

# The MA & PhD: from conception to delivery

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# Pre-conception: Understanding yourself



- Our varying rates of intellectual maturation

Just as our physical development cannot be accelerated by external stimuli, our intellectual maturation occurs at a pace which is almost impossible to influence.

Where are you on the scale?

Are you intellectually optimised for an MA or PhD?

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# Conception: Ingredients of a well chosen topic



- A question to answer or a problem to solve  
The thesis should be structured in a way that provides criteria for assessment to be made (has an original answer been found or a solution proposed?). Spend time conceiving.
  - What are the limits & parameters of the project?  
Can the task be achieved in 60,000 or 100,000 words?  
What is unique about your approach (original topic? approach? sources? methodology?).
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# Ingredients of a well chosen topic ...

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- A well chosen supervisor

Someone with a commitment to the project, can suggest sources & methodologies, has expertise, communicates on your level, has ideological & methodological empathy.

- Available sources

Do you have easy access to the archives, primary & secondary sources, people (interviews), languages, internet, ethics clearances, etc, that you need?

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# Gestation: planning & process

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- Break up the project into bite size pieces

Focus early on structure by thinking in terms of chapters - where are the natural divisions in the project? Create separate files & boxes for each chapter as you research (like laying tracks in a studio).

- Read critically

Only read source material with questions in mind, taking notes along the way, otherwise you will have to re-read later.

Keep an open mind to contradictory arguments - an awareness of challenges to your views is more impressive than strident conviction, absolute confidence & incontrovertibility.

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# Planning & process ...

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- Interest & morale

Keep interested in the topic by looking for alternative & innovative sources & commentary from cognate fields (music, art, literature/poetry, photography, drama, film).

- Put early achievements on the board

A long queue always feels better when you look at the people behind you - writing something early brings a greater sense of progress & achievement. Get involved in work-in-progress seminars! Build collegiality.

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# Late term & pre-delivery

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- Keep your audience in mind

Don't make the examiners work to understand you.

Assume unequal knowledge of the subject.

Strive hard to communicate, clarify & simplify.

- Intentions & outcomes

Do they match? Does the introduction set out the scope

of the project clearly? Have I done what I said I would?

Have I missed anything significant or included anything

tangential or irrelevant to my project?

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# Delivery



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- Minimise the grounds for challenging you.

Look at other MAs & PhDs.

Be open to change.

Understand the subjective nature of assessment.

Respect the rules & conventions of submission.

Think of it first as a credential.

A work in progress rather than your final word.

A snapshot of a particular stage in your development.

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# Post delivery

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