

Assessment Report

Scholarship, 2008

Media Studies

COMMENTARY

The selection of quotes this year allowed candidates to respond in an appropriate way, and to demonstrate their critical thinking and subject knowledge. The wider range of quotes encouraged a variety of responses from candidates. The shift to three options per question ought to have improved performance, given the increased opportunity candidates were provided with to find quotes to suit their particular strengths. It does not appear to have resulted in a significantly improved performance. Nevertheless there was less evidence of prepared essays and less repetition of material across both essays. It is worth noting that a significant minority of candidates were clearly not capable of achieving at Scholarship level, and probably should not have entered for the examination.

Excessive length or detail in candidate responses did not necessarily improve performance. At times, detail helped to show that the candidate had a high level of subject knowledge; at times, it did not. Less convincing scripts tended to dwell on descriptive detail in an attempt to appear knowledgeable, with the detail often not relevant to the argument beyond the first few comments. Candidates should balance their subject knowledge with more focus on elements of critical thinking by consider a range of different perspectives, developing convincing arguments with clear detail, and providing an insightful and perceptive understanding of their topic.

Some candidates successfully presented arguments that took issue with the quote, at least in part. This requires a sophisticated, organised approach, and was not well suited to all questions. Quite a number attempted to oppose the quote when this may not have been the best decision. It is important that candidates are prepared with a range of ways to approach a question, but they also need to exercise appropriate judgments when making choices about approaches.

Some questions were clearly more popular than others; Question 1(b) was the most popular, followed by Questions 2(a) and 3(a). Question 3(c) was the least answered option.

In Question 1(b) it was not necessary or particularly productive to define each of the terms within the Joey Skaggs quotation. Some candidates spent excessive time dwelling on minor semantic differences that were not really useful for their overall argument. Picking one or two words to focus on was usually more effective.

Many candidates in Question 2(a) did not have a clear understanding of what convergence is when applied in a media context. Successful arguments looked at convergence of ownership, media technologies, audiences, media consumption habits, and media production trends. Many candidates, however, did not clearly define or understand convergence, and instead produced analyses (often well-considered and written) of historical developments in a media/industry that had no clear links to convergence. These candidates could not score well for critical thinking.

What a “blockbuster” is, in the chosen medium, needed to be clearly and convincingly defined in Question 2(c). There were some effective arguments that used other media - for example, comparing high production cost commercial music to low budget internet-based publishing. By contrast, some assumed that all commercially made films have been “blockbusters”. It is incorrect to assume that films like *Sleeping Dogs* or *Smash Palace* can be defined in these terms.

A number of candidates argued, rather oddly, in Question 3(b), that the creative process of viewing was all about losing oneself in the story or the characters. Most did argue convincingly that the quote is really asking viewers to contemplate how films can make people think and engage with ideas, rather than entertain them with story and character.

Question 3(c) required the candidate to engage with the idea that the reader creates meaning in a text independent (to an extent) of the author's intentions. It confused some candidates, who had difficulty making a clear distinction between objectivity and subjectivity that lies at the heart of this quote. In these responses candidates often wrote about one as if it were the other, and ended up confused by the time they had reached the end of the essay. Very few candidates approached this as an essay on reader theory, or the power of the reader, two approaches which were perfect for this quotation. The best responses considered a range of readings across a number of texts in order to establish the idea that readers see themselves in texts, an approach that should have been well-considered in the internally assessed work completed for 90600.

In a minority of responses, candidates used inappropriate texts. While it must be acknowledged that adults do return to school to pursue qualifications, texts such as "A Clockwork Orange" or "Eyes Wide Shut" are really not appropriate for school study.

The best performing candidates most commonly demonstrated the following skills and/or knowledge:

- strong analytical ability with some insightful arguments; they had a clear, articulate writing style
- ability to refer thoughtfully to a wide range of texts or other evidence in their analysis
- ability to bring in knowledge and concepts from other related fields – e.g. history, sociology, philosophy, English; often this came from a clear love of thinking and ideas, and their own reading and exploration of the world apparently outside formal education
- ability to build a coherent, thoughtful argument that addressed the quote (either supported, opposed, or both) in a clear and analytical way
- strong understanding of a range of ideas and concepts in Media Studies
- understanding of the complexity of the subject and attempted to communicate this; they showed that there are no easy answers to any of the set questions; they also argued back and forth, and analysed various positions; a small number of candidates took issue effectively with the quote in order to construct a response.

Candidates who did NOT achieve scholarship lacked some or all of the skills and knowledge above and in addition they:

- often reproduced prepared essays with limited relevance to the quote, and made only cursory attempts to make their material fit the quote
- often failed to support their argument with appropriate or specific evidence
- tended to describe or explain, without attempting to build an analytical argument
- lacked an overall shape to their argument, perhaps jumping from one aspect to another without clear linking