Point 5:

**Point (topic sentence):**

**Evidence (supporting points):**

**Analysis (explanation, discussion):**

Now, write a statement that summarises the main point of the conclusion:

**Write your own response**

Plan and write your own response, using a Module C question from another HSC examination paper. Use the planning model outlined above. Create your own original work in restricted time. Allow for about one hour of writing time.

**Edit your work**

After you finish, go back and edit your work. Use the editing checklist on page 9 to make sure that you have covered all necessary areas.

2010 Paper 2 Section III Module C – Elective 2: History and Memory

To what extent has textual form shaped your understanding of history and memory? In your response, make detailed reference to your prescribed text and at least ONE other related text of your own choosing.

**Sample response: Prose fiction**

**Prescribed text:** True History of the Kelly Gang, Peter Carey, 2000

**Related texts:**
- Ned Kelly, Douglas Stewart, 1943 (drama)
- Ned Kelly Uncovered, Alex West, 2009 (TV documentary)

Introduction connects textual form to the module as required in the question and introduces the texts to be discussed

The phrase ‘history and memory’ reminds us that we can never have a fully objective understanding of the past. History tells us that events have occurred and we can agree on the accuracy of certain names, dates and places. Our memory of these events, however, is far less accurate and will vary from person to person. It is coloured by the observer’s context, by narrative perspective and by the prejudices and biases that we all have. In Peter Carey’s novel, True History of the Kelly Gang, Douglas Stewart’s play, Ned Kelly and the television documentary, Ned Kelly Uncovered, we see how the different textual forms, narrative perspectives and contexts create views of Ned Kelly that have similarities and differences and result in the continual revision and re-creation of our understanding of this significant historical figure. Kelly still polarises debate in Australia about whether he was a victim who embodies the Australian virtues of equality and a fair go, or if he was simply a thief and a murderer who was properly punished in the end.
Peter Carey presents us with a flawed but essentially heroic character. The first person narrative tells us Kelly’s motivations and gives us insights into the complexities and contradictions of his character. It also lends an air of authenticity to the story – we are being told the ‘true history’ of events by Kelly himself. Thus, we learn from Kelly that he wants nothing more than a quiet life as a selector, was an earnest and heroic boy with a strong sense of responsibility, has been unfairly victimised by the police, was unwillingly apprenticed to Harry Power and is tainted by the family connection to the Quinns, who are the real criminals in the area. Whenever violence has occurred, Kelly is quick to point out that he did not initiate it or he was forced into it for self-preservation, such as with the infamous Stringybark Creek murders.

Despite that fact that these are all unreliable and self-serving views of Kelly, we are encouraged to believe them by the way that Carey has constructed his ‘factual’ text. He has presented Kelly’s story as a series of letters to his (fictional) daughter, apparently written on whatever materials were at hand, such as paper from various banks in Victoria or the back of auction flyers, and annotated in a faux-historical style to make us believe that these are real working documents held in the (fictional) Melbourne Public Library. The blurring of fact and fiction also permeates the novel through the voice of the Jerilderie Letter, a real document outlining Kelly’s grievances against the police, the squattocracy and the Victorian government. By sustaining Kelly’s authentic voice and style for the entire novel, depicting actual events from Kelly’s life and using the grievances and self-justification of the Jerilderie Letter as a model for the content of True History of the Kelly Gang, Carey presents a convincing view of Kelly that persuades the reader to accept his largely sympathetic characterisation and to believe both the fact and fiction of the story.

Characterisation and language convince us that Carey’s work of fiction is fact and they thus embed a particular view of Kelly in the reader’s consciousness. Kelly is depicted as a very complex person. The mass of contradictions that make up his personality – heroic but violent, intelligent but poorly educated, motivated by justice but a thief and a murderer, and so on – make him seem realistically human and lend an air of verisimilitude to his words and actions. His opening sentences to his daughter burn with indignation at the “injustice” of life and the “lies and silences” used to oppress the poor and down-trodden, and this emotional view of the world and his place in it is maintained throughout. The vivid imagery, the fine attention to detail throughout and the focus on Kelly’s thoughts and feelings convince us that this is a real person speaking, who has legitimate grievances against people who are out to get him. For example, describing a speech he makes to inspire the people of north-east Victoria to rebellion against the government, he writes:

> The words must be said and say them I did beneath the dazzling Milky Way the skies spilled like broken crystal across the heavens. … I didn’t even remember what I said except the government must deliver the innocent from gaol or else I were provoked to show some colonial stratagem.

The description of the night sky, with its beauty and the implied connection with the Southern Cross as a symbol of the Eureka Stockade
Douglas Stewart’s 1943 play, *Ned Kelly*, deals with events from the robbery at Jerilderie to the capture at Glenrowan. We see from the outset a man who is essentially decent and well-meaning, but his own failings and external events conspire to cause chaos and bring about his downfall. There is no attempt by Stewart to make his audience think that his Ned Kelly is anything other than a dramatic characterisation on the stage. Instead, Stewart presents us with a limited view of Kelly that focuses on his obsessions and his shortcomings – he is a tragic hero with a fatal flaw, in Stewart’s own words, “The heroic will gone wrong”.

Stewart directs his audience to a specific view of Kelly through his stage directions, through the dialogue and through the action. The stage directions tell us that Kelly enters as “a dominating figure, retaining the air of a leader even when his habitual uneasiness betrays itself in jumpiness, brutality or boastfulness. When crossed, he is murderous; normally, riotously good-humoured.” From this we learn that he has a violent side (”brutality”, “murderous”) that can override the “good humoured” leader. Kelly’s speeches in the play are predominantly about justifying his actions and blaming the police. There is an edge of defiance to all these speeches – he will not give in to their intimidation but intends to fight to the last. He says:

> They’ve driven us back and put a fence around us,
> And we’ve got to trample the wire, root up the posts,
> Or the game is finished. They think it’s finished now,
> The fence is around the bush, but a man who was big
> Could beat them yet.

He sees himself as the big man who has a chance of winning back his freedom and he intends to try that chance.

The action of the play is centred on some of Kelly’s acts of defiance and his willingness to take the fight to the police and the authorities. This gives him genuine heroic stature, even as he is defeated and captured at Glenrowan. In the final scene of the play, he staggers out of the morning mist in his armour, a “grotesque and gigantic figure”, highlighting how his outlaw status has rendered him both abnormal and extraordinary. He dares the police to “Stand up and meet me” and when he is shot and taken, one trooper remarks that, “He could have escaped in the bush. Came back to fight!” His defiance throughout the play, his constant focus on what he sees as injustice and his undoubted bravery, especially in the final scene, combine to give us a view of Kelly that suggests that, had circumstances been otherwise, he might have achieved greatness.

The 2009 TV documentary, *Ned Kelly Uncovered*, also shapes a particular view of Kelly. It establishes its credentials as a factual text by explaining that the Glenrowan Hotel site will be excavated to find evidence of the siege and the presence of the Kelly Gang, using “scientific” methods to “discover the truth behind the legend”. Various experts provide information and opinions about the dig site and about Kelly. They are
posed working at the site itself, at their microscopes or in front of the Victorian State Library, which houses most of the important Kelly artefacts. There are several recreations of significant events, such as making the armour, testing it against the bullets of the day and Kelly’s appearance in the armour on the final morning of the siege. There are also vox pop segments to show the wide range of public opinion about Kelly, from victimised hero to ruthless thug. All these features combine to suggest that the program is factual and unbiased.

However, from the outset, the view of Kelly as a champion of the downtrodden is privileged. The opening lines refer to “romantic”, “celebrity” and “home-made hero”. He is described as a “champion of the weak” and the Jerilderie letter is a “cry from the heart”. The program establishes Kelly as a political revolutionary, to legitimise his actions. He is described as being compassionate at Glenrowan and the final descriptions of him are as someone who was “brave”, “loyal” and “fiercely articulate”. Against all this, the dissenting views come from a Victorian policeman and one person interviewed who agreed with his hanging.

As with True History of the Kelly Gang, there is blurring of the lines between fact and fiction in the documentary, but it is achieved quite differently and for a different purpose. Where Carey has melded the two to make his work compelling as a piece of fiction, the documentary uses the factual overlay to disguise its manipulative techniques. Thus, because we are shown ‘proof’ of what could have been Kelly’s own bullets, or the remains of Steve Hart or Dan Kelly, we are more likely to accept as true the other information in the program, whether it is factual or not. The authenticity of some aspects verifies the overall view of Kelly as a “legend” and a hero.

From these three very different texts, it is clear that textual form influences how Kelly has been represented and how we understand him as a historical figure. In all texts, including the ‘factual’ documentary, the composers have made deliberate choices to present their understanding of his character. In True History of the Kelly Gang, Carey gives us a man who is flawed and dangerous, but unable to admit it to himself; Stewart’s Kelly is a potential hero who has been defeated by personal shortcomings, in the manner of stage heroes of the past; and the archaeological documentary shows us a hero of the oppressed. What these texts also tell us is that language and ideas are inherently untruthful, or at least inadequate, because of the limitations of individual perspective, bias and context.

Follow up

Look up the Notes from the Marking Centre and the Marking Guidelines for the 2010 Examination (on the Board of Studies website). Use these guidelines to identify what was valued and to assess the sample 2010 responses.