

Getting the Most from Your MA

Abigail Gilmore
Director, PGT

School of Arts, Languages & Cultures

www.alc.manchester.ac.uk/graduateschool

Content

- Introduction
- **Exercise 1: the Bigger Picture**
- Building your professional profile
- The Intellectual Leap
- The Practical Leap
- **Exercise 2: Getting Research-Ready**
- The Personal Leap
- Questions

About one and half hours with discussion

Objectives

To improve your capacity to understand what and how you are learning and to review, plan and take responsibility for your own learning

This will help you to:

- become a more effective, independent and confident self directed learner;
- understand how you learn best and relate that learning to a wider context;
- improve your career management skills (*your career* includes a PhD if appropriate)

Some initial tips

What you get out of your MA will depend on your own unique ambitions, experience and skills

Keep the **bigger picture** in mind

Keep a written record

- skills acquired and required
- progression and experiences through your MA
- key contacts and resources

Exercise1:

Building your 'bigger picture'

- Why are you doing an MA? Why this MA? Why the University of Manchester?
- What do you expect from the next year (or two for p.t. students)?
- Are there any other ambitions you hope to achieve during this time?
- What do you expect from your lecturers, the University and yourself?
- What obstacles or difficulties do you anticipate during your MA?
- What are you most looking forward to?
- Do you know what job you might like to do when you finish your MA? What industry you might work in? What career path you might follow?
- Would you like to study for a PhD? If so what programme? Do you intend to apply for funding? Who might supervise you?
- What do you want to be able to say about yourself, your abilities and your plans for the future at the end of the MA?

Try to find 3 key words for each – in pairs – 10 minutes

So, what is an MA?

- A bridge...not 'the end of the line'
- More responsibility
- A chance to develop & practice transferrable skills
- Opportunity to build professional profile & networks and work with professionals

You will need to:

- Be self-managed, self-directed
- Be prepared, plan for meetings & seminars
- Have your own agenda

Some agility required...

Leaping...

The intellectual leap involves exploring horizons, seeing the big picture of your discipline and beyond, being original, pushing boundaries, developing your own ideas and using others'

The practical leap involves researching your essays, producing an MA-level research project, bibliographies, quality of writing, IT skills

The personal leap involves developing your interpersonal skills, managing your own time, solving your own problems, career development

The Intellectual Leap

What are the 'horizons' of your discipline?

What is epistemology, and what are the big epistemological issues in your discipline?

What have been the main methodological innovations recently? How have they challenged and changed the practice of your discipline? With whom are they associated?

Resources: Departmental Research Seminars, Journals,
<http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/ourservices/>

The Practical Leap

- Using electronic resources, search engines
- Finding your subject's key publishers and journals
- Building research networks
- Avoiding plagiarism
- Producing an innovative research project

Resources: John Rylands University Library, 'Google Scholar', JSTOR,
<http://www.artsmethods.manchester.ac.uk/>

Exercise 2: Producing an Innovative Research Project

What are the key practical areas which you need to address to ensure effective research design & preparation?

What are the main things that you will need to consider before embarking on your research project?

How will you ensure it is original, robust and well-conceived?

In pairs, try to identify 5 key areas in 10 minutes

The Personal Leap

- What are you going to get out of the MA *in addition* to the qualification? What other skills are you going to develop? What skills do you need to develop to achieve your ambitions?
- Where do you think you're most likely to encounter difficulties or stress in the project you've undertaken? Think well outside the classroom...

Some final tips

- Grow your professional networks, including outside of the University
- Engage with your wider research community – go to conferences and seminars & set objectives for what you want from these events
- Develop your project management skills
- Get used to presenting your work in public
- Work on your English, written and spoken
- Learn your ‘elevator script’ – how to concisely articulate your MA (skills, knowledge, experience, specialisms) to others
- Don’t forget to socialise too!

(if time – practice elevator script; questions)