



2010

English Language GA 3: Examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2010 English Language examination consisted of three sections. Section 1 had five questions worth a total of 22 marks and Section 2 had five questions worth a total of 23 marks. Students could choose one of three essay topics in Section 3, which was worth 30 marks. There was one text for analysis in Section 1 and one text in Section 2. The transcript in Section 2 contained 101 intonation units, a similar amount to past years.

The majority of students made good use of the time available; this was reflected both in the length of responses and in the number of students who completed all of the required questions.

Students were able to demonstrate what they had learnt and few students were unable to respond to a question. Linguistic knowledge was good and reflected sound revision. Students' knowledge of the subject has strengthened, although some of the skills required to answer questions continue to require refinement. Not all students were equally well prepared or equally capable of answering questions worth five or six marks. In particular, Question 10 required a sound knowledge of syntax. This question proved to be a discriminator as few students focused solely on the syntactic features in the interaction, and those who did, struggled to correctly identify the sentence structures used in the dialogue.

General advice to students

- In Section 2 students are advised to apply linguistic knowledge and use linguistic terminology rather than recounting what is said in the transcript.
- Students are encouraged to provide topical, relevant and varied examples when writing essays.
- Students need to read the essay topic carefully and engage with it accordingly in a sustained manner.
- When writing the essay, the use of prepared responses is to be discouraged.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

Section 1 – Written text

This section consisted of an airline company's advertisement which was promoting a new service to Los Angeles. Questions 1a.–3 related to Part 1 of the text, Question 4 related to Part 2 of the text, and Question 5 related to Parts 1 and 2 of the text.

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	7	31	62	1.6

Students needed to give a full response that clearly identified two functions of the text. Appropriate answers included:

- entertain the reader by using SMS language in an amusing way
- entice/persuade the reader to buy the product/service (low fares to LA) by capturing their attention with humorous use of language
- provide information about the cost of non-stop flights to LA.

It was not sufficient to write only 'to persuade' or 'to entertain.'

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	29	33	39	1.1

Declarative sentences provide information about the details of the flight and offer. Imperative sentences implore the reader to take up the offer in a persuasive manner. An example of a declarative sentence included, 'V Australia is like, totally launching their awesome non-stop flights to LA on Dec 1'. An example of an imperative sentence included, 'Book now at your preferred V Australia travel agent ...'

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It was necessary for students to comment on declarative and imperative sentences. A number of students confused the two and, for example, provided a comment on how a declarative sentence provides information, but then incorrectly supported this with an example of an imperative sentence.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	20	21	59	1.4

Answers included metaphor, pun or slogan.

It was necessary for students to link 'ideas' occurring 'every day' with the pun 'takes off' and then comment on how the image is one of dynamism and creativity – a positive image for the airline. The phrase also serves to entertain the reader.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	18	10	23	26	24	2.3

Discourse particles in the text copy the language used by young Californians. This language contributes to the youthful, exuberant nature of the conversation.

- Discourse particles such as 'like', 'literally', 'seriously' and 'totally' act as intensifiers, emphasising what is to follow in the text.
- 'OMG' sets the tone of the text and expresses an attitude of disbelief.
- 'No' acts as turn-taking indicator.

Students were required to comment on the linguistic function of at least two different discourse particles in Part 1 of the text. It was important to understand the phrase 'linguistic function' and to analyse the role of each identified discourse particle.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	14	13	22	17	18	9	7	2.7

Examples of features included:

- travel-related jargon, for example, 'peak days', 'economy' and 'regulatory approval'. Such examples deal with pragmatic issues and are formal in tone
- the passive voice, for example, 'Refunds ... are not permitted'. By omitting the agent in this example the focus moves away from the airline and absolves them of responsibility. This style of writing is often used in contracts and is typical of more formal writing
- the discourse of Part 2 read as a list of terms and conditions. In contrast to Part 1, Part 2 was more formal and less emotive
- sentence fragments (ellipsis) are used, for example, 'Departing Melbourne to Los Angeles'. These present key factual information concisely and dispense with pronouns or verbs, thereby not engaging with the reader.

To attain full marks students had to refer to three features from within the text that contributed to formality. It was also necessary to refer to at least two different subsystems when discussing the features. High-scoring students clearly identified the features and followed this with a commentary. To attain full marks metalanguage had to be used appropriately, examples needed to be given and the response had to be accurate.

Following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Part 2 contains examples of the passive voice, 'Seats are limited' (lines 17 and 18) and omits the agent, not stating who is limiting the sale of seats thus using a syntactic device to create formality. There are also examples of lexemes that are related specifically to travel and airlines such as, 'peak days' (line 18). This is a jargon expected of this type of discourse and again brings formality to the text. Finally, figures and dates are used a lot as you would expect in such small print, these stress the conditions that are in place and again add to the formality. E.g. '1 Dec and 16 Jan.'

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	2	6	20	26	23	13	10	3.4



To answer this question it was necessary for students to identify a range of ways in which the formality of Part 1 differed from the formality of Part 2. Students needed to make reference to both parts of the text. Part 1 was less formal than Part 2 and included many informal features of language.

Examples of these features included:

- colloquial language: for example, 'awesome' and 'seriously' are features associated with younger speakers
- intensifiers: for example, 'really', 'totally' and 'literally' add an exaggerated feel to the text and add colour
- the abbreviation 'OMG': this sets an excited, but informal tone
- 'your preferred ... travel agent' suggests a relationship between the reader and the company. Pronouns are missing from Part 2
- the word 'rad', short for 'radical', has been shortened and again is a feature of language associated with younger speakers in an informal context.

Following is a high-scoring response.

Part 1 is less formal than Part 2 of the text. This is demonstrated through the use of slang, for example, 'OMG' line 1, discourse particles, 'like' line 2, and colloquialisms, for example, 'rad' line 10. This makes the text in Part 1 display features more typical of spoken than written text. The absence of adjectives in Part 2 compared to Part 1, for example, 'awesome' line 4, 'rad' line 10 also makes Part 2 sound more formal and distant. Contractions are also evident in Part 1, for example, 'that's' line 10, while full lexemes are used in Part 2. Part 1 also uses active voice for example, 'OMG, V Australia...launching.' Line 1-6, while Part 2 uses passive voice, for example, 'operated by' line 20. Abbreviations are also used both in 'OMG' and in 'LA', while Part 1 uses pronouns for example, 'your' line 11, makes the ad sound more personal than Part 2.

Section 2 – Spoken text

The transcript was of a conversation between a bookseller and a customer who is buying books at a local writers' festival. They have not met before, but both engage in conversation while the sale is taking place.

Question 6

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	8	17	31	25	19	2.3

Students were required to discuss the conversational strategies used in Lines 1–5 and lines 97–101; however, not all students used appropriate linguistic metalanguage when discussing this topic. A few low-scoring responses merely described what was happening. It was important to link the transactional nature of these two conversations with metalanguage such as opening and closing, adjacency pairs and politeness markers. Indeed, the higher-scoring responses recognised the formulaic opening of, 'Are you waiting to be served?' and the formulaic closing of, 'That's your invoice/Enjoy the day'. Politeness was an important element of these extracts.

Following is a high-scoring response.

In lines 1-5, adjacency pairs, openings and greetings are used, for example, 'Are you...served?' line 1 and, 'How did you...those?' line 3. These are conventional greetings in a sales context, and ensure cooperative turn taking. In lines 97-101, farewells and thank you as a form of adjacency pair are used again, and are also typical of the sales context. For example, 'That's your invoice.' Line 98 and 'Enjoy the day' line 98. These are almost always used and initiated by the worker to ensure the customer is satisfied and greeted with etiquette and politeness. Farewells, for example, 'Enjoy the day.' Line 98 and, 'It's a pleasure.' Line 101 is also polite and typical of conversational strategies.

Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	11	6	17	23	43	2.8

Many students scored full marks on this question, which required a commentary on the discourse function of two prosodic features. It was important for students to relate the commentary to the specific example in the text, rather than provide a broad, generic definition of a prosodic feature.

Following is a high-scoring response.

Stress is used to emphasize words such as 'joking' (line 9) and 'shocking' (line 12) in order to express disbelief and interest. Slow tempo is used in line 18 on 'three hours' in order to add further emphasis to C's amazement at the slowness of the traffic and to show her empathy for such a situation.

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Question 8

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	12	20	25	22	15	7	2.3

Students were required to examine the topic management between lines 19 and 33 and discuss how this reflects on the relationship between C and A. It was important for students to use metalanguage and analysis in this response rather than recount what was said in the excerpt. Not all students recognised that C and A were essentially strangers who were engaging in a conversation while a transaction was occurring. The conversation was polite and friendly, but again some students mistook this as a sign that the two interlocutors had met before when they had not.

It was C who managed the topic of conversation by encouraging A to keep talking about her experiences. C uses minimal responses and laughter to affirm A, and to show she is listening and interested in what she is saying. Overlaps are used, but these are supportive rather than hostile. C also uses repetition as a way of showing her interest in this conversation and to show she is listening.

Following is a high-scoring response.

The relationship between C and A is friendly and supportive.

This can be seen in the way in which C is quick to take the floor and continue from where A left off (lines 19-20) 'I did a ...', 'went around?' thus being helpful in keeping the conversation flowing. C also supports A in her speech through the use of minimal responses like '[Yeah]' (line 22) and 'Yep' (line 24). The presence of laughter as well (line 26) shows the friendly relationship between the two. A is also supportive when C is speaking, as seen from her minimal response '[Yeah]' (line 30) and continuation of A's speech through overlap (line 33) '[which]'. In this case, the overlap is not competitive, but supportive as it seeks to show that the speaker has been listening, and is also avoiding awkward pauses in conversation.

Question 9

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	9	8	24	25	34	2.7

Marks were awarded for discussion of the function of two non-fluency features. Examples of these features included:

- voiced hesitations/fillers
- overlaps
- minimal response
- repairs
- repetition.

Question 10

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	31	16	16	13	12	8	4	2

In lines 41–54 the variety of utterance structures was reflective of the spontaneous nature of the conversation. A's long compound complex sentence is fragmented by C's use of minimal responses as she encourages A to continue speaking. There was a greater range of sentence types in lines 41–54, which is to be expected as social interaction takes place.

In contrast, in lines 55–59 a transaction is occurring and the utterances are shorter, often with ellipsis. This is due to a shared knowledge of what is occurring and so full sentences are not necessary if meaning is to be conveyed.

Students found this question very challenging. The question required a comparison of syntactic features within two interactions.

Following is a high-scoring response.

In 41-54, sentences are longer, for example, 'Well...would take' (line 44) than those found in lines 55-59. Interrogatives such as 'Were you here...' (41) occur more often in 41-54 suggesting a more phatic function of the exchange between those lines. Further, utterances in lines 41-54 are less formal, indicated by the non-standard use of the co-ordinating conjunction 'And' to begin sentences as in 'And actually...' (48). Lines 55-59 have noticeably shorter and concise sentences from both parties such as 'on credit'. And 'Thank you'. (58). With ellipsis such as 'On credit' (58) contributing to the brisk transactional tone of lines 55-59.



Section 3 – Essay

Essay chosen	0	1	2	3
%	1	59	13	27

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	2	1	2	3	5	6	10	12	15	14	11	8	7	3	2	1	8.1

Section 3 of this year's paper contained three essay topics. The instructions for Section 3 required students to refer to the stimulus material provided. These prompts were, on the whole, used appropriately, and the majority of students remembered to include a reference to at least one prompt within their response. Over half of the students chose to answer on Question 11, with its stimulus material being used by most students.

Most essays mainly provided relevant, up-to-date examples that showed evidence of wide reading. The structure of responses varied from the tightly structured, cohesive response to the disjointed response that made little attempt to engage with the topic.

However, some examples used by students were hackneyed and over-used, although perfectly correct. For example, the term 'lol' was often used as an example of electronic language, 'footaballa' was used as an example of an ethnolect and 'passed away' was used frequently as an example of a euphemism. In writing an essay, correct linguistic terms should be used; it should be noted the term 'wogspeak', used as a synonym for ethnolect, is not a linguistic one. Students are encouraged to draw from a wide range of examples. Some students did not attempt to link paragraphs and often their essays appeared to be disjointed and were poorly structured.

Question 11

Relevant topics explored included (but were not limited to):

- the dynamic and continually evolving nature of language
- interdependent and interactive factors that bring about change
- social change
- changes to language due to where we live in Australia and the world.

The topic required an understanding of how language changes in a contemporary Australian context. It was necessary to refer to at least two subsystems of language. Many students chose to write on similar topics, which included Americanisms, technological influences, political correctness and ethnolects.

A small number of students chose to use examples of language change from periods in the past such as the Gold Rush. These students may have misread the topic, possibly reading the word 'led' instead of the actual word in the topic 'lead'. It is vital that students take time to understand what the topic requires and respond accordingly. Many students used paragraphs that described and listed features associated with, for example, technological change, but did not link this content to the topic and engage in a thorough analysis. Students should not use pre-prepared paragraphs that can be used in a variety of essays. Such paragraphs rarely engage the reader and seldom add to the cohesiveness of an essay.

Following is an example of a high-scoring response. This student considered technology, attitudes to Standard English, societal changes and globalisation in his/her response. A broad range of examples was provided and the student showed a clear understanding of the topic. A reference to at least two subsystems was made, as well as reference to the stimulus material.

Australian English is a unique variety of the English Language. However, like all varieties, it is in a constant state of motion and evolution, undergoing changes including conversions, borrowings and neologisms appearing. There are many driving forces prompting change in Australian English; the technology revolution, globalization and changing attitudes towards language itself, are but a few.

Arguably the most influential force prompting change in our language is technology, and most notably, mobile phones and the internet. Through new functions and capabilities, we have needed to coin new lexemes such as 'download' and convert lexemes such as 'google' and 'facebook', which began as proper nouns, but have now been converted to verbs as well, in order to be able to express their capabilities effectively. Text messaging, too, has prompted change, in particular to the written mode. A limit of 160 characters per message has prompted non-standard orthography and syntax to become common. Elliptical sentences such as 'as if', reductions such as 'probs', and abbreviations like 'FML' and 'CBF' become, not only fun, but necessary for effective communication with such limited space. Some of these lexemes have even become common in spoken language, for example, 'CBF' is pronounced 'ceebz' and commonly used among teens.



Australian English is changing more quickly now than it has in the past. This has to do with a change in attitude amongst its users, and thus in 'the way they use the language' (Janet Holmes). Because younger generations have grown up with constant exposure to non-standard language through e-communication, and grammar is no longer taught in formal lessons in schools, prescriptivist attitudes towards language are becoming less common. Australian English users tend to view the primary function of language as communication, and view coherence as having more importance than cohesion. In a culture where language play is in our nature, being able to freely express this through dysphemistic infixes such as 'abso-bloody-lutely' and using diminutives to belittle politicians, for example calling John Howard, 'Johnny', a descriptivist view gives us more freedom to enjoy our language in a wide range of contexts and modes.

Our society is changing and thus so must our language too. As new situations arise, we need new lexemes to be able to clearly describe them. Who, ten years ago, would have heard of 'black balloons' or the 'baby bonus'? As new situations arise in society, we require neologisms to be able to clearly and effectively communicate about them. With these new contexts come changing Principles of Appropriateness and attitudes towards language, particularly taboo lexemes. Australia is known for its common use of dysphemisms, and these appear to be becoming more acceptable than ever, with our former Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, dropping 'shit' on national television (albeit with disastrous consequences) and a NSW magistrate deeming it acceptable for a police officer to be called a 'prick' as this expression is used 'in everyday language now'. Altering opinions on what is appropriate for use are driving changes to what is considered Standard language.

Globalisation, too, is prompting language change as Australians communicate within a changing world. The television shows which dominate our screens are mostly American, while Australian shows are left to unpopular time slots or the ABC. Is it any wonder, then, that lexemes such as 'cookie' and 'sweater' are replacing their Australian synonyms 'biscuit' and 'jumper'? While iconic Australian-isms 'no worries' and 'mate' survive, they are often surrounded by borrowings from other languages, such as 'Let's go out for sushi, mate', juxtaposing the Japanese 'sushi' with the traditional Australian 'mate'.

A language must continually evolve to truly reflect the identity and meet the needs of the society it is in. Influences such as technology, globalisation and changing attitudes towards language have all led to a change in Australian English. Susan Butler has stated that 'language is a constant stream in our society', and it is true that for language to truly reflect our society it must constantly evolve.

Question 12

Relevant topics included (but were not limited to):

- how people react to language change and why they might resist it
- the importance attached to the standard variety of English
- attitudes to accent variation
- how low prestige varieties attract negative attitudes
- the importance of language being rule-governed
- how some people have strong views on what is perceived as being good or bad usage.

Following is an example of a high-scoring response. The essay was confident and accurate, using language in an assured way that showed a clear control of the English language. There was much evidence of wide reading, as well as a reference to the stimulus material. The general focus was on language varieties and how people view these. However, the paragraph on Aboriginal English, while containing interesting and detailed information, did little to connect to the topic and this was reflected in the topic sentence. This paragraph weakened the overall score of the essay. Following this, however, was a confidently written paragraph on the impact of American language in Australia. Here the student showed an exploration of the opinions on the usage of Americanisms and supplemented this with a range of examples and metalanguage from different subsystems. The final body paragraph showed a clear grasp of the issues surrounding political language in relation to public reaction and made clear points as to why such language might polarise opinions.

Language is what separates humans from animals. It is the reason we are able to socialise, perform transactions and communicate our thoughts, ideas and perceptions in the world. We use language every day to shape our lives and to influence the lives of others. Thus, it is a powerful tool which is capable of great and ghastly things, and something which draws many strong views as a natural corollary of this capability.

People shape their identity using language and affect the way they are perceived by others. Using certain words or saying them in a certain way can convey a person's history, attitudes and self-image. In the Australian context, a number of sub-cultures such as the Aborigines strive to set themselves apart from other sub-cultures, and make a unique name for themselves, through language. Aboriginal English reflects the cultural heritage of Aborigines through unique semantic features such as 'aunty' to refer to any older female and 'he' to refer to inanimate objects. Similarly, the unique lexeme 'Unna?' to mean 'isn't it?' pays tribute to a rich cultural history of Aboriginal languages, setting Aboriginal English apart. As was said in the television documentary, 'Ways of Being, Ways of Talk', 'Aboriginal English...differs from Standard Australian English at every level,' and 'expresses an Aboriginal world view.' Because language is so powerful in constructing identity, many people feel strongly about it.



When it comes to guarding and savouring language, many people become incensed and emotional. As a marker of identity, language is compromised by influences from other cultures. For example, a number of people feel that Americanisation is a threat to Australian English: the journalist Andrew Herrick wrote in June 2010 that 'We have imported American language with its toxic culture', lamenting the disappearance of a number of unique Australianisms that is gradually taking place. Herrick feels that Australian identity, created through language such as rhyming slang and idioms such as 'blood blister' for sister and 'she'll be apples' to mean it will be ok respectively, is compromised by his perceived onslaught of Americanisation. Many people have similarly strong views of Americanisations as it permeates Australian English with vague language such as 'epic' and different pronunciation such as placing emphasis on the first syllables of 'address' and 'research' – they fear that Australian identity is compromised by loss of individuality. However, some such as Michael Lallo believe 'People who get their knickers in a twist over the use of Americanisms need to get a life.' Lallo's strong views are not explained, but he evidently feels that his Australian identity is not compromised by Americanisation; perhaps he strives to shape identity through other salient features of Australian English such as the famous 'o' and 'ie' suffix diminutives of 'arvo' and 'Aussie'. Either way, opinions about how to shape identity and others' perceptions of you are strong, as people do not like to feel they cannot display their uniqueness through language.

Political language also draws much contentious debate. Using weasel words and doublespeak, politicians routinely attempt to hoodwink their public by way of labyrinthine and opaque language. As Teddy Roosevelt once said, '[Weasel words] are one of the defects of our nation': hollow phrases such as 'goals matrix' and 'outcomes' and 'synergy' are used regularly in deceiving people in the workplace to believe that something is being said. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd exploited jargon by referring to 'CSBMs' in a public speech, which, even upon translation to 'confidence and security-building measures', was unclear. This kind of language naturally evokes strong emotions and views as it leaves listeners feeling duped or inferior and excluded. As a divisive and nefarious linguistic feature, political language also draws much discussion by calling to question the value of our language and its social aspects. When it is exploited to the selfish ends of its user it affects many people's perceptions of the speaker and of language itself.

In conclusion, language has always drawn strong views and emotive commentary. To express identity through language is a powerful thing, and to deceive and lie to people is too. No matter the context or purpose, language will forever provoke reaction from the people being limited by it.

Question 13

Relevant topics included, but were not limited to:

- how language reflects society's attitudes and values
- sexism in language
- political language and the use of spin and deception
- euphemism and dysphemism.

Following is a high-scoring response. It thoughtfully addresses the essay topic, incorporating reference to the stimulus material. It uses relevant and interesting examples, many of which are from the last two years. The examples are closely linked to the topic, and thus reinforce the writer's position.

Language is an integral aspect of communication and identity and therefore can influence people's perceptions, thoughts and behaviours. This can simply be through how a particular individual's idiolect shapes others' perceptions of them. For example, through that person's use of a particular jargon or non-standard forms of English, or it can be through someone deliberately manipulating language to influence perception, such as with the use of discriminatory language, political language or advertising.

Language reflects and shapes identity, and as such, is one way in which other people's perceptions of an individual can be shaped. The lexical, phonological, syntactic and morphological features of an individual's language use, as well as how they describe themselves, can influence the perceptions of them and of people around them. For example, the use of Broad Australian terms such as 'fair dinkum' and 'drongo' are perceived negatively as 'ocker' to many people. The use of the non-standard forms such as 'I seen' instead of 'I saw' is another example that could shape perceptions – many might judge the speaker to be uneducated and treat them as such. The way in which Alexander Downer was mocked for being 'plummy' and 'pompous' with his cultivated accent shows how phonological features can influence perceptions of an individual. The way people choose to label themselves – or how others choose to label them, can also influence perception. The term 'green' for instance, has the connotation of someone who is environmentally conscious, and could alter the perception of an individual labelled as such. Referring to people who leave graffiti tags as 'graffiti artists' as opposed to 'graffiti vandals' is another example – the former term adding a sense of skill and legitimacy, connotations the latter term does not have.

The use of discriminatory language is another example that illustrates how language can influence perceptions, thoughts and actions. Racist, sexist, homophobic or otherwise discriminatory terms can help create and reinforce discriminatory ideas and create generalisations. For example, Tony Abbott's comment on housewives doing the ironing suggests to people that it is normal for women to largely be doing the ironing. It can also be more deliberate – the way the media describe 'Middle eastern terrorists', for example, creates an association of terrorism with Middle-Eastern individuals. Another example is the use of 'gay',



largely by teenagers to mean 'stupid'. Using 'gay' in this way connects being gay with something that is stupid or frustrating, which could alter perceptions and thoughts about gay people and consequently actions toward them.

Doublespeak involves the use of language to deliberately obscure, and is another way of using language to influence perception. Military terms, such as 'rectification of frontiers' to mean forced population movements, are a way of altering people's thoughts by concealing negative actions or effects, by making them sound more technical, less dangerous and removing the emotional or human aspects. Political language that doesn't fall under the category of doublespeak is also used to manipulate – Tony Abbott's use of the phrase, 'Stop the Boats' is one example. This short, dramatic sentence makes the situation sound more ominous and dramatic than it probably was in order to influence perceptions about the situation and lead them towards the action of voting for him.

Advertising frequently makes use of particular language to alter perceptions and thoughts about the products they are attempting to sell, and to influence people's actions. The V Australia advertisement for their LA flights uses slang like 'OMG' and "like, totally' to influence people into thinking of LA as a fun and attractive place by using lexicon associated with a particular stereotypical image of Los Angeles.

In conclusion, language works in many ways to influence perceptions, thoughts and actions, whether done deliberately or not. The ability to do this is used to discriminate and to drive people toward certain actions or beliefs.