates this meant that they essentially had two opportunities to talk about genre in their scholarship examination. This is a major concern affecting the overall make up of Media Studies and allowing too much focus on film studies and literature analysis.</p> <p>Question 2, Development of a Medium / Media Industry question was by far the least popular question chosen by candidates. Quotes/statements that were popular in this question were the "Technology" and "Streaming" quotes/statements. However, there was an obvious lack of accuracy in subject knowledge with candidates answering this question often generalising around inaccurate and presumptuous facts. Historical knowledge especially in the music, TV and film industries was poorly argued (if at all) and candidates had trouble looking beyond current technologies and mediums.</p> <p>Lack of future trends and predictions based on current media avenues was also a concern. Many strong scholarship candidates failed to make the step to Outstanding Scholarship due to not looking beyond the current situation and making educated predictions. Much of this problem derives from a lack of subject knowledge and understanding of media audiences and media industries.</p> <p>Question 3 provided a safe avenue for candidates to extend their understanding of genre with most candidates settling for quotes/statements that directly addressed genre. Candidates who took the opportunity to address quotes/statements relating to narrative and specific close reading techniques, such as editing, etc. struggled to demonstrate advanced knowledge and understanding of practice, technique and meaning. Many candidates couldn't structure nor articulate answers in a way that provided a clear and focused analysis when it came to close reading in any way that was outside of a genre response.</p> <p>There were many references to (and inclusions of) quotes/statements from past examinations indicating a rote approach to Scholarship. Many candidates provided quotes from media commentators that appeared out of context to the argument and without purpose.</p> <p>A large number of candidates from a range of providers used the same source material, texts, arguments, and opinions in their responses.</p> <p>Whilst a significant portion of candidates were able to quote theorists (Barthes, Derrida etc) and theories (Hypodermic, cultivation etc), only a few managed to integrate these theories in a meaningful way into their arguments. For the most part, the quotes added little. It would be more productive in general for candidates to analyse and explore evidence rather than 'name-drop' theories and theorists.</p> <p>A key requirement of the 'genre' questions this year was to develop convincing understandings of social contexts in which genre arise and flourish. For this, a sound understanding of history was necessary. Unfortunately, candidates often demonstrated a questionable, at times inaccurate, and often superficial understanding of history. Several examples might be instructive. Regarding the gangster film <i>The Godfather</i>, whilst arguments for audience appreciation of a new kind of leader (Corleone) in contrast to the 'hated' Nixon are initially compelling, they ignore the fact that Watergate did not affect Nixon's November 1972 historic landslide re-election, which followed the March 1972 release of the film. The scandal was very much a mid-1973 affair, well after the <i>Godfather's</i> first run. They are on more solid ground when making links between the film and Nixon's leadership of the Vietnam War in general, particularly when considering Nixon's apparent mixed messages in his troop withdrawals, Vietnamization and</p>

Linebacker bombing campaigns, policies which appeared to both de-escalate and re-escalate the conflict. So candidates need to take care when linking the film to public disquiet with American leadership, which in 1972 was arguably not a dominant ideology.

It was pleasing to see how many candidates engaged with Maori representation in the exam. It is clearly being taught with care and is engaging the interest of many. However, several observations are appropriate. A number of candidates made large claims about Maori representation with only limited or unconvincing supporting evidence. Whilst the Boyd (1809) is a compelling incident that was often discussed thoughtfully, reporting of it in the Evening Post was much later (and needs to be signalled as such). Contemporary reports in England sensationalised to an extent, but relatively early reports in the Sydney Gazette, for example, did attempt balance and challenge the notion that the 'eurocentric' view was entirely negative. In a September 1810 report, for example, the Gazette clearly indicated the failures of the Captain and described local Maori upbraiding him for their 'maltreatment' before the massacre. And the same report went to great lengths to describe the attempts of local chief Tippahee (sic) to save the survivors from Ngati Uru, the irony being (as the Gazette points out) that he (Tippahee or Te Pahi) who was initially blamed was actually trying to save the Boyd survivors. So the media representation of this event, even in the 'eurocentric' press, was not straightforward. Candidates need to take care that they develop a nuanced view of such events and representations in order to gain the highest marks.

It was also surprising that there was very little in the way of Maori representation in the media between the Boyd and the 1970s, according to most responses. Many key events and possible resources spring to mind- in terms of conflict, Wairau 1843, The Northern Wars, The Waikato and Taranaki Wars, Parihaka. And later, The New Zealand Exhibitions, The Maori Battalion, the work of the National Film Unit, Tourism marketing, Broken Barrier, Runaway and so on. There is much to be gained from a more wide-ranging study of representation of Maori over this period.

And finally, Once Were Warriors is not emblematic of Maori culture, just as ISIS propaganda is not emblematic of Islam. Candidates often made the grave error of inferring from the particular to the general without convincing evidence or awareness of the breathtaking nature of their claims. A similar mistake could be made by suggesting that Into the Blue's disturbed villain represents Pakeha culture, and thus young single pakeha males are all mass murderers, at least representationally. Patterns of representation must be shown as patterns, not isolated or outlying occurrences.

Discussions of war films at times failed to adequately explore the specific social and historical contexts. One key important difference between World War II and the Vietnam War was not explored by any candidate- that WW2 was an international conflict engaging many of the world's nations in an ideological struggle that threatened western democracy and was never seriously challenged in the mainstream press, whilst Vietnam was an increasingly unpopular proxy war that many could not understand and was arguably 'lost' in the press. This key contextual difference has a great bearing on how the war film genre served as a barometer of the times, and how it either followed or led public opinion.