KEY ASPECTS OF MEDIA STUDIES

| Key Aspect	Areas of interest
Categories	Genre, purpose, tone, style
Language	Medium/form specific technical codes, cultural codes, anchorage
Narrative	Medium/form specific structures, codes, conventions
Representation	Selection and portrayal, stereotypes, non-stereotypes, cultural assumptions, ideological discourses
Audiences	Target audience, preferred reading, differential decoding, mode of address
Institutions	Internal factors, external factors
Society	The time, place – the facts, ideas, history, events, politics, economics, technology or any other factors relevant to the society in which particular examples of media content are made, consumed or set.

Important information

Categories – purpose, genre, tone and style

Purpose – Identify the purposes of your chosen text and give evidence to support your ideas. Appropriate purposes might include – to entertain, to inform, to sell, to persuade, to educate and so on…..
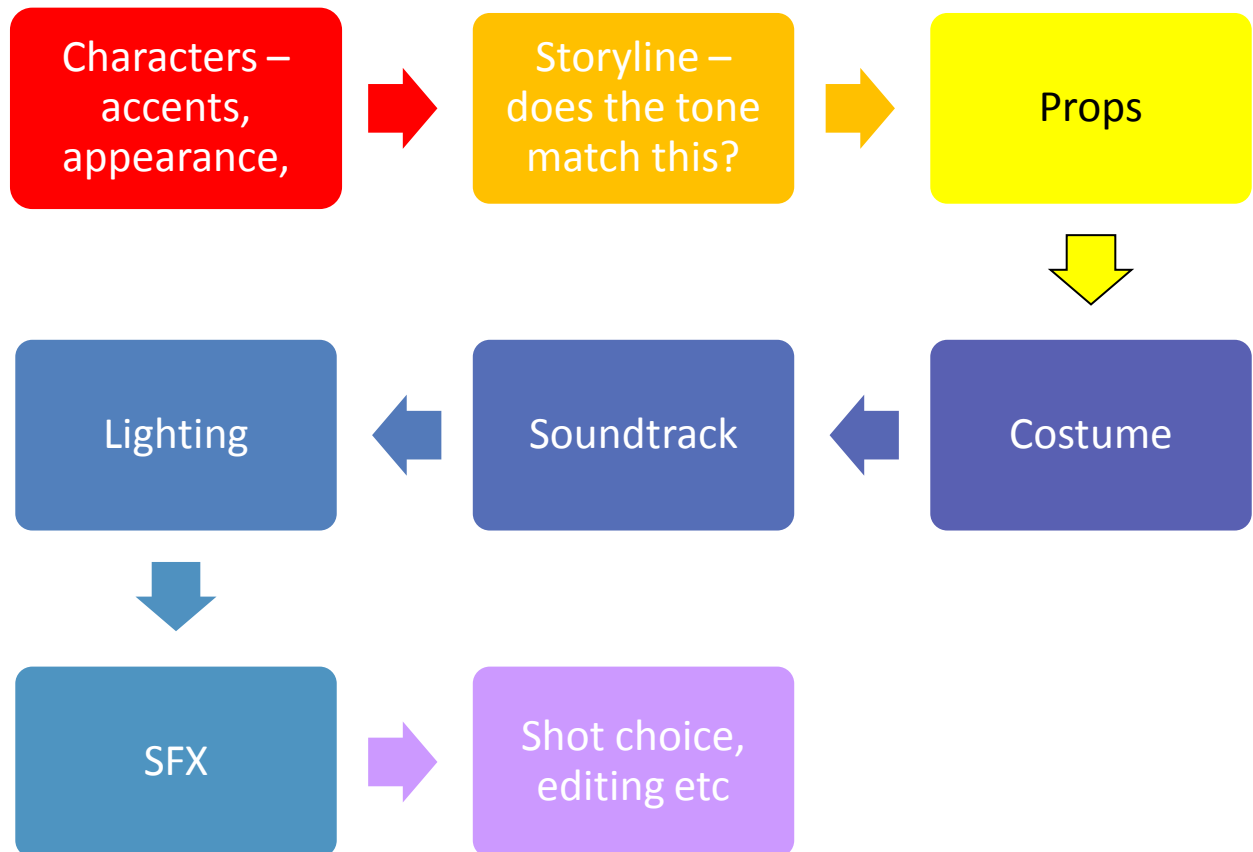
Genre - Genre is characterised by a shared set of conventions, both technical and cultural. Texts which use the conventions of more than one genre are described as generic hybrids. The normal reason for doing this is to increase the appeal of the text to a wider audience. Some of the main areas to analyse for generic conventions would include:
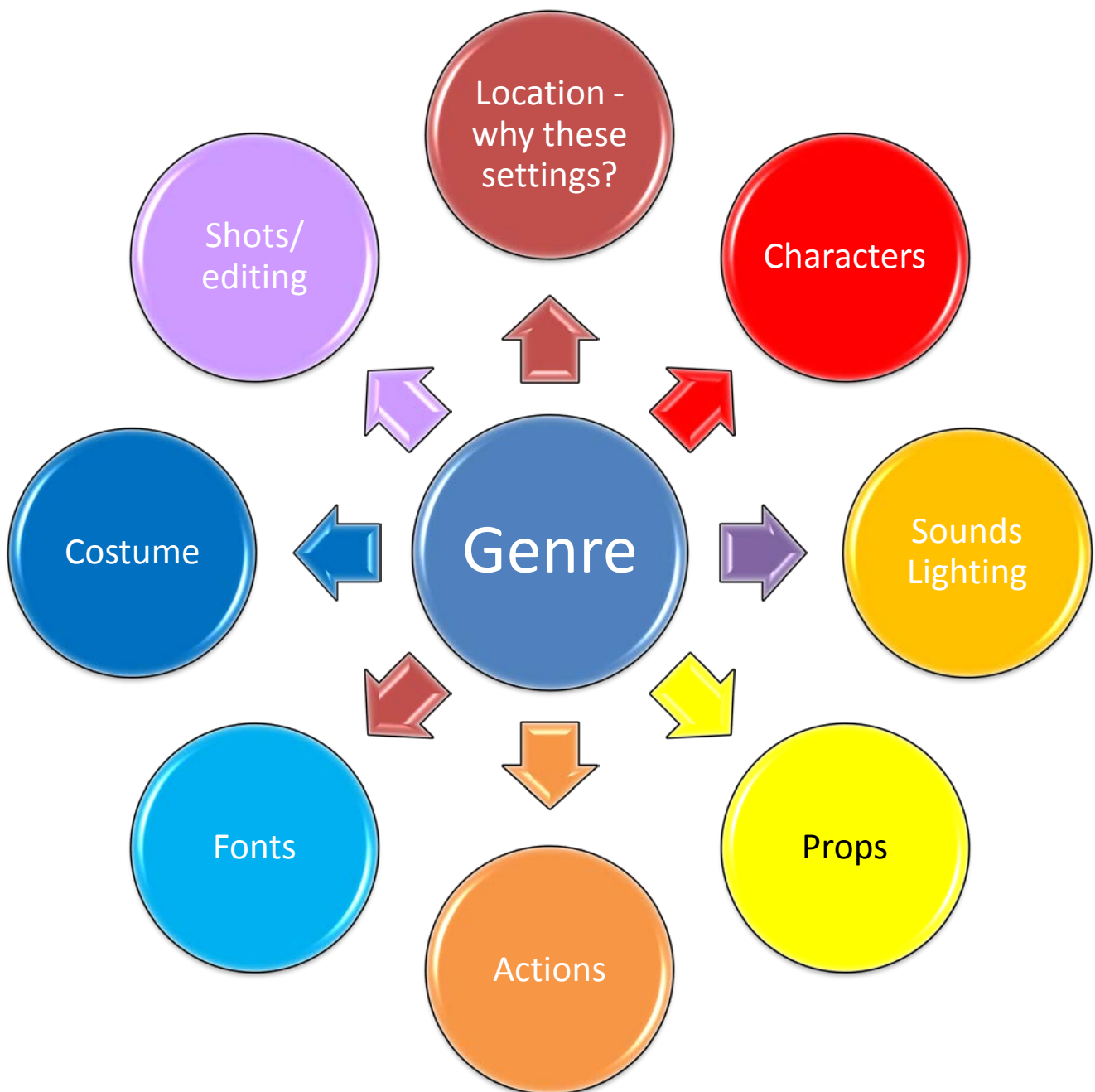
Tone –

Depending on its audience, purpose, genre etc. a text will create a particular tone. It will position the audience carefully through this and will adopt an appropriate tone to do so. How are these tones created? What does the audience get from these? Tones are often most closely linked to the technical elements of the text. Some of the areas to look at for tone are suggested below.

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┌─────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────┐
│  Characters –   │  →   │  Storyline –    │  →   │     Props       │
│    accents,     │      │  does the tone  │      │                 │
│   appearance,   │      │   match this?   │      │                 │
└─────────────────┘      └─────────────────┘      └─────────────────┘
                                                           ↓
┌─────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────┐
│    Lighting     │  ←   │   Soundtrack    │  ←   │    Costume      │
└─────────────────┘      └─────────────────┘      └─────────────────┘
        ↓
┌─────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────┐
│      SFX        │  →   │  Shot choice,   │
│                 │      │  editing etc    │
└─────────────────┘      └─────────────────┘
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Style

In general the style of a text is likely to consist of visual, technical or linguistic features that make it look, read or sound the way it does.
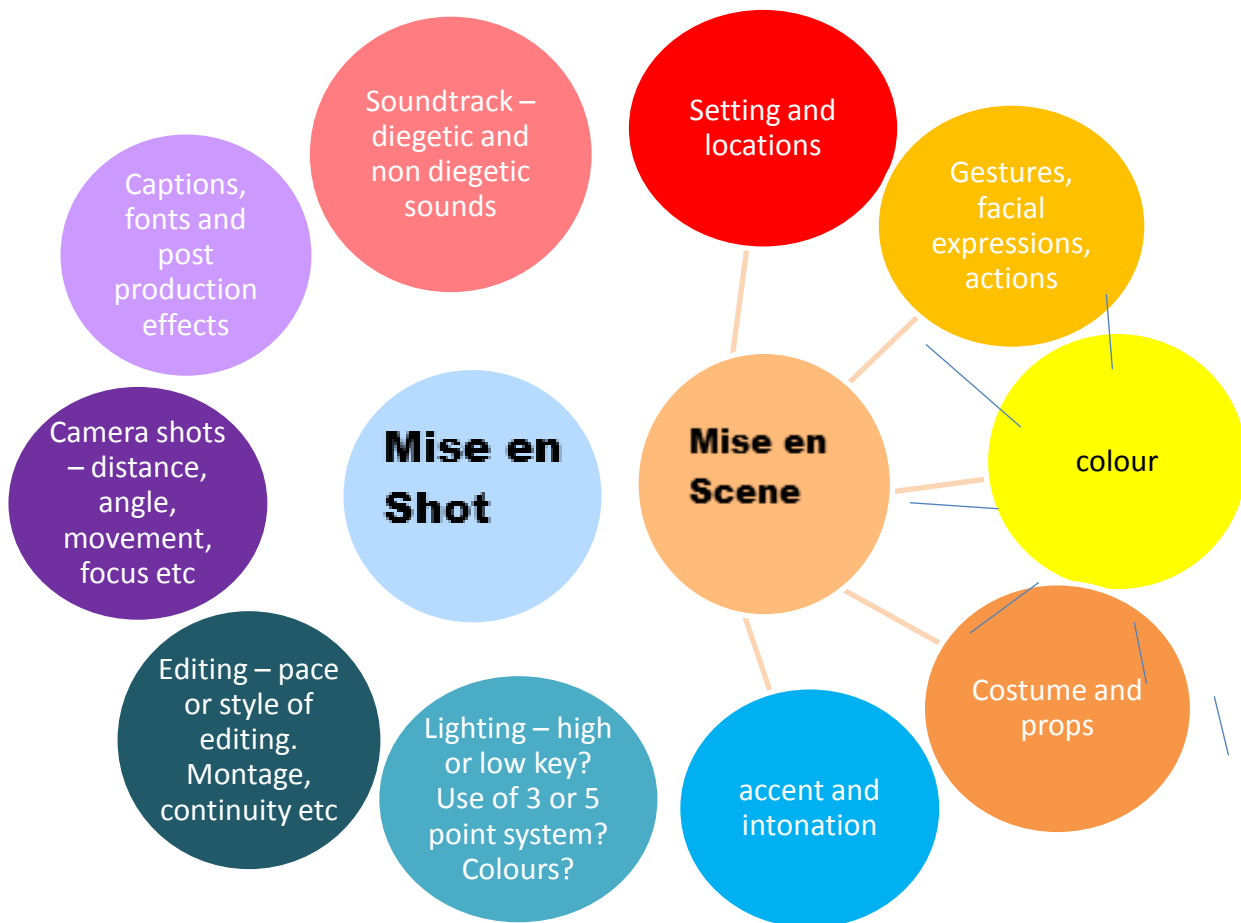
In analysing Style we would consider the tools of the trade used by the text-maker to create a particular look.

There are an almost limitless number of "styles" in the media – some of the dominant ones on film making might include - Realistic, (Un)conventional, Traditional, Modern, Dark, Flamboyant/lavish, Minimalistic, Fly on the wall, Cinema verite, Poetic realism….

Language — technical codes, cultural codes and anchorage

There are, in any moving image text, an almost infinite number of signs at work and any of these signs, if looked at individually, could communicate many different meanings.

These units of meaning are **polysemic** and have multiple decodings available to the reader. How can the text producer **anchor** their intended meaning – meanings which the majority of the audience will receive?

Soundtrack – diegetic and non diegetic sounds

Setting and locations

Captions, fonts and post production effects

Gestures, facial expressions, actions

Mise en Shot

Mise en Scene

colour

Camera shots – distance, angle, movement, focus etc

Editing – pace or style of editing. Montage, continuity etc

Lighting – high or low key? Use of 3 or 5 point system? Colours?

accent and intonation

Costume and props

Cultural codes – or mise-en-scene. Literally meaning "what is in the scene"?

Technical codes – or mise-en-shot. Literally how has it been shot?
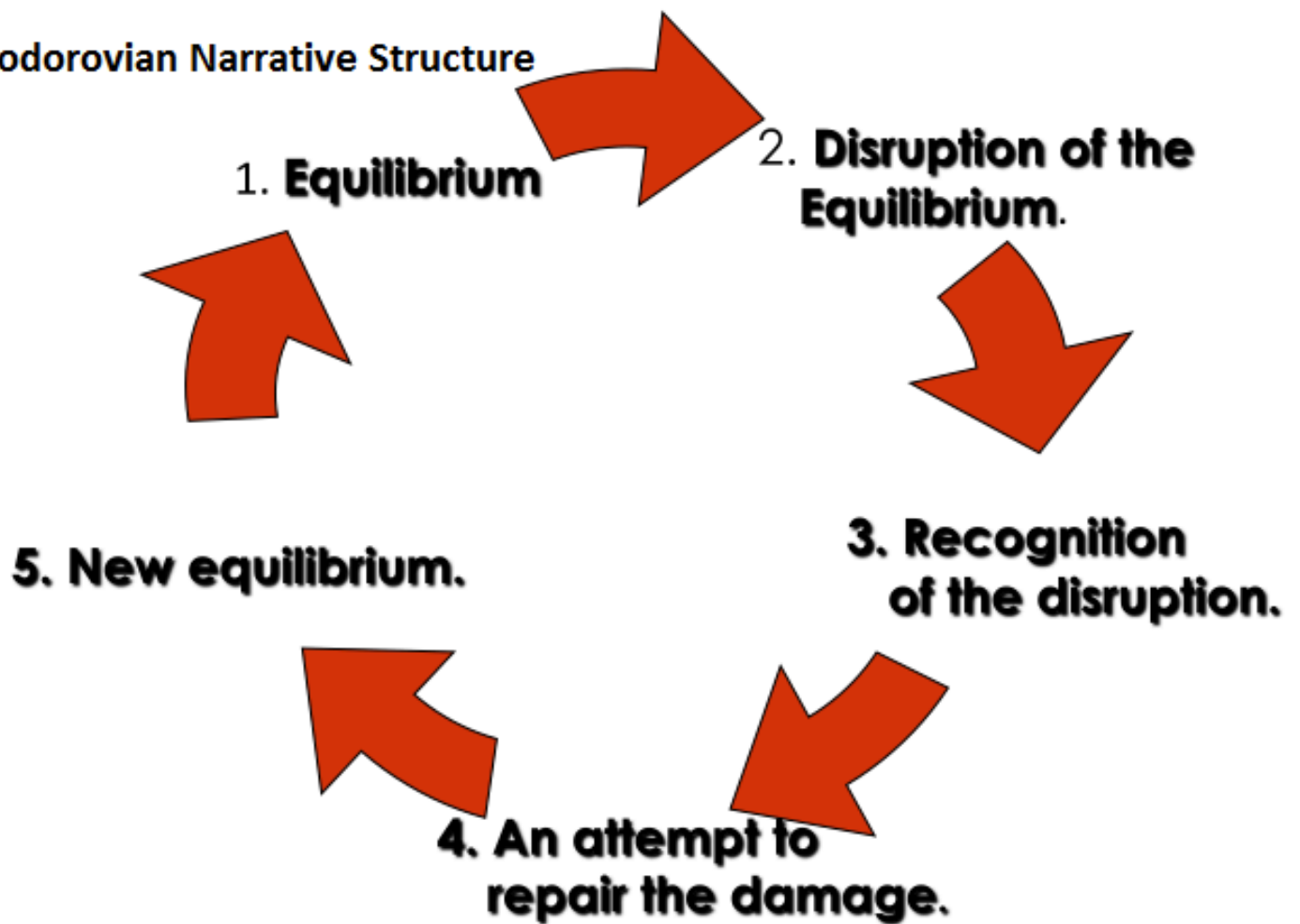
Narrative — narrative structures, codes and conventions

- **Narrative structures** involves looking at the overarching shape and ordering of the text.
- **Narrative codes** involves studying the small individual units of meaning within the text.
- **Narrative conventions** looks at the traditional standard ways of relaying particular genre or types of media texts.

Narrative structures

Todorovian Narrative Structure

1. **Equilibrium**

2. **Disruption of the Equilibrium**.

3. **Recognition of the disruption.**

4. **An attempt to repair the damage.**

5. **New equilibrium.**

Narrative Codes

There are a number of theorists who postulate on the individual coded elements which make up any narrative.

Most significant of these would probably be **Roland Barthes** and **Claude Levi Strauss**.

These codes provide the viewer with motivation to watch and/or information that moves the narrative forward.

Roland Barthes' theory of narrative codes suggests texts use a number of narrative codes to tell the story:

- **Enigma Code**: The presentation of various mysteries (enigmas) that are resolved in the end

- **Semic Code**: The way characters, objects or setting take on certain meanings. For example, a newsreader's sad expression may suggest a sad story.

- **Symbolic Code**: Parts of the text that carry ideological meaning. For example, thunder could mean anger

- **Cultural Code**: References to cultural knowledge. For example, William Wallace = a Scottish hero

- **Referential Code**: References from general knowledge. For example smoke could indicate a fire.

- **Action Code**: Actions we understand because we have seen them before. For example, someone getting ready for bed suggests it is night time.

Narrative conventions

This concerns the traditional/standard way of formatting the narratives in particular types of media text.

- So for example it is a narrative convention that a soap opera will conclude with a cliff-hanger.

- In a newspaper it is a convention that the sport section is at the end of the paper.

- In a Marvel/DC movie it is a convention that there will be a final enigmatic scene placed after the credits.

Representations

— Selection and portrayal, stereotypes, cultural assumptions, ideological discourses.

Representation is the way the media RE-PRESENT individuals, groups, events and issues.

Stereotypes
Media Institutions use stereotypes because the audience will instantly understand them. Think of stereotypes as a 'visual shortcut'. They're repeated so often that we assume they are normal or 'true'.

Archetypes
This is the 'ultimate' stereotype. For example, the white stiletto wearing, big busted, brainless blonde bimbo.
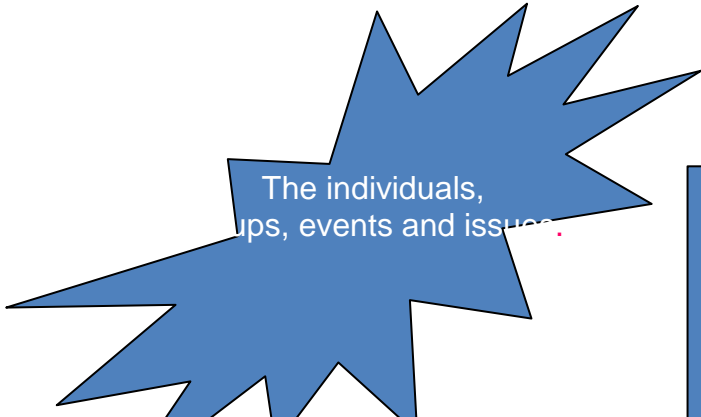
Countertype
A representation that challenges tradition stereotypical associations of groups, people or places.

Selection and portrayal involves considering **WHY** particular groups, individuals, places, ideas and so on are selected for representation in the first place. It also involves analysing **HOW** these groups, individuals, places, ideas and so on are represented. This often involves discussing the connotations of the **language** used to create these **representations** or the **narrative** which reveals it.

Cultural assumptions looks at the way that one particular cultural group views another particular cultural group. We often think that our assumptions are true because they are routinely reinforced by the media. EG – many older people have a negative impression of young people. However these beliefs are simply assumptions reinforced by media texts which target this particular group. The Daily Mail and Express play on this.

Ideological discourses look at the big ideas represented in media texts. Popular Hollywood ideologies include things like "Money isn't everything", "Might is Right" and "Love Conquers All"
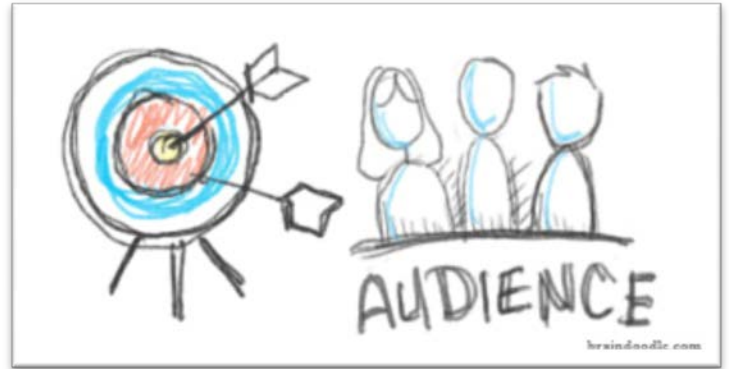
The individuals, ups, events and issues.

MEDIATION

Your REPRESENT individuals, groups, e and issues.

Audience - Target audience, preferred reading, differential decoding, mode of address.

The **target audience** refers to the group of people for whom the text was made. This should be stated and the evidence that helps you identify this group should be stated. Target audience can be described in many ways but the description should identify, where relevant, such qualities as – gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, class, nationality, interests, lifestyle and so on.

Modes of address –
This concerns the way in which the text *speaks* to the audience and the feelings that this can create in that audience. Audiences can be informed, persuaded, shocked, made tense, passive, empathetic, etc.

There are a variety of tricks available to text producers to encourage these particular reactions. These are described in Media Studies as **modes of address**. They include restricted, omniscient, direct, indirect **modes of address**.

A **direct mode of address** speaks straight to the audience maybe as an appeal or as a command. This is a common approach in advertising thanks to the strong preferred readings this anchors. It connotes the personal touch, a real relationship between the text and its audience.

Although any text, by its very nature, is addressed to an audience of some kind, an **indirect mode of address** could be identified when the text is constructed to suggest that it does not address anyone beyond its diegesis. This would connote, amongst other things, impartiality perhaps or factuality on the part of the text and is a common technique in documentary. Although at first glance this would appear not to create such strong preferred readings.....

The **restricted mode of address** is very conventional in Hollywood films and the narration is often focused on following events as the hero experiences them. It can create real shock as the audience don't know what to expect. Often this is used to draw us into the protagonists experience and to create empathy. We don't know the bomb is in the room.

Omniscient mode of address is also very conventional in Hollywood films and is seen when the camera leaves the main character/s to show the audience something the characters don't know. It can create **dramatic irony** as it gives the audience **privileged information** and can be used to build tension. We know the bomb is in the room.

The institutions who have created a media text will have meanings that they hope the audience will accept. These meanings are referred to as **preferred readings**.

That is to say that these are the readings the makers of the text want the audience to make.

However members of the target audience are not guaranteed to accept the preferred reading of a text, and non target audience members are quite likely to reject at least some of a preferred reading.

In Media Studies we describe these reactions as **differential decodings** – where the audience has interpreted (consciously or subconsciously) the reading in a different way to what the text producer intended. It is probably easiest to imagine this as a spectrum of possible readings.

Institutions – Internal factors, external factors

This is a wide ranging area and the relevant factors are very specific to the text being made. As a general definition of the terms above we could say that:

Internal factors generally relate to the process of creating the text. This is text dependent and the internal factors that impact on a movie are different to those that impact on a print text or radio and so on. This will largely involve looking at such issues as available technology, time and resources, budgets, cast and crew.

External factors generally relate to the context in which the text is produced. Again this is text dependent and the external factors that impact on a movie are different to those that impact on a print text or radio and so on. This will involve considering such things as location, legal and voluntary controls, health and safety, school/college rules and regulations.

In the Creating Media unit you are required to carry out at least one piece of appropriate research into relevant institutional factors which may present you with opportunities and/or constraints.

The institutional factors you might wish to research for your own production work might include: technology, resources, time, people, budget, location, legal and voluntary controls, health and safety, school/college rules and regulations.

Society –

- the links between the society which produces and/or consumes the text and the text itself.
- Recognition that media texts are influenced by the society in which or for whom they have been made.
- Further, recognition that many media texts set out to influence the society for which they have been made.

> This will involve you researching **the time, the place, the facts, ideas, history, events, politics, economics, technology** or any other factors relevant to the society in which particular examples of media content are made, consumed or set.

So for example the media content produced in and/or about Scotland in the last few years has been influenced by the Independence Referendum. Some of this content was also designed to influence the outcome of the referendum.

- The disaster movies of the 70s influenced each other. The format was popular so was imitated.
- Jaws being released in the summer holiday season in America was not an accident.
- Michael Moore's films seek to influence, and are influenced by, our society.
- PPBs, PSBs and advertising clearly attempt to influence our society. Their construction is also influenced by our society.
- Sky News is influenced by the political views of its owner Rupert Murdoch.
- Avatar was made and hugely influenced because of new technological developments in 3D.
- Harry Potter films were made largely because society wanted them to be made. As an international bestseller the films were created to profit from this phenomena.

Useful links

http://www.imdb.com/   - Institutions

http://www.thinkbox.tv/   - Audiences

https://mediatexthack.wordpress.com/   - Media Studies 101

http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/short/gramtv.html - Film Language

https://vimeo.com/13094965   - Film Language

http://nofilmschool.com/2013/07/scorsese-essay-explains-importance-of-visual-literacy
- Film literacy

http://www.intofilm.org/schools-resources - Production

https://www.youtube.com/user/indymogul - Production

https://www.asa.org.uk/ - Advertising standards

https://www.cap.org.uk/ - Code of Advertising practice

http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/governance/regulatory_framework/charter_agreement.html - BBC Charter

http://www.mediaknowall.com/gcse/gcse.php - everything ☺

http://www.filmsite.org/ - general

http://www.scotland.org/features/great-scottish-movies/ - Scotland

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinema_of_Scotland - Scotland

http://www.nls.uk/exhibitions/cinema - Scotland