

## CHAPTER 2

# Why we study and setting goals

You've arrived! You are back at university, now for a Masters in Media and Communications. It might have been some time since you last studied, or maybe you have followed directly on from an undergraduate degree, but the questions are the same, why are you here? Should you have come? And how will you survive? Have no fear! This chapter starts by exploring these very questions, before taking us on a whistle stop introduction to goal setting, time management and how to stave off procrastination.

Media and Communications is an exciting field, helping us to come to terms with many of the things that define what it is to be human. To understand how we communicate – from the earliest times, through to the internet and social media – is to understand the history of humanity. And as the world becomes ever more mediated, that is how it becomes increasingly defined and controlled through technology, the study of Media and Communications becomes ever more important. The world, too can sometimes seem overwhelming, with the politics of fear and fake news influencing the way we live. And with stories of the psychological damage caused by social media and the 24-hour news cycle invading our homes and pockets, it can push us to want to hide from the world, and to feel powerless. A Masters degree in Media Studies though is designed to question and challenge these thoughts, helping you to think about what we mean by 'the media' and to question how we might study it. There are lots of different ways we can approach this, we can examine Media as technology, as a way of making meaning, through theories of everyday life, or workplace, as something that brings pleasure, or even as a destructive force. During your studies you might examine media production and organisation, analysis of media output, consumption, or even to ask bigger questions about the issue of media in society. These are approaches that will also be explored through a wide range of long standing debates and theories including 'political economy',

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‘critical race studies’, ‘psychoanalysis’, ‘feminist media theory’, and these you will have to apply to all kinds of mediums, including radio, TV, cinema, internet, newspaper, advertising, and music). Throughout all of this, you will need to consider the way in which Media and Communications both reflect on, and shape and change the world around us. Given the range and complexity of (often) new ideas you will be exploring, it is worth considering near the beginning of the course what your inspiration is, as this will help you to keep a motivation and drive throughout your studies. For me, when I write, I have the works of Rosa Luxemburg (2004) or George Orwell (1946) swimming around my mind. Both inspire me as to why to write:



When I was studying (a long time ago when I was young and handsome), and in my work now (where I am old and greyer) these words were, and remain a great inspiration. They don't have to be your drive, and writing, as we will see later, isn't the sole aim of your studies, but understanding the impetus for your work is essential. So, before we get too far into the book, have a think about what it is that brought you to do a degree in Media and Communications. It might be to challenge working practices, to question the way women or certain groups of people are treated in the media industry, or you wanted to know about how the way we communicate affects our lives. It might be to learn how to better run a company, or push into new fields and new markets. It might be that you want to explore ethics in AI or develop a deeper understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of Media and Communications. Or maybe another year of access to the cheap student bar. Take a moment to think about what brought you here, to these studies, and make some notes in the box below. Your motivation may change over the course of your degree, but it is good to have a starting point.



I am doing this degree because.....

Whatever you have written above, a Masters degree is designed to give you a chance to find, and then explore your passions in depth, with the guidance of your lecturers and tutors. To do this effectively though, it is essential to know how you will manage your time, to look after yourself and plan your studies to ensure you have the space to read, write, think, experiment and take joy from your university experience.

### Managing your time

There have been many embarrassing moments in my life, but one that I am willing to share with you, here in these pages, is about the time I downloaded an audio book about how to manage time better. It was a free download (the best things in life are free to download), and I was eager to find out how I was going to reorganize my life to ensure I met my deadlines, attended parties, slept and kept my sanity. That podcast sat on the desktop of my laptop for months. A note to listen to it appeared on my to-do list. The podcast got transferred to a new laptop, and then to another new laptop. Eventually, it was deleted, unheard, advice unheeded, and leaving a rather strange sense of failure.

Clearly the podcast was too long, the daunting task of sitting down to listen to it for a whole 20 minutes(!) was just too much to bear and so it never happened. Throughout your studies there are going to be many of these kinds of moments, moments when you think, I haven't got time for that now, so I will save it for later. You may even be thinking that about this book. A Masters degree is a huge undertaking, and so it is worth thinking carefully about how to carve out some space for both reading and writing as well as other aspects of studying – and while we are here, let's carve out some space for parties, socializing, networking and enjoying the place in which you are studying – after all, you have already read a handful of pages of this book, so you deserve it.

As with all aspects of academic work, the first job is to identify the problem, only then can we seek a solution. So, take a few minutes to think about the biggest time management issues you have. Perhaps there is a specific time when things didn't work, perhaps there is something that is always a distraction? Write some of your ideas down in the space below – don't worry, you have time.



My time management issues are:

There are lots of reasons that we might struggle to manage our time well, and you may have identified slightly different ones to those which I will mention here, but many of our time management issues come from the same kind of place, the place where podcasts about time management go to die. That is, that we worry that we don't have time to finish something, and so we don't start it. And then, after many weeks have passed we find the deadline has appeared and we still have to do the work, but now, WE DON'T HAVE TIME!

The best way around this is to think of your degree as a job (sorry that sounds boring). Not a real job of course, but a job where you get to read and discuss ideas all day, a job where you get to make suggestions and put forward ideas and a job that often comes with lots of great social benefits (sounds better). It is though nonetheless a job (sorry).

How do we get ourselves into that state of mind? Well, we could get up each morning and put on a tie (or not) and fancy shoes and walk to the library for a 9am start and then leave again at 5:30pm, but that isn't really how people work best. People all work a little differently and at different times of the day. Furthermore, you have classes, your sports club, your band plays on Thursdays, and your mum comes to visit every Friday. Whatever it is, things get in the way of a 9–5 approach to a degree. Instead we need to build a custom weekly plan that will help us to keep on top of our work.

Following is a weekly planner to help you with this, and we are going to fill it in step by step using a template to create our own 9–5.

1. The first step is to add your classes onto the timetable. Block these out in one colour.
2. Now add any paid job that you might have (studying is an expensive business).
3. If you have a club or something that you just can't give up, then block this out too.

By now you might have something that looks like that in figure 2.1. We have added all the things that just can't be moved, and that we need to place our independent study around.

Here comes the hard part, now we are going to add in study time. But wait! It is not as simple as just saying all the other parts are study time; that is where things often go wrong. We can't study 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and without some careful consideration we might be wasting our best working moments. Instead, we need to think carefully about a few things:

- What time of day do you work best?
- Can you get up in the morning?

Time	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
6-7							
7-8							
8-9							
9-10						Job	
10-11		Lecture		Lecture			
11-12							
12-13							
13-14							
14-15	Lecture	Lecture					
15-16				Training			
16-17							
17-18							
18-19							
19-20							
20-21							
21-22							
22-23							
23-00							

**Figure 2.1:** Unmoveable events.

- Can you work after class, or are you too tired?
- Can you work late at night?
- If you can work at night, are you likely to get distracted by more exciting plans?

For me, I like to work in the mornings and I know I can't work well after I have given a class as my brain is too tired, so I block out periods of working time that are in the mornings, and so my weekly plan looks more that in figure 2.2.

Note that I still have a good 20 hours of study time in this picture, along with 15 hours of lectures. This makes for a 35 hour week; not even quite a

Time	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
6-7							
7-8	Study		Study		Study	Job	
8-9							
9-10							
10-11		Lecture		Lecture			Lecture
11-12							
12-13							
13-14			Study				
14-15	Lecture	Lecture		Training			
15-16							
16-17							
17-18							
18-19							
19-20							
20-21							
21-22							
22-23							
23-00							

**Figure 2.2:** Adding in study time.

full time job. And furthermore, I am always finished my independent study by 6pm, when my brain starts to slow down and often insists I stop writing. Understanding that something that takes me three hours to do of an evening will only take one hour with a fresh brain in the morning really helps me to manage my time. For you it might be different, you might work best at night and need a long time to wake up. The important thing is to take this into consideration in your planning. So, think carefully about when you work best and add this to your chart.

Weekly work planner							
Building a custom weekly plan that will help us to keep on top of our work. Add your classes, work commitments and clubs first, then block out space every week to complete assignments and reading – then stick to this, don't try more, and don't do less.							
Time	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
6 - 7							
7 - 8							
8 - 9							
9 - 10							
10 - 11							
11 - 12							
12 - 13							
13 - 14							
14 - 15							
15 - 16							
16 - 17							
17 - 18							
18 - 19							
19 - 20							
20 - 21							
21 - 22							
22 - 23							
23 - 00							

Figure 2.3: Planner.

This is a great start. We have a solid frame work from which to begin. Sticking to this routine will not only help you keep on target, it will also stop you from burning out. The secret is to work at the times you said you would, even in a week with less assignments, and not work when you said you won't. However, we all know that that is easier said than done. There is still always the creeping

issue of procrastination. That constant risk of getting nothing done at all. What is to be done about this?



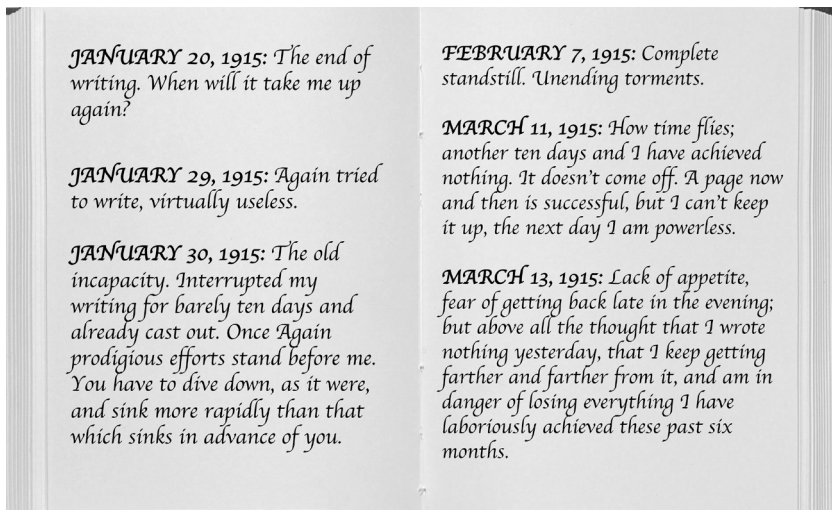
Treat your studies as a day job. That really helped me plan how to read, and save some time for family engagements and part-time work.

Alfonse – MA Media and Development

## Procrastination

A degree involves a huge amount of self-discipline, and thus the spectre of procrastination is never far away, but what is it really? And how can you avoid it? Or at the very least keep it at bay for the time you are undertaking your studies? Having a good timetable like that above is a good start, but there are a few other things we can do too, and that is what this section is going to be all about. So, stop watching Netflix, no need to pair up all your socks, your kitchen doesn't need cleaning right this minute, instead let's work on some tactics together, because unlike Mozart, most of us aren't capable of writing the overture to *Don Giovanni* the morning of the premiere (he really did).

First, it is important to know the issue isn't unique to you. All students, lecturers and writers suffer this to some extent. Even famous writers such as Franz Kafka agonized over their writing and how it didn't always come easily, as we can see from these extracts from his diary in 1915.

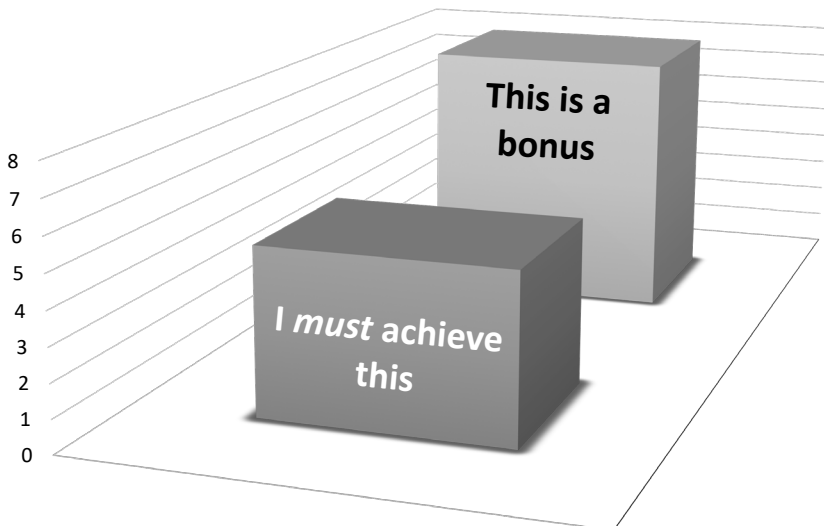


**Figure 2.4:** Kafka's diary.



So then, what do we do to stave off procrastination, to keep to our study plan and to ensure that we are able to meet all our deadlines and are able to enjoy our time studying without slipping into Kafka's desperation. We all start our studies, as well as New Years, and most new projects, with very high expectations. 'This time', we tell ourselves, 'is the time we will work perfectly.' This plan though, can actually get in the way of our work. Giving so much importance to the work you are about to do can make it much harder to get into the flow, or to stay there. You can become over self-critical and this can stop you from working. One way to try and overcome this is to use the two-goal approach. When our expectations are too high we don't feel comfortable setting realistic goals, we might feel we are not pushing ourselves hard enough. To solve this, we should set ourselves two sets of goals. One is a realistic one, the other is what we might call a stretch goal.

For example, the realistic goal might be to read five articles (or write 1000 words, or edit five minutes of video). The stretch goal might be to read eight articles (or write 1500 words, or edit eight minutes of video). So, if you manage to read five articles, you get that great feeling of achieving your goal, and can rest easy. If, however, you manage more, that is a bonus (Whoop!) This little psychological trick you play on yourself can help you manage the balance between high expectations and achievable goals.



**Figure 2.5:** Number of articles to read.

Not managing this balance can lead to your passion waning, because not meeting your own high expectations leads to disappointment. To deal with this we

succumb to other ideas and start doing things we know we can achieve – like watching a whole boxset in one sitting. This is something that can then become a habit. To avoid this, it is important to remember why the topic interested you when you started it, and even when the topic isn't so interesting to you, it is important to keep going, to push through the desire to stop the project. Looking back at your thoughts on your motivations to help you regain that focus. Pushing through the desire to stop, and instead keeping on track with your work (and here comes the science part) actually changes the neurological pathways in your brain, and repeatedly finishing projects rather than dropping them builds up good neural habits that will mean it gets easier and easier to stave off procrastination (Duhigg, 2012). Using your timetable from the previous pages will help with this.

### **Make your tech a little more humane**

Smartphones are great, but they can become a bit of a distraction, but just suggesting you turn it off for a year isn't too helpful. Luckily the Centre for Humane Technology provides us with some great tips about how to take control of our smartphones in a way that means we can still use them, but they won't be competing for our attention. They suggest, turning off notifications that aren't from people, and changing your icons to grey scale, to stop them leaping out at you when you are just checking the time. Try making only the essential apps appear on your home screen, even going as far as making some apps only launchable by typing their whole name. They have loads of other great tips, and also provide a range of apps to help you take control of your smartphone. Go check them out!

**[humanetech.com/take-control](http://humanetech.com/take-control)**

Despite this, at least once in your studies you are likely to experience burn-out. This isn't writers block, this isn't procrastination, this is that you are totally exhausted. You can limit the chances of this happening by following the advice above, but should it occur there is only one way to solve this, and that is to give yourself a few days rest. This is a tricky one though. Yes, you need to rest, to go for dinner with friends, take long walks, or watch some films. This, though, only works if you truly take a break. You need to not work at all in this time. Do not stare at the screen – trying to work builds up a cycle of guilt, followed by not fully resting, which is again followed by being unable to work. The only way to break this cycle is to stop totally. Decide how long you will need, a few days perhaps, and then step away from all your studies, totally and fully. You will come back with a new passion, and be able to work faster and harder.

The final issue faced by Masters students is just being too distracted. And of course you are. A new city, new friends, new ideas and thousands of adventures

to be had, inside and outside your mind. You may also be distracted by being sick, having to take a job, looking after children, or many other aspects of life. However, unless you are taking a total break to recover from burn-out, you should try and keep some sort of work going. Continue to read books related to the subject you are studying and keep a notebook to jot down ideas, even if you don't have time to work on them right now, you will later, and this will keep your mind working on the issues you are studying. It is also good to adjust your writing schedule to consider unavoidable distractions as they occur. Learning your best way of learning is an ongoing process and will evolve during the year, so keep your working schedule current to help you find the right times to grow into being a fantastic scholar and researcher. Novelist Chinua Achebe says:



I believe myself that a good writer doesn't really need to be told anything except to keep at it.

CHINUA ACHEBE

### Types of assessment

Before we get too far into the book, it is probably worth a short note on the types of assessment you might be asked to undertake. Generally assessments fall into two types, those for formative, and summative. You will probably hear your lecturers talk about these, and they will likely have these names in module and course handbooks. But what are they and what does it mean for you? Well, in simple terms one goes towards your grade, and the other doesn't. Why would you do an assessment that doesn't add to your grade? Well the formative assessments, without a mark, are designed to help you and your tutor discover how your learning is going, what things might need improving, and where you could seek help. It also helps tutors to change the direction of a class if there is something that lots of people do not understand. Summative assessments on the other hand, are designed to test your skills and knowledge and to give you marks. Both are really important, and both should be taken seriously. Formative work really helps with reflection, too (see chapter 6).

## Other study tips

Before we get right into the nitty gritty of doing your degree over the next eleven chapters, let's look at some general tips to help you sustain your studies, many of these will also help you in your life in general, and the workplace. Whatever your working schedule, you must take regular breaks (perhaps try the Pomodoro Technique, see p. 19). Think about where you are working; try not to work in bed, so you have a separate space to rest. Consider whether you prefer working in the library, the kitchen table, your desk or in a café. Once you know your best working space (this might be different for different types of work), stick to this – I like to do emails and admin work in public spaces, but I need music to write and silence to edit, so I ensure I move around when working on different parts of a project. Also, think about the light and temperature in the room you are working in. Consider spending a little money on a good lamp – Michel Foucault, the French philosopher and social theorist, used to take his own to libraries and lectures. You should also break tasks down into smaller chunks or sub-tasks – there are some pages to help you do this at the end of this book. You can also use technology to help you with this, there are loads of task management apps available, although trying them all out can become a form of productive procrastination, so be careful! One piece of technology you should certainly take advantage of though is your university's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). These come in many forms, such as Blackboard or Canvas, but essentially these are all places where content from lectures and assessments are collected together. You should ensure you are familiar with these tools, and where resources are located to help your studies flow more smoothly. And finally, eat regularly, and try to eat well, while also enjoying what you eat. Most importantly, drink plenty of water. Your brain needs water to work, so stay hydrated wherever you are working. And always follow the advice of sociologist Theodor Adorno:



Work while you work,  
play while you play.

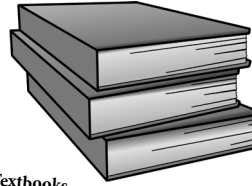
THEODOR W. ADORNO

## The Media Students' Tool Bag



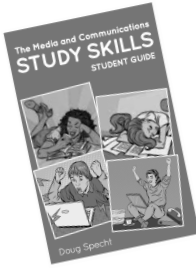
### A smartphone

There are loads of great apps available to help you with your studies now – a smartphone also helps you keep a good diary and can be used as a recorder in interviews.



### Textbooks

Well, maybe not all of them ... or else your bag will be too heavy, but buying the core book for a course or module can help you avoid fights or fines at the library.



### This book

Keep referring back here to help you with all kinds of tasks.



### Highlighters

Sometimes helpful, sometimes not, but handy to have a few.



### USB drive

While most stuff is done in the cloud now, having a USB stick in your bag can be handy for quickly sharing files with classmates or staff.



### Google Docs

Shared documents mean easier collaboration with your classmates, having access to the cloud will make group work and collective note taking easier.



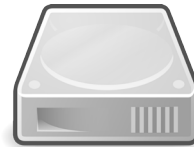
### Notebook and pen

It can be easier to get notes down in a lecture using a pen, and there are less distractions than your laptop.



### A laptop

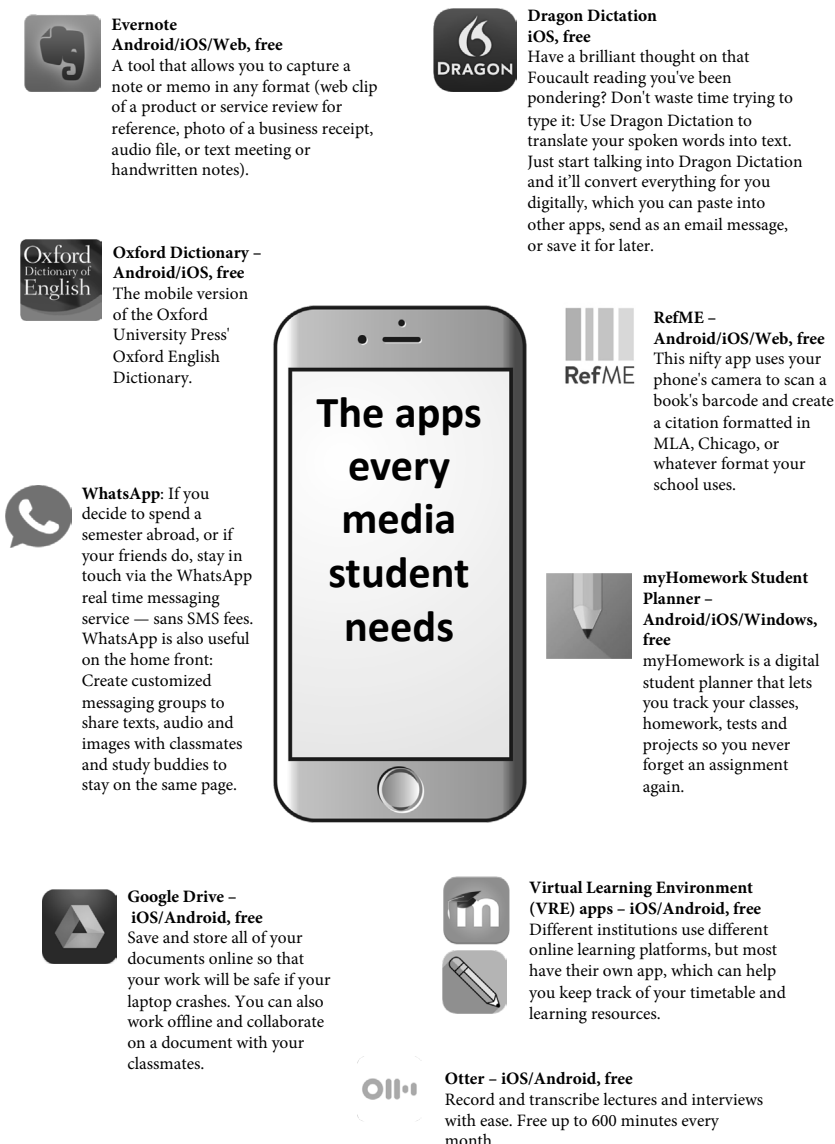
Your essays will need to be typed, so a laptop helps. You can also install lots of programmes to help with organisation and referencing. Most libraries will lend laptops, but remember to backup.



### External hard drive

You might not want to keep this in your bag, but you should back up your work often. The cloud often isn't big enough for films and other media work, so a good hard drive could be a life saver.

Figure 2.6: The media students' tool bag.



**Figure 2.7:** The apps every media student needs.



The Pomodoro Technique is a time management method developed by Francesco Cirillo in the late 1980s. The technique uses a timer to break down work into intervals, traditionally 25 minutes in length, separated by short breaks. These intervals are named pomodoros, the plural in English of the Italian word pomodoro (tomato), after the tomato-shaped kitchen timer that Cirillo used as a university student, when he devised the technique.

Adapted from MyLearnMBA (2017)

Now we have some good working habits under our belt, or in our back pocket, or wherever you are keeping them, it is now time to look at all the aspects of the work you will be undertaking. The following chapters are designed to build upon each other, but you will also be undertaking many of these tasks simultaneously, so it is worth going through the whole book, and then coming back to each section as you need. I'll see you in chapter 3!

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