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Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa  
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

## Level 2 Media Studies 2025

### 91251 Demonstrate understanding of an aspect of a media genre

Credits: Four

Achievement	Achievement with Merit	Achievement with Excellence
Demonstrate understanding of an aspect of a media genre.	Demonstrate in-depth understanding of an aspect of a media genre.	Demonstrate critical understanding of an aspect of a media genre.

Check that the National Student Number (NSN) on your admission slip is the same as the number at the top of this page.

**You should write an essay on ONE of the five statements in this booklet.**

If you need more room for any answer, use the extra space provided at the back of this booklet.

Check that this booklet has pages 2–12 in the correct order and that none of these pages is blank.

Do not write in the margins (//////). This area will be cut off when the booklet is marked.

**YOU MUST HAND THIS BOOKLET TO THE SUPERVISOR AT THE END OF THE EXAMINATION.**

Excellence

TOTAL 08



## Page 1

### INSTRUCTIONS

Choose ONE media genre.

Write an essay discussing the extent to which you agree or disagree with ONE of the statements below, in relation to an aspect of your chosen media genre.

### STATEMENTS (Choose ONE)

1. Changes in the audience are what drive changes in the media genre.
2. The need for profit means that genres will take very few creative risks.
3. A media genre must take on influences from other genre(s) to remain relevant.
4. A genre is successful only when it reflects what audiences are thinking about at the time.
5. As a genre evolves, its conventions will also evolve.

Media genre:

Select your statement:  ▾

### PLANNING

Changes in the audience are what drive changes in the media genre, because media reflects the zeitgeist and the society of the time

## ESSAY

Type your essay in the space below. You should aim to write a concise essay of no more than 750–800 words. The quality of your writing is more important than the length of your essay. (The counter will change colour when you reach the recommended word count.)

Make sure you **respond only to your chosen statement throughout** your essay, and support your discussion with **evidence** from media text(s) and / or other sources, which may include your own production experience.

**B** *I* U       

Changes in the audience are what drive changes in the media genre,

We, as people, are constantly changing. The culture, fears and expectations of each society differs as we change, and this change can be seen reflected in the horror subgenre: the slasher movie. As our world changes, the slasher genre also reflects this as it goes through different stages and conventions develop. This can be framed by Christian Metz's 4-stage genre progression model, which states that genres cycle through 4 different stages: Experimental, Classical, Parody, and Deconstruction. By looking at the slasher subgenre through the different cycles it went through, we can see how different conventions and components of each cycle reflect society and the audience's fears and expectations, and so as society changes, the genre changes.

*Psycho* (1960) directed by Alfred Hitchcock, is defined under the 'experimental' stage of Metz's genre progression model. It was wildly successful, having a budget of 800,000 which drove in a net profit of 32 million, and is one of the first films which we can reasonably label as a slasher. While it doesn't have the same iconic conventions that we know and love today, *Psycho* was a film which pushed boundaries and explore limits, allowing the slasher genre to develop. One of the first changes in the development of the slasher genre can be seen reflecting the cultural zeitgeist of the 1950s. At this time, America had just come out of WW2, the economy was booming, and there was a rise in suburbanization. However, people returning from war were facing disillusionment, along with society having underlying fear about the Cold War. Horror cinema was mainly composed of Gothic themes, monster films, or out of space terrors (reflecting America's fears with the space race), but was introduced to an entirely new face of terror: The psychological killer. Norman Bates was not something the audience had commonly seen before; for the first time, the terror was coming not from supernatural or monstrous beings, but the monster was within Norman Bates himself, a poor, awkward mama's boy. As said by theorist Kendall R. Phillips, "*Psycho* both resonated with and violated American cultural means". Norman Bates and the emergence of the psychological killer was new and unexpected, something the audience wasn't used to, but also represented the underlying anxieties and subconscious fears which society had about the rising Cold War at the time. Films at this time were also held back due to the Hays Production Code, a guidelines designed to match the American values at the time. *Psycho* was one of the first movies to take a bold move and explore the limits of the boundaries, with many of the Hays Code being broken. This includes rules such as "Nakedness is forbidden", "Methods of crime are not to be detailed", "Undergarments may not be shown." We can see these rules right from the beginning of the movie, where Marion Crane is shown in her undergarments, engaging in premarital sex. Methods of crime are also shown as we watch how Marion steals money from her job and runs away, and nudity is shown in the iconic shower scene. In this shower scene, Hitchcock used rapid cuts and fast-paced editing to create an effect of an intense and brutal murder, with shots flashing between Marion to the knife to blood in the water. Hitchcock managed to imply a brutal murder to the viewers without actually showing any graphic content, pushing the boundaries onto what can be done. The limitations of Hays Code and the audience expectations were broken by Hitchcock, who under restriction found more creative ways to change what he could do and hence, laid the essential groundwork for the many slashers to come.

Following the experimental stage comes the classical stage--the stage where the genre conventions are set and become recognised. This can be seen by *Halloween* (1978), directed by John Carpenter, which is often seen as the slasher genre at it's purest form. We can see many of the iconic slasher conventions we all recognise today, the final girl, the masked killer, the suburban setting, and when we break each of these conventions down, we can see how they reflected the audience and society as it shifted. As we enter the 1970s, America had just lost the Vietnam war, causing a sense of loss and disillusionment, followed with other major events such as the Watergate scandal, which lead to distrust in government, with America being described as having 'a national sense of pessimism'. This time was also when suburbanization was highest, following ideas of the American Dream and hoping to find a sense of safety in the white picket fences and happy family dynamics. This is reflected in the slasher, where we moved from an isolated, slightly gothic themed house in *Psycho* to a neighbourhood suburb in *Haddonfield*. Robin Wood states that "the horror film's function is to present that which society represses" and this is exactly seen in *Halloween*, as the suburban setting, following with the unstoppable killer, represents the fears which the audience wished to suppress. Michael Myers, described as "purely and simply... evil" represented the underlying anxieties which bled into everyone, even under the seemingly safe suburban areas, and the impending sense of doom which American citizens felt. The unstoppable masked killer (also taking influence from the rise of media coverage on serial killers) against the suburban setting reflected how people used the safety of the suburb and the idealised views of the American Dream to suppress the underlying anxieties and feelings of distrust. The masked face and dehumanization of Michael Myers was also a way for people to grapple with the increasingly violent society and the changes they were scared to come. We can also see through the Final Girl trope how the male gaze seeped into the genre. *Halloween's* final girl, Laurie Strode, survives through her resilience, resourcefulness, and her moral purity, and can be seen as the change in the role of women, where through second wave feminism allowed for more female representation and empowerment. However, Laurie is seen to survive through her 'moral purity' of not drinking, having sex, or doing other immoral activities, which reflects the conservative values at the time, representing the debate on the role of women. Despite how Laurie uses her witty skills and resourcefulness to fend off Michael, using a clothing hanger, a knitting needle and even Michael's own knife, the one who delivers the final blow is not her. This display of the final girl, who despite being resourceful and intelligent, still 'needs to be saved' in the end, catering towards the male gaze. This can be further seen through the use of P.O.V. shots, where the audience sees through Michael Myer's own eyes. This was in order to cater to the male dominated audience, who would feel dominant and more powerful viewing the movie through these lens and in turn leave more positive reception to the movie, reflecting the audiences underlying fears and expectations.

However, after the success of Halloween, people saw the strategic formula of the slasher which guaranteed a low budget with high return, causing for over 300 slasher films to be made in the following decade, along with never ending sequels. This marks the 'parody' stage of the genre's progression--audiences recognised and had grown tired of the repeating formulas, along with the changes in society led the slasher subgenre to become saturated and audiences bored. This is where *Scream* (1996), directed by Wes Craven revitalised the dying slasher genre. *Scream* differed from other slashers due to its self aware and meta style, even seen as 'mocking' the conventions of the slasher genre. By now, the Cold War had ended and audiences moved away from external threats and were increasingly worried towards the threats within themselves. There was a rise in conservatism, followed with the AIDS crisis, and adults were worried about the growing youth culture and delinquency. We can see this change reflected as the slasher genre moves away from older, adult characters and into a group of young teenagers. The killers, who are later revealed to be two members of the teenage group, Billy and Stu, reflect the growing fears of youth delinquency and holding 'a mirror to the cultural insecurities at the time' (Rockoff, 67). Part of what made *Scream* so successful is the self-aware comments and references to other slasher films, as seen when Randy directly states the 'rules' to survive a slasher: "Number One: Don't have sex. Sex equals death. Number Two: Don't drink or do drugs... Number three: never, ever, ever, say "I'll be right back!" because you won't be back!" or when Tatum mocks the repetitiveness of the genre: "Please don't kill me Mr. Ghostface, I wanna be in the sequel!". These nods and references to the iconic slasher conventions give a humorous and nostalgic effect to long time viewers, who are likely bored of the repeating formulas, while allowing newer generations to learn a little context about the slasher genre. As the audience changes and becomes bored of repeating conventions, *Scream* manages to bring audiences a new appreciation as they feel a sense of accomplishment noticing all the little references and jokes about conventions. *Scream* also changed with the ways they present the conventions themselves. As we entered the third wave of feminism, *Scream's* final girl, Sidney Prescott, shows the change between audience conceptions on women in the past and now. Sidney, unlike Laurie from *Halloween*, earns her survival till the end, and does so even when breaking one of the biggest 'rules' to surviving a slasher, not having sex. This shows how the influence of third wave feminism shifted the display of the final girl from one more catered to the male, to one which was independent and powerful. Sidney is the one who provides the final blow, saying "Not in my movie" when the killer seemingly revives to get their final revenge, marking a stark change from *Halloween* and previous slashers where instead, the final girls were often saved.

After the success of *Scream*, the genre quickly fell back into a cycle of saturated markets and cheap sequels--there is only so much change *Scream* could provide, and "when horror cinema descends into repetition and spoofs into ridiculousness, the mantle of the genre is handed to other types of movies" (Newman). In order to keep audience engagement, creators had to continue reflecting the audience changes in new unique ways, leading us to the 'deconstruction' stage, where the conventions of a genre are broken down and merged with other genres. As our world gets increasingly diverse, the main audience of the slasher genre evolved and expanded into a wider, more diverse range of audiences. This can be seen through the *Film Street Trilogy* released through Netflix. These films took use of nostalgia, having the movie in a 90s setting, combined with a diverse cast with LGBTQ+ representation allowed the trilogy to reach a new, diverse, audience while still providing the same sense of nostalgia with slasher movies. Along with this, there was also a rise of streaming services due to the accessibility of the internet, and less people were going to movie theatres. The slasher genre had to be built through other mediums, such as TV series. This can be seen through the 2015 series *Scream Queens*, an over-the-top, campy series following a sorority of college girls who get killed off one by one. Not only does this follow the change in audience moving to more serialized and accessible streaming services, *Scream Queen* also combines the conventions of slasher with comedy in order to create a new and unique series which sparked interest within teen audiences. While it not only poked fun at slasher conventions, *Scream Queens* also used satire to poke fun at societal issues at the time, such as the dependence on social media and issues of body image. Overall, by following the progression of the slasher genre through Metz's cycle, we can point out how the conventions of each slasher evolve over time, and how they reflect the changes in the audience and the cultural zeitgeist, and so for a genre to remain relevant, it must change as the audience changes.

## Excellence

**Subject:** Media Studies

**Standard:** 91251

**Total score:** 08

Q	Grade score	Marker commentary
1 (1)	E8	<p>The candidate demonstrated a clear and critical understanding of the media genre in response to their chosen statement 1: “Changes in the audience are what drive changes in the media genre”, supported by detailed examples from texts and explicit links to how and why the genre has evolved through cycles. The analysis incorporated some secondary evidence to support arguments, including reasons for audience appeal and commercial success.</p> <p>The candidate examined the impact of the genre on society and other media forms, including changes in medium and format, and explored in detail the implications of these aspects. They successfully drew conclusions about the likely effects on the genre, and how and why audience drive these changes.</p> <p>Overall, the candidate presented a well-structured argument, with clear links between examples, theory, and implications, meeting the criteria to gain a high Excellence.</p>