

2025 NCEA Assessment Report

Subject:	Media Studies
Level:	2
Achievement standard(s):	91248, 91251

General commentary

Overall, candidates displayed a broad engagement with both contemporary and historical media, utilising a mix of long-established texts and newer releases. However, a significant determinant of success across both standards was the appropriateness of the chosen media product or genre. There remains confusion regarding definitions: in 91248, some candidates inappropriately analysed a whole genre (such as road movie) rather than a specific media product; while in 91251, some candidates conflated franchises (such as MCU) with genres. Candidates would benefit from understanding the fundamental distinctions between a media product, a franchise, and a genre to avoid self-penalising before their analysis begins.

Across both standards, the ability to directly address the chosen examination statement remained challenging. Higher-performing candidates adopted a clear stance, integrating key words from the statement fluently throughout their argument. Conversely, candidates who treated the statement more as an "add-on", addressing it only briefly at the conclusion of paragraphs, or including unrelated material regardless of the chosen statement, did not perform as well.

The application of media theory and evidence was another differentiating factor. Successful responses utilised theory (such as audience psychographics, media effects theory, or genre theory) and secondary evidence (such as box office statistics or reviews) to unpack arguments and explain why relationships or genre conventions exist. Conversely, candidates who "name-dropped" theorists without explicit linkage to the argument, or relied on unsupported generalisations, frequently confusing the specific "audience" of a text with general "society", limited the grade they could achieve.

Candidates would benefit significantly from learning explicit essay-writing skills. Clear introductions, thematic paragraphing, and the ability to maintain a narrow, deep focus on specific exemplars rather than broad chronological histories or plot summaries, provided the clearest pathways to Merit and Excellence.

Report on individual achievement standard(s)

Achievement standard 91248: Demonstrate understanding of the relationship between a media product and its audience

Assessment

The examination required candidates to select one of five statements and write an essay discussing the extent to which they agreed or disagreed, in relation to the relationship between a chosen media product and its audience.

Commentary

Overall, there was a range of media products used ranging from those that have been taught for some years, such as *Stranger Things* and *Aroha Bridge* (TV shows), and *NZTA* (TVCs), through to newer products, such as *The Gone* and *Alone Australia* (TV shows). The *Barbie* (movie), *Snack Masters* (TV show), and *Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour (Taylor's Version)* (concert film) have also become popular choices over the last two years.

This year, more so than in others, some candidates wrote on a selection of texts within a media genre, such as the road movie genre. A media genre is *not* a media product, but a loosely defined set of characteristics grouping separate media texts together and providing a general blueprint for their production and distribution. As such, a media genre does not qualify as a media product. Essays that discussed genre needed to be assessed on the merits of whether one of the media products discussed met the requirements for the standard, not the genre as a whole. These essays tended not to fare as well for candidates, who would benefit from remembering a careful choice of media text is key.

Choosing a media product with several different seasons or episodes is a way of delving into various different aspects of how the relationship with the audience is developed or maintained. Equally, a one-off media product, such as a film that engages with its audience in a unique, successful or multi-faceted way can also provide a rich source of learning and thinking for candidates.

This standard lends itself to applying an understanding of media theory and other media related terminology, such as psychographic audience profiling to explain how and why the relationship operates the way it does. Candidates not taught this are disadvantaged, despite having lots of detail about the media product itself to discuss. Similarly, products that lend themselves to a discussion of interesting, topical, unusual, or complex wider implications/consequences provided a clear pathway to gain Excellence.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- described how a relationship operated between a media product and an audience, but may have been vague on the specific make up or characteristics of this audience
- provided detailed evidence from the media product and concerning the make up of the audience to support their description of how the relationship operated
- referred to media theory and/or secondary sources, but did not show a sound understanding of how the theory or quote helped to shed light on how/why the relationship operated the way it did
- included some material that was largely irrelevant to the statement they had chosen or not sufficiently linked back to the key words of the statement to be considered relevant.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Merit** commonly:

- explored why the relationship between media product and audience exists and how it is built on
- used evidence, such as statistics, quotes, and media theory in an accurate and confident manner to demonstrate how and why the relationship operated
- knew their material well and were able to select appropriate points relevant to the statement they had chosen, referring to the key words or ideas from the chosen statement consistently throughout the response
- attempted to discuss a wider consequence, but not with sufficient depth, evidence, or logic to make it convincing (wider consequences also needed to be relevant to the chosen statement and the rest of the essay).

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Excellence** commonly:

- wrote fluently, adopting a stance in relation to the chosen statement, as opposed to simply referring to it mechanically
- demonstrated both a thorough knowledge of the relationship between their chosen media product and its audience, as well as a capacity to think through the nuances and complexities of this relationship
- included relevant information on the changing nature of the media-sphere, such as developments with technology, AI, and algorithms
- referenced quotes and/or media theory to unpack a relevant point
- framed the discussion of wider consequences in a way that contributed to the overall argument of the essay and remained relevant to the chosen statement.

Candidates who were awarded **Not Achieved** commonly:

- wrote much less than the suggested word count
- demonstrated a superficial knowledge or understanding of the relationship between a media product and its audience (often times this manifested in a lack of specific evidence suggesting a self-selected media product as opposed to a product that was studied)
- selected a media product that was too vague or broad, such as a media genre
- did not address the chosen statement sufficiently.

Achievement standard 91251: Demonstrate understanding of an aspect of a media genre

Assessment

The examination required candidates to select one of five statements and write an essay discussing the extent to which they agreed or disagreed, in relation to an aspect of a chosen media genre.

Commentary

Overall, candidates demonstrated improved engagement with the genre focus of the standard. Compared to previous years, fewer essays relied solely on plot summary across three separate films.

Word counts were generally appropriate, with most essays falling within the expected 600–1500 word range, which helped candidates remain more focused on the statement rather than attempting to include everything they had been taught.

Popular genres continued to dominate responses, particularly horror (including sub-genres, such as slasher, psychological horror, and vampire), coming-of-age, superhero, sitcom, and teen genres. Essays that focused on a narrower range of texts as key exemplars of the genre were more successful than those attempting broad chronological histories, which often lacked focus.

While many candidates attempted to address the chosen statement, there remained a consistent issue with superficial engagement. Some candidates treated the statement as an “add-on”, addressing it briefly at the end of paragraphs rather than integrating it throughout the argument. A recurring misunderstanding was the conflation of “audience” with “society”, leading to unsupported generalisations that did not clearly link back to genre conventions or expectations.

Candidates would benefit from stronger essay-writing skills, particularly clear introductions, thematic or ideas-based paragraphing, and purposeful conclusions. Some responses still resembled reports or timelines rather than analytical essays.

Common issues identified with this standard included:

- continued misuse of franchises (such as *MCU*) as genres
- inappropriate or questionable text choices (such as *Cannibal Holocaust*, *Midsommar*, *Euphoria*), with uncertainty about whether texts were taught or fully understood
- limited identification and understanding of sub-genres
- overreliance on media theorists without explicit linkage to the argument
- essays where length was mistaken for quality
- insufficient integration and explanation of secondary evidence (such as box office statistics)
- persistent confusion between analysing genre and analysing representation or social issues more suited to other Media Studies standards.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- wrote rote-learned essays that were loosely adapted to fit the statement
- used a text-by-text or film-by-film structure, often with one paragraph per film
- answered the statement briefly, without nuance or sustained development
- relied heavily on plot description rather than using texts as evidence for genre discussion
- included media theory in a superficial way, often name-dropping theorists without clear understanding or relevance
- used academic language taught in class with limited understanding of its meaning.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Merit** commonly:

- addressed the chosen statement more fully and consistently
- demonstrated ideas that went beyond individual films and showed awareness of the genre as a whole
- used a wider range of texts, sometimes including current examples
- structured essays clearly, often with one main idea per paragraph supported by multiple texts
- included some secondary evidence or references to trends, intertextuality, hybridisation, or change over time, though links to the statement were sometimes tenuous
- attempted to discuss implications, but these were not always convincingly developed or clearly connected to the argument.

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement with Excellence** commonly:

- answered the statement fully and convincingly with a clearly structured, coherent essay
- used a thematic or ideas-based structure, referencing multiple texts within each paragraph
- demonstrated strong understanding of genre conventions, audience expectations, and genre evolution
- integrated theory, statistics, and secondary academic or industry evidence carefully and purposefully
- selected evidence judiciously, avoiding excessive plot summary
- discussed implications of genre change with sophistication and nuance, often considering future developments of the genre
- demonstrated original thinking and a high level of independent learning.

Candidates who were awarded **Not Achieved** commonly:

- produced responses dominated by plot summary or personal commentary
- did not address the statement or misunderstood the genre as a whole
- focused on a single text, franchise (such as the MCU), or named multiple texts without analysis
- showed limited or no understanding of audience, genre conventions, or purpose
- made broad generalisations without textual evidence
- wrote significantly under the expected word count or used unrelated rote-learned essays.