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Managing your transition to masters

CHAPTER CONCEPTS

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- KEEPING A RESEARCH DIARY AND A LEARNING LOG ● SUMMARY OF THIS CHAPTER ● FURTHER READING

Starting a new course at a new university can be a daunting prospect with so much to arrange and do and many unfamiliar people and places to get used to. Postgraduate study can be very different from what you have done before in level, intensity and the expectations your tutors will have of you. You will find that your status, as a masters student, will set you apart from the undergraduates – who will either look up to you or wonder why you have voluntarily signed up to do more study. Your status brings with it expectations that you will behave as a member of a scholarly research community and as such exhibit a mature attitude, bring a set of personal and professional qualities to your work and be part of a collegial group made up of your peers and the departmental staff. The basis of this chapter comes from long experience in a number of universities teaching many postgraduates. It tries to cover many of the most obvious points about being organized, but for whatever reasons are often the cause of problems for students. Some of the main questions for this chapter are:

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- 1 How can you prepare for doing your masters research?
- 2 With so much to do, what are some of the ways to manage time and resources?
- 3 What kind of project management system will you need?

The intent therefore, while it may seem a little patronizing in parts and makes assumptions that students have families, is to look at how you might manage the transition to becoming a postgraduate, at how to become an active member of the research community, at life issues, and at how to set up a management system for the substantial amounts of information you will generate when doing your dissertation.

Transition to study

Moving from undergraduate to postgraduate study or from the workplace into the academic environment is like starting a new life. Many things, people, procedures and even finding your way around may, at first, be difficult. Added to this is the tendency for most masters courses to be intensive, even though they last for one to three years. For full-time students the norm is a 12-month course and for the part-time student 24 to 36 months. It is normal for the dissertation element of masters courses to begin, for full-time students, after the first semester, and for part-time students in the second half of year two. This means you may have about six to nine months to complete your dissertation on the full-time mode and between 24 to 36 on the part-time mode. It is essential, therefore, that you adapt quickly to your new environment and position and this means managing the transition to being a masters student in two to three weeks.

MANAGING THE TRANSITION AS A PROJECT

One way of approaching the transition is to see it as an opportunity to practise your project management skills and to exercise some of your personal qualities. You need to define the objectives for the transition period, and these will be:

- ◆ to become familiar with the geography of the university, especially the department;
- ◆ to become familiar with the procedures governing your course, especially the dissertation;

- ◆ **to get to know who is who among the staff, how to contact them, what roles and responsibilities they have, especially the course director, and do not forget to find out who the departmental secretary is and where their office is; and**
- ◆ **to identify and check on important dates, especially for submission of course work.**

It is seldom that any student has the time before their course to get to know the department. It is therefore important to gather as much information as you can on any initial visits, such as open days and interview days. As you are the 'customer' you have the right to make reasonable requests for all necessary information about the course you will be doing including staff lists, timetables and maps. It is now usual for most good universities to provide pre-start packs that contain most of the information you will need for your first couple of weeks. It is important to read your 'course handbook', as it is sometimes called, before you start – do not file it away, as it contains important information that tutors will expect you to know before you start your course.

GET TO KNOW THE STAFF

One of the key activities for you in the first week is to get to know the staff who are significant contributors to or administrators of your course. Normally there will be a time in the first week when you and your peers are introduced to the department, usually over some social function. Use this to go around and introduce yourself personally to each member of staff, talking to them about their speciality and about research they may be doing. This will be one of your first rounds of 'networking' in your new community.

Getting to know staff will help you in a number of ways, including:

- ◆ **being able to ask questions without feeling awkward because they do not know you;**
- ◆ **going to see them about research ideas you have for your dissertation;**
- ◆ **borrowing materials for your research and reading; and**
- ◆ **seeking pastoral support for your learning and course work, especially when things are not going to plan and you feel you need to talk to someone.**

Departments with an 'open culture' normally support what is called the open-door policy. This is when you do not need to make an appointment to see a member of staff

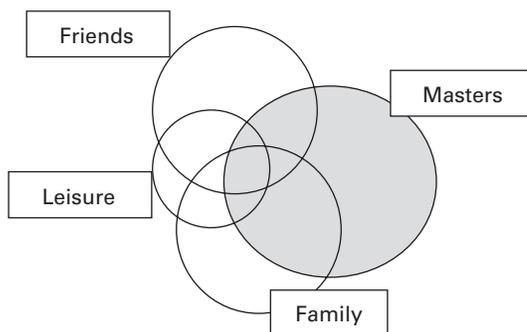


FIGURE 2.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR MASTERS IN YOUR LIFE

if it's a quick question. However, if you think you will need more than five minutes, make an appointment to guarantee the time with them. Access to staff is therefore important. So ensure you have the information on how to contact individual staff via telephone, e-mail, post and fax and also the departmental secretary. Use these methods to keep staff informed of your activities, especially if you are unable to attend a scheduled tutorial or class or you want to seek advice on a research idea. It helps staff if they have some idea of your research idea before you turn up to discuss it. E-mailing it to them in advance will allow them to think about it and to give you better feedback when you see them.

MANAGE YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Most people have a range of commitments outside university – family, friends and leisure activities, and, of course, paid work. Trying to keep up with all your usual activities simultaneously with doing your masters may not be possible and you may need to give up some things while you are studying. Try also to keep a balance between your study and other commitments, family, friends and social life generally.

Figure 2.1 shows the main spheres of most people's lives when they embark on doing a masters course. As you can see, the masters element is not only larger than the others but overlaps them. This is intended to show how doing a masters takes time away from the others to become the most dominant and demanding part of your life while you are on your course. There are two approaches you can take to this situation. One is to ignore all your family and friends and have no social life to focus exclusively on your masters work. Some people do this believing their masters research is their life. If this 'works' for you then this is fine, but do not be pressured by others into this form

of existence. What we mean by this is that peer students will often exaggerate how much time they devote to their research, making it seem that you are spending too much time on other things. To suddenly drop all you have done before, the people you know and your leisure activities (hobbies and interests) to focus on your research can be unhealthy both mentally and physically and can therefore impact on the very thing – your masters research – that you sacrificed so much for. Any activity, including research, which largely excludes all others is excessive and can become compulsive behaviour, and when this happens you may need your family and friends to help you recover.

The second approach you may take, and the one we strongly recommend, is to see your research as a part of your life for now, as something that will be over in a relatively short period of time. This means, if you can, involving your family and friends in your ambitions, even if it is simply telling them about what you are doing, but not in too much detail as this will probably make you seem like a bore. By letting the significant people in your life know about your ambition they are more likely to believe they are a part of it and give the necessary support when you need it. This often ranges from taking the children to the park for a couple of hours while you work on some data analysis or taking you to the pub for some needed relief, to the ultimate help, which is proofreading something you have written. Never turn this kind of help away when it is offered because to do so may mean it is not offered again. As an aside, it can often be said that without the support of family and friends many students would not complete their masters – especially those doing it part-time. Husbands, wives and partners will often know your dissertation as well as you do and as such they deserve some form of qualification because it is they who have made sacrifices and taken on extra responsibilities so that you can do your masters. Having said this, do be prepared for the ‘Educating Rita’ situation. This is when people close to you, for whatever reason, resent what you are trying to achieve for yourself.

Suggestions for organizing yourself

It is important therefore to maintain your domestic life by finding ways to manage your time and the expectations others can reasonably have of your energies while you are doing your masters research. Whatever way you do this, it is usually tied to your particular personal circumstances, but I, from my own experience, suggest the following points – based on planning your activities and the expectations others may have of you – as suggestions you may wish to use.

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- ◆ ***Plan the year*** When possible plan ahead. This means long- and short-term planning. Long term when you start your masters, draw up a timetable so you and your family know what commitments you will have and when. Things to include are deadlines for course work, times for attending university and, importantly, blocks of time you will need for work in the library or at home for study. Remember to build in to your schedule holiday time because you and your family and friends will need an occasional break from your masters research. If you go away from home for your holiday, say abroad; one thing we strongly advise against is taking work with you. Sitting on the beach reading a text book or, even worse, doing work on a lap-top computer, is very sad.
- ◆ ***Plan weekly and for the next day*** On a weekly and daily basis make lists of what needs to be done. This means listing many of your normal routines and domestic tasks so as not to forget them, as this can easily be done when you are doing research. Do the same for your course-related tasks, listing what you need to do this week especially for major tasks coming up in a few weeks or a couple of months' time. This may include ordering books from the library to doing initial preparatory reading on a topic. As you achieve each task cross it off your list. There is a significant motivational boost to achieving even the simplest objectives so try to achieve some each day, especially the necessary ones.
- ◆ ***Get organized*** Do not leave until tomorrow what you can do today. Get yourself into a routine based on preparing what you can before you need it. This includes preparing the night before the obvious things, such as clothes for college and food to take with you, to packing your case with the necessary books, pens and paper. Disorganization is no virtue to someone trying to manage an intensive course of study and a life.
- ◆ ***Take for-me-days*** Occasionally, when you need some respite take what we call 'for-me-days'. These are days that are just for you and no one or anything else. The idea is if a day becomes available when other jobs can wait, take it for yourself and do whatever you want. Such days help you bring a sense of control and normality back to what may often seem like a hectic schedule.
- ◆ ***Sleeping and eating*** Getting enough sleep and eating good foods are essential for body and mind. You cannot function at your optimum levels if you are tired or are lacking basic sustenance. For part-time masters students the one day and evening per week attendance can be extremely tiring. There is so much to cram

into the day in between formal classes and tutorials that pacing yourself becomes an important part of your attitude for managing yourself. This may mean finding suitable places where you can take a 20–30 minute nap in the middle of the day. Short sleeps in the day and before an evening session can be very beneficial. They will rejuvenate your mental ability and ensure that you maximize your time in classes. This may also mean ensuring you get enough sleep the day before college, taking care with alcohol the night before as this will severely impair your concentration because it will make you tired the next day. Remember not to work too late into the evening as this may also make you over-tired the next day. From our experience it is often good to set a time when you do not work beyond, such as 9.30 p.m. Also before you finish for a session make brief notes on what you need to do next, so that when you pick up a piece of work the next day you do not spend time thinking about where you were and what you were doing, but have a clear set of tasks to get on with.

Although some of these suggestions may seem a little patronizing the intention is to help you maximize what you can get out of your time, as an investment you are making in yourself, doing a masters. They are the general philosophy I follow that works for me. You need to find out what works for you. Planning and organizing your time and yourself will help you to avoid drifting and wasting, what is to you, valuable time and limited energies.

MANAGING YOUR TIME

You probably know a substantial amount about managing your time and, like most of us, know of the frustrations of making the most of our time and thinking that we can find more if only we tried harder. Many of the anxieties we face in modern life are time-related, caused by us not having enough time to do everything we would like and sometimes need to do. You cannot find any more time than you already have. Time is a finite resource that cannot be saved, increased or bought. You can, however, make more effective and efficient use of the time you already have. If we take this as our starting point we can begin to look at how we may reorganize our activities and this means changing some of our behaviours and the claim others have on our time.

The starting point for using your time more effectively and efficiently is finding the motivation and self-discipline to alter some of your behaviours and radically change some habits. Breaking any habit is not easily done, but it is often our habits which contribute to some of our anxieties about time. Making some very basic alterations to

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	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning	Domestic stuff	Study 2 hours	Free	Shopping	Domestic stuff	Shopping	Free
Afternoon	Work 1-4 p.m.	Work 1-4 p.m.	Work 1-4 p.m.	Work 1-4 p.m.	Work 1-4 p.m.	Study 2 hours	Free
Evening	Keep fit	Study 2 hours	Classes 1 hour	Classes 1 hour	Study 2 hours	Socializing	Free

FIGURE 2.2 RECORD OF TIME USE

habits and behaviours will give you a pay-off in terms of 'time-space' to do the things you need to do and will give you a sense that it is you who controls your time and not others. From my own experience I offer the following suggestions on how you may better manage the time that belongs to you.

Get to know how you use your time

You need to look carefully at how you use your time. This means making a record, over a week or two, of your time use so you can analyse your behaviours. A simple log in the form of a chart will give you the data you need. Figure 2.2 shows a typical time log that will show you how you are currently using your time, while Table 2.1 will help you to identify behaviours and factors you allow to eat into your time.

Looking at this weekly schedule we can see that this person has about 10 hours for study. But in reality this may not be the case, as they allow a range of distractions and other people to take some of this valuable time. Therefore this person needs to:

- ◆ **see what they can take out of their weekly schedule;**
- ◆ **minimize some of the distractions; and**
- ◆ **minimize the claims others have on their time.**

To implement some of these may not be popular with family and friends. But as we said earlier, if they support you then making small sacrifices in the claims they have on your time and even taking on some of your tasks and responsibilities are ways in which they can show their support. Figure 2.3 shows a revised weekly schedule and a

TABLE 2.1 ANALYSING DISTRACTIONS

Interruptions	No	Yes	Actions to minimize
Telephone – I always answer it and people often call me.		✓	Get an answer machine. Do not answer the phone during certain times of the day/night.
Prioritizing – I often try to do too many things at once, many of which are trivial tasks.		✓	Grade tasks into A tasks (urgent), B tasks (important), C tasks (not important). Do the A tasks in order and plan the B tasks. Leave the C tasks.
Visitors – people tend to call on me, at home, at work, unannounced and often only for a chat.		✓	Let people know when you are not available and if they still call on you strictly limit the time they take from you.
Deadlines – usually something comes up so I miss some.		✓	Plan as far ahead as possible for research tasks and all other important tasks. Establish time in your schedule to gather the information you need for tasks coming up in the medium term future.
Procrastination – is what I do best. I tend to put things off or find other things to do rather than what is important.		✓	Say no to distractions. Get into a routine of working certain times of the day. Set targets for each study session. Stop making excuses, you are responsible for yourself.

list of actions the person intends to take to minimize distractions and the claims others have on their time.

Implement the main principles of time management

It is from these simple data and analysis that anyone can begin to re-claim the time that rightfully belongs to them. This may seem a little harsh but your time is like your money – why give it away or waste it so freely except, of course, on those goals, activities and persons in your life which are important? Managing your time therefore has a number of implications which will affect people close to you, but also how you are

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	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning	Domestic stuff	Study 3 hours	Study 3 hours	Shopping	Domestic stuff	Study 2 hours	Study 3 hours
Afternoon	Work 1-4 p.m.	Work 1-4 p.m.	Work 1-4 p.m.	Work 1-4 p.m.	Work 1-4 p.m.	Shopping	Free
Evening	Keep fit	Study 2 hours	Classes	Classes	Study 2 hours	Socializing	Free

FIGURE 2.3 REVISED WEEKLY SCHEDULE

seen and how you see yourself. Getting the balance between the different and competing elements of making life acceptable is what time management is about. Allocating and managing the time for these kinds of activities may, at times, be about managing the conflict between them and overcoming your want to do something other than what needs to be done. The following principles, shown in Table 2.2, may help you to manage such conflicts and at the same time change your time-using behaviours.

Implementing some of these suggestions and ones you think of may be a little painful at first. This is because we all miss things which we have become used to doing, but often when we reflect on these things we realize there was no real reason for doing them in the first place. You will have this time to do other, more important, things which will give you a better quality of life because you will be doing more real activities that are investments in your life and those around you.

MANAGING YOUR SPACE

A part of being organized is having a space of your own at home. Your research will generate a substantial amount of material which you need to have at hand to consult and the space to use. Articles, books, questionnaires, coding sheets, notes, card indexes, research diaries, literature search profiles, along with various stationery, take up space. We suggest that you make a space for a desk somewhere in your home. The key point is, get space for yourself to work in that is recognized as yours and which is not to be

TABLE 2.2 KEY PRINCIPLES OF TIME MANAGEMENT

Key principles	What they mean	Putting them into practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do what is important. 	Do not spend time on low-priority tasks and unnecessary activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize your tasks. Use daily and weekly task lists. Say 'no', do not take on extra work or responsibilities. Do not aim for perfection. Stop doing some things like watching soaps on television.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct your effort and energies. 	20% of most effort results in 80% of activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get organized so as not to waste time looking for things. Plan your time use in advanced, but do not think planning is doing. Do important intellectual tasks when you are at your best in the day. Do not procrastinate by doing pleasing jobs which have no value to your research. Know what you are meant to be doing and do it. Finish things and do not leave them. Set deadlines and monitor them – even use a timer with an alarm. Have a strict routine for domestic tasks and stick to it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce time wastage. 	Using too much time for some tasks takes time that could be used for your research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set time limits for meetings with supervisors. Remove distractions from your study space. Minimize interruptions. When you finish one job set up the next for your next study session. Prepare in advance, e.g. food, clothes.

Source: Adapted from Cameron, 1997: ch. 5.

disturbed. When setting up your space the following are suggestions which might help you to stay organized:

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- ◆ **Keep your materials organized in ring-binders, magazine boxes and folders.** You will be amazed at how much stuff in the form of notes, handouts, photocopies, assessed course work, floppy disks and the like you will generate. It will become increasingly important that you can find stuff when you need it. There are few things more annoying than not being able to find an article you know you have and wasting an hour or more looking for it.
- ◆ **Get equipped with all the necessary pens and paper and keep these on or near your desk.** Note taking, jotting ideas, drafting and doing diagrams use up lots of paper, so make sure you have enough and do not have to waste time going out to get more. Do not overdo the stationery by spending money on expensive pens and desk aids. Cheap pens, paper, paper clips, Post-it notes and ring-binders are all you really need and anything else will waste money you could be spending on books.
- ◆ **If possible have your space clear of distractions.** Keep photographs and the phone and any other unnecessary stuff away from your work-space. This also goes for the biscuit tin and kettle as it is easy to reach for snacks when things are not going as you want.
- ◆ **It may be that you have a personal computer.** This is good but even with major advances in technology they still take up a substantial amount of desk space. Try to keep enough space for writing and spreading out your articles, books and notes.

MANAGING THE LONELINESS AND ISOLATION OF RESEARCH

Doing masters research can be a lonely experience. This is because apart from your supervisor you will, most probably, be the only one really interested in your topic. Friends and family will, as a matter of course, show an interest but will in the main not want to know the details of how your research is progressing. When things do seem as if they could be going better, family and friends may help with encouragement but will not be able to do much more than this. Only you will know what needs to be done and how to do it and, of course, it is supposed to be your research done by you.

There is no way to avoid the loneliness of research, but you can share the feeling with others. Your peers will know what it feels like to be doing research and having only

one other person to talk to who knows what it is you are doing. The following are, therefore, some simple suggestions about how to manage the loneliness and to feel as though you are not the only one to experience this when doing your research.

- ◆ **Establish peer support networks at the start of your masters course. These are small groups of people in your cohort who know the value of talking to one another in order to get the most out of the course you are all doing.**
- ◆ **Use the peer group network to identify the common issues and problems, and to discuss ideas and tactics to address these. Use Internet discussion facilities to set up a virtual group so that people unable to attend meetings can make contributions.**
- ◆ **Arrange regular meetings. Use these to focus on particular issues and problems that most of you seem to be experiencing. Think about inviting some of the doctorate researchers along to share their experiences and tactics for coping with doing research.**
- ◆ **Use the Internet discussion groups of previous cohorts to see what issues they identified and how they addressed them and use these as the basis for discussions among your peers.**

Finding someone else to talk to about your research who understands what it is like to do research can be a help in overcoming the occasional bout of intellectual loneliness. Some degree of isolation is, however, an essential part of the research experience. The times you have on your own to read and think are the times when you will be expanding your intellectual capacity to understand, assimilate and engage, at increasingly higher levels of sophistication, with theory and argument.

NETWORKING

A good graduate school will provide you with opportunities to network with staff and researchers from within and external to your university. You may already be a good 'networker', but if not do not be put off by your lack of experience. Use any opportunities which present themselves to practise your networking skills. As with the other skills and abilities associated with becoming a member of the research community, mixing with your peers is something you can learn to do.

When an opportunity presents itself, such as at a research seminar or conference, talk to someone known for their research. Do not worry if you see yourself as a little shy. Remember that they do not know you and will be only too pleased to talk to you about research. It is also the case that persons you see as being extroverts are not always necessarily good researchers. From my experience some of the most detailed and conscientious research has been done by individuals who would, by their own self-labelling, call themselves shy. Whether you see yourself as a 'theorist', 'pragmatist', 'activist' or 'reflector', face-to-face communication is an essential part of your remit as a masters student.

Life issues

The comments in this section may be construed as controversial. The issues discussed here are complex, not easy to present and will likely annoy some tutors and managers of educational institutions. In all walks of life people will encounter harassment or some form of discriminatory, sexist and exploitative behaviour (from staff as well as other students), and some students and staff may encounter racial or ethnic harassment. The comments that follow are from my postgraduates and illustrate some of the issues they have experienced. We make no claims for the generalizability of these, nor for any standing in research terms.

'I often feel very isolated from the everyday goings on in the Department, as an outsider, because their (male students and staff) conversations aren't usually about research...'

'I know I shouldn't but I always aim for perfection ... I believe my work has to be better than anyone else's for it to be taken seriously ... '

'Dr X is very critical and often dismissive of my work even though I know I work much harder and know far more than most of the men on our course.'

'Some of the staff seem to have one way of talking to the men on our course and another to the women. The men always seem to get praised for the slightest things and the women ignored ... I often feel quite low after certain tutorials, especially when I have done a lot of preparation that wasn't acknowledged.'

'You have to be careful with some of the male students. If you say something in a seminar group that they haven't thought of, they will often repackage it and pass it off as their own. One of them is very fond of saying, "Yes, I thought the same."'

'Dr Y seems to target individual women. He hangs around the notice boards, and often stops you in the corridor or gets in the lift with you ... and in the coffee bar he is often with a female undergraduate. Basically his conversations are too personal ... He has even asked A and B if they would like a lift home.'

'A couple of them just don't realize that we have to be away by 3.30 to pick up our children ... and see us leaving and interpret this as a lack of commitment.'

I believe these comments have some relevance, in that even from the standpoint of a male supervisor, I have witnessed some behaviours by colleagues (male and female) and from students that I have personally believed to be discriminatory, sexist and exploitative. If you have a grievance ensure that you have copies of the relevant policies for your university that cover equal opportunities, grievance procedures and codes of conduct. If you believe you are being subjected to any form of unfair treatment I suggest you do the following:

- ◆ **make contemporaneous notes on all the details;**
- ◆ **if possible get your peers to make statements detailing what they have witnessed regarding your case;**
- ◆ **consult the policies of the university to see what formal procedures you can use to pursue your grievance; and**
- ◆ **if you do not want to make a formal complaint, then you can inform the course director, head of the department or the dean of faculty to make them aware and request they take all the necessary actions to stop the situation. Remember to make notes on any meetings you have with staff, letting them know you are doing so in the meeting itself.**

Of course, the majority of supervisors are highly experienced and will do all in their power to make your time productive and enjoyable. The above comments are merely precautionary.

Establishing a document control system

A masters dissertation will generate a lot of material which needs to be kept organized if you want to keep control of it and use it efficiently. You will need a system that works, and this does not mean a vague system based on filing everything on the floor. This is not to say that some floor space, if you can claim some, is not a good thing to have. Figure 2.4 gives an overview of the kinds and amount of materials you will need to manage when doing your dissertation.

Figure 2.4 does not really represent the substantial amount of stuff you will accumulate, but you will soon experience the reality of this as you get further into doing your dissertation. Therefore, before you get swamped with paper and computer files you cannot find because you forgot to make notes on them, think seriously about your project management system – how you organize your records and materials so that they can be managed. The suggestions which follow are from *Doing a Literature Search* (Hart, 2001) which, in essence, is all about information collection and management, and from Orna and Stevens (1995) about the general principles of managing information during a research project.

Further information on the management of the literature search can be found in Chapter 6, 'Searching and reviewing the literature'.

The following are the kinds of routine tasks you need to start doing as a part of your document control system:

- ◆ **Set up a physical filing system.** Use a physical store to keep and index articles and copies of materials that you have made. You will collect many of these during your search. It is important to index and write an abstract for each of them and file them so that they can be retrieved when you need them.
- ◆ **Set up files on your computer.** Create and give consecutive file names to your bibliographies and working notes, and place these into directories on your computer. Put each chapter and parts of a chapter on separate memory devices to avoid over-writing and the loss of your data. Do not use an obscure software application but stick to common applications. Make a record in your search log of the names and content of your files and remember to delete files you do not need to avoid having multiple versions of a file on your computer and disks. Use easily recognizable file names, for example, 'ch1 introduction v1'.

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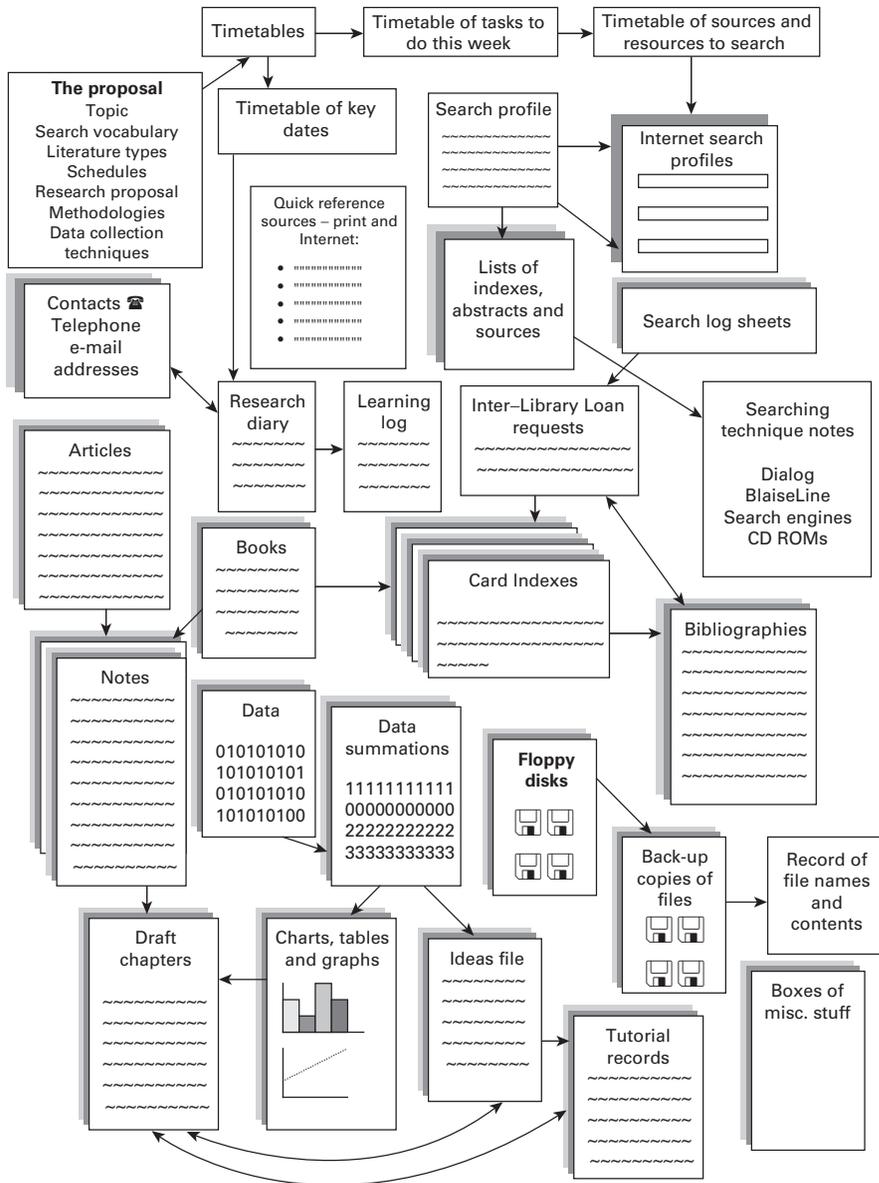


FIGURE 2.4 DIVERSE ELEMENTS FOR MANAGING A MASTERS DISSERTATION

- ◆ **Make back-up files of your computer files at least once each week. Keep these in a safe place. As well as making copies of your files onto other memory devices you can send them via e-mail to a friend who has consented to store your copies**

on their machine. You can do this by incorporating the file-back-up task into your timetable of tasks to be done. All too often disks are lost or damaged and with a back-up you will avoid retracing work you have already done.

- ◆ Do printouts of your computer files as well as making copies of all your files after each time you work on one. Although this can be time-consuming, if by some chance a disaster does strike and you lose all your files, including the back-ups, at least you will have a hard copy to work from. Regular printouts will also give you material you can carry around with you to examine and analyse when you get the time.

CITING YOUR SOURCES AND CREATING BIBLIOGRAPHIES

As you identify relevant materials, such as articles, you need to record these in your bibliographies. It is important to take the citation details of every item you come across that you deem relevant to your research.

Citing references and attribution

You must keep full bibliographic details of items you find during your search. As you will probably have several sub-topics within your general topic, this means using your card index to construct several bibliographies in which some of the cards will be duplicates. Record the full bibliographic details of items that you have identified as relevant. The alternative is to try and remember the details, which is impossible, especially when you are likely to have 50 to 70 references for an undergraduate project and many more for a postgraduate dissertation or thesis. In *Doing a Literature Search*, Appendix 4, 'How to cite sources', you will find suggestions on how to cite references for a range of material including the Internet, but for further advice and updates see websites such as the following, which give links to the major sources on how to cite materials:

- ◆ *Librarian's Index to the Internet* (<http://lii.org/>).
- ◆ *The World Wide Web Virtual Library* (www.spaceless.com).

The full citation of other people's work is essential: this is known as 'attribution' – the scholarly standard of acknowledging where ideas in your own work have their origins. Not only is it unethical to use someone else's work without referencing it, but it can be an infringement of copyright to do so. Therefore make a record of the bibliographic details of work you consider relevant to your topic to ensure that you acknowledge the work of others that you use in your own research.

Creating bibliographies

There are various methods you can use to construct and maintain a bibliography. The manual method amounts to establishing a card index with each item being indexed on to one or more cards. The cards are then arranged in some logical order, say, alphabetically. However, given the massive amount of literature available,

Tip: you can print out the bibliographic details of articles and books from your searches of CD ROMS and stick them on to cards to save writing them out by hand.

many researchers use electronic means to store, organize and retrieve citations. There are a number of ways a personal computer can be used to create a personal bibliography. In practice it is easier to record bibliographic items first on cards and then to transfer these to a personal computer. A simple card index for book materials might look like the example shown in Figure 2.5.

A range of software for constructing bibliographies is widely available. Some people adapt word-processing packages, while others invest in dedicated software. Even the most simple of word-processing packages can provide a means to produce lists of items that can be regularly updated. The more sophisticated packages enable the researcher to print selections of records in a variety of formats for different document types. One of the most popular commercial bibliographical packages is *ProCite*, from CiteWise.com (a division of Chervell Scientific).

The key advantages of electronic databases are:

- ◆ you can extract bibliographical records in a variety of predetermined formats to suit different needs, for example, the different requirements of different journals;

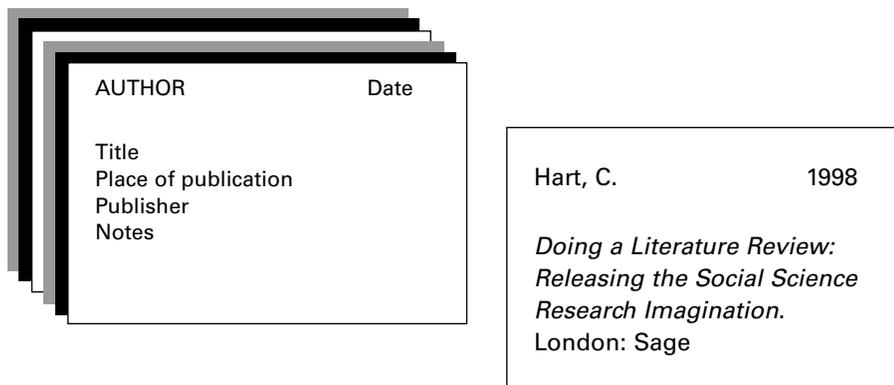


FIGURE 2.5 EXAMPLE OF A CARD INDEX

- ◆ you can search the bibliography using key words;
- ◆ you can automatically arrange the items according to different criteria, for example, date of publication, by author or by key word;
- ◆ you can check the spelling of author names and titles in your text;
- ◆ you can add notes to annotate the record;
- ◆ you can download data from CD ROM and online databases into the bibliography;
- ◆ you can make automatic changes to the typography to meet the needs of different journal styles;
- ◆ you can edit records easily and transfer them to other parts of the database; and
- ◆ you can copy all or part of the database to create a card index that you can carry with you when you need to check something, say in the library.

USING THE COMPUTER

It will be expected, by your university, that you have a computer that is capable of being used to produce a dissertation. This normally means that it will have the

necessary capacity and software to enable you to produce text, figures, tables and graphs and that it is connected to the Internet. There will be computers you can use at your university; some will be for specialist searching of databases not available to the general public and some to enable you to do statistical analysis of data.

A computer is an essential tool that will help you to produce your dissertation. While we cannot give any guides to specification because these change so fast, I do recommend that prior to starting your masters course you obtain information on what computers and kinds (and versions) of common software they use. It will make such things as word-processing much easier if you use the same software package as used on the university's computers. This will ensure that you have compatibility and can get on with work when you are at university or at home.

KEEPING A RESEARCH DIARY AND A LEARNING LOG

It is very important to maintain a diary of your activities when doing your research. We are using the word diary in the sense of research as well as in the conventional sense of a calendar of dates. The main reasons for keeping a diary are:

- ◆ **you can plan key dates in advance and agree deadlines;**
- ◆ **you will then be able to plan your work so as to meet your deadlines; and**
- ◆ **contacts, web addresses, details of books and so on can be noted in your diary and transferred to your other files at a later date.**

Your diary is in effect a log of your research. It will become a record of what you did, when you did it, with what and what the outcomes were. It will become a reminder of what needs to be done and what things, such as inter-library loans, need to be followed up. Your diary is then a working document and a source of information for your dissertation. As a record of your activities your diary will provide you with the necessary details to help you evaluate your research, and this is usually included in the concluding chapter of your dissertation.

One method of keeping a research diary is to use it in two main ways. The first is as a plan of your activities, as you would use a conventional diary. The second is to use

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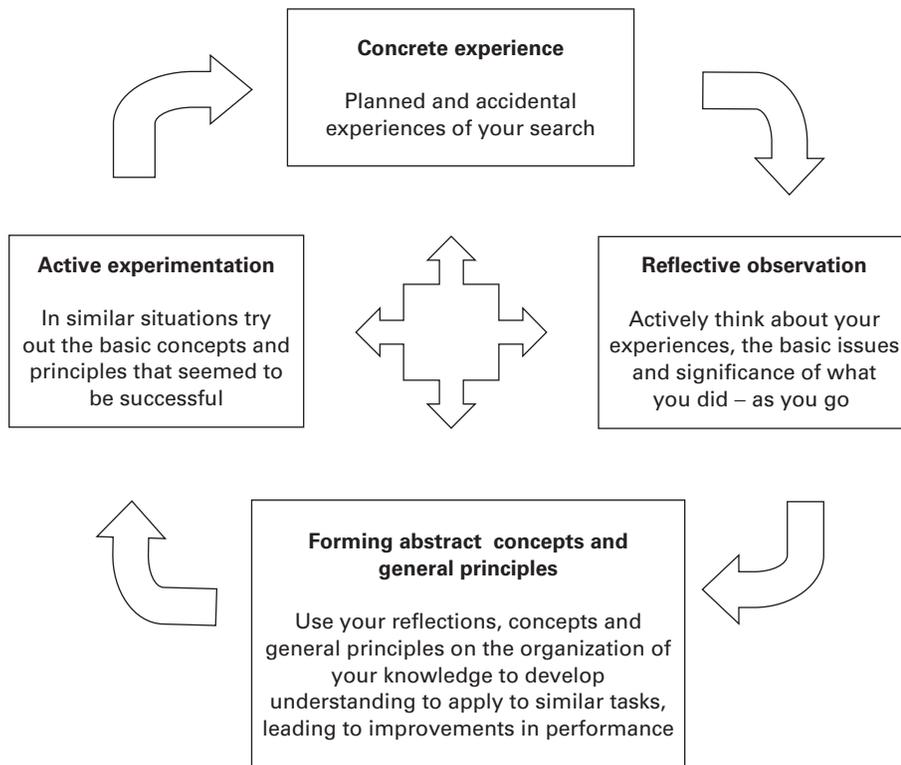


FIGURE 2.6 THE LEARNING CYCLE

Source: Adapted from Kolb et al., 1984.

it as a learning tool. This means that every time you think you have acquired new knowledge, a different viewpoint or skill, you make a note of what it is and how it was acquired. Figure 2.6 shows this as the learning cycle. This figure is derived from the work of Kolb, Rubin and MacIntyre (1984), who suggest that learning can be viewed as a circular process where experience is followed by attempts to make sense of that experience through reflection and contemplation. A part of this is conceptualizing the nature of the experience in more abstract terms in order to think about how its principles may be adapted and applied to other situations, often experimenting with them to see what happens. The whole process then begins again, going around as if circular. This approach can be used when things go right and when they go wrong. For example, when you have a block in thinking you can reflect on how it was overcome to think about its nature and possible causes. The irony here should not be missed. In practising this approach you may soon come to realize that perfection is not what is required and that it is a sign of your growing confidence the more you come to see and do only that which is required.

This approach to learning has links to the learning styles we introduced in Chapter 1. As an activist you will learn how to conceptualize, as a reflector you will learn to experiment, as a pragmatist you will learn to reflect and as a theorist you will learn look for experiences. The more you do the more resilient in attitude and behaviour you will become and this will show in the increasing levels of attainment you will be achieving. This will also show in your increasing resourcefulness in that you will learn and be able to apply an increasing number of techniques to learning. Finally, the more you learn and are able to achieve will be in part due to your increasing capacity to reflect on and about your experiences to such a degree that your analytical abilities will reach depths you never thought possible for yourself. This is the promise of masters research, but for now once you have begun the habit of *learning how to learn* you will soon experience, to greater degrees, the different learning styles. This will mean you will not only develop as a person, but you will be able to do many more things than you previously thought possible. In this way you will acquire, in addition to skills, a range of attitudes and qualities which are essential for the capable and confident masters graduate.

SUMMARY OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter has attempted to provide guidance on how to manage the transition from work or undergraduate studies to doing a masters and has emphasized the following:

- ◆ It is important to establish a balance between your research and your 'real' life.
- ◆ You need to organize yourself and your materials for effective and efficient working.
- ◆ Time management is an absolute for most successful dissertations.
- ◆ Use your experiences as an opportunity to learn new ways of learning and working and by doing so you will become more resilient, resourceful and be able to reflect on how you learnt and so be able know how to learn more.

Further reading

Hart, C. (2001) *Doing a Literature Search: A Comprehensive Guide for the Social Sciences*. London: Sage. Chapter 3 'Search management' provides examples of search logs.

Silverman, D. (2000) *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*. London: Sage. Chapter 2 'The research experience' contains examples of research diaries kept by doctoral students.