

2025 NCEA Assessment Report

Subject:	Media Studies
Level:	3
Achievement standard(s):	91490, 91493

General commentary

Overall, candidates were required to engage directly and consistently with a selected statement from a range. While many attempted to do so, responses frequently addressed only parts of the statement or reinterpreted them to suit rote-learned material. Candidates who used their chosen statement as an organising framework throughout their response were more successful. This allowed them to analyse industry or genre in depth rather than referencing the statement only in introductory or concluding sections. Reliance on heavily scaffolded or rote-learned essays continued to limit candidates' ability to demonstrate personal critical understanding and flexible application of knowledge.

A recurring issue was uneven understanding of core concepts. In 91490, this was evident in narrow or outdated views of how industries operate, with candidates often focusing on a single organisation rather than the industry as a whole, or relying on extended historical narratives at the expense of contemporary analysis. In 91493, candidates frequently neglected to sustain discussion of genre across time, instead adopting text-by-text or era-based structures that limited conceptual depth. Overreliance on genre cycle theory often resulted in responses that aligned more closely with lower-level expectations.

Interpretation of key terms within statements also posed challenges. Some candidates misunderstood abstract or contextual language, leading to a misalignment between the chosen statement and the material presented. This was particularly evident where candidates attempted to fit familiar content to unsuitable statements.

The quality and use of evidence varied considerably. Successful responses across both standards employed detailed primary evidence to establish arguments, supported by secondary evidence to extend and strengthen analysis. This approach clearly distinguished well-prepared candidates from those who did not engage meaningfully with the demands of the standards.

Given the conceptual breadth of both standards, candidates would benefit from sustained exposure to a diverse, current range of texts, examples, and contexts. This would support deeper understanding, reduce reliance on formulaic responses, and better prepare candidates to respond thoughtfully and precisely to the statements provided.

Report on individual achievement standard(s)

Achievement standard 91490: Demonstrate understanding of an aspect of a media industry

Assessment

The examination required candidates to select one of five statements and write an essay discussing the extent to which they agreed, by evaluating the operation, impact, and wider significance of an aspect of a chosen media industry.

Commentary

Overall, candidates would have benefited from a broader and more current understanding of how their chosen media industry operates. Stronger responses demonstrated awareness of recent and significant industry developments and showed flexibility in applying knowledge across a range of questions, rather than relying on a single pre-prepared topic.

Statement 5: “Current media has rewritten the rules for media industries”, was by far the most commonly selected. This statement allowed candidates to explore industry change. However, many responses relied heavily on extended historical overviews rather than maintaining a focus on contemporary developments. In some cases, candidates interpreted the concept of “rules” too narrowly, limiting discussion to regulation rather than broader industrial, technological, or cultural practices. Others adopted overly broad interpretations of “current media”, which weakened their ability to engage with up-to-date examples.

Other statements were attempted by fewer candidates, with statement 3: “Indigenous media struggles in relation to mainstream media”, being the least popular. Some candidates struggled to interpret key terms such as “indigenous” and “outrage” within the context of the statements. Pre-prepared and heavily scaffolded responses were evident and frequently did not address the selected statement meaningfully.

A recurring issue was limited understanding of industry structures. Many candidates demonstrated either a narrow or outdated view of their industry, often focusing on a single organisation rather than the industry as a whole. This was compounded by large, unsupported leaps in discussion across time periods, which reduced coherence and analytical depth.

More successful responses showed clear, current industry knowledge and applied it directly and consistently to the chosen statement.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- responded to key words from the statement, though commonly only in the introduction or conclusion
- relied heavily on a history of the industry rather than addressing a particular aspect of the industry as required.
- showed basic industry understanding, but focused on a single entity (such as Netflix) rather than the wider industry context
- provided basic evidence, often from primary sources, to support their discussion.

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

- explained how the chosen aspect had a clear impact on the industry

- developed a thesis in the introduction that attempted to address the statement throughout the response
- showed an ability to move beyond mere history to discuss more recent (if not entirely "current") industry developments
- used a mix of primary and secondary evidence, including statistics, to support their explanations.

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

- provided a sophisticated, integrated argument that directly interrogated the complexities of the statement
- demonstrated a high level of flexibility, adapting deep subject knowledge to the specific constraints of the statement rather than relying on scaffolded structures
- used judicious, highly current, or relevant examples that proved a genuine understanding of the contemporary media landscape
- subverted or interrogated the statement, showing an understanding of the nuances and "new rules" of the industry.

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

- did not identify or discuss an industry (talking about "the media"), or focusing on one particular business/show
- did not address the statement
- wrote a pre-prepared essay
- did not include evidence to support their points
- wrote considerably less than the recommended word limit or a longer essay, mostly containing non-relevant material, such as a history of the industry
- focused more often on an issue (such as the development of AI) rather than how it might apply to a media industry.

Achievement standard 91493: Demonstrate understanding of a relationship between a media genre and society

Assessment

The examination required candidates to select one of five statements and write an essay discussing the extent to which they agreed, by evaluating the influence, impact, and wider significance of a relationship between a chosen media genre and society.

Commentary

Overall, a significant number of candidates relied on rote-learned material, including familiar genres, discussions, and evidence that have appeared in earlier examination cycles. This limited candidates' ability to respond flexibly and directly to the specific demands of the statements. Often, a number of candidates attempted fitting pre-prepared content to the statements, reinterpreting or misinterpreting the statements to suit an existing response.

Strong responses engaged with the whole statement, choosing well according to their genre and/or society. This led to engaged and thoughtful discussions. However, many candidates appeared to focus on a single part of a chosen statement, limiting their ability to engage fully with the options provided. This led to the standard of the assessed responses being lower than in previous years.

Further teaching and learning of emerging, unconventional, or social-leaning genres would benefit candidates. The consideration of genre conventions with sociological counterparts might assist in differentiating genres from movements or representation. While these responses often demonstrated engagement and interest, the discussions were more appropriately aligned with standards focused on representation, readings, or industry rather than genre-society relationships. As a result, these responses did not frequently meet the intent of the standard.

A common limitation in responses was a text-by-text, era-by-era structure. These responses tended to position individual films within a particular historical moment but did not sufficiently establish or sustain discussion of a genre across time. There was also heavy reliance on genre cycle theory, particularly Focillon, Metz, or Schatz, with some responses resembling Level 2 approaches. Candidates often discussed one film per stage of the cycle, without demonstrating a clear understanding of how those texts meaningfully functioned within the genre, or its historical development.

Candidates generally did not achieve Merit or Excellence unless responses were of substantial length, typically exceeding 1100 words. This suggests that concise, sustained, analytical writing remains challenging at this level, particularly given the conceptual demands of the standard.

Grade awarding

Candidates who were awarded **Achievement** commonly:

- established the genre and a society at the start of the response and in the conclusion
- engaged generally with the statement – commonly through the introduction and conclusion
- began each paragraph or point with an aspect of the relationship and then used evidence from the genre to support each point, making it clear they had viewed and understood their chosen media texts
- offered some explanation of the relationship between the genre and society, but generally focused on the connection between the text and a time period rather than a wider/deeper consideration of the genre
- engaged generally with the individual texts and their individual impact on society rather than the genre.

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

- established the relationship between the genre and the society as central to the discussion
- applied evidence from media genre texts and/or secondary sources to support their ideas
- explored the genre within a particular period
- began to make judgements on the statement
- discussed multiple texts per paragraph, using texts from the genre to support the explanation of the impact of the relationship
- connected paragraphs with a common thread, regarding the relationship between the genre and the society
- focused on specific, often narrow time frames for the society, such as post-9/11 US society for war films, or 1940s–50s America for film noir, or post-2008 for neo noir.

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

- wrote with originality and nuance
- incorporated media theory appropriately and meaningfully rather than using the theory as the essay structure
- focused on the genre first, the texts second
- incorporated secondary evidence, using it to support the discussion

- explored whether the relationship served the society or the genre more
- engaged with the genre beyond the studied texts
- sustained a clear focus on a specific, often narrow time frame for the society, with an understanding of the genre beyond this time frame, but without the discussion becoming tangential.

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

- read a series of texts closely
- produced a series of paragraphs, each about a media text from a time period, without demonstrating understanding of the genre itself and/or the relationship
- gave a broad and generalised overview of the genre, without offering discussion of the society to establish a connection/relationship in the response
- did not respond to their chosen statement or created a rote-learned response
- used made up information and/or created their own genre and/or statement
- wrote on a single text rather than a genre.