

Media Investigation: Ten steps to success

The Media Investigation is a major assignment in Media Studies. It is 30% of the year's assessment so it has to be a substantial piece of work. It has a word equivalent of 2,000 words although the report does not have to be entirely written.

A way of understanding how to complete the task is by accessing strategies from the rubric.

The steps in the completion of the media investigation are intended to support a student's progress and to ensure that a teacher can verify the investigation is a student's own work.

Step 1 Research Processes. Locating a topic and suitable resources. Ensure that primary sources are available. Defining the topic as contemporary (in the last 12 months), Locating a number of sources. Locate primary and secondary sources.

Step 2 Deciding on the Title of the Investigation. Why you need a great focus question.

Step 3 The Analysis of One Media Article. Select one article and use at least one question on audience, organization, representation and conventions. State the name of article, author and where it was published.

Step 4 . Critical Thinking Audience authorship context

Step 5 . Sources of Bias sequencing, space, opinion

Step 6. Judging Sources as a Valid Representation of a Media Issue media ethics

Step 7. Write an Introduction to the Report. Grab attention and state your case

Step 8 . Writing a Draft of the Report. 2,000 words

Step 9. Writing a Second Draft of the Report. 2,000 words

Step 10. Hand in the completed report with the cover sheet . Only your SACE number can be used . Check that there is no reference to identify the school or you. The word count is 2,000 but that does not include appendices

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Feature	D-E	C	B	A
<p>Research: Collection of relevant primary and secondary sources that place the media investigation in current debates. Examination of sources for bias, relevance, and credibility. Demonstration of independent research and referencing skills.</p>	<p>Limited range of sources. The internet was used exclusively</p> <p>Referencing is incomplete.</p>	<p>Primary and secondary sources used. Some evaluation of sources</p> <p>Referencing is consistent</p>	<p>Primary and secondary sources used in a critical manner. Evaluation of one or two sources is detailed.</p> <p>Referencing is consistent</p> <p>Original research evident.</p>	<p>Comprehensive range of sources. The information highlights the currency of the issue. All sources evaluated for bias relevance and credibility.</p> <p>Referencing includes a range of types of information. Referencing is consistent</p> <p>Extensive original research evident.</p>
<p>Understanding:</p> <p>To what extent does the investigation focus on an important current media issue? How well does the student identify the facts, opinions, bias, value judgments, breadth of Representation</p>	<p>The work is mainly descriptive. Opinions accepted as facts. A narrow range of views represented</p>	<p>The work has elements of interpretation touching on some of the concepts of the course .e.g. representations, conventions, audience, organizations.</p>	<p>The work has elements of interpretation using all of the concepts of the course .e.g. representations, conventions, audience, organizations.</p>	<p>The issue is articulated and explained clearly.</p> <p>The issue is examined in depth using all of the concepts of the course. Course concepts are applied as tools of analysis.</p> <p>The value positions of the sources are identified and placed in context. A broad range of views discussed.</p>
<p>Analysis: Skill in investigating the media issue Analysis and interpretation of the information gathered. Consideration of different views</p>	<p>One aspect of the issue is examined</p>	<p>More than one aspect of the issue is examined. Alternative views are stated.</p>	<p>More than one aspect of the issue is examined. The student states the relevance of a media theory. Alternative views are stated.</p>	<p>Critical, analytical and reflective interpretation based around the use of one or more media theories. Alternative views are evaluated.</p>
<p>Evaluation: Of the debated aspects of the media issue. Reasoned judgments on the findings of the investigation</p>	<p>One aspect of the issue is examined</p>	<p>Varying opinions are judged for strength of argument</p> <p>There is reflection on interpretations.</p>	<p>Varying opinions are judged for strength of argument. There is a logical development of ideas.</p> <p>There is reflection on interpretations.</p>	<p>Opinions are investigated in detail and compared . Critical skills evident.</p> <p>The report uses extensive evidence.</p>
<p>Communication:</p> <p>Coherence, logical development and economy in expression.</p> <p>A conclusion to the analysis of the media provided</p>	<p>Opinions are listed. Judgments not substantiated</p>	<p>The introduction states the topic of the report. Body paragraphs develop points. A conclusion provided</p>	<p>The analysis in the report flows from the introduction. Judgments are linked to arguments supported by specific media examples. A conclusion flows from the body paragraphs</p>	<p>The introduction focuses the report.</p> <p>Body paragraphs develop points in a logical, succinct and coherent manner.</p> <p>The conclusion convincingly confirms the points made in the body paragraphs.</p>

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Media Investigation Step 1 : Draft of the research Processes

Build a mind map and link resources to elements of the media issue.

Locate resources . Write short summaries. Link articles

To complete stage 1 of the investigation you have to build a mind map and link resources to elements of the media issue. 1. Define the topic as contemporary : (in the last 12 months). In this you have to justify your choice of the topic. The topic is significant if there are a large number of media reports produced for a range of media outlets, a number of people are influenced by the media reports , the issue has been reported over a long period of time.

2. Locate a number of sources : Locate primary and secondary sources. Provide a dot point summary of five sources and indicate the point of view, the reliability of the source and the contribution of the source in understanding the media issue

Feature	Rubric for Step 1 of the Investigation		
	Low	Medium	High
Sources	Limited range of sources. All sources are secondary. The issue no longer has currency	Primary and secondary sources have been identified The issue has currency	A comprehensive range of sources was accessed. The information highlighted the significance and currency of the issue
Appraisal	Limited evidence of analysis of point of view. The internet was mainly used for sources	There is some evidence that some sources have been analyzed for point of view and reliability. There is a balance between open forum sources and other types of publications	Ample evidence that all sources have been analyzed for point of view and reliability. Open forum sources were referenced against other publications.
Research and Referencing	Referencing incomplete or inconsistent. Minimal research was conducted	Referencing was detailed Original research was conducted	Referencing was detailed and consistent. Extensive original research was conducted

Some sources you may find useful

Media Theories in a PPT presentation

<http://www.slideshare.net/geoffimoss/media-theories-3016026>

Media Code of ethics <http://www.australian-news.com.au/codethics.htm>

Crikey <http://www.crikey.com.au/>

Global citizen media <http://globalvoicesonline.org/-/world/oceania/australia/>

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Step 2: Deciding on a title for the investigation

Do

Invest some time to make sure you will investigate a media issue.

A Powerful Title and Focus Question

The focus question allows you to demonstrate understanding of the course concepts

A focus question can help direct the investigation.

Narrow the investigation. Know that there are parts to the investigation. Refer to the rubric.

Answerable in 2,000 words

Contemporary: The issue needs to be in the media in the past 12 months.

Dont's

You should be aware of popular investigations which have been done before. Violence in the Media, Girls and Body Image. Unless there have been new issues or new ways of examining the topics the investigation is likely to have limited success.

Misuse sources e.g.

Create a survey and give it to 30 people and then convert the responses to percentages.

Step 3 : Use the course concepts as a tool of analysis. Demonstrate how course concepts may be used on one media article.

Select one article and use at least one question from A,B,C and D below. Write detailed answers. State the name of article, author, where it was published.

A. Media Representations,

1. What processes of selection and organizing images, sounds and words took place to produce the report?
2. In making the report what choices were made by a journalist. Who to interview, who not to interview, How many people were contacted. Who was left out?

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3. In the editing process (written text, video images) what decisions had to be made? (Think about our analysis of It Must Be True and Columbine.)

B. Media Conventions

1. How did a TV report differ from a newspaper report or an internet page on the same event or issue?

2. How does the article meet the expectations of the audience ?

4. How is a report on the ABC different from a report on Channel 7? (Commercial, public, social media)

Consider an analysis of

The soundtrack

The symbols or images in a photo of a newspaper article

To what extent has editing been used to enhance or alter meaning?

Is there any examples of innovation in the style of the article?

C. Media organizations

An individual or an organization may have a number of reasons for producing an article

To do good. It is an important issue that people need to be aware of.

Share in the tragedy of life. Bad things happen and we should care about others and help.

"I can become an important journalist by taking on a big issue"

Bad news stories sell. If it Bleeds it Leads. Tears on current Affairs programs means larger ratings.

"I am a creative person who needs to express myself in a public way."

Small organizations have the capacity to be as visible as the large organizations. Crikey.com vs News Limited

1. What is the article saying?

2. What is the dominant purpose of the organization that produced it?

Who is, saying what , to whom , for what purpose?

D. Media Audiences

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How an individual or a group of people reads or makes sense of a media product will vary.

Individuals bring their own opinions and interpretations and make meaning.

Audiences may be able to resist messages. A group or an individual may challenge the ideas or reality presented in a text.

1. What do you know about the intended audience of the article?
2. How might the intended audience be influenced by the content of the text.
3. What alternative audiences might exist?
4. What alternative meanings might come from the article?

Rubric for Step 3 of the Investigation Topic

Feature	Low	Competent	High	Outstanding
Understanding: To what extent does the investigation focus on an important current media issue?	The work is mainly descriptive. Opinions accepted as facts.	The work has elements of interpretation touching on some of the concepts of the course .e.g. representations, conventions, audience, organizations.	The work has elements of interpretation using all of the concepts of the course .e.g. representations, conventions, audience, organizations.	The issue is articulated and explained clearly. The issue is examined in depth using all of the concepts of the course. Course concepts are applied as tools of analysis.
How well does the student identify the facts, opinions, bias, value judgments, breadth of representation	A narrow range of views represented	Views are identified and supported with examples	Views are identified and supported with specific examples	The value positions of the sources are identified and placed in the context of large scale media debates

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Step 4 : Focus on critical literacy

You need to pose questions about

Authorship: Who is responsible for the article? Name of person, background, what other articles have they written?

Context: What else was being discussed, what other media issues were current at the time. How does this issues in the media rate in importance?

Intended Audience: Who was this article aimed at. What reactions to the article were expected?

Unintended audience: Who else might read the article and what reactions might be notice?

Purpose(s) What was the intended purpose of the media report. What unintended purpose did the article serve?

Step 5: Identification of Sources of Bias: The reliability of a source

Selectivity, Sequencing, Space, Opinion

It is not good enough in year 12 to say an article is biased. You must be able to identify the elements in an article which reveal the bias.

In this section you must identify the bias of the media representation.

The key question: What is the source of bias in this article. To what extent is the TV program radio item, the internet page, blog, youtube video reliable?

Bias is the favouring of one side or viewpoint over another. It is a lack of balance in the presentation of news and opinions. It may simply mean favouritism when it comes to a certain political party, or it may mean prejudiced treatment of certain groups in the community. Trade unions, women's groups, Aborigines, migrants and unemployed youth are some of the groups that often accuse newspapers of bias. Media analyst John Avieson says bias can usually be seen to take the following forms: selectivity, sequencing, space or opinion.

Selectivity Biased reports can be produced by selecting facts and opinions that agree with their own point of view. Other facts and opinions are left out. In this way the newspaper can say it is still printing "the truth", but it is not printing the whole truth.

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Sequencing Giving some facts more importance than others can change the meaning of the truth. Placing the favoured facts at the top, near the headlines, gives them greater impact. For example, stories about strikes usually first tell readers how they will be affected. The reasons for the strike are often given last. This approach has led union leaders to claim that newspapers are biased against them.

Space Newspapers and magazines may give more space to news and opinion that agrees with their own opinions. Opposing news may be given less space. Locating an article on the front page gives the story a priority. Burying a report deep inside a newspaper may be a way of giving a story less visibility. Articles such as apologies by the newspaper for inaccurate reports are often buried.

Opinion Editorials always support particular points of view and other opinions have no chance of being supported in the newspaper. For example, newspaper editorials never support strikes or protest demonstrations. Objective journalism, which is completely neutral, favouring no point of view, is an impossibility. Like perfection, it can only be hoped for. It is important, however, that newspaper readers understand how bias can operate because often it is not obvious.

So key words to use in your report have to be **Selectivity, Sequencing, Space. Opinion** may be best used in terms of either meeting audience's (reinforcing stereotypes) needs or in terms of campaigns. Pages 1-7 of the text book has additional ideas relevant to criticism. It is important to analyze the articles you have located on your topic in terms of selectivity, sequencing, space and opinion. It is relatively easy to analyze opinion but, as a media student you must do more. This is where sources are important. A primary source should be someone who has worked in your topic actually making media. E.g a journalist. You should use the next three weeks organizing to meet with a person who works in the field to speak with you. For the docos students have contacted politicians, scientists and other experts.

Another aspect of evaluating sources. You should know the significance of .com .gov .org .edu . Not all websites are created equally. In year 12 this is a starting point for evaluating the quality of the information.

This information has been adapted from C Stewart The Media

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Step 6: Judging Sources

To what extent is the article a valid representation of the media issue?

You need to be aware of what standards audiences or media critics have used to judge the quality of an article. Some ideas about values or standards are:

Protecting Children: In what circumstances should children be protected from media about your issue? How are children protected? To what extent is the protection effective?

Family values: To what extent does the article respect the norms and values in society ?

The journalist's code of ethics: What standards do journalists say are important? To what extent do journalists follow the code? What happens when the code is not followed?

Entertainment: To what extent does the article engage an audience?

Artistic standards: To what extent does the article illustrate creativity and experimentation.

Beneficence: To what extent does the article have a positive moral impact? To what extent is the community better off because of the article?

Specific community/ industry values. In sport, for example, journalists or documentary makers are not allowed to bring the game into disrepute. The AFL has a code for journalists who can not criticize umpires. Michael More is highly regarded as a documentary maker because of his style. The Walkley Awards are for good journalism, Logies go to popular TV.

In some media issues journalist have claimed that the public's right to know is more important to a person's right to privacy.

Your task is to explore those claims.

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Step 7: Writing the introduction to your investigation

There are four parts that must be in the introduction. It has to be written in paragraph form. I suggest that it be seven sentences.

1. The scope of the research, Make sure it is an important contemporary media topic.
2. The line of investigation or hypothesis. State an argument.
3. The main organizing idea (media theory) remember the startled rabbit, active audience
4. Major sources used as evidence. Mention primary and secondary sources.

For example :

Scope of the investigation as a research assignment. This is an investigation into the impact of a voluntary code of practice for advertising food products directed at children.

The hypothesis or argument. This study suggests that self regulation of media activities has little impact on the targeting of children. Overseas approaches to the issue have been based on laws.

The main idea is that commercial media emphasize parental responsibility and use terms such as the nanny state or political correctness while critics of the advertising industry suggest that protecting children from unethical advertising is more important than individual freedoms. Media theories are developed in pages 155-164 of the text book

The **sources** are from mainstream media reports on research into the impact of a voluntary code as well as blogs such as Crikey.com and a part of that site Croak.

Wrap up The topic developed more urgency this year as experts have warned of an obesity epidemic in children.

Function of an introductory paragraph

1. Focus the reader's attention. You can do this by making a bold statement. Use a great quote. Cite a selection of headlines (with sources, dates)
2. Explain to the reader what they are about to read.
3. Explain what evidence will be used. How you will use the evidence. Ensure that you have a primary source: someone who is closely involved in the topic who may be able to comment on the accuracy of the secondary sources.

So a paragraph to introduce the investigation could be:

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This is an investigation into the reported failure of a voluntary code of practice to do with targeting children with food and drink messages. This study shows that there is a problem in advertising to children by the media. The consequence of this is that it contributes to health issues related to teenage identity. The main idea is that self regulation has allowed the advertising of food products which can create health problems to continue. It has been suggested that competition between food companies and arguments about parental responsibility might be two reasons why the issue persists. The investigation is based on an a review of the recent articles on the content of food and drink advertisements, a comparison with how the issue is treated overseas and a small survey of food adverts from children's viewing times. A second theme developed is about how journalists rely on press releases to shape their reports. This theme is about the influence of lobby groups in the media and the role of smaller organizations in the way issues are represented in the media. (180 words 7 sentences)

Criteria

1. To what extent does the paragraph focus attention?
2. To what extent does the paragraph tell the reader what they will be reading in the report?
3. To what extent does the paragraph give a reason to read the report?

Step 8: Feedback on Draft of the Media Investigation

Four Criteria can be used to give feedback

1. **Use of Key media words/terms.** From our discussion of reliability of sources, Criticism evaluation We have discussed ideas such as protection of children, codes of ethics, beneficence, industry standards (and lack of)
2. **Use of specific examples from the articles**
3. **Personal opinions**
4. **Communication** Logical development of ideas. Indicated by the use of linking word such as therefore, these examples highlight, this is evidence which supports.

Step 9 : Writing a second draft of the report. 2,000 words

Step 10 : Hand in the completed report with the cover sheet

Only your SACE number can be used. Check that there is no reference to identify the school or you. The word count is 2,000 but that does not include appendices.