The most important thing to understand before sitting for the HSC, is just what the syllabus requires of you. You must have a copy of pages 81-85 of the syllabus, and be familiar with them. The Knowledge and Understanding outcomes (p82), tell you what you are expected to know. The Skills outcomes (p82), tell you what you should be able to do. The Significant Concepts (p83) are terms you should be familiar with, and be able to write about with specific examples, and the Key Questions (p83) are ones you should have considered, and have an opinion on. Finally, the Subject Matter (p83-4), outlines the framework for studying Popular Culture. There are seven headings, and you must be familiar with each of these.

You are required to have a case study to apply to the subject matter, and you must be able to apply that case study on a local, national and global level. It is at this basic level of selecting a case study where students often get into trouble. It is important that your case study can be studied at a local, national and global level, and that you can apply ALL of the seven headings under Subject Matter to your case study.

It is beyond the scope of a lecture like this to give you the answers to questions of popular culture. You are drawing on a wide range of case studies, and each must be considered on its own terms. Rather, I would like to try and point you in the direction of the questions you must ask of your popular culture. If you can ask and answer these questions with a range of specific examples to support your views, you will have to succeed in the HSC.

1. The nature of popular culture
The syllabus requires you to understand the nature of popular culture. You are not required to have a definition of popular culture, but rather to show that you understand what popular culture is. The best way to do this is to develop a number of defining characteristics that help explain and identify examples of popular culture. Experts don't agree on what it is, and markers don't expect you to be able to sum up such a complex concept in a pithy sentence.

The new syllabus, which came into operation this year for Year 11 provides a very basic definition in its glossary. On page 61 it describes popular culture as "a shared set of practices and beliefs that have attained global acceptance and which can be normally characterised by: being associated with commercial products; developing from local to national to global acceptance; allowing consumers to have widespread access and are constantly changing and evolving." This is not meant to be a definitive definition, and it is important to focus particularly on those distinguishing characteristics:

1. it is associated with commercial products
2. it moves from local to national to global acceptance
3. it allows widespread access to consumers
4. it is constantly changing and evolving.

Your task is to make sure that your case study reflects these four characteristics. If you are unable to apply them to your case study, it probably isn't a popular culture, and you will have difficulty successfully answering a question in the HSC.

Some examples that illustrate this process are:

(i) Rock’n’roll
It has emerged as a major business, with music being worth SUS38.1 billion to the American economy in 1998. The commercial products associated with it include CDs, magazines, videos, TV programs and films. Since 1954, it has progressed from a local fad in towns like Memphis (Elvis Presley) and New Orleans (Little Richard and Fats Domino), through to national success as TV shows like Ed Sullivan gave teenagers across the United States access to the new sounds. Through tours, films and international record releases the music became global. Consumers around the world had access in a variety of ways, from the direct access of concerts through to TV shows, movies, magazines, and the initial currency of rock'n'roll, 45rpm records. That rock music has changed and evolved is obvious. Elvis Presley gave way to The Beatles who gave way to the Sex Pistols, who gave way to Michael Jackson who evolved into Nirvana, and so on.

(ii) Teen movies are another example.
The movies are a clear and obvious product, which has evolved from the Hollywood to American to global success. The access is clear and immediate, and it is easy to follow their evolution. Just sit and watch James Dean in Rebel Without A Cause (US- 1954), To Sir With Love (UK-1967), Puberty Blues (Aust-1979), The Breakfast Club (US-1984) and Clueless (US-1995). In that package you have commercial product, global impact, easy access and changing images.

One other quick example is kid's music. It is an interesting one because it is an example of Australia exporting popular culture to the world. Just as an examination of Elvis Presley helps you understand the nature of rock'n'roll as a popular culture, so do The Wiggles for kid's music. Pre Wiggles kid's music was fairly haphazard and episodic, now it is a lucrative, highly organised and almost global popular culture. Walk into any ABC shop if you want examples of commercial product. The Wiggles have graduated from playing pre schools and kindles to the Sydney Entertainment Centre, and in the last year have played sell out concerts in England and the United States, as well as linking with the globally powerful Disney Corporation. They allow pure access to their consumers (and parents), and although you can legitimately argue that The Wiggles haven't evolved particularly (although Anthony has changed the colour of his skiwie! ), but the genre of kid's music has. There is now a wide range of choice, with school holidays presenting concerts by Play School, Hooley Doolies, Incy Wincy and Blinky Bill.

2. The creation of popular culture
The most important thing to understand in the creation of popular culture is the context of the creation. It is vital to ask the questions "why did the popular culture start there and then?", and "how did it progress from local to national to
global?". If you can answer those questions about your popular culture, you are well on the way to successfully answering any question asked in the HSC about creation.

If you were examining animation as a popular culture, you would have to examine the context of The Simpsons and South Park to use two obvious examples. When did they start? Why did they become popular? How significant is the local level of creation? Why did The Simpsons move from a small part on the Tracey Ullman Show to become major icons of 1990's popular culture? To what extent does South Park reflect the social environment at the end of the 20th century?

Look at "Star Wars" which has emerged as a legitimate popular culture in its own right, rather than merely being an example of a popular culture genre. It fulfils all the distinguishing characteristics. To explain its creation you would have to examine the career of George Lucas, look at the local version of his vision in films like THX 1138, and then explain why the initial Star Wars film was such a success in 1977. To do that you could research the papers and magazines of 1977 to understand the context. Was there a moral in Star Wars which appealed at the time? Was it merely clever marketing? Why then did the two sequels have such success? Is the eruption of fanaticism over Phantom Menace genuine interest?

With rock'n'roll you must ask the questions "why Elvis?", "why Memphis?" and "why 1954?". What was it about that specific environment which allowed the emergence of a sound and individual, which would transform the world of popular entertainment? This can be linked to the emergence of teen movies at around the same time. What was going on that enabled these popular cultures to emerge when they did?

Reflect for a minute on the most recent creation of Pokemon. Is it a genuine Popular Culture or simply a rapidly passing fad? This is when you must go back to the distinguishing characteristics and see how well they apply. From there you must then ask questions of its creation.

To understand creation, you have to able to ask and answer these questions of your particular case study. If you can't ask and answer the questions, chances are that it is not a genuine popular culture.

3. The consumers of popular culture
The obvious questions to ask here are "who are the consumers?" of your popular culture, and "what is it that they consume?". You will have already touched on this in your work on the nature of popular culture. If one of the characteristics of a popular culture is its link to commercial products, you are obviously entering the world of consumers and products.

To follow the Star Wars example a little further. This time last year, The Phantom Menace was about to be launched. There was huge hype and anticipation. Consumers had been surviving on teasers skategically placed as well advertised previews at popular films during the first half of 1999. Then came the release, and as the figures rolled in, it was obvious that the viewers of The Phantom Menace covered a wide range of the population. As I am arguing that "Star Wars" is a popular culture in its own right, the consumers have to be more than those who simply went to see a film. Look at the massive merchandising push. You could go to KFC and get the Star Wars kid's meal,
walk down the aisle of any toy store and fall over toy Darth Mauls and trip on errant light sabres. Newsagents suddenly became promotional vehicles, as every magazine seemed to have a Star Wars character grinning from the cover. The same book was packaged with different covers to encourage multiple purchases. There is such wide range of commercial product associated with the "Star Wars" concept. Consumers can range from kids wanting the latest toy, to forty year olds desperate to establish a link with the time they were eighteen, through to the canny investors convinced they'll be sitting on a goldmine in thirty years time if they keep their young Darth Vader doll in mint condition.

With the growth in technology there are ever increasing ways of bringing consumers and products together. E-commerce was a futuristic concept a decade ago, but now it is possible to purchase products associated with your particular popular culture from anywhere in the world with the click of a button. Access to any popular culture has been made that much easier with the web. Try for yourself some simple searches if you want to find examples of how the web has changed access to popular culture. On a regular Google search, it produced 15 100 sites for South Park in 0.06 seconds, a staggering 32, 800 for Star Wars, 63 998 for The Simpsons, and 71 800 for "The Beatles" in only 0.02 seconds. That's not bad for a band that has been defunct for thirty years. "Grunge" produced 25 400 sites, "Teen Movies" 4 750, and a search for "MP3" an incredible 306 999. There is obviously a lot of consumption and interaction going on!

4. The interactive process between individuals and aspects of popular culture

This section raises the obvious question of "how is interaction achieved?", but you are also required to consider aspects of socialisation, and the question "how am I/others influenced by this popular culture?". It is this section which introduces the concepts of heroes, myths and icons. These are all terms you must be familiar with. Popular culture is awash with mythology. Is Elvis dead? Jim Morrison was the world's greatest poet. Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys spent two years in bed. There are thousands of rumours, stories and half truths fuelling most popular cultures. They provide gossip, entertainment, dreams and the means to selling more merchandise. Is Luke Skywalker a hero or icon? Is Darth Vader simply a villain or an icon of our constant battle between good and evil? You can mount an argument that Elvis Presley and The Beatles are icons of popular culture because their very name transcends their original context. They have achieved a meaning beyond their initial fame. Jimi Hendrix probably is borderline hero/icon, while Janis Joplin or Buddy Holly is simply a hero, meaning the world to many, but never quite gaining the universality of acceptance Elvis and The Beatles achieved.

You must look firstly to your own experiences, and ask yourself, "how do you interact with your popular culture?" The key concept to recognise here is access. Interaction is all about access. No access, no interaction, no popular culture. As I mentioned earlier, technology has had a major impact upon popular culture, particularly in allowing widespread access. That is the major point about the Internet, its freedom of access as long as you can afford the technology to connect. Once you've thought about how you interact, reflect on how it influences you. How much time does it take up? How much money do you spend in pursuit of your particular popular culture?

For an example of interaction in its absolutely purest form, go to a Wiggles
concert. The genuine excitement, the willingness of The Wiggles to provide widespread access by constantly touring and stay around after a show to sign dinosaur tails is perfect interaction between consumer and provider of popular culture.

5. Control of popular culture by groups, institutions and organisations
Access is again a key issue here. In many popular culture examples there is an element of generational differences, and the story of that popular culture is often expressed in terms of one generation trying to restrict access to another generation. This is an oversimplification, and is not always the case, but it certainly can be argued for many popular cultures.

A key player in the issue of control of access to popular culture is the Office of Film and Literature Classification. They are the body responsible for rating what we see and read. On 8/5/99 the Sydney Morning Herald ran a vital story on page 3. Under the heading "Cabinet bushwhacks censors", it revealed that Federal Cabinet had rejected the entire list of candidates for censorship positions, and demanded fresh names more representative of the community. This was despite the fact that those rejected represented a range of ages, occupations, sexes and locations, and had been accepted by all the states. Such a move has grave implications for the consumers of any popular culture deemed unacceptable by government. In the last year, you have had this Board twice try and deny adults access to films because of their sexual content, Lolita and Romance. In each case, the Board was eventually overruled on the grounds that it was out of touch with prevailing community standards, but it left open the question of how much the Board was attempting to reflect the standards of the Howard government rather than the community.

The Internet has suffered recent criticism because of its ease of access. The same Federal government has recently passed laws restricting access to Internet sites. It is yet to be proved whether these laws will be workable, but there is no doubt that the government is attempting to legislate to control access to popular culture. Jon Casimir put it succinctly in the Herald's Icon section also on 8.5.99. In an article examining the impact of legislating for control of the Internet, he summarised it thus, "If you think South Park T-shirts are offensive, you'll probably welcome the Federal Government's new Internet blocking laws". This ongoing battle over the Internet has been carried into schoolrooms, where the State government has tried to juggle the dual responsibilities of providing reliable internet access to all students, while restricting what they actually access. Just try logging on to most popular culture sites at school if you want to test how far control is going. Regardless of your popular culture case study, you must be able to find examples of attempts at control. Whether it is radio station 2SM (then owned by the Catholic Church) banning Normie Rowe's hit "It Ain't Necessarily So" because of the lines "It ain't necessarily so/the things that your liable to read in the Bible" in 1965, or board riders being confronted by flags on a perfect break, someone is always trying to stop someone else doing something. Think about the significance of a film being recut to achieve an M rather than MA rating. That can quite often have huge commercial ramifications.

6. Different perceptions of popular culture
This follows directly on from the question of control. One of the key reasons people try to control and limit access to popular culture is because of their
different perceptions of it. The syllabus poses two important questions, "who accepts the popular culture?", and "who rejects it?".

Rock'n'roll in its early days provides some perfect examples. The generation gap was alive and well, as the new music struggled for acceptance. You've probably all seen the footage of white southern Americans describing rock'n'roll as "rigger music" and "a Communist plot". We can laugh now, but those were genuine attitudes held by some of a generation who felt that their "sons and daughters are beyond your command" (Bob Dylan). Teenagers were also berated from the church pulpit by preachers condemning "the Devil's music".

Certainly *The Simpsons* and *South Park* have generated their share of controversy as those whom "get it" struggle against those who don't. Radio stations today can advertise "no hard rock or weird sounds, just good rock'n'roll", which is a classic example of different perceptions. On the day South Sydney take the NRL to court to protest their exclusion from the national Rugby League competition, it is very easy to deconstruct Star Wars with News Limited as the Evil Empire and Rupert Murdoch as Darth Vader. It comes back to context. In the 70's, people were keen to see Star Wars as a Vietnam allegory, today it can protest the implications of growing globalism. If you're looking for an experiment to illustrate different perceptions of popular culture, play/show a range of ages and backgrounds an example of your popular culture and record their reactions. Just try playing "Smells Like Teen Spirit" to a range of ages extending from 15 to 70. You will probably have all the examples you need in fifteen minutes.

7. The contribution of popular culture to social change
The syllabus asks you to consider "what positive or negative aspects of popular culture have become part of society?" It is important to remember that this question cuts both ways. Has the popular culture influenced society, and has the society influenced the popular culture? The other question to consider is whether any of the changes have been marked or long lasting.

Significant individuals, heroes of a popular culture, may well make a difference. The late sixties singer/songwriter Joe South played a major role in establishing the credibility of the southern United States as a place of intellect and social concern after the horrors of the Ku Klux Klan and blatant racism. His music played a major, if unrecognised role in allowing his home town, Atlanta, to eventually host the Olympic Games. Kurt Cobain's stand on aggressive machismo was a significant step towards breaking down gender stereotypes in the early nineties.

I believe a very strong case can be made for rock music playing a key role in breaking down racist attitudes in America. How can racism sustain any logical base when white teenagers are screaming at the likes of Little Richard and Chuck Berry, and sticking their pictures on their bedroom wall? Michael Jackson's achievement in having the largest selling album of all time with *Thriller* shows how far rock music moved the world. Currently playing at the Seymour Centre in Sydney is a musical called *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*. It collects popular songs from Billie Holiday's anti racist "Strange Fruit" through to Archie Roach's "Took The Children Away", and is a telling display of just how important the role of rock music has been in both reflecting and promoting social change in the second half of the 20th century.
*The Simpsons* and *South Park* continue to play a key role in shaping social attitudes at the moment, and it may well be possible to argue that *Phantom Menace* is introducing morality to a morally bankrupt society. Certainly *The Wiggles* have awakened a generation of under fives to the joys of live performance, and that may yet have major effects on Australian society. Will they simply accept the lack of live venues for under 18's as they move into Primary School, or will there be a demand for something to fill the gap left by growing out of *The Wiggles*?

**Conclusion**
The successful study of popular culture is about asking questions. You must be prepared to submit your choice of a case study to probing questioning and analysis. If it is found wanting in any area, you must ask the question "is this a genuine example of popular culture?", and be prepared to act.

HSC markers are looking for students who can apply their knowledge and understanding to a specific question. They are looking for critical thinkers who can support their ideas with relevant examples. Ask lots of questions and support your answers with specific examples, and you will succeed.