

Media Units 3 & 4

Chapter 2 — Audiences: engagement, consumption and reading

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Chapter 2 Audiences: engagement, consumption and reading — 2A Audience engagement

Theory

Chapter 2 is about the three things an audience does with a media narrative: they **engage** with it, **consume** it and **read** it — the study design’s own list of “how audiences engage with, consume and read media narratives”. This subtopic owns the first of the three, **engagement**; the next two subtopics take consumption and reception (2B) and reading (2C). Keeping the three apart is one of the most heavily rewarded skills in the course, and examiners flag their confusion almost every year, so this subtopic defines engagement precisely and then draws its borders with its neighbours.

What audience engagement is. In the study design, **audience engagement** refers to **how audiences are affected emotionally and cognitively by a media product and how these ways of engaging combine to form complex meanings and experiences**. Read that definition slowly: it has three moving parts — an **emotional** channel, a **cognitive** channel, and the **combination** of the two into something richer than either alone. Engagement is about what a product does to the audience’s inner experience — their feelings and their thinking — as they take it in. It is not the same as watching, buying or being persuaded by a product; it is the affecting of feeling and thought itself.

Emotional engagement. To be engaged *emotionally* is to be affected in your **feelings**. A media narrative engages an audience emotionally when its construction makes them feel something — fear, tension, grief, joy, warmth, amusement, disgust, hope. When a horror sequence makes you tense, when a reunion scene makes you tearful, when a comedy makes you laugh out loud, you are emotionally engaged. The feeling is real and immediate, and it is built — never accidental.

Cognitive engagement. To be engaged *cognitively* is to be affected in your **thinking**. A media narrative engages an audience cognitively when its construction makes them think — interpret, question, anticipate, piece together, solve, weigh up or reflect. When a mystery makes you form and test a theory about who is guilty, when an ending makes you reconsider everything that came before, when a drama makes you reflect on how a real institution actually works, you are cognitively engaged. Cognitive engagement treats the audience as an active mind doing work, not a passive receiver.

The combination — “complex meanings and experiences”. The two channels rarely work alone, and the study design’s definition insists on this: the emotional and cognitive ways of engaging **combine to form complex meanings and experiences**. In a well-constructed narrative the feeling deepens the thinking and the thinking sharpens the feeling. Dread (emotional) makes you concentrate harder on what a scene means (cognitive); understanding exactly what is at stake (cognitive) makes the dread bite harder (emotional). The most sophisticated engagement answers name **both** channels and then show how they **combine** — that combination is the definitional heart of this subtopic, not an optional extra bolted on at the end.

Engagement is generated by codes and conventions — never by “vibes”. Engagement does not appear from nowhere; it is produced by the same tools that build every media narrative. **Media codes** are the **technical and symbolic tools used to construct meaning** — camera, acting, mise en scene, editing, lighting, sound, typography, colour, visual composition, text and graphics, and paper stock for print. **Narrative conventions** are common narrative structures such as character, character arc, point of view and three-act structure. Engagement is generated when these choices act on the audience. Every claim you make about engagement must therefore be **anchored to a specific code or convention** — never “the show is really gripping”, but “the cross-cutting between the two rooms and the ticking non-diegetic score withhold the outcome, generating suspense”. Naming a feeling without naming what built it is the single biggest examiner complaint in this part of the course. The table below sets out the main engagement mechanisms and the codes and conventions that generate each.

Engagement mechanism	Codes / conventions that generate it	Type of engagement produced
Suspense	withholding information through editing (cross-cutting, delayed reveals), slow pacing, a tense non-diegetic score, sound stings	emotional tension fused with the cognitive work of anticipating the outcome

Engagement mechanism	Codes / conventions that generate it	Type of engagement produced
Identification	close-ups and reaction shots, a sympathetic performance (acting), aligning us with a character	emotional — we come to feel <i>with</i> and <i>for</i> a character
Alignment (point of view)	the narrative convention of point of view — restricting us to one character’s knowledge and perspective	mainly cognitive — we share what a character knows and understands
Curiosity / puzzle	an enigma set by withheld plot information, clues planted in mise en scene and dialogue	cognitive — the audience forms and tests theories
Humour	comic timing and deadpan performance (acting), incongruous editing, comic mise en scene	emotional — amusement, delight
Emotional cueing	non-diegetic music, lighting, colour, close-ups	emotional — mood is set and a feeling is prompted before anything is said

Engagement is always engagement of a particular audience. The study design states that **all media products are made for target audiences, defined by their cultural, social and historical contexts and demographics, as well as individual traits such as age, gender and values.** A **target audience** is the specific group a product is designed to reach and engage. Delineating it precisely matters because the same construction engages different audiences differently — a gentle animation delights a young child and amuses a watching parent for different reasons. Name a target audience by three kinds of factor: its **context** (cultural, social and historical — the group’s shared background), its **demographics** (measurable population characteristics such as location, education, occupation and life stage), and its **individual traits** — the study design’s own examples here are **age, gender and values**, along with interests, experiences and tastes. Note where that sentence puts age and gender: under *individual traits*, not demographics — keep them there when you quote it. “Teenagers” is too broad to analyse; “Australian 15- to 18-year-olds who follow reality-competition formats” can be. The exam rewards audiences pinned this tightly — the 2025 examiners’ report’s high-scoring example was “Australian 16–25 year olds interested in climate activism”, not “modern audiences”.

Engagement is not consumption, reading or response. Four ideas sit close together, and separating them is a live and repeatedly tested skill. Keep them apart:

- **Consumption** is the **physical way an audience accesses and experiences a media product** — streaming on a phone, watching in a cinema, bingeing a season over a weekend, listening to a podcast on a commute. **Reception** is the study design’s wider term, which names both halves: **both the physical way audiences consume media products and the context of the time and place in which they receive it** — the mode of consumption *plus* the *when* and *where* of receiving it (both treated in depth in 2B). Choosing to binge a series is a **consumption** behaviour; being made to feel dread as you binge it is **engagement**.
- **Reading** is the **meaning an audience makes** of a narrative — how they decode its codes and conventions and interpret it through their own contextual lens (treated in depth in 2C). Reading is the *interpretation* an audience arrives at.
- **Response** is the **way a media product may influence audiences to act or change their behaviour** — signing a petition, buying a product, changing an everyday habit. Response is what an audience *does* as a result.

Engagement sits between consumption and response: an audience **consumes** a product (a physical act), is **engaged** by it (affected emotionally and cognitively), **reads** it (makes meaning), and may **respond** to it (acts or changes behaviour). Engagement is specifically the emotional-and-cognitive affecting — not the act of consuming, not the meaning made, and not the behaviour that follows. Sliding from one to another without noticing is the classic error this subtopic drills out.

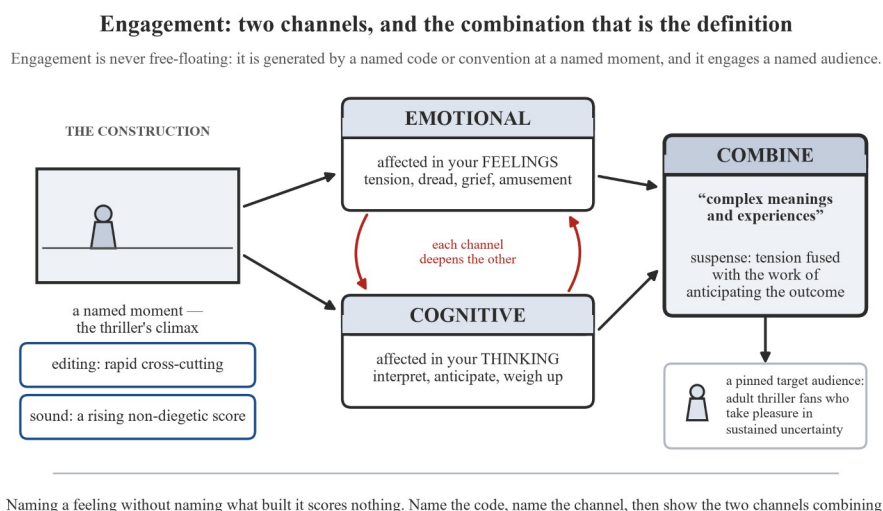
The analysis method. For any engagement question, work through four steps in order:

1. **Name the code or convention** and the **specific moment or sequence** where it operates.

2. State **how it works** on the audience.
3. Name the **type of engagement** it generates — emotional, cognitive, or (best of all) how the two **combine**.
4. **Link it to the target audience** — why it engages this particular, precisely named audience.

Applied to a one-line hypothetical: (1) at a thriller’s climax, rapid cross-cutting and a rising non-diegetic score as the protagonist searches a stranger’s house; (2) the editing withholds whether she will be caught while the score tightens the pace; (3) this generates suspense — emotional tension fused with the cognitive work of anticipating the outcome; (4) engaging an audience of adult thriller fans who take pleasure in sustained uncertainty. Keep every claim anchored to a code, name the engagement channel, and pin the audience.

The figure below traces that chain. Note the two red arrows at its centre: they run in **both** directions at once, which is what the definition’s word “combine” is describing.



Contemporary example — Spotify, December 2024

Spotify is an audio streaming platform which in 2024 operated in Australia and internationally.

On **4 December 2024** it released **2024 Wrapped**, giving each listener a personalised summary of their own year of listening, presented as a sequence of data stories in a Wrapped feed in the app. Spotify’s release listed top songs, artists and podcasts; a “Music Evolution” story dividing the year into up to three named musical phases; recorded clips from artists; and, for the first time, an AI-generated podcast built with Google’s NotebookLM in which two generative-AI hosts discussed the listener’s year — offered to eligible free and premium users in a limited group of markets that included Australia. Listeners could share results to messaging apps and social channels, including TikTok.

Wrapped is engagement engineered rather than incidental. Its **media codes** — text and graphics, typography, colour and visual composition — deliver the data as bold sequential cards, generating **emotional** engagement: surprise, amusement, nostalgia at a year condensed. Because every card is built from the listener’s own data, it simultaneously sets **cognitive** work — interpreting what a named “musical phase” claims about you, weighing the ranking against the taste you thought you had. The two **combine to form complex meanings and experiences**: the pleasure is feeling recognised and working out what the recognition means at once. The subtopic’s borders remain visible — streaming through the year was **consumption**, being amused and made reflective is **engagement**, posting a card to a feed is a **response**.

Source: Spotify Newsroom, “2024 Wrapped Is Here! Experience Your Year in Listening Like Never Before”, 4 December 2024 — <https://newsroom.spotify.com/2024-12-04/wrapped-user-experience-2024/>. Accurate as at July 2026.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded

Discuss how one media narrative engages its audience both emotionally and cognitively, and how these ways of engaging combine. Refer to *Chernobyl* (2019). (5 marks)

This is the shape of a 5-mark Section A engagement question. The table builds the response one sentence at a time, keeping the emotional channel, the cognitive channel and their combination in view.

Working	Comment
<i>Chernobyl</i> (Craig Mazin, 2019) is a dramatised miniseries about the 1986 nuclear disaster, made for an adult streaming audience, and it engages that audience both emotionally and cognitively.	Step 1. Open by naming the product, its target audience, and the claim that both channels are at work — not “it is really powerful”.
It engages the audience emotionally through its sound design and lighting : a low, droning non-diegetic hum runs beneath many scenes, and the dim, desaturated palette makes the world feel poisoned, generating a steady sense of dread.	Step 2. Anchor the emotional engagement to specific codes (sound, lighting), and name the feeling they generate (dread) — not “the mood is tense”.
It engages the audience cognitively by withholding, then piecing together, the technical and institutional causes of the disaster, so the audience must work to understand how a system of denial turned an accident into a catastrophe.	Step 3. Name the cognitive channel and the thinking the construction demands (understanding cause, weighing institutional failure).
The two combine : the dread makes the audience concentrate harder on what each revelation means, while understanding the scale of the danger makes the dread far more frightening — feeling and thinking reinforce each other.	Step 4. Show the combination explicitly, with causal language — this is the definitional core the marks reward.
In this way the emotional and cognitive ways of engaging “combine to form complex meanings and experiences”: the horror is felt and understood at once, not one after the other.	Quote the study-design phrase and confirm that both channels were developed together, neither an afterthought.

Example 2 — scaffolded

Explain how media codes are used to generate suspense in an elimination challenge in *MasterChef Australia*. (4 marks)

This example isolates one engagement mechanism (**suspense**), keeps it code-anchored, and shows the difference between choosing to watch a program (consumption) and being made to feel tension (engagement).

Working	Comment
<i>MasterChef Australia</i> (Network Ten) is a reality cooking-competition format, and in its elimination challenges the editing and sound are used to generate suspense for its audience.	Name the product, its form, and the codes you will explain — do not simply say “it is exciting”.
The editing cross-cuts rapidly between contestants’ half-finished dishes and the counting-down clock, and repeatedly delays the judges’ verdict — often holding the reveal across an advertisement break.	Step 1 of an “explain” chain: name the code choice (cross-cutting, delayed reveal) precisely.
This is reinforced by sound : a ticking, percussive non-diegetic track and sudden musical stings raise the pressure and mark each near-disaster.	Add the second code and its specific device — keep it to observable choices, not adjectives.
The effect is suspense : the withheld outcome makes the	Complete the how/why chain to the audience’s

Working	Comment
audience anticipate who will be eliminated (cognitive), while the pace and stings make them feel the tension (emotional), so they are engaged on both channels at once.	engagement, naming the mechanism and both channels.
<i>Note:</i> choosing to switch the program on is consumption ; being made to feel the tension of the countdown is engagement — the codes generate the engagement.	Seed the engagement-vs-consumption border that this chapter keeps testing.

Example 3 — unscaffolded

Describe how emotional engagement is generated in the opening of *Up* (2009). (3 marks)

In *Up* (Pete Docter, 2009), the opening “Married Life” montage generates emotional engagement almost entirely through **editing, music and mise en scene**, with no dialogue at all. The sequence edits together short scenes of a couple’s life from youth to old age, set to a gentle, recurring musical motif, while the ageing costumes and the changing home (mise en scene) mark the passing years. Because the audience is carried through a whole shared life in a few wordless minutes, the construction builds a strong bond with the couple and generates a deep feeling of warmth and then loss. *Takeaway:* to describe emotional engagement, name the codes at work (here, editing, music and mise en scene) and the specific feeling they generate.

Example 4 — unscaffolded

Analyse how codes and conventions generate emotional and cognitive engagement in *Squid Game* (2021). (7 marks)

In *Squid Game* (Hwang Dong-hyuk, 2021), a Korean survival drama made for a global adult streaming audience, codes and conventions are used to generate emotional and cognitive engagement at the same time. The **emotional** engagement is built through the narrative convention of **alignment** and through **camera**: the story restricts us largely to a desperate, indebted protagonist, and close-ups hold us on his fear as ordinary children’s games turn lethal. This alignment generates **identification** — we feel his dread as our own — so the emotional stakes are high whenever he plays.

The **cognitive** engagement is built through **colour** and **mise en scene**. The bright, childlike palette of the games — pastel sets, pink hooded guard uniforms and green tracksuits — is deliberately jarring against the violence it frames. This incongruity does not simply frighten the audience; it prompts them to *think*, inviting a reading of the deadly contest as a comment on economic desperation and inequality. The audience is set the cognitive task of interpreting why a story about survival looks like a children’s playground.

The two channels **combine to form complex meanings and experiences**: the emotional identification with the protagonist makes the audience *care* about the social critique, while the critique makes the dread feel meaningful rather than merely shocking. For its target audience — adults consuming the series on a global streaming platform — the construction therefore engages feeling and thought together. *Takeaway:* a strong “analyse” answer anchors each claim to a named code or convention, names the engagement channel it generates, and shows explicitly how the emotional and cognitive combine.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Define each of the following: (a) emotional engagement; (b) cognitive engagement; (c) what it means for these two ways of engaging to “combine to form complex meanings and experiences”.

Q2. Codes and conventions generate audience engagement through recognisable mechanisms. (a) Name three mechanisms by which a code or convention can generate engagement. (b) For each mechanism you named, state a code or convention that commonly produces it. (c) Explain, with a brief example, how one named code generates one type of engagement.

Q3. Every media product is made for a target audience. (a) State the three kinds of factor by which the study design says target audiences are defined. (b) Rewrite the audience label “young people” so that it delineates a specific target audience. (c) Explain why delineating a precise target audience matters when you analyse engagement.

Q4. Engagement, consumption and reading are distinct ideas. (a) In one sentence each, distinguish audience engagement from audience consumption and from audience reading. (b) Classify each of the following as engagement, consumption or reading: (i) streaming a series on a phone during a bus commute; (ii) feeling tense as a character walks into danger; (iii) interpreting a film’s ending as a criticism of greed. (c) Explain why confusing engagement with consumption is a costly error in an exam.

Q5. Audience engagement and audience response are related but different. (a) Distinguish audience engagement from audience response. (b) Classify each as engagement or response: (i) being moved to tears by a documentary; (ii) donating to a charity after watching it; (iii) changing what you buy at the supermarket because of a program. (c) Explain why a strong answer keeps engagement and response apart.

Q6. A reliable method for an engagement question is: name the code or convention → state how it works → name the type of engagement it generates → link it to the target audience. (a) List, in order, the four steps of this method. (b) For a media narrative you have studied this year, complete the first two steps for one moment. (c) Complete the last two steps for the same moment.

Un scaffolded

Q7. Using an example, describe how one media code can generate emotional engagement in an audience. (3 marks)

Q8. (*Stimulus.*) Read the description of a planned sequence below.

Stimulus. In a scene from a planned short film, a woman is alone in a dark house at night. The editing cross-cuts between her hand reaching slowly for a door handle and a shadow moving in the hallway behind her. A low non-diegetic drone rises steadily; every ordinary sound — a creak, a dripping tap — is amplified. The reveal of what is behind the door is held back for several seconds.

Explain how the media codes in the sequence generate suspense, engaging the audience. (4 marks)

Q9. Explain how the narrative convention of point of view can align an audience with a character and generate identification. Refer to a media narrative you have studied this year. (4 marks)

Q10. Describe how humour is used to engage an audience, referring to at least one code or convention. (3 marks)

Q11. Explain how a media narrative can engage its audience cognitively. Refer to a specific narrative in your response. (4 marks)

Q12. A student says: “I really engaged with that series — I watched the whole season in one weekend on my laptop.” Discuss why this statement confuses engagement with consumption, and explain what genuine engagement with the series would involve. (4 marks)

Q13. Discuss the difference between how an audience is *engaged* by a media narrative and how an audience *reads* it. In your response, refer to a media narrative you have studied this year. (5 marks)

Q14. (*Stimulus.*) A student wrote the response below to the question “Explain how a media narrative engages its audience.”

Stimulus. “The music was really emotional and it made me feel things. There is nothing to think about, you just feel it. Overall the show is about family, and that is why everyone likes it.”

Discuss two ways this response could be improved. (4 marks)

Q15. Discuss how a single media product can engage two differently delineated target audiences in different ways. Refer to a media narrative in your response. (4 marks)

Q16. Explain how a media product may prompt an audience **response**, and how this differs from audience engagement. Refer to an example. (5 marks)

Q17. (*Stimulus.*) Read the audience-research summary for a proposed production below.

Stimulus. A streaming service is developing a new series and has gathered this profile of its intended viewers: mostly aged 15–19; living in Australian outer-suburban and regional areas; heavy users of short-form video and group messaging; strongly interested in music, friendship-group drama and stories about “people like us”; value authenticity and dislike being talked down to.

Using the profile, explain who the target audience is and how one code or convention could be used to engage it. (4 marks)

Q18. Analyse how codes and conventions are used to generate both emotional and cognitive engagement, and how these combine, in a media narrative you have studied this year. In your response, refer to specific moments and to the target audience. (8 marks)

Media narrative: _____

Q19. In December 2024, Spotify released its annual Wrapped feature, which gave each listener a personalised summary of their own year of listening in a shareable format. Analyse how a personalised product of this kind engages an audience emotionally and cognitively, and how these ways of engaging combine. In your response, distinguish this engagement from the audience’s consumption and response. (5 marks)

Answers

Q1. (a) How an audience is affected in their **feelings** by a product's construction (fear, tension, grief, joy, amusement). (b) How an audience is affected in their **thinking** — made to interpret, anticipate, question, solve or reflect. (c) The emotional and cognitive channels reinforce each other so that feeling and thinking together produce a richer meaning and experience than either alone (SD: "combine to form complex meanings and experiences"). **Q2.** (a) Any three of: suspense, identification, alignment (point of view), curiosity/puzzle, humour, emotional cueing. (b) Each paired with a plausible code/convention (e.g. suspense—editing/sound; identification—close-ups/performance; alignment—point of view; humour—comic performance/timing). (c) A named code, the specific choice, and the engagement it generates, with an example. **Q3.** (a) Cultural, social and historical **contexts**; **demographics** (e.g. location, education); **individual traits** — the study design's own examples are age, gender and values. (b) A version naming context + demographics + traits, e.g. "Australian 15- to 18-year-olds interested in music and reality formats". (c) Engagement is always of a particular audience; the same construction engages different audiences differently, and the exam rewards a precisely delineated audience over "young people". **Q4.** (a) Engagement = being affected emotionally and cognitively; consumption = the physical way a product is accessed and experienced (with the time and place of that consumption, this is **reception**); reading = the meaning the audience makes of it. (b) (i) consumption; (ii) engagement; (iii) reading. (c) The task asks how a product affects feeling and thought; describing how someone watched it (consumption) never analyses engagement, so the answer misses the question. **Q5.** (a) Engagement = the emotional and cognitive affecting; response = being influenced to act or change behaviour. (b) (i) engagement; (ii) response; (iii) response. (c) Engagement is the lever and response the outcome; keeping them apart lets you show cause (feeling/thinking) and effect (behaviour) rather than blurring them. **Q6.** (a) 1 name the code/convention (+ specific moment); 2 state how it works on the audience; 3 name the engagement type (emotional/cognitive/combined); 4 link to the target audience. (b) —(c) Any studied narrative, correctly working the four steps (see solution for a model). **Q7. Describe (3).** One code named (e.g. sound, lighting, camera), a specific choice, and the feeling it generates in the audience; not just naming the code. **Q8. Explain (4).** Editing (cross-cutting, delayed reveal) and sound (rising drone, amplified effects) each named → how each withholds/heightens → the suspense generated (emotional tension + cognitive anticipation). **Q9. Explain (4).** Point of view/alignment defined; a studied narrative where restricting the audience to a character's knowledge/perspective builds identification; the emotional (and cognitive) engagement that results. **Q10. Describe (3).** A code or convention that builds humour (e.g. deadpan performance, comic timing, incongruous editing) named, with an account of the amusement it generates. **Q11. Explain (4).** A named narrative; a construction that makes the audience think (enigma, withheld information, an idea to interpret); the cognitive engagement that results — thinking, not feeling. **Q12. Discuss (4).** Streaming a season is **consumption** (a physical way of taking the product in); genuine engagement is being affected emotionally/cognitively by its construction; name what that would look like. **Q13. Discuss (5).** Engagement = how the construction affects feeling/thinking; reading = the meaning the audience makes; a studied narrative distinguishing the two, with an example of each. **Q14. Discuss (4).** Two of: "made me feel things" names no code (unanchored); only the emotional channel is offered and the cognitive is dismissed ("nothing to think about"), so no cognitive engagement is analysed; the audience is generic ("everyone") not a delineated target audience; "about family" gives a topic, not an engagement analysis. **Q15. Discuss (4).** One product; two precisely delineated audiences; how the same construction engages each differently (different channels/feelings), because they bring different contexts and traits. **Q16. Explain (5).** Response = influence to act or change behaviour; an example where a product is designed to/does change behaviour; engagement (feeling/thinking) distinguished as the lever that precedes the response. **Q17. Explain (4).** The audience delineated from the profile (age, location, media habits, interests, values); one code or convention chosen and how it would engage this specific audience. **Q18.** See Fully-worked solutions for a full model plus high/mid/low band descriptors and common errors. **Q19. Analyse (5).** The emotional channel anchored to the codes that present the data (surprise, amusement, nostalgia) and the cognitive channel named (interpreting what the personalised data claims about you), then the **combination** of the two shown; the year of streaming identified as **consumption** and sharing the result as **response**, both kept distinct from the engagement itself.

Fully-worked solutions

Q1. (a) **Emotional engagement** is how an audience is affected in their feelings by a media product — the way its construction makes them feel fear, tension, grief, joy, warmth, amusement or disgust. (b) **Cognitive engagement** is how an audience is affected in their thinking — the way a product's construction makes them interpret, question, anticipate, piece together, solve or reflect. (c) To say the two **combine to form complex meanings and experiences**

means the emotional and cognitive channels reinforce each other: the feeling deepens the thinking and the thinking sharpens the feeling, so that together they produce a richer meaning and experience than either would alone. *Marker's note*: the combination is the study design's own wording and the definitional core of this subtopic — do not stop at defining the two channels separately.

Q2. (a) Three mechanisms, for example **suspense**, **identification** and **humour** (also acceptable: alignment/point of view, curiosity/puzzle, emotional cueing). (b) Each paired with a code or convention that produces it — suspense through **editing and sound** (withheld reveals, a tense score); identification through **close-ups and performance**; humour through **comic timing and performance**. (c) *“Explain” requires a how/why chain, not a definition.* Take **sound**: a slow, minor-key non-diegetic track laid under a quiet scene (the choice) darkens the mood and slows the pace (the effect), so the audience feels unease before any threat appears (the engagement). The code produces the feeling — that chain is what makes it engagement. *Marker's note*: naming a code without stating the engagement it generates is the most common way to lose the mark here.

Q3. (a) Target audiences are defined by their **cultural, social and historical contexts**, their **demographics**, and their **individual traits** such as age, gender and values. (b) A specific version names context, demographics and traits, e.g. **“Australian 15- to 18-year-olds who follow music and reality-competition formats”**. (c) Engagement is always the engagement of a **particular audience**: the same construction engages different audiences differently, so a claim about engagement only holds once the audience is pinned. Examiners reward audiences delineated precisely (the 2025 examiners' report's high-scoring example was “Australian 16–25 year olds interested in climate activism”) and penalise “young people” or “modern audiences”. *Common errors*: an audience given as a single broad label with no context, demographics or traits.

Q4. *“Distinguish” asks for the clear difference between each pair.* (a) **Engagement** is being affected **emotionally and cognitively** by a product; **consumption** is the **physical way** an audience accesses and experiences the product — which, together with the **context of the time and place** in which they receive it, is what the study design calls **reception**; **reading** is the **meaning the audience makes** of it. (b) (i) **consumption** (a physical way of taking it in — a phone, on a commute); (ii) **engagement** (a feeling generated by the construction); (iii) **reading** (an interpretation of the ending's meaning). (c) The outcome and the exam ask how a product **affects feeling and thought**. Writing about how someone watched it — the device, the binge, the setting — describes **consumption** and never analyses engagement, so the response misses the question. *Marker's note*: “engaged with it by streaming it” is the classic slide from engagement to consumption — engagement is what the construction did to the viewer, not how the viewer accessed it.

Q5. *“Distinguish” asks for the difference.* (a) **Engagement** is the **emotional and cognitive affecting** of an audience by a product; **response** is the **way a product may influence audiences to act or change their behaviour**. Engagement is what an audience *feels and thinks*; response is what they *do* as a result. (b) (i) **engagement** (a feeling); (ii) **response** (an action — donating); (iii) **response** (a behaviour change). (c) A strong answer keeps them apart because they are cause and effect: engagement (feeling/thinking) is the **lever**, and response (acting/changing behaviour) is the **outcome**. Blurring them means you can neither show how the product engaged the audience nor whether it changed anything. *Common errors*: treating “the audience was moved” (engagement) as if it were the same as “the audience acted” (response).

Q6. (a) The four steps: **1** name the **code or convention** and the specific moment; **2** state **how it works** on the audience; **3** name the **type of engagement** (emotional, cognitive or their combination); **4 link it to the target audience**. (b)–(c) *Model response (studied narrative: Heartbreak High, 2022)*: **1** In the aftermath of the “incident” in which a wall map of students' relationships is exposed, the series uses the convention of **point of view (alignment)** to keep the audience with the central character, Amerie, as she is publicly shamed and ostracised by her peers. **2** By restricting us to her perspective as she becomes a social outcast, the construction positions the audience inside her humiliation. **3** This generates **emotional** engagement — empathy and second-hand embarrassment. **4** It engages the series' target audience of Australian teenagers, who recognise the social stakes of public exposure at school from their own lives. *Marker's note*: the four steps must connect — a common error is to name a code and then retell the plot with no engagement channel named.

Q7. *“Describe” asks for an account of how the code works.* Take **lighting. Hard, cold, overhead lighting** in a scene set in a bare, clinical room — flat white light with no warmth and no soft fill — generates emotional engagement: the audience reads the harsh, shadowless glare as sterile and exposing, and feels unease and discomfort on the character's behalf before a word is spoken. The code (the cold, hard lighting) produces the feeling (unease) — that is emotional

engagement. *Common errors*: naming the code (“there is dark lighting”) without stating the **feeling** it generates; at three marks, name the code, the specific choice and the emotion.

Q8. “*Explain*” asks for a full how/why chain to the audience’s engagement. The codes in the sequence generate **suspense**. The **editing** cross-cuts between the woman’s hand on the door handle and the shadow moving behind her, so the audience is made aware of a threat she cannot see; the reveal is then **delayed for several seconds**, stretching the uncertainty. The **sound** reinforces this: a rising non-diegetic drone tightens the pace, while amplifying ordinary noises (a creak, a dripping tap) keeps the audience straining for the danger. Because the outcome is withheld, the audience both **feels** mounting tension (emotional) and **anticipates** what is behind the door (cognitive) — the two channels together are suspense. *Marker’s note*: complete the chain to the audience’s engagement and name **both** channels; stopping at “it is scary” leaves out the mechanism the marks reward.

Q9. “*Explain*” asks for a how/why chain. The narrative convention of **point of view** engages an audience by controlling **whose knowledge and perspective** we are given. *Model response (studied narrative: Breaking Bad, 2008)*: the narrative aligns us largely with Walter White — following his decisions, granting us his reasons, and rarely leaving his perspective. This restricted **alignment**, reinforced by **close-ups** that hold us on his reactions, generates **identification**: because we see events from his position and understand why he acts, we come to feel *with* him even as his choices darken, so his risks become our tension. The engagement is emotional (we are anxious for him) and cognitive (we are drawn into weighing his justifications). *Marker’s note*: name the convention (point of view/alignment) and the bond it produces (identification); describing the plot instead of the mechanism is the common error.

Q10. “*Describe*” asks for an account of how the code works. *Model response (studied narrative: Fisk, 2021)*: the Australian workplace comedy engages its audience through **acting** — specifically the **deadpan performance** and dry comic timing of its central character, whose flat, unbothered delivery in awkward office situations generates humour. **Editing** supports this by holding on a beat a fraction too long after an awkward line, letting the discomfort land. The audience is engaged emotionally through amusement: the mismatch between the character’s unflappable manner and the awkwardness around her is what produces the laugh. *Common errors*: saying a show “is funny” without naming the code (performance, timing, editing) that builds the humour; three marks reward a named convention and the amusement it generates.

Q11. “*Explain*” asks for a how/why chain, and the channel here is cognitive. A media narrative engages an audience **cognitively** when its construction makes them **think** — interpret, anticipate and piece information together. *Model response (studied narrative: Mare of Easttown, 2021)*: the crime narrative plants questions and partial clues, using **editing** and **dialogue** that withhold as much as they reveal, so the audience is invited to form and test theories about who is responsible. The audience is not a passive receiver; they actively work through the evidence alongside the detective. This is cognitive engagement: the meaning and the pleasure come from the **mental work** of solving the enigma. *Marker’s note*: cognitive engagement is about **thinking**, not feeling — an answer that only describes sadness or fear has named the wrong channel.

Q12. “*Discuss*” asks you to develop the point and reach a position. The statement confuses **engagement** with **consumption**. Watching a whole season in a weekend on a laptop describes the **physical way** the student accessed the series and the **time and place** in which they received it — that is **consumption** and its reception context, not evidence of engagement. Genuine **engagement** would be the series affecting the student **emotionally and cognitively** through its construction: for example, being made anxious by the editing at a cliffhanger (emotional), or being prompted to interpret what a recurring visual motif means (cognitive). Bingeing may well *follow* strong engagement, but the binge itself is a consumption behaviour, not the engagement. *Marker’s note*: the trap is exactly this slide — “I engaged with it because I watched all of it” describes consumption; name what the construction did to the viewer’s feeling and thinking to describe engagement.

Q13. “*Discuss*” asks you to develop the distinction with evidence. **Engagement** and **reading** are different stages of the audience’s experience. Engagement is **how the construction affects the audience’s feeling and thinking** as they take the narrative in; reading is **the meaning the audience makes** of it. *Model response (studied narrative: Paper Planes, 2014)*: take the film’s climactic moment — Dylan’s final throw at the world junior paper-plane championship. As the plane is launched and the film holds on its flight, the audience is **engaged**: the build-up and the withheld outcome generate suspense and hope, so the audience **feels** the tension of whether it will land the win. That felt tension is engagement — the effect of the construction on feeling and thinking in the moment. The audience’s **reading** is the meaning they make of the same moment: that the flight is really about a grieving boy reaching beyond the loss

of his mother and drawing his withdrawn father back to him, so the throw is **read** as a meaning about healing and connection, not merely a contest result. The two are distinct: the suspense is what the audience felt (engagement); the meaning about grief and reconnection is what they read (reading). *Marker's note:* engagement is the affecting (felt X); reading is the meaning made (read as Y) — a strong answer pins both to the SAME named moment and does not collapse one into the other. Build your answer on a media narrative you have actually studied this year.

Q14. “Discuss” asks you to develop each improvement. **First, the response asserts a feeling with no code and names only one channel.** “It made me feel things” identifies no **code or convention**, and “there is nothing to think about” abandons the **cognitive** channel altogether; the student should anchor the feeling to a specific code (for example, how a particular use of music or editing builds it) and add the **cognitive** engagement the show generates, so both ways of engaging are covered. **Second, the response gives a generic audience and a topic, not an analysis.** “Everyone likes it” names no delineated **target audience**, and “the show is about family” states a **topic** rather than an account of how the construction engages; the student should delineate a precise audience (context, demographics and individual traits) and analyse the engagement built for it. *Common errors:* this stimulus contains two live traps — **feelings asserted without any code and with no cognitive channel**, and a **generic audience with a topic in place of engagement analysis**.

Q15. “Discuss” asks you to develop the point with evidence. *Model response (studied narrative: Bluey, 2018):* the ABC animation is constructed to engage **two differently delineated target audiences at once**. For its primary audience — Australian preschool children — bright **colour**, simple **visual composition** and playful **performance** generate emotional engagement: delight and the recognition of their own play. For a second audience — the parents watching alongside — the same episodes carry gentle humour and recognisable, sometimes poignant, parenting situations that generate a more **cognitive** engagement: reflection on family life. Because the two audiences bring different **contexts** and **individual traits**, the identical construction engages them on different channels and for different reasons. *Marker's note:* the point is that **one** product engages **differently delineated** audiences differently — reward two audiences named precisely and the distinct engagement each experiences, not a single generic “everyone”.

Q16. “Explain” asks for a how/why chain, and here the target is response, distinguished from engagement. Audience **response** is the way a media product may **influence audiences to act or change their behaviour** — distinct from engagement, which is the emotional and cognitive affecting that may precede it. *Model response (studied narrative: War on Waste, 2017):* the ABC factual series first **engages** viewers emotionally (dismay at images of landfill and food waste) and cognitively (understanding the scale of the problem), but its designed **response** is behavioural — it is widely credited with prompting audiences to change everyday habits, such as switching to reusable coffee cups and cutting single-use plastics. The engagement (feeling and thinking) is the **lever**; the response (changed behaviour) is the **outcome**. *Marker's note:* keep the two apart — “the audience felt concerned” is engagement; “the audience changed what they bought” is response. A response answer must name an **action or behaviour change**, not just a feeling.

Q17. “Explain” asks you to derive the audience and a matching engagement strategy from the profile. The **target audience** is Australian teenagers aged **15–19** in **outer-suburban and regional** areas — an **age band** (an individual trait, in the study design's listing) and a **location** (demographics) — who are **heavy users of short-form video and group messaging** (media habits and individual traits) and **interested in music and friendship-group drama**, and who **value authenticity** and dislike being patronised (values). To engage this precise audience, the narrative convention of **point of view** could be used to align viewers closely with a relatable teenage protagonist “like us”, so that the friendship-group drama is experienced from the inside; casting and naturalistic **acting** would reinforce the authenticity this audience prizes, generating identification and emotional engagement. *Marker's note:* delineate the audience on all three factor types (context, demographics, individual traits) drawn from the profile, then tie **one** code or convention to what this audience specifically values — a generic “good acting appeals to everyone” does not use the profile.

Q18. *Command term — analyse:* break the narrative into its constructed elements and show how they work together to generate emotional and cognitive engagement, with specific evidence at named moments.

Media narrative: *The Newsreader* (2021)

Model response (studied narrative: The Newsreader, 2021):

The Newsreader (ABC, 2021) is a drama set in a 1980s commercial television newsroom, made for a target audience of **Australian adults — ABC drama viewers with an interest in recent history and the media industry**. Its codes and conventions are used to generate emotional and cognitive engagement at the same time.

The narrative generates **emotional** engagement through the convention of **alignment** and through **camera**. The story aligns the audience closely with an ambitious young reporter and a newsreader under constant pressure, and the restless, close-framed camera in the high-stakes control-room sequences — as a live bulletin threatens to fall apart — generates tension and empathy. Because we are positioned with these characters at their most exposed, we feel the anxiety of a broadcast going out live.

The narrative generates **cognitive** engagement by staging its personal dramas against **real historical news events** of the decade. This construction (a selection of setting and story material) invites the audience to think about how news is made, who decides what airs, and what ambition costs — a reflective, interpretive engagement rather than a simple emotional reaction.

The two ways of engaging **combine to form complex meanings and experiences**. The emotional investment in the characters makes the cognitive reflection on journalism land harder — we care about the ethics because we care about the people — while understanding the historical stakes deepens the personal tension. For its target audience of history- and media-interested Australian adults, the construction therefore engages feeling and thought together, not one after the other. In this way the narrative's codes and conventions build the layered engagement the study design describes.

Band descriptors (out of 8):

- **High (7–8):** analyses at least one emotional and one cognitive moment, each anchored to a **specific code or convention** at a named moment; the **combination** of the two channels is shown explicitly and causally; the **target audience** is precisely delineated; specialised media language is precise and sustained.
- **Mid (4–6):** both channels present but one is thinner, or the **combination is asserted rather than shown**; some code-level evidence, but at least one claim is unanchored (“it is emotional”); audience named but not precisely delineated; media language present but uneven.
- **Low (1–3):** describes the plot or names feelings without codes; only one channel addressed; no combination; audience generic (“everyone”) or absent; little media language.

Common errors: naming feelings without the **code** that generates them; addressing only the emotional channel and forgetting the **cognitive**; failing to show the **combination** (the definitional core); describing **consumption** (“people binge it”) instead of engagement; a **generic audience** instead of a delineated one.

Q19. Command term — analyse: break the product into its constructed elements, show how each generates engagement, then show the two channels working together.

On 4 December 2024 Spotify released 2024 Wrapped, a personalised summary of each listener's year of listening presented as a sequence of data stories. It engages the audience **emotionally** through **text and graphics, typography and colour**: the year's listening is delivered as bold, sequential cards whose scale and pacing generate surprise, amusement and nostalgia — the feeling of a year handed back in a few screens. It engages the audience **cognitively** because every card is generated from that individual listener's own data, setting the interpretive task of deciding whether a named “musical phase” or a top-artist ranking matches the taste they believed they had. The two **combine to form complex meanings and experiences**: the delight makes the listener attend more closely to what the data claims, while working out what it claims makes the delight personal rather than generic. The **target audience** is delineated to the individual — the construction is built from that listener's own record, so no two audiences receive the same product. The borders hold: the year of streaming that produced the data was **consumption**; being amused and made reflective by the cards is **engagement**; posting a card to a social feed is a **response**, an action that follows engagement rather than being it. *Marker's note:* the trap in a personalisation example is to describe the sharing (response) or the streaming (consumption) and call it engagement — anchor the emotional claim to a code, name the cognitive work the personalised data demands, and show the two combining.

Chapter 2 Audiences: engagement, consumption and reading — 2B Consumption and reception

Theory

Every media narrative has to reach an audience through some physical means, in some time and place. A film is seen on a vast cinema screen in the dark, or on a phone on a bus; a podcast is heard through earbuds on a morning commute; a photographic series is walked past, printed large, in a quiet gallery. None of these is a neutral pipe through which the “same” narrative simply arrives. **How** and **where** an audience takes a product in shapes what they make of it. This subtopic is about that: the modes and sites by which audiences consume media narratives, and how the context of consumption alters the way a narrative is received and read.

Reception — the study design’s definition. In this course, **audience reception** means **both the physical way audiences consume media products and the context of the time and place in which they receive it**. Read the two halves separately, because you need both. The **physical way** is the mode of consumption — the screen, the device, the sound, whether it can be paused, whether it is watched or listened to. The **context of the time and place** is the *when* and *where* of reception — an opening-weekend cinema crowd, a solitary late-night binge, a commute, a gallery visit. A full answer about reception names both.

Consumption is the act of accessing and experiencing a media product — turning the pages of a print product, watching it, listening to it, playing it. Reception is the wider, study-design term that wraps consumption together with the time and place it happens in. The banner over this chapter — *engagement, consumption and reading* — reminds you that the study design says “the use of codes and narrative conventions influences audience engagement, consumption and reading of narratives”; this subtopic owns the middle term and its effect on the last.

Modes and sites of consumption. Audiences consume narratives in many ways, and each mode carries a characteristic physical way of consuming and a characteristic context of time and place. The table sets out the main ones.

Mode / site of consumption	Physical way it is consumed	Typical context of time and place	How it can shape reception and reading
Cinema (theatrical)	large screen, enveloping surround sound, darkened auditorium, one uninterrupted screening	a booked session, often an opening-weekend “event”, among a crowd of strangers	scale and darkness intensify immersion; the inability to pause sustains tension; a shared crowd amplifies emotion (laughter, gasps)
Broadcast / appointment TV	a scheduled program watched live at its set time on a television	at home, at a fixed hour, often alongside others watching simultaneously nationwide	watching “live” creates a shared, simultaneous experience and a pressure to avoid spoilers
Streaming / on-demand (binge)	any-time access on a smart TV, laptop, tablet or phone, with pause, rewind and next-episode autoplay	chosen by the viewer, often alone, sometimes many episodes at once	self-paced control and solitary viewing allow close, private reading; bingeing compresses a narrative
Mobile / short-form	a small hand-held phone screen, often muted with captions, thumb-scrolled and auto-played	on the move, in short bursts, amid other tasks and notifications	fragmented, divided attention favours instantly legible meaning; the small private screen shortens attention
Podcast / audio	earbuds or speakers, sound only, hands and eyes free	while commuting, exercising or doing chores, usually alone	an intimate voice “in the ears” builds closeness; multitasking can divide

Mode / site of consumption	Physical way it is consumed	Typical context of time and place	How it can shape reception and reading
Gallery / exhibition (photography)	physical prints at scale, hung in a curated order, viewed on foot	a quiet, deliberate visit to a public space, moving past others in near silence	attention scale, silence and a fixed sequence invite slow, serious, contemplative reading
Gaming platform	interactive play on a console, PC or handheld, with controller or touch, often headphones	long immersive sessions or short portable bursts, alone or with others	interactivity and session length shape pace and immersion; headphones and screen size alter intimacy

Individual and communal consumption. A useful cut across all of these is whether a narrative is consumed **individually** or **communally**. Solitary consumption — a phone on a train, earbuds on a run, a late-night solo binge — tends to feel private and personal, and lets the audience set its own pace. Communal consumption — a full cinema, a family around a television on finals night, a gallery of quiet strangers — adds the reactions of others: laughter, gasps, applause, or a shared hush. The same narrative can be received very differently depending on whether an audience meets it alone or in a crowd.

Keep the four audience terms apart. The study design names four related but distinct ideas, and examiners penalise students who blur them.

- **Reception / consumption** (this subtopic): the physical way a product is consumed and the time and place of consumption.
- **Engagement** (2A): how audiences are affected emotionally and cognitively by a product. Engagement is developed in the previous subtopic — do not turn a consumption question into an engagement essay.
- **Reading** (2C): the meaning an audience makes of a narrative. This subtopic treats reading only as the *result* that a consumption context influences; 2C develops how readings are made in depth.
- **Response**: the way a product may influence audiences to **act or change their behaviour** (signing a petition, buying a product). This belongs later in the course.

How the consumption context alters reception and reading. This is the analytical heart of the subtopic. The study design notes that “factors such as technology, critical media literacy and the context of creation and consumption can alter the way audiences receive, engage with and respond to media products”. Three factors are worth naming:

- **Technology** — the device and platform. A pause button, a rewind, subtitles or a dubbed audio track, a large 3D screen versus a muted phone: each is a technological feature of consumption that changes what reaches the audience and how.
- **Critical media literacy** — the audience’s competence in interpreting media critically. A media-literate viewer who recognises a sponsored post as an advertisement, or who notices how a scene is constructed, reads the same product differently from a viewer who takes it at face value.
- **The context of creation and consumption** — the circumstances in which a product was made and those in which it is received. This subtopic works on the consumption half: when and where reception happens — alone or in a crowd, on release night or years later, in an absorbed cinema or a distracted commute. (The context of creation is the context of production, which belongs to a later chapter.)

Change any of these and you can change the reading. A tense thriller consumed in an unintermittible cinema is received as relentless; paused for snacks and messages at home, its tension is broken. A comedy in a full, laughing cinema feels funnier than the same film watched alone. The claim you are always making in this subtopic is causal: *because* the audience consumed the narrative **this way, in this place, at this time**, they read it **like so**.

The trap: consumption context is not production context. The single most costly error in this part of the course — flagged in the 2024 examination report — is answering a **consumption**-context question with the **production** context. If a question asks about the context in which an audience *consumed* a narrative, it is asking about **reception**: when and where and how the audience received it. It is **not** asking when, where, why or by whom the product was **made** — that

is the context of production, which belongs to a later chapter. “The film was made in Australia in 2019 on a low budget” is a production fact; “the audience watched it alone, streamed on a phone, years after release” is a consumption fact. Keep them apart: in this subtopic, “context” almost always means the context of **reception**.

The analysis method. For every consumption-and-reception question, work through three steps in order:

1. **Name the mode or site of consumption** — be specific (large-format cinema; a solo phone binge; a gallery exhibition), not “at the movies” or “online”.
2. **Describe the physical way it is consumed and the context of the time and place** of reception — both halves of the reception definition.
3. **State, causally, how this consumption context impacts the reading** — the meaning the audience makes — using linking language (“because”, “so that”, “as a result”).

Applied to a one-line hypothetical: (1) a horror film consumed as a midnight cinema session; (2) on a huge screen, in the dark, with a crowd, unable to pause, on opening night; (3) *because* the audience cannot look away and is surrounded by others reacting, the fear is intensified and shared, so the film is read as a relentless, inescapable ordeal rather than a story one can hold at arm’s length. Name the mode, describe both halves of reception, and link causally to the reading.

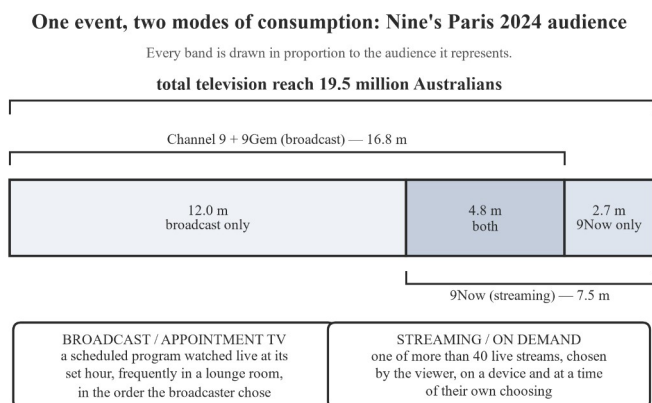
Contemporary example — Nine Entertainment, August 2024

Nine Entertainment is an Australian television broadcaster which in 2024 operated metropolitan free-to-air channels and the broadcaster video-on-demand platform 9Now.

On **14 August 2024** Nine reported that its coverage of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games had reached **19.5 million** Australians — a national total television reach figure covering Channel 9, 9Gem and 9Now together. The same release put 9Now’s own national reach at 7.5 million and its incremental reach at 16 per cent: **2.7 million** people consumed the Games only through 9Now and not through the broadcast channels. 9Now carried more than 40 live streams alongside the two broadcast channels.

Those figures separate two **modes of consumption** of a single event. On Channel 9 and 9Gem the Games were **broadcast / appointment** television — a scheduled program watched live at its set hour, frequently **communally** in a lounge room, in the order the broadcaster chose. On 9Now the same event was consumed **individually and on demand**: a stream selected by the viewer from more than forty, on a device and at a time of their own choosing. The 2.7 million who watched only on 9Now show that the **physical way** a product is consumed and the **context of the time and place** of reception are not incidental packaging — part of the audience was reachable in one reception context and not in the other. **Technology** here, a platform offering parallel live streams with viewer self-selection, shaped not only how the Games were received but by whom.

Splitting the release’s totals gives the three groups drawn below. Of the 19.5 million, $19.5 - 2.7 = 16.8$ million were reached by the broadcast channels; of those, $7.5 - 2.7 = 4.8$ million also used 9Now, leaving **12.0 million** who used broadcast alone. That derivation reproduces Nine’s own published incremental-reach figure exactly: $2.7 \div 16.8 = 16$ per cent.



2.7 million people were reachable in the second context and not in the first: the mode of consumption decided who was reached at all.

Derived from the release: broadcast = $19.5 - 2.7 = 16.8$ m; both = $7.5 - 2.7 = 4.8$ m; broadcast only = $16.8 - 4.8 = 12.0$ m. Incremental reach = $2.7 \div 16.8 = 16\%$, as published.

Source: Nine for Brands, “19.5 million Australians captivated by Paris 2024”, 14 August 2024.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded

Discuss a context in which an audience consumed a media narrative and how it impacted their reading. Refer to *Oppenheimer* (2023). (5 marks)

This is the shape of the live 5-mark consumption question (2024 Q3). The table builds the response one sentence at a time.

Working	Comment
The consumption context I will discuss is large-format cinema: many audiences consumed <i>Oppenheimer</i> (Christopher Nolan, 2023) in a darkened cinema on a very large IMAX screen, in a single uninterrupted screening among a full crowd on its opening weekend.	Step 1. Name the mode or site of consumption and the physical way it is consumed — be specific (large-format cinema, not “at the movies”).
This is the reception context in the study-design sense — the physical way the film is consumed and the context of the time and place in which it is received: a booked session, on release, sitting still in the dark for around three hours with no ability to pause.	Step 2. Name both halves of the reception definition — the physical way AND the context of time and place.
Because the screen is vast and the sound enveloping, and because the audience cannot pause or look away, this consumption context intensifies the film’s immersive dread and makes its scale feel overwhelming.	Step 3. State how the consumption context impacts the READING, using causal language (“because”). Reading = the meaning the audience makes.
The same narrative streamed at home on a laptop, paused for snacks and interrupted by messages, would be received quite differently — its tension broken and its scale reduced — which shows that the meaning an audience makes is shaped by how and where they consume it.	A brief contrast proves the point: change the consumption context and the reading changes. This is the core claim of the subtopic.
Note that this is the context of <i>reception</i> — when, where and how the audience received the film — not the context in which the film was produced.	Guard against the 2024 trap: consumption context is not production context. Keep them apart.

Example 2 — scaffolded

Explain how the method by which an audience consumes an audio narrative impacts their reading. Refer to *The Daily* (2017–). (4 marks)

This example isolates an individual, audio-only mode and the discipline of chaining the consumption method through to the reading — the shape of the sample exam’s Q1a/b.

Working	Comment
<i>The Daily</i> (The New York Times, 2017–) is a daily news podcast most often consumed through earbuds while commuting, exercising or doing chores — an audio-only mode in which the hands and eyes are free.	Name the consumption method precisely: the physical way (earbuds, sound only) and the typical context of time and place (a solitary commute).
Because the presenter’s voice is delivered directly into the listener’s ears with no competing images, this mode constructs an intimate, one-to-one address, so the listener tends to receive the reporting as a personal,	“Explain” needs a how/why chain: the physical mode (earbuds, voice-only) produces the effect (intimacy) which produces the reading (personal, trusting).

absorbing conversation.

The context shapes the reading in the other direction too: consumed while multitasking on a busy commute, the same episode may be received with divided attention, so finer detail is missed.

A strong answer shows the consumption context can both deepen AND dilute a reading — reception is not automatically “better” or “worse”.

Either way, the meaning the listener makes is shaped less by the words alone than by how, where and in what state of attention the episode is consumed.

Land the point: the method of consumption impacts the reading — the sample Q1a/b shape.

Example 3 — unscaffolded

Describe how the site at which a photographic series is consumed can shape the way an audience receives it. (3 marks)

When a photojournalism series such as the annual World Press Photo exhibition is consumed in a gallery, the site itself shapes reception. The images are printed large and hung in a deliberate, curated order, and the audience consumes them on foot, moving slowly through a quiet public space in near silence. This physical mode — scale, stillness and a fixed sequence — invites a slow, serious and contemplative reading, in which each image is given sustained attention. The same photographs consumed as small thumbnails scrolled quickly in a social-media feed would be received far more fleetingly. *Takeaway:* to describe a consumption context, name the physical way and the place of consumption (a gallery, large prints, on foot) and state what kind of reading it invites.

Example 4 — unscaffolded

Analyse how two different modes of consuming the same media narrative can lead audiences to different readings. Refer to *Squid Game* (2021). (7 marks)

Squid Game (Hwang Dong-hyuk, 2021) was released all at once on Netflix, and its dominant mode of consumption was solitary on-demand streaming — often binged across a single sitting on a laptop or phone, with the viewer free to pause, rewind and control the pace, and free to choose between the subtitled and the English-dubbed audio. This mode does analytical work on the reading. Bingeing compresses the nine-episode arc so that its escalating tension is received as one breathless build rather than a series of separated instalments; solitary viewing on a personal device makes the violence feel close and private; and the choice of subtitles over the dub, or the reverse, changes the nuance an audience receives, since a dubbed track re-voices performances that subtitling leaves intact. The technology of the platform and the solitude of the setting are shaping what the narrative means to the viewer.

Consumed a different way — one episode a week, on a large television in a shared lounge room — the same narrative would be received differently. A weekly release stretches the tension across two months and invites anticipation and discussion between episodes, so a cliffhanger is read as a talking point rather than a reason to press “next”; a communal lounge-room screening dilutes the private intimacy of the solo phone viewing and adds the reactions of others. Neither reading is more correct than the other; they differ because the physical way and the timing of consumption differ. *Takeaway:* a strong “analyse” answer names two specific modes of consumption, gives concrete features of each (binge versus weekly; solo phone versus communal television; subtitles versus dub) and shows how each shapes the reading — not merely that it does.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Define each of the following: (a) audience reception; (b) consumption; (c) the difference between individual and communal consumption.

Q2. Reception has two parts and takes many forms. (a) Name the two components of the study design’s definition of audience reception. (b) Name three different modes or sites by which audiences consume media narratives. (c) Classify each of the following as individual or communal consumption: (i) watching a film alone on a phone on a train; (ii) attending a packed opening-night cinema screening; (iii) a family watching a live broadcast final together; (iv) listening to a podcast on earbuds while jogging.

Q3. For a media narrative you have studied this year: (a) Name one way an audience may consume it. (b) Describe the physical way it is consumed and the context of the time and place of reception. (c) Explain how this consumption context could impact the audience's reading.

Q4. The study design says several factors can alter the way audiences receive, engage with and respond to media products. (a) Name the three factors it lists. (b) Give one example of how each could alter reception. (c) Explain how a viewer's critical media literacy could change their reading of the same product.

Q5. The terms consumption, engagement, reading and response describe different things. (a) State the difference between consuming a narrative and engaging with it. (b) State the difference between reception and response. (c) Classify each statement as chiefly about consumption/reception, engagement, or response: (i) "She watched the series on her phone during her commute."; (ii) "The final scene made him cry."; (iii) "After the documentary she signed the petition."; (iv) "They saw it on a big screen in a crowded cinema."

Q6. A reliable method for this outcome is: name the mode or site of consumption → describe the physical way and the context of time and place → state, causally, how it impacts the reading. (a) List, in order, the three steps of this method. (b) Apply the first two steps to this case: a class watches a set film on a projector screen in a lit classroom, across two lessons on separate days, stopping when the bell goes. (c) Complete the third step for the same case.

Un scaffolded

Q7. Describe how consuming a film in a cinema differs from consuming the same film by streaming it at home, in terms of the physical way it is consumed and the context of reception. (3 marks)

Q8. (*Stimulus.*) Read the two scenarios below.

Stimulus. Two people watch the same episode of a television drama. Ayesha watches it live on release night on a large lounge-room television, with her family, all reacting together. A week later, Tom watches the same episode alone on his phone on a crowded bus, with the sound low and one earbud in, pausing twice for messages.

Explain how these two consumption contexts could shape different readings of the episode. (4 marks)

Q9. Outline one way an audience commonly consumes an audio narrative such as a podcast, and one feature of that consumption context. (2 marks)

Q10. Describe how the site of consumption shapes the way an audience receives a short moving-image work exhibited on a continuous loop in a public gallery space. (3 marks)

Q11. (*Stimulus.*) Read the description below.

Stimulus. A current-affairs story is published in two ways: as a 45-second vertical video on a social-media app, auto-playing on mute with burned-in captions as users thumb-scroll past it, and as a 2000-word article on the same outlet's website.

Explain how the mobile short-form consumption context of the vertical video could shape the audience's reading compared with the article. (4 marks)

Q12. Discuss how consuming a program as "appointment" viewing — watching it live at its scheduled broadcast time — can shape an audience's reading differently from watching it later on demand. (4 marks)

Q13. For a media narrative you have studied this year, discuss which shaped the audience's reading more: the physical way the narrative was consumed, or the context of the time and place in which it was received. (5 marks)

Q14. (*Stimulus.*) A student wrote the response below to the question "Discuss a context in which an audience consumed the narrative and how it impacted their reading."

Stimulus. "The film was produced in Australia in 2019 on a low budget by a first-time director who wanted to tell a local story. This context shaped the film because the director used real locations. This impacted the audience because they could tell it was Australian."

Discuss two ways this response could be improved. (4 marks)

Q15. Explain how technology and a viewer's critical media literacy can alter the way an audience receives and reads the same media product. (4 marks)

Q16. Using an example, discuss the difference between how an audience *consumes* a narrative and how it *engages* with it. (4 marks)

Q17. Analyse how the platform and mode on which a video game is played — for example, an immersive session on a large screen with headphones, versus short bursts on a small portable screen — can shape the way a player receives and reads its narrative. (6 marks)

Q18. Analyse how the context of consumption — the physical way it was consumed and the context of the time and place of reception — of a media narrative you have studied this year shaped the way an audience received and read it. In your response, refer to at least two specific features of the consumption context. (8 marks)

Q19. In August 2024, Nine Entertainment reported that its Paris 2024 Olympic Games coverage had reached 19.5 million Australians across Channel 9, 9Gem and 9Now, and that 2.7 million of those people consumed the Games only through the 9Now streaming platform. Analyse how these two modes of consuming the same event — scheduled broadcast and on-demand streaming — differ in the physical way the coverage was consumed and in the context of the time and place of reception, and how each could shape an audience's reading of the Games. (5 marks)

Answers

Q1. (a) Both the physical way audiences consume a media product and the context of the time and place in which they receive it. (b) The act of accessing and experiencing a product — watching, listening, turning the pages of a print product, playing. (c) Individual = consumed alone (e.g. a phone on a train); communal = consumed with or alongside others (e.g. a full cinema), whose reactions become part of the experience. **Q2.** (a) The physical way it is consumed AND the context of the time and place of reception. (b) Any three modes/sites — e.g. cinema, broadcast/appointment TV, streaming/binge, mobile/short-form, podcast/audio, gallery exhibition, gaming platform. (c) (i) individual; (ii) communal; (iii) communal; (iv) individual. **Q3.** Own studied narrative. (a) a named mode; (b) both halves of reception described; (c) a causal link from that context to the reading (see solution for a model). **Q4.** (a) Technology; critical media literacy; the context of creation and consumption. (b) One example each (e.g. a pause button; recognising an advertisement; watching alone vs in a crowd). (c) A media-literate viewer questions or notices construction, so reads more critically than a viewer who takes it at face value. **Q5.** (a) Consuming = the physical act/mode of taking a product in; engaging = being affected emotionally and cognitively by it. (b) Reception = how/where it is consumed; response = acting or changing behaviour because of it. (c) (i) consumption/reception; (ii) engagement; (iii) response; (iv) consumption/reception. **Q6.** (a) 1 name the mode/site; 2 describe the physical way + context of time and place; 3 causal link to the reading. (b)–(c) The classroom case worked through the three steps: a projected school screening; a lit room, ordinary speakers, two blocks split by two days, among commenting classmates → an interrupted, daylight, semi-public reading in which atmosphere never accumulates. **Q7. Describe (3).** Cinema = large screen, surround sound, dark, uninterrupted, communal, a booked session; home streaming = small/medium screen, pausable, private, any time. Must name the physical way AND the context for both. **Q8. Explain (4).** Ayesha: communal, live, big screen → shared, immediate, heightened reading; Tom: solo, mobile, delayed, distracted, paused → private, fragmented, cooler reading. Each context chained to a reading. **Q9. Outline (2).** One mode (e.g. alone, through earbuds, while walking or commuting) + one feature of that context (e.g. the listener's own surroundings are received along with the episode; the listener chooses the moment and place of listening). **Q10. Describe (3).** Gallery installation = a looping work with no announced start or end, met on foot in a shared public room, watched standing, amid gallery light and other visitors; the audience arrives partway through and leaves when it chooses → received in fragments and out of order, sampled rather than followed whole. Name the site's features and the reception they produce. **Q11. Explain (4).** Vertical short-form on mobile: muted, captioned, thumb-scrolled, amid distraction → fast, surface reading favouring instantly legible meaning; the article invites slower, fuller reading. Chain the mode to the reading. **Q12. Discuss (4).** Appointment/live = simultaneous, shared, spoiler-sensitive → an urgent, communal reading; on-demand = self-paced, delayed, solitary → a private, controllable reading. Reach a position on the difference. **Q13.** Own studied narrative; one real consumption context named, with BOTH halves of the reception definition set out; each half weighed for what it did to the reading; a position reached and justified (either half may win if the case is argued). (*reception, not production*) **Q14.** Two of: it describes the PRODUCTION context, not the consumption context; it names no mode of consumption (how/where the audience received it); it gives no genuine impact on the reading. **Q15. Explain (4).** Technology (device/platform features) and critical media literacy each chained to a changed reading of the SAME product. **Q16. Discuss (4).** Consumption = how/where the audience takes the narrative in; engagement = how it affects them emotionally and cognitively. One example showing both, kept distinct. **Q17. Analyse (6).** Two modes of play (immersive large-screen + headphones vs portable short bursts), each with concrete features, each shaping the reading of the game's narrative. **Q18.** See Fully-worked solutions for a full model plus band descriptors and common errors. **Q19. Analyse (5).** Broadcast/appointment mode (Channel 9, 9Gem): a scheduled live program on a television set, at the hour the broadcaster set, often communal → a shared, simultaneous, event reading. On-demand mode (9Now): one stream self-selected from more than forty, any device, any hour, usually individual → a self-directed, partial, private reading. The 2.7 million exclusive 9Now viewers used to show that a reception context reached an audience the other did not. Each mode chained causally to a reading.

Fully-worked solutions

Q1. (a) **Audience reception** is both the physical way audiences consume a media product and the context of the time and place in which they receive it. (b) **Consumption** is the act of accessing and experiencing a product — watching, listening to, playing or turning the pages of a print product. (c) **Individual** consumption happens alone (a phone on a train, earbuds on a run) and tends to feel private and self-paced; **communal** consumption happens with or alongside others (a full cinema, a family on finals night) so that the reactions of others — laughter, gasps, a shared hush — become part of the experience.

Q2. (a) The two components are **the physical way the product is consumed** and **the context of the time and place of reception**. (b) Any three, for example **cinema**, **streaming / binge** and **podcast / audio** (also broadcast/appointment TV, mobile/short-form, gallery exhibition, gaming platform). (c) (i) **individual**; (ii) **communal**; (iii) **communal**; (iv) **individual**. *Marker's note*: a reception answer that names only the device and forgets the time and place — or the reverse — has given half the definition.

Q3. “*Explain*” in part (c) requires a *how/why chain*, not a description. *Model response (studied narrative: The Haunting of Hill House, 2018)*: (a) The mode: a solitary late-night binge of the Netflix series, streamed on a laptop. (b) The physical way — a medium screen with headphones, pausable and rewindable, watched in several episodes at once; the context of time and place — alone, late at night, at home, self-paced. (c) *Because* the viewer is alone in the dark, controlling the pace and watching several episodes back to back, the series’ tension builds without release and its quieter, more haunting moments land closely — a reading that a fragmented, daytime, one-episode viewing would not produce. *Marker's note*: part (c) must reach the reading; naming the mode and stopping is the common miss.

Q4. (a) The study design lists **technology**, **critical media literacy** and **the context of creation and consumption**. (b) *Technology* — a pause-and-rewind function lets a viewer re-watch a difficult moment, changing what they take in; *critical media literacy* — a viewer who recognises a clip as a paid advertisement discounts its claims; *the context of consumption* — watching a comedy in a full, laughing cinema versus alone at home changes how funny it feels. (c) “*Explain*” asks for a *how/why chain*. A viewer with strong **critical media literacy** does not take a product at face value: they notice how a scene is constructed, question whose interests it serves, and recognise persuasion or omission. **Because** they interrogate the product rather than simply absorbing it, they may read a glossy influencer post as marketing rather than candid advice — a reading a less media-literate viewer, consuming the same post uncritically, would not reach. *Marker's note*: keep the product the **same** and show the literacy changing the reading; that is the point of the factor.

Q5. (a) **Consuming** a narrative is the physical act and mode of taking it in — watching, listening, playing; **engaging** with it is being affected **emotionally and cognitively** by it (feeling suspense, thinking through a puzzle). One is *how you access it*, the other is *how it works on you*. (b) **Reception** is how and where a product is consumed; **response** is **acting or changing behaviour** because of it — signing a petition, changing a habit. (c) (i) **consumption/reception**; (ii) **engagement**; (iii) **response**; (iv) **consumption/reception**. *Common errors*: turning a consumption question into an engagement essay — engagement is developed in 2A; here, keep the focus on how and where the narrative is consumed.

Q6. (a) The three steps: **1** name the mode or site of consumption; **2** describe the physical way it is consumed and the context of the time and place of reception; **3** state, causally, how this impacts the reading. (b)–(c) *Model response (the classroom case)*: **1** a school classroom screening — a set film projected to a class. **2** the physical way: a projected image in a room with the lights up, ordinary speakers, and the film stopped mid-way when the bell goes and resumed two days later; the context of time and place: a timetabled lesson in the middle of a school day, watched among classmates who react and comment aloud as it runs. **3** *because* the film is met in daylight, in two separated blocks, and among classmates talking over it, its atmosphere never accumulates and the two-day gap lets any tension drain away, so the class receives it as **material to be studied and discussed** rather than as an absorbing single experience — a reading a dark, unbroken viewing would not produce. *Marker's note*: the three steps must connect; a common error is to describe the mode and never link it to the reading.

Q7. “*Describe*” asks for an account of the features. Consuming a film **in a cinema** and **at home** differ in both halves of reception. The **physical way**: a cinema offers a very large screen, enveloping surround sound and a single, uninterrupted screening in the dark, with no pause; home streaming offers a smaller screen, adjustable sound, and full control to pause, rewind and stop. The **context of time and place**: the cinema is a booked session in a public space, usually communal, often on release; home streaming is private, at any time the viewer chooses, often alone and amid the distractions of home. In short, cinema consumption is large-scale, uninterrupted and communal, while home streaming is smaller, controllable and private. *Marker's note*: three marks reward naming the physical way **and** the context for **both** modes — not just “the cinema screen is bigger”.

Q8. “*Explain*” asks for a *how/why chain* for each context. The two consumption contexts could produce different readings of the same episode. **Ayesha's** context is communal, live and large-screen: watching on release night with her family reacting together, on a big lounge-room television, means the episode is received as a **shared, immediate event**, its surprises amplified by the family's collective gasps and comments and read as something to experience together **now**. **Tom's** context is solitary, mobile and delayed: alone on a phone on a crowded bus a week later, with

low sound, one earbud and two interruptions for messages, he receives the episode with **divided attention** and no shared reaction, so its tension is broken by the pauses and its impact is cooler and more private. **Because** the physical way and the timing of consumption differ so sharply, the same episode is read as an urgent communal event by one viewer and as a fragmented private catch-up by the other. *Common errors:* describing the two set-ups without saying what each does to the **reading** — the marks are in the causal link.

Q9. “Outline” asks for the key feature briefly. An audience commonly consumes an audio narrative such as the Australian true-crime podcast *Casefile* **alone, through earbuds, while walking, commuting or doing chores**. One feature of this consumption context is that **the listener’s own surroundings are received along with the episode**: because the narrative is carried by sound alone while the eyes stay on the street, the train window or the kitchen, wherever the listener happens to be becomes part of the consumption context — the same instalment met on a dark walk home is received quite differently from one heard in a bright kitchen. *Marker’s note:* two marks — one clear mode, one clear feature of the consumption context; no extended analysis is required at this tariff.

Q10. “Describe” asks for an account of how the site works. A short moving-image work looped in a public gallery space — as screen-based works are exhibited at a venue such as ACMI in Melbourne — is consumed on terms the site sets. The **physical way**: the work runs continuously, with no start or end announced to the audience, on a screen in a shared room, watched standing or from a bench, amid gallery lighting and the movement and murmur of other visitors. The **context of time and place**: a daytime visit in which this is one work among many, entered partway through and left whenever the visitor chooses rather than when the work ends. **Because** the audience arrives mid-loop and sets its own exit, the work is received **in fragments and out of order** — a few minutes given close attention, the opening perhaps met last of all — so it is read as an experience to sample and piece together rather than a narrative followed from beginning to end. *Marker’s note:* name the site’s concrete features (continuous loop, no fixed start, standing in a shared public room, self-chosen exit) **and** what they do to the reception; naming the venue without the reception is half an answer.

Q11. “Explain” asks how the mode shapes the reading. The **mobile short-form** consumption context shapes the reading of the vertical video. Auto-playing **on mute** with **burned-in captions** as users **thumb-scroll** past it, in the middle of a distracting feed, the 45-second clip is consumed **fast, on a small private screen, with divided attention**. **Because** the audience gives it only seconds before scrolling on, the mode favours **instantly legible meaning** — a single striking image, a punchy caption — so the story is received as a quick, surface impression rather than a developed account. The same story as a 2000-word article, consumed deliberately on a website, invites a **slower, fuller reading** in which context and complexity can register. The consumption mode, not the underlying facts, largely explains the difference. *Common errors:* treating this as being about the content of the story rather than the **mode of consumption**; four marks need the mobile mode chained to a reading. This mobile-first logic is exactly what the short-lived platform Quibi built its whole design around — quick “bites” made to be watched on a phone.

Q12. “Discuss” asks you to develop the point and reach a position. Consuming a program as **appointment viewing** shapes the reading differently from on-demand catch-up. Watching **live at the scheduled time** — as audiences long did with a series such as *Game of Thrones*, and as they still do with a live broadcast event like the AFL Grand Final — means the audience receives it **simultaneously with everyone else**, unable to skip ahead and not yet knowing the outcome. **Because** the experience is shared and unspoiled, a twist or result is read as an **urgent, communal event** that fuels next-day discussion, and there is real pressure to watch live to **avoid spoilers**. Consumed later **on demand**, the same program is received **privately and self-paced**, its outcome perhaps already known, so the same moment is read more calmly and in isolation, as a catch-up rather than an event. On balance, appointment consumption heightens urgency and shared reading, while on-demand consumption favours control and privacy — the mode genuinely changes the reading. *Marker’s note:* reach a position on the difference; the strongest answers name the spoiler/simultaneity dynamic as the mechanism.

Q13. “Discuss” asks you to weigh the evidence and reach a position. Model response (studied narrative: *Jasper Jones*, 2017): Audiences consumed *Jasper Jones* (Rachel Perkins, 2017) in cinemas, and the session discussed here is a near-empty midweek screening at a suburban cinema. The **physical way** it was consumed: a large screen in a darkened auditorium, enveloping sound, one uninterrupted sitting with no ability to pause. The **context of the time and place**: a sparse weeknight session, a dozen strangers sitting well apart, at the end of a working day. On balance the **physical way** shaped the reading more. **Because** the room was dark, the screen large and the film unpausable, attention was held on small, quiet choices of performance and framing, so the film was received as an **intimate, closely observed drama**. The near-empty room mattered less than the communal-consumption examples earlier in

this subtopic might suggest: with almost no one to react to, none of the shared laughter that would carry a comedy was available, yet the reading of this quiet drama survived intact — the audience simply had nothing to amplify. The time and place were not irrelevant, since an audience arriving tired at the end of a workday brings less patience to a slow opening, but they modified the reading rather than made it. *Marker's note:* “discuss” wants a **position**, not two paragraphs set side by side — say which half carried the reading, justify it, and concede what the other half still did. And keep this on **consumption**: how and where the audience received the film, never how or why it was made.

Q14. “Discuss” asks you to develop each improvement. **First, the response answers the wrong kind of context.** The question asks about the context in which the audience **consumed** the narrative — the reception context of time, place and mode — but the student has written about the **production** context (where, when, by whom and why the film was **made**). Low budget, first-time director and real locations are all production facts; the student should instead name **how and where the audience received the film** — for example, streamed alone on a laptop, or seen at a one-off community screening. **Second, the response gives no genuine impact on the reading.** “They could tell it was Australian” is not a reading shaped by a consumption context. The student should chain a **specific consumption context** to a **specific reading** — for example, “watched at a packed local community screening, the audience recognised their own town on screen and received the film as a shared local celebration”. *Common errors:* this stimulus contains the single most common trap in the subtopic — **production context supplied where consumption context was asked** — flagged in the 2024 examination report.

Q15. “Explain” asks for a how/why chain for each factor. **Technology** and **critical media literacy** can each change how an audience receives and reads the **same** product. Take a streamed documentary. **Technologically**, watching it with a **pause-and-rewind** function and **subtitles** lets a viewer stop, re-watch a dense passage and read every word, so they absorb more of its argument than a viewer watching a single uninterrupted broadcast; the platform’s features change what reaches them. In terms of **critical media literacy**, a viewer with strong media literacy **notices how the documentary is constructed** — whose voices are selected, what is omitted, how music steers emotion — and so reads it as a **constructed argument** to be questioned, whereas a less media-literate viewer may receive the same documentary as **plain, unmediated fact**. In both cases the product is identical; the **conditions and competence** of consumption change the reading. *Marker's note:* keep the product constant and show each factor doing work — that is what the “same media product” phrasing is testing.

Q16. “Discuss” asks you to develop the distinction with an example. How an audience **consumes** a narrative and how it **engages** with it are related but distinct. **Consumption** is the physical way and context in which the audience takes the narrative in — for example, streaming a horror film alone, late at night, on a laptop with headphones. **Engagement** is how that narrative affects them **emotionally and cognitively** — the fear, the suspense, the working-out of what will happen next. The two connect: the solitary, dark, headphone consumption can **intensify** the emotional engagement (the fear feels closer), which shows that consumption conditions **shape** engagement without being the same thing. A student who answers a consumption question by writing only about how scared the audience felt has slipped into **engagement** and left the actual question — how and where the narrative was consumed — unanswered. *Marker's note:* engagement is developed in the previous subtopic; here, keep consumption in the foreground and use engagement only to show the boundary.

Q17. “Analyse” asks you to break the situation into elements and show how they work together, with specific evidence. The **platform and mode** on which a video game is played shape how a player receives and reads its narrative. Consider a first-person, story-driven game such as *Firewatch* (Campo Santo, 2016), whose narrative is carried largely through spoken dialogue over a hand-held radio. Played in an **immersive mode** — a **long, uninterrupted session on a large screen with headphones**, alone in a dark room — the player receives the game as **enveloping and intimate**: the headphones place the radio voice close and private, the big screen fills the field of vision, and the unbroken session lets tension and atmosphere accumulate, so the narrative is read as a **slow, absorbing, emotionally close** experience. Played in a **portable mode** — **short bursts on a small handheld screen** on a commute, with speaker sound and frequent interruptions — the same game is received quite differently: the fragmented sessions break the build-up, the small screen and open surroundings reduce immersion, and divided attention flattens the atmosphere, so the narrative is read more **casually and piecemeal**. Analysed together, screen size, audio, session length and setting **work as a set** to determine how immersed the player is, and therefore how the narrative is read. *Marker's note:* six marks need at least two clearly contrasted modes, concrete features of each, and the reading each produces — interactivity and session length are the levers to name.

Q18. Command term — analyse: break the consumption context into its specific features and show how they work together to shape the way the narrative was received and read, with specific evidence.

Model response (studied narrative: The Queen's Gambit, 2020):

The Queen's Gambit (Scott Frank, 2020) was released all at once as a Netflix limited series, and for most of its audience that binge-released streaming context strongly shaped the reading. Two features of that consumption context did the work.

The **first feature is the physical mode of consumption**: all seven episodes made available at once, watched on a laptop or television with pause, rewind and **next-episode autoplay**, self-paced and often several episodes in one sitting. **Because** the episodes ran on with no enforced week's wait, many viewers consumed the series across one or two compressed sittings, so Beth Harmon's rise through the chess world and her struggle with dependency were received as **one propulsive, unbroken arc** — read as a single, escalating story of obsession that the audience stayed inside for hours at a time.

The **second feature is the context of the time and place of reception**: the series was consumed **privately and at any hour the viewer chose** — commonly alone, at home, late at night — rather than at a fixed broadcast time among others. **Because** the viewing was solitary and self-paced, the narrative's close attention to Beth's interior world — her isolation and the quiet of the empty rooms she plays in — was met closely and without interruption, so the audience read it as an **intimate character study** rather than a public spectacle.

The two features reinforce each other: the binge-release mode and the private, self-paced setting both push the audience toward a compressed, close, interior reading. This becomes clearest by contrast — had the same viewer met the series in ten-minute fragments on a phone between other tasks, the build would have been repeatedly interrupted and the quiet attention to Beth's interior world crowded out by the surroundings, and it would more likely be read as a period drama half-followed in the background. That contrast shows how much of the narrative's meaning for its bingeing audience depended on **how and where** it was consumed. *Because* the reading shifts so sharply with the mode and setting of consumption, the reception context is doing genuine analytical work, not merely delivering a fixed narrative.

Band descriptors (analyse, out of 8):

- **High (7–8):** names a specific consumption context and at least **two specific features** of it (the physical mode and the context of time and place); links each **causally** to the reading; uses a contrast or second mode to show the reading depends on the consumption context; specialised media language is precise; stays on **reception**, never drifting to production context.
- **Mid (4–6):** a consumption context named with **some** features and at least one link to the reading; linkage partly asserted rather than developed, or only one feature carried; media language present but not sustained.
- **Low (1–3):** describes the mode with **no** impact on the reading, or answers with the **production** context, or slips into engagement; little specific evidence; reading vague or absent.

Common errors: giving the **production** context where the consumption context was asked (the 2024 trap); naming a mode of consumption but never linking it to a **reading**; describing only the device and omitting the **context of time and place** (half the reception definition); sliding into **engagement** (how the audience felt) instead of how and where they consumed the narrative.

Q19. Command term — analyse: break each mode of consumption into its specific features, then show how those features shape the reading, with the reported figures as evidence.

On 14 August 2024 Nine Entertainment reported a national total television reach of 19.5 million Australians for its Paris 2024 Olympic Games coverage across Channel 9, 9Gem and 9Now, with 2.7 million of those people consuming the Games **only** through 9Now. One event, two very different consumption contexts.

The **broadcast mode** on Channel 9 and 9Gem is **appointment** television. The **physical way** it is consumed: a scheduled program on a television set, watched live, in the running order and at the pace the broadcaster set, with no ability to pause or choose another event. The **context of the time and place**: a fixed hour, at home, frequently **communally** — a household or a room of people watching the same final at the same moment as the rest of the country. **Because** everyone meets the event simultaneously and cannot skip or rewind, a race or medal is received as it

happens and reacted to together, so the Games are read as a **shared national occasion** — something the audience is present at rather than merely watching.

The **on-demand mode** on 9Now reverses nearly every one of those features. The **physical way**: one stream chosen by the viewer from more than forty running in parallel, on a phone, tablet, laptop or smart TV, startable and stoppable at will. The **context of the time and place**: whenever and wherever the viewer chose, typically **individually**, often out of sync with the live schedule and with the rest of the audience. **Because** the viewer assembles their own selection of events, the Games are received as a **self-curated set of the sports that interest them** rather than a broadcast whole, and are read more privately and more partially — deep in one sport, absent from the others.

The **2.7 million** who consumed the Games only through 9Now are the analytical point. These were not people choosing a preferred version of the same reception context; they were reachable in one context and not the other. That the audience of a single event divides this way shows the consumption context is not neutral delivery: **technology** — a platform offering parallel live streams with viewer self-selection — determined both how the Games were received and by whom. *Marker's note*: five marks need **both halves** of the reception definition for **each** mode and a causal link from each to a reading; naming the platforms without saying what the mode did to the meaning the audience made will not score. Keep this on **reception** — how and where the audience consumed the coverage — not on how Nine produced it.

Chapter 2 Audiences: engagement, consumption and reading — 2C Reading media narratives

Theory

When an audience watches a film, plays a game, scrolls through a photographic essay or listens to a podcast, they do not simply receive a fixed message poured into them. They **make meaning** from what the creator has built. That meaning-making is what this subtopic calls **reading**: the process by which an audience **decodes the media codes and narrative conventions** of a media narrative to arrive at an understanding of what it means. To “read” a narrative here has nothing to do with reading words on a page; it is to interpret everything the creator has constructed — a low-angle shot, a sudden silence, a branching choice, the order of a set of images — and to build from those signs a sense of what is happening and what it signifies. A **reading**, then, is the meaning an audience arrives at.

Reading sits alongside engagement and consumption — and is not the same as either. This chapter is built on three related but distinct ideas, and the single most common error in this part of the course is to blur them. Examiners have flagged the confusion of consumption, engagement and reading repeatedly. The table below separates the three.

Concept (subtopic)	What it names	The question it answers	A quick example
Engagement (2A)	how a product affects an audience emotionally and cognitively	<i>How does it make me feel and think?</i>	feeling tense and alert during a chase
Consumption (2B)	the physical way an audience receives a product, and the time and place of reception	<i>How, where and when do I receive it?</i>	streaming the film on a laptop at home
Reading (2C)	the meaning an audience makes by decoding the product’s codes and conventions	<i>What do I understand it to mean?</i>	interpreting the chase as a warning about surveillance

The three interact — how you consume a narrative can shape how you engage with it, and how you engage can colour how you read it — but they are separate concepts, and a question about reading is answered only by naming a **meaning**. If you are asked how an audience reads a narrative and you describe how they *feel* (engagement) or *where they watch it* (consumption), you have not answered the question.

How reading is possible: the shared creator–audience understanding. An audience can read a narrative at all only because it shares something with the creator. The study design calls this shared resource **media language** — the framework of media codes, conventions and technologies, and the understanding of how these are selected and sequenced to make meaning, that **creators, producers and audiences hold in common**. Because both sides share this understanding, meaning can pass from the maker to the audience: when a creator places a character in a **low-angle shot**, the choice conveys power *because* audiences have learned to read low angles that way. The study design puts it plainly — audience readings of meaning are **mediated through a shared understanding of the media codes and conventions** used to construct a narrative. Reading is therefore not a private guess; it is decoding, using a shared code. It follows that where the shared understanding is missing — an audience unfamiliar with a form, a genre or a cultural symbol — the meaning can be **misread or missed**.

Intended readings and actual readings. Every media creator builds a narrative hoping the audience will take a particular meaning from it. Call this the **intended reading**: the meaning the construction is designed to produce. The **actual reading** is the meaning an audience really makes — which may match the intended reading, or may differ from it. A creator can guide a reading, through the codes and conventions they choose and the shared understanding they rely on, but cannot fully control it, because the audience brings its own resources to the decoding. A game that dresses a warm family story in horror-film conventions may set up an initial actual reading (dread) quite different from its intended reading (tenderness); a documentary may intend admiration and meet scepticism. Naming both the intended and the actual reading — and being clear about the gap between them — is a mark of a strong response.

Multiple and divergent readings. Because audiences bring different resources to their decoding, the **same narrative can be read differently by different audiences**, and none of those readings need be “wrong”. Divergent readings are driven by what each audience brings to the text:

Factor	How it can shape a reading
Age	a viewer’s life stage supplies different reference points — a teenager and a grandparent read the same farewell scene through different experiences of leaving home
Culture	shared traditions, languages and beliefs let some audiences decode meanings — a gesture, a song, a symbol — that others read differently or miss entirely
Experience	what an audience has lived, or previously watched (their prior reading of similar narratives), lets them read with recognition where others read only the surface
Media literacy	how skilfully an audience decodes construction — a highly literate viewer notices persuasive or generic techniques and reads them as deliberate choices

These four are the ones this subtopic works with most, but the list is not closed: any attribute an audience brings — its values and beliefs, gender, occupation, life circumstances — can shift a reading the same way. The same codes, read through different lenses, generate different but valid meanings. Note that where those differences come from an audience’s broader **context** — the era, place or society they read from — the analysis belongs mostly to a later subtopic, 3C. Here the focus is the reading process itself: *that* audiences decode differently, and *why*, kept close to the text.

The contextual lens — and why reading matters. Each audience reads through a **contextual lens**: the sum of the **time they live in, the place and culture they belong to, and the experiences, values and media literacy they bring** — the whole of what an audience carries to the decoding. Note that the term is anchored in **context**: the study design says that *contextual influences such as time, place, culture, societal attitudes and values* may be reflected in media products, and that *audiences also read and consume media through this contextual lens*. (This subtopic works mainly at the personal end of that lens — age, culture, experience, media literacy — and leaves the time-and-place end to 3C, but the term itself covers the whole of it.) The study design draws the larger point from this idea: *by understanding the contextual lens through which audiences view and consume media texts, students are able to understand the contribution and role that the media has in shaping our views, values and opinions about our world*. Reading is the point at which this shaping happens. As audiences decode narratives, the meanings they make can reinforce, extend or challenge the views and values they already hold — which is why the media’s role is not trivial, and why analysing *how* audiences read is worth doing.

Stay in the study design’s language. You do not need the specialist labels of academic reception theory to discuss reading well. The study design’s own words are precise enough: audiences **engage with, consume and read** narratives; **audience readings of meaning are mediated through a shared understanding** of the codes and conventions used to construct them; and audiences read through a **contextual lens**. Those are the phrases to build an answer on. The **intended/actual** and **divergent** vocabulary used in this subtopic is this book’s plain way of naming the differences between readings — it is a useful teaching frame, not study-design wording, so make its meaning clear as you use it. Reaching for imported jargon tends to produce vaguer, not sharper, answers. Name the code, name the meaning, name what the audience brings.

The analysis method. For every question about how a narrative is read, work through four steps in order:

1. **Name the audience** and the part of its **contextual lens** that matters here (its time and place, culture, age, experience, values or media literacy).
2. Name the **specific moment** and the **code or convention** being decoded.
3. State the **meaning that audience makes** — its reading.
4. **Link the reading causally to the lens** — why *that* audience reads it *that* way — and note whether it matches the intended reading, or diverges from another audience’s reading.

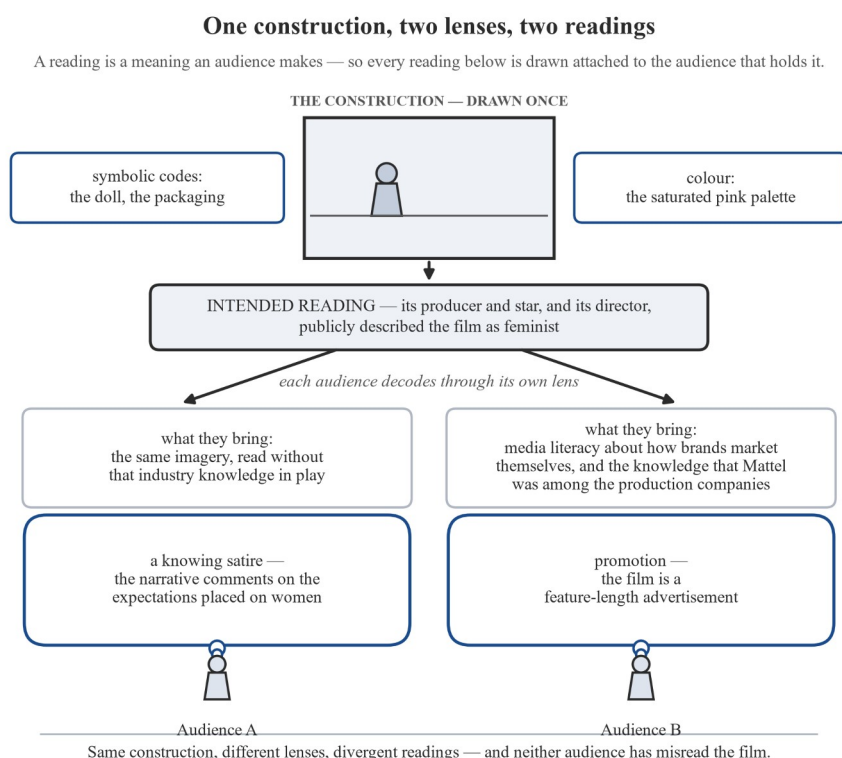
Applied to a one-line hypothetical: (1) an audience of first-time job-seekers, reading through the lens of their own recent experience; (2) reads the scene in which a character is turned away at an interview, constructed through tight framing and flat, grey lighting; (3) and makes the meaning that the system is indifferent and demeaning; (4) they read it this way because their lived experience supplies the recognition — where an audience without that experience might read the same scene as merely one character’s bad day. Keep the code, the meaning and the lens developed together.

Contemporary example — LuckyChap Entertainment, July 2023

LuckyChap Entertainment is a film and television production company founded in 2014 by the Australian actor and producer Margot Robbie with three partners, and credited as one of the production companies on the feature film *Barbie*.

On **20 July 2023** *Barbie* (Greta Gerwig) opened in Australian cinemas on the same day as *Oppenheimer*. It took \$19.5 million at the Australian box office that opening weekend, and the two releases together gave Australian cinemas their highest-grossing weekend since April 2019. The film’s **intended reading** was stated in public: Robbie, as producer and star, and Gerwig, as director, described the film as feminist.

The **actual readings** audiences made pulled apart. One audience decoded the film’s toy-brand iconography — the doll, the packaging, the saturated pink — as knowing satire, and made the meaning that the narrative comments on the expectations placed on women. Another audience, reading through a **contextual lens** shaped by **media literacy** about how brands market themselves and by the knowledge that the doll’s manufacturer, Mattel, was among the film’s production companies, decoded the identical imagery as promotion, and made the meaning that the film is a feature-length advertisement. Scholars writing in *Feminist Media Studies* framed the split in those terms — feminist ideas reaching the mainstream, or a brand taking up feminist ideas for its own ends. Same construction, different lenses, **divergent readings**. The figure below draws that split: the construction appears once, because it does not change, and each reading is attached to the audience that made it.



Source: *Feminist Media Studies*, Alicia Byrnes, Janice Loreck and Nonie May, “‘She’s everything’: feminism and the Barbie movie”, published online 21 July 2024 —

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14680777.2024.2381254>; and *The Canberra Times*, Anna McGuinness, “Barbie and Oppenheimer break Australian box office records on opening weekend”, 24 July 2023 —

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8281486/barbenheimer-delivers-historic-boon-for-australian-cinemas/>. Accurate as at July 2026.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded

Discuss how an audience reads meaning from the use of one narrative convention in a media narrative. Refer to the documentary *2040* (2019). (5 marks)

This is the shape of a 5-mark reading question. The table builds the response one sentence at a time.

Working	Comment
The narrative I will discuss is the documentary <i>2040</i> (Damon Gameau, 2019), and the audience I will consider is a general Australian audience with an everyday, non-specialist understanding of documentary.	Step 1. Open by naming the narrative and the audience whose reading you will discuss.
<i>2040</i> is built around the narrative convention of point of view : Gameau establishes a strongly personal, first-person point of view, realised through direct address — he speaks straight to camera and structures the whole film as a hopeful visual letter to his young daughter, imagining the year 2040 she might grow up into if the best solutions that already exist were taken up now.	Step 2. Anchor the reading to a specific narrative convention (point of view). Note that direct address is the <i>form</i> technique through which that point of view is realised — do not mistake the form convention for the narrative one.
Because the audience shares an understanding of both this first-person point of view and the form conventions of the personal-essay documentary — that direct address invites trust, and that a hopeful framing signals a call to action — they read the film as an optimistic argument that change is achievable, rather than as neutral reportage or a despairing warning.	Step 3. State the meaning the audience makes (the reading), and show it depends on the shared understanding — while classing the personal-essay elements correctly as form conventions, distinct from the narrative convention of point of view.
This reading is possible only because creator and audience share the “media language” of the form: Gameau selects and sequences the convention expecting the audience to decode it in the intended way, and they do.	Step 4. Link the reading causally to the shared creator–audience understanding ; name the intended reading and that it lands.
A different audience — say, one deeply sceptical of climate documentaries — might read the same hopeful framing as naive; the convention guides the reading but does not guarantee it.	The examiner rewards awareness that a reading is decoded, not simply received — and can diverge.

Example 2 — scaffolded

Explain how the intended reading of a media narrative can differ from the reading an audience actually makes. Refer to the video game *Gone Home* (2013). (4 marks)

This example isolates the **gap between the intended reading and the actual reading**, and the way a creator can exploit the audience’s shared understanding to open that gap.

Working	Comment
<i>Gone Home</i> (Fullbright, 2013) drops the player, alone, into a large, empty family house on a stormy night, with the lights off and a note hinting that something is wrong.	Name the construction — the codes that set up the audience’s first reading.
Drawing on their shared understanding of horror-game conventions (the empty house, the thunderstorm, the ominous note), most players form an actual reading as they begin: that this is a horror game and a threat is waiting.	Step: name the actual reading the audience makes, and the shared convention that produces it.
The creators’ intended reading , however, is quite different: pieced together from notes and objects, the	Name the intended reading and show it does not match

Working	Comment
narrative is a tender, domestic coming-of-age story about a young woman, and the horror conventions are a deliberate misdirection.	the initial actual reading.
The gap is the point: by borrowing conventions the audience already knows how to read, the game leads players to an intended dread it then dissolves into empathy — the intended and the actual readings pull apart, and the design uses the audience's own decoding to do it.	Explain — complete the how/why chain from construction, through shared understanding, to the divergence between intended and actual reading.

Example 3 — unscaffolded

Describe how an audience's media literacy can shape the reading they make of a media narrative. Refer to the video game *Papers, Please* (2013). (3 marks)

In *Papers, Please* (Lucas Pope, 2013), the player works as a border-checkpoint inspector in a fictional authoritarian state, stamping documents under mounting time pressure and escalating moral pressure. A **highly media-literate** player decodes the repetitive stamping mechanic and the steady stream of impossible choices as **deliberate design** — reading the game as a critique of border bureaucracy and of how ordinary people are made complicit in an oppressive system. A player who reads only the surface takes it as a puzzle game about checking passports. The more literate reading is not a different game; it is a different **meaning**, decoded from the same construction. *Takeaway*: media literacy is how skilfully an audience decodes construction — the more literate the reading, the more of the maker's meaning it recovers.

Example 4 — unscaffolded

Analyse how the construction of a media narrative can invite audiences to make multiple, divergent readings of the same experience. Refer to the video game *Journey* (2012). (7 marks)

Journey (thatgamecompany, 2012) is built almost entirely from symbolic codes — a lone robed figure, a distant mountain, wordless chimes for communication and a swelling, receding musical score — and deliberately withholds dialogue, on-screen text and any stated goal. Because the shared understanding it relies on is broad (symbols of pilgrimage, ascent, light and dark) rather than specific, the construction leaves open space for the audience to fill with meaning drawn from their own experience. One player reads the trek towards the mountain as a spiritual pilgrimage; another, reading through the lens of a recent bereavement, reads the fading of a travelling companion and the final climb into light as a passage through grief towards acceptance; a third reads the whole arc as the shape of a single human life. None of these readings is wrong.

The openness is engineered, not accidental. The **anonymity** of the online companion — no names, no chat, only the chimes — and the **abstraction** of the imagery are construction choices that invite personal meaning-making rather than enforce a single fixed reading. The same codes, decoded through different lives, generate divergent but valid readings; the narrative is completed differently by each audience. *Takeaway*: a strong reading analysis names the specific construction choices that **open** (or close) the space for meaning, and links each divergent reading to what the audience brings to it.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Define each of the following terms: (a) reading (of a media narrative); (b) intended reading; (c) contextual lens.

Q2. This chapter distinguishes three audience concepts: engagement, consumption and reading. (a) State the difference between reading and engagement. (b) State the difference between reading and consumption. (c) Classify each of the following as engagement, consumption or reading: (i) a viewer laughs out loud at a comedy; (ii) a listener plays a podcast through earbuds while out on a run; (iii) a player interprets a game's bleak ending as a comment on inequality.

Q3. Reading depends on a shared understanding between creator and audience. (a) Define the term “media language”. (b) Explain, with a brief example, how a shared understanding of one media code lets an audience read the meaning a creator intended. (c) Explain what can happen to the reading when a creator and an audience do not share that understanding.

Q4. The same narrative can be read differently by different audiences. (a) Name four factors that can lead audiences to read the same narrative differently. (b) Choose one of those factors and explain how it can change the reading an audience makes. (c) Explain why a divergent reading does not mean an audience has read the narrative “wrongly”.

Q5. An intended reading and an actual reading do not always match. (a) State the difference between the intended reading and the actual reading of a narrative. (b) Give one reason an audience’s actual reading might differ from the creator’s intended reading. (c) Explain why a creator cannot fully control the reading an audience makes.

Q6. A reliable method for discussing a reading is: name the audience and its contextual lens → name the moment and the code or convention → state the meaning the audience makes → link the reading to the lens. (a) List, in order, the four steps of this method. (b) For a media narrative you have studied this year, complete the first two steps for one specific moment. (c) Complete the last two steps for the same moment.

Un scaffolded

Q7. An audience member can be gripped by a media narrative yet read it differently from the person sitting beside them. Using one named moment, explain how the same engagement can lead two viewers to different readings. (4 marks)

Q8. Explain how a shared understanding of media codes and conventions between a creator and an audience makes reading a narrative possible. In your response, refer to what can happen when that shared understanding is absent. (4 marks)

Q9. Explain why a single media narrative can be read in several different ways by different audiences. In your response, refer to at least two factors that shape a reading. (5 marks)

Q10. (*Stimulus.*) Read the description of a scene below.

Stimulus. In the closing moments of a family film, an ageing farmer stands alone at a fence line at dusk and watches his adult children drive away from the property for the last time. The camera holds on his still face in a long, slow shot; a single sustained note plays; then the screen cuts to black.

Describe how audiences of two different ages might read this moment differently. (4 marks)

Q11. Discuss how an audience’s cultural background can shape the reading they make of a media narrative. Refer to a media narrative in your response. (5 marks)

Q12. Discuss how an audience’s prior experience can lead them to read a media narrative differently from an audience without that experience. (4 marks)

Q13. (*Stimulus.*) Consider the following statement about audiences.

Stimulus. “By understanding the contextual lens through which audiences read media, we understand the role the media plays in shaping our views, values and opinions about the world.”

Discuss how the reading audiences make of a media narrative can contribute to shaping their views and values. Refer to an example. (5 marks)

Q14. (*Stimulus.*) A student wrote the response below to the question “Explain how an audience reads a media narrative.”

Stimulus. “The audience reads the narrative by streaming it at home on the weekend. They binge the whole series on the couch, and that is how they read it. Watching it on a big TV means they read it really well.”

Discuss two ways this response has confused *reading* with *consumption*, and how it could be corrected. (4 marks)

Q15. Explain how a media creator uses codes and conventions to guide an audience towards an intended reading. Refer to a specific media narrative and to specific construction choices. (6 marks)

Q16. For a media narrative you have studied this year, discuss the reading you made of one specific moment, and how your own contextual lens shaped that reading. (5 marks)

Q17. A classic Australian film is re-released decades after it first appeared, and a contemporary audience watches it for the first time. Discuss how this new audience's reading of one aspect of the film might differ from that of its original audience. (5 marks)

Q18. Analyse how audiences from two different positions may read the same moment or aspect of a media narrative differently. In your response, refer to specific construction and to what each audience brings to its reading. (8 marks)

Q19. On 20 July 2023 the film *Barbie* — produced by companies including LuckyChap Entertainment — opened in Australian cinemas, and audiences read it in opposed ways: some as a satire about the expectations placed on women, others as an advertisement for a toy brand. Analyse how a single media narrative can produce two such divergent readings. In your response, refer to specific construction and to what each audience brings to its reading. (5 marks)

Answers

Q1. (a) The process by which an audience makes meaning from a narrative by decoding its media codes and narrative conventions; also the meaning arrived at. (b) The meaning a creator designs the construction to produce. (c) The sum of what an audience brings to a text — the time it lives in, the place and culture it belongs to, and its experiences, values and media literacy — and through which it views, consumes and reads that text. (*Accept any answer that names the lens as the audience's own context/what it brings; the dimensions listed are indicative, not a closed set.*) **Q2.** (a) Engagement = how a narrative affects an audience emotionally and cognitively (how it makes them feel/think); reading = the meaning they make by decoding it. (b) Consumption = the physical way, time and place a narrative is received; reading = the meaning made. (c) (i) engagement; (ii) consumption; (iii) reading. **Q3.** (a) The shared framework of media codes, conventions and technologies — and how they are selected and sequenced to make meaning — held in common by creators, producers and audiences. (b) One code named, a shared convention for reading it, and the meaning that passes to the audience (e.g. a low angle read as power). (c) The intended meaning may be misread or missed (an unfamiliar form, genre or cultural symbol). **Q4.** (a) Any four defensible factors. The chapter's four are age, culture, experience and media literacy; also accept values or beliefs, gender, demographic or social position, and any other audience attribute the student links to a different reading. (b) One factor named, with a clear how/why link to a changed reading. (c) The same codes decoded through different lenses yield different but valid meanings; openness in the construction can invite this. **Q5.** (a) Intended = the meaning the construction is designed to produce; actual = the meaning the audience really makes. (b) Any valid reason — a different contextual lens, missing shared understanding, deliberate subversion. (c) The audience decodes with its own resources, so meaning is completed by the audience, not fixed by the maker. **Q6.** (a) 1 name the audience + contextual lens; 2 name the moment + code/convention; 3 state the meaning made; 4 link the reading to the lens (and note intended vs divergent). (b)–(c) Any studied narrative, correctly working the four steps (see solution for a model). **Q7. Explain (4).** Engagement = emotional/cognitive effect (the shared grip); reading = the meaning each viewer makes; one named moment where two viewers, equally gripped, make two different meanings; the two named as distinct. (*names two meanings, not just the shared feeling*) **Q8. Explain (4).** Shared media language → a named code decoded the intended way → meaning reaches the audience; plus a line on misreading when the understanding is absent. **Q9. Explain (5).** At least two factors — age, culture, experience and media literacy are the chapter's, but any defensible factor counts — each linked to a different reading; the point that divergent readings are valid, not wrong. **Q10. Describe (4).** Two named ages, two different meanings, both tied to the SAME described codes (the long held shot, the sustained note, the cut to black). Not “older people are sadder”. **Q11. Discuss (5).** One narrative; how cultural knowledge (language, symbol, custom) lets one audience decode layers another reads differently or misses; kept on the reading, not a full context essay. **Q12. Discuss (4).** How lived or prior-viewing experience produces recognition and a different reading; the different reading linked to the specific experience. **Q13. Discuss (5).** The reading connected to the SHAPING of views/values; an example where audiences read the same text differently through their lenses; the study design's link between the contextual lens and the media's role in shaping views, values and opinions. **Q14. Discuss (4).** Two confusions named — it describes consumption (streaming/bingeing/screen), not a meaning; screen size is a viewing condition, not interpretation — plus how to correct (state a meaning decoded from a code/convention). **Q15. Explain (6).** A specific narrative; specific construction choices; the shared understanding they rely on; the chain completed to the INTENDED meaning at named moments. **Q16. Discuss (5).** Own studied narrative; one specific moment; the reading made; the personal contextual lens that produced it, linked causally; context kept light. **Q17. Discuss (5).** Original vs contemporary reading of one aspect; construction unchanged, lens changed; kept light (deep context analysis belongs to 3C). **Q18. Analyse (8).** Same specific moment/aspect; two named audience positions; the different meaning each makes; the lens driving each; divergence attached to reading, not a context essay. See solution for a full model plus common errors. **Q19. Analyse (5).** The same construction named (the film's toy-brand iconography — the doll, the packaging, the colour palette); two audience positions and the **different meaning** each makes; each reading linked causally to what that audience brings (media literacy about brand marketing, prior knowledge of the doll, values); the publicly stated **intended reading** named and the divergence from it; the divergence kept at the level of **reading**, not engagement, consumption or box-office success.

Fully-worked solutions

Q1. (a) **Reading** is the process by which an audience **makes meaning** from a media narrative by **decoding its media codes and narrative conventions**; the word also names the meaning the audience arrives at. (b) The **intended reading** is the **meaning a creator designs the construction to produce** — the reading the codes and conventions are

chosen to guide the audience towards. (c) A **contextual lens** is the **sum of what an audience brings to a text** — the **time it lives in**, the **place and culture it belongs to**, and its **experiences, values and media literacy** — through which it views, consumes and reads that text, and which shapes the meaning it makes. *Marker's note*: the dimensions are indicative, not a closed list; reward any definition that names the lens as the audience's own context. The term is anchored in **context**, so a definition that leads with time, place and culture is fully correct — 2C simply keeps its *analysis* at the personal end and leaves the contextual end to 3C.

Q2. (a) **Engagement** is **how a narrative affects an audience emotionally and cognitively** — whether it grips, moves or absorbs them; **reading** is the **meaning** they make by decoding it. You can be gripped (engaged) yet still make a particular meaning (reading), and the two are different questions. (b) **Consumption** is the **physical way, time and place** an audience receives a product (in a cinema, on a phone, bingeing at home); **reading** is the **meaning made** once received. (c) (i) **engagement**; (ii) **consumption**; (iii) **reading**. *Common errors*: misplacing (iii) — being amused is engagement, but interpreting the game's bleak ending as being *about* inequality is a reading (a meaning made).

Q3. “*Explain*” asks for a *how/why chain*. (a) **Media language** is the **shared framework of media codes, conventions and technologies**, and of how they are **selected and sequenced to make meaning**, that **creators, producers and audiences hold in common**. (b) Take the **camera**: when a creator frames a character in a **low-angle shot**, the audience reads that character as **powerful or dominant** — because both creator and audience share the convention that low angles signal power, the intended meaning passes across that shared code to the audience. (c) When the shared understanding is **absent** — an audience unfamiliar with the form, genre or a cultural symbol — the intended meaning can be **misread or missed**: the same low angle is read as merely “a shot from below”, or a culturally specific gesture is read in a way the creator never intended. *Marker's note*: the mark is in the **chain** — code → shared convention → meaning — not in a definition of the code.

Q4. (a) Any four factors the student can link to a different reading. The four this chapter works with are **age, culture, experience and media literacy**; an audience's **values or beliefs**, its **gender**, and its **demographic or social position** are equally valid and must be credited — the stem does not restrict the student to the chapter's list. (b) *Model — media literacy*: a **highly media-literate** audience decodes construction as deliberate choice, so watching a reality-competition format it may read the “villain edit” — the selective cutting that casts one contestant as the antagonist — as a **manufactured storyline** rather than reality, and make a more sceptical reading, where a less literate audience takes the character at face value. (c) A divergent reading is not “wrong” because reading is **decoding through a lens**: the **same codes**, read through different experiences, cultures or literacies, produce **different but valid meanings**, and many narratives are deliberately constructed with the openness to invite this. *Marker's note*: reward the idea that meaning is completed by the audience, not that “everyone can think what they like”.

Q5. “*Explain*” asks for a *how/why account*. (a) The **intended reading** is the meaning the construction is **designed to produce**; the **actual reading** is the meaning an audience **really makes** — which may match the intended reading or differ from it. (b) An actual reading may differ because the audience reads through a **different contextual lens**, **lacks the shared understanding** the creator assumed, or because the creator has **deliberately subverted** a convention. (c) A creator cannot fully control the reading because the audience **decodes with its own resources**: the maker chooses the codes and can guide the reading, but the meaning is **completed by the audience**, so the outcome is guided, not guaranteed. *Common errors*: treating the intended reading as the only “correct” one — the point is that the actual reading can legitimately diverge.

Q6. (a) The four steps: **1** name the audience and its **contextual lens**; **2** name the **specific moment** and the **code or convention** being decoded; **3** state the **meaning the audience makes**; **4** **link the reading to the lens**, noting whether it matches the intended reading or diverges from another audience's. (b)–(c) *Model response (studied narrative: Storm Boy, 1976)*: **1** An audience of young, family viewers reading through the lens of a child's attachment to a pet. **2** The moment in which the boy learns that the pelican he has raised, Mr Percival, has died — a pivotal event decoded through the film's close **point of view** on the boy, which keeps the audience with his experience of the loss. **3** This audience reads the moment as a first, hard lesson about **loss and letting go**. **4** They read it this way because their lens is that of the child's bond with the animal; an adult viewer, reading through the lens of experience of grief, might read the same moment as being about **mortality and moving towards independence**. *Marker's note*: the steps must connect — naming a moment and then retelling the plot with no stated **meaning** is the common failure.

Q7. “*Explain*” asks for a *how/why chain*. **Engagement** is **how a narrative affects an audience emotionally and cognitively** — whether it grips them; **reading** is the **meaning** they make by decoding its codes and conventions. Because the two are distinct, two viewers can be equally gripped yet read the same moment differently. *Model*

response (example: The Hunger Games, 2012): take the moment the tributes are lifted into the arena and the countdown to the opening bloodbath begins. Both viewers watching side by side are **engaged** — the ticking clock, the ring of poised competitors and the cut between terrified faces grip them equally. But their **readings** diverge: one, reading through the lens of an action survival story, makes the meaning that this is a thrilling contest the heroine must win; the other, reading through an interest in how the media works, makes the meaning that the moment is a pointed comment on televised spectacle — an audience being entertained by children’s deaths, exactly as the Capitol’s audience is. The **engagement is the same** (both are gripped); the **reading** — the meaning each makes — is what differs. *Marker’s note:* the trap is to describe only the shared grip (“it was gripping, everyone was on the edge of their seat”) and never state the two different **meanings** — engagement is the effect, reading is the meaning made.

Q8. “Explain” asks for a how/why chain. An audience can read a narrative only because it shares with the creator an understanding of **media language** — the codes and conventions of the form and how they make meaning. When a creator uses a convention — say, the slow push-in of the wildlife documentary onto a single animal — the audience that **shares** that convention reads the moment as inviting **awe and respect**; the meaning passes from maker to audience across the shared code. The same holds for symbolic codes such as lighting or colour: a shared understanding that shadow suggests menace lets low-key lighting be read as threatening. When the shared understanding is **absent** — an audience new to the form or unfamiliar with a cultural symbol — the intended meaning can be **misread or missed entirely**: the push-in reads as merely “the camera moving closer”, carrying none of the intended awe. *Marker’s note:* four marks need the chain completed to the audience’s **meaning**, plus at least a line on what happens when the shared understanding breaks down.

Q9. “Explain” asks for a how/why account. A single narrative can be read in several ways because different audiences bring **different contextual lenses** to the same construction, and the same codes decoded through different lenses produce different meanings. Take two factors. First, **experience**: a viewer who has lived through something the narrative depicts reads it with **recognition** and may draw out meanings a viewer without that experience never reaches. Second, **culture**: an audience that shares the traditions, language or symbols a narrative uses can decode **layers** — a gesture, a phrase, a piece of iconography — that another audience reads differently or misses. (Age and media literacy work the same way.) On top of this, some narratives are **deliberately constructed** to be open, leaving room for audiences to complete the meaning themselves. Because meaning is **decoded**, not simply received, these divergent readings are valid rather than mistaken. *Marker’s note:* five marks want **at least two** factors, each tied to a **different reading**, and the point that divergence is legitimate.

Q10. “Describe” asks for an account of how each reading is made. The same moment — the long, held shot of the farmer’s still face, the single sustained note, the cut to black — is read differently through two ages. A **younger audience** (for example, teenagers) may read the moment chiefly as being about the **children leaving and growing up**, a bittersweet step into independence, because their own life stage gives them that reference point. An **older audience** (for example, viewers whose own children have left home) may read the same stillness and the fade to black as being about the **farmer’s loss, ageing and the end of a way of life** — a meaning closer to mortality — because their experience supplies those reference points. The identical construction yields two readings because each age decodes it through different lived experience. *Common errors:* naming two ages but only one meaning, or writing “older people find it sadder” (an emotional response, not a **reading**) — describe the two different **meanings** and tie each to the same described codes.

Q11. “Discuss” asks you to develop the point with an example and reach a position. *Model response (narrative: Ten Canoes, 2006):* *Ten Canoes* (Rolf de Heer and Peter Djigirr, 2006) is told largely in Aboriginal language and structured as a story within a story drawn from the customary law of the Yolŋu people of Arnhem Land. An audience that **shares that cultural background** reads the narrative with access to layers built into its construction — the significance of kinship, Country and the cautionary lesson the tale carries — decoding meanings that are part of the film’s shared understanding. An audience **without** that cultural knowledge can still follow and value the story, but reads it more at surface level, as an unfamiliar tale from another culture, missing some of the meaning its construction assumes. Cultural background, then, changes **what the audience decodes** from the same narrative. *Marker’s note:* keep the focus on the **reading** (what each audience decodes), and treat First Nations material respectfully and only at the level of public record — do not invent cultural detail. Note that a fuller analysis of audiences from different cultural **contexts** belongs to 3C; here the point is the reading itself.

Q12. “Discuss” asks you to develop the point. *Model response (narrative: Sherpa, 2015):* *Sherpa* (Jennifer Peedom, 2015) documents the Sherpas who work on Mount Everest, around the 2014 ice avalanche. A viewer with **experience**

of demanding physical labour or of the mountains reads the footage of Sherpas carrying heavy loads across the Khumbu Icefall with **recognition of the danger and skill** involved, and tends to read the film as a **story about exploited, high-risk labour**. A viewer **without** that experience — reading through the lens of the popular adventure documentary — more readily reads the same footage as **spectacular scenery and thrilling adventure**. The prior experience each audience brings (including their prior reading of similar narratives) leads them to make **different meanings** from identical construction. *Marker's note*: four marks want the **different reading** tied explicitly to the **specific experience**, not a general claim that “experts understand more”.

Q13. “Discuss” asks you to develop the point with an example. *Model response (example: Gayby Baby, 2015)*: Because audiences read through a **contextual lens** shaped by their own values, the same narrative can be read very differently, and those readings feed back into the views and values audiences hold. *Gayby Baby* (Maya Newell, 2015), a documentary following children of same-sex parents, was read by many audiences as a **warm, ordinary portrait of family life** that normalises diverse families — a reading that reinforces the value that all families are equal. Around the same time, its planned screening in a Sydney school was read by other audiences as **advocacy inappropriate for the classroom**, a reading shaped by different values, and the disagreement became national news in 2015. The example shows why the study design ties the contextual lens to the media’s role in shaping our views, values and opinions: **reading is where that shaping happens** — the meaning each audience decodes reinforces, extends or challenges the values it already holds. *Marker's note*: connect the reading to the **shaping of views and values** (the study design sentence); the common error is to describe the film’s content and never reach the point that **reading is where media influence lands**. Treat the example factually and respectfully.

Q14. “Discuss” asks you to develop each improvement. **First, the response describes consumption, not reading.** “Streaming it at home”, “binge the whole series on the couch” and where they watch it are all the **physical way and place** the narrative is received — that is **consumption** (2B), not reading. The student never states any **meaning** the audience makes, which is what reading is; the response should say what the audience **understands the narrative to mean** and how they decode a specific code or convention to get there. **Second, the response confuses viewing conditions with interpretation.** “Watching on a big TV means they read it really well” treats screen size as if it were reading; a large screen may aid consumption or engagement, but **reading is the interpreting of meaning**, not the quality of the picture. A corrected response would, for example, note that the audience reads a recurring motif as a symbol of the protagonist’s guilt — a **meaning decoded from construction**. *Common errors*: this stimulus contains the live trap — **consumption offered as reading** (the 2B/2C confusion examiners flag); name it explicitly.

Q15. “Explain” asks for a full how/why chain to the intended meaning. *Model response (narrative: That Dragon, Cancer, 2016)*: *That Dragon, Cancer* (Numinous Games, 2016) is an autobiographical game about the makers’ young son, and its creators guide players towards an **intended empathetic reading** through specific construction. The **interactive code** is used against the grain of its usual meaning: players expect that acting will change outcomes, so when the game places them at the cot of a crying child and makes **nothing they do soothe him**, that removal of agency is read as **helplessness** — the intended meaning of a parent’s powerlessness. This is reinforced by a subdued **colour** palette and a hospital-room **mise en scene** that the audience reads as sombre, and by a quiet **sound** design that holds the mood. Because players **share the understanding** that interactivity implies control, the deliberate withholding of control lands the intended reading. Choice by choice, the construction is built to guide the audience to a specific meaning. *Marker's note*: six marks need the chain — construction choice → shared understanding → **intended meaning** — anchored at **named moments**; handle the real, sensitive subject respectfully and only at the level of public record.

Q16. “Discuss” asks you to develop the point. *Model response (studied narrative: Gallipoli, 1981)*: The moment I will discuss is the film’s final image: the freeze-frame of Archy caught at the instant he is shot, charging the Turkish line at the Nek. Reading through my own **contextual lens** — an Australian who has grown up with Anzac commemoration and its questions about the cost of war — I read the frozen image not merely as one soldier’s death but as an **emblem of wasted youth and the futility of the charge**, and I connect it to a wider reading of the film as questioning the price paid by ordinary young men. A viewer without that lens might read the freeze-frame as a shocking but isolated tragedy. The construction (the sudden freeze, the abruptness of the cut) guides the reading, but it is my lens that fills it with that particular meaning. *Marker's note*: name a **specific moment**, state **your** reading, and link it **causally** to the lens that produced it; keep the surrounding context light — a full context analysis is 3C’s task, not this one’s.

Q17. “Discuss” asks you to develop the point and reach a position. Model response (narrative: *Crocodile Dundee*, 1986): When *Crocodile Dundee* (Peter Faiman, 1986) was first released, its original audience largely read Mick Dundee’s easy outback confidence as an **affectionate, admirable image of the Australian character** — a reading in step with how the film was constructed and received at the time. A **contemporary** audience, watching for the first time and reading through a lens shaped by changed attitudes — to gender, and to how Indigenous Australians are represented — may read some of the same moments **more critically**, as dated or as reflecting attitudes now questioned. The **construction has not changed**; the **contextual lens has**, so the reading shifts. The film therefore supports more than one reading depending on when, and by whom, it is read. *Marker’s note*: keep this **light** — name the shift in the lens and the shift in the reading, but do not attempt a full analysis of social or historical context factors; audiences reading from different **contexts** are the deep business of 3C. Handle any sensitive content in general, respectful terms.

Q18. “Analyse” asks you to break the moment into its parts and show how the same construction is read into different meanings, with specific evidence. Model response (studied narrative: *The Final Quarter*, 2019): *The Final Quarter* (Ian Darling, 2019) is built entirely from archival broadcast footage and news headlines from AFL champion Adam Goodes’ final seasons (2013–2015): there is no narration and no new interviews, so the media commentary of the time collides on screen unmediated. The aspect I will analyse is one specific moment: Goodes’ on-field war-cry celebration during the 2015 Indigenous Round, and the sustained crowd booing around it.

The **first audience** reads this moment through a lens informed by awareness of racism and of Indigenous cultural expression. Decoding the gesture as a **proud assertion of Indigenous identity**, and hearing the booing against that knowledge, this audience reads the moment as an act of **cultural pride met with a racially charged response**. The **second audience** reads the identical footage through a different lens: decoding the same gesture as **aggressive or confronting**, and reading the booing as an ordinary reaction to a player’s on-field conduct rather than anything to do with race, this audience makes the meaning that the response was **unremarkable**. The two readings are irreconcilable, yet both are decoded from the same images.

The point of the analysis is that the divergence arises **at the level of reading**: the documentary’s construction — presenting the footage plainly and letting the clashing commentary stand — foregrounds the fact that one moment produced two opposed meanings, and invites the contemporary audience to read those earlier readings themselves. Because each audience decodes the same construction through a different **contextual lens** — different experience of racism, different cultural knowledge, different values — the same moment yields different meanings.

Band descriptors (analyse, out of 8):

- **High (7–8):** analyses the **same specific moment or aspect** for **two clearly named audience positions**; states the **different meaning** each makes and links each causally to the **contextual lens** driving it; anchors both readings to **specific construction**; recognises that both readings are decoded, not simply received; specialised media language is precise and sustained; the divergence is kept at the level of **reading**, not expanded into a full context essay.
- **Mid (4–6):** two readings offered but one is thinner, or the **lens is asserted rather than shown**; some construction named but at least one reading is loosely anchored; the two positions present but not sharply distinguished; media language present but uneven.
- **Low (1–3):** retells the moment or names feelings without stating a **meaning**; only one reading, or two readings with no lens; drifts into a context essay (3C) or into engagement/consumption; little specific construction.

Common errors: naming two audience positions but stating only **one** meaning; giving an emotional **response** (“one audience finds it sadder”) in place of a **reading** (a meaning decoded); leaving a reading **unanchored** to any construction; expanding into a full **context** analysis (the business of 3C) instead of keeping the divergence attached to reading; treating one reading as the only “correct” one. Treat this real and sensitive case respectfully, and only at the level of public record.

Q19. “Analyse” asks you to break the case into its parts and show how the same construction is read into two different meanings. On **20 July 2023** *Barbie* (Greta Gerwig) opened in Australian cinemas. Its **intended reading** was unusually explicit: the film’s producer and star, Margot Robbie, and its director described the film as feminist, so the construction was selected and sequenced to be decoded as satire rather than as straight promotion. That intended

reading depends on a **shared understanding** — the audience must already know what the doll has meant as a product before it can read the film's use of the brand's own imagery as a comment on it.

The **first audience** — viewers with long familiarity with the doll and an interest in how women are represented — decodes the exaggerated toy-world **mise en scene**, the packaging imagery and the saturated pink **colour** palette as deliberately ironic, and makes the meaning that the narrative criticises the expectations placed on women. The **second audience** reads through a **contextual lens** shaped by **media literacy** about brand marketing and by the knowledge that the doll's manufacturer was among the film's production companies; decoding the identical imagery as product display, it makes the meaning that the film is a feature-length advertisement. Scholars writing in *Feminist Media Studies* set the two readings side by side, asking whether the film showed feminist ideas entering the mainstream or a brand taking up feminist ideas for its own ends.

The divergence sits at the level of **reading**: the construction did not change, the lenses did, so the **actual reading** made by the second audience pulls away from the stated **intended reading**, and neither reading is simply received. *Marker's note*: five marks need **two stated meanings**, each tied to what its audience brings and anchored to named construction; describing the public argument without naming the two meanings scores poorly, and box-office success is neither a reading nor evidence of one. Treat the real film and the people involved factually.