

## **MSc Media and Communications**

### **Steps for planning and writing your essay: advice from the mentors**

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**Structure it:** This is both helpful in starting to think about the essay and in writing it. Make an essay outline that is 1-2 pages and include what you want to accomplish with it. This is a 'mini' variant of the finished product, with all the components in it, but in a much shorter format. Do an introduction, the scope of the research, brief outline of your theories, and why your case study matters. You could also include a small text on what method you'd want to use if that is part of the essay. Granted, the analysis won't be here, but do not hesitate to include thoughts about the analysis, that is to say your thoughts on what you want to pursue. The clearer you are in this outline, the easier it will be for you to pursue your case in the full essay.

**Don't skip out on reading:** Read as much of the literature as you can during the course, so that the week/s you have for the essay writing are mainly about doing the research and writing. This also means you have a good grasp of the course literature when connecting it to your essay subject.

**Make notes while reading:** It takes some extra time, but this is invaluable. Make notes while reading, sum up in your own words and extract quotes (don't forget the page number!). This not only makes it easier for you to remember what you've read, but in writing, it also makes it much easier to find arguments, quotes or other information in the literature.

**Leave room for your own arguments:** It can be tempting to include a lot of literature that is connected to your case. Remember to leave room for *your ideas*. It is, after all, your text, your interpretation and understanding of the case and the literature. This does not mean using the word 'I' or 'my' but rather making room for your analysis. It is not always an advantage to cite a lot (even though a long reference list is a beautiful thing), but a lot of the strength of a good essay comes from your own analysis, your own findings and conclusions.

**Ask yourself 'Why?':** In mainly the introduction, be sure to have an argument for why your research actually is valuable. Be it a question of representation of gender, or an analysis of a

video game, always back up your research with a good problematization, a solid argument for the relevance of your case, both within the world of research, but also within the field of media and communication.

**Referencing:** Be consistent. When using the Harvard system, the key is being consistent, that the references look the same throughout the text. If you use a Harvard guide online, then use that one guide and follow it. You can find a lot of guides online, and here's one: <http://www.citethisforme.com/harvard-referencing>. Good referencing makes your argument flow and allows you to back up your ideas with academic and other sources. Take time to check your references, add in missing authors, or dates, so this complete when you hand in the essay.

**Reference your methods:** And don't forget that methods books are supposed to be referenced as well! Write a short paragraph on the methods you used in you text, and reference it (when applicable). There are many methods books, and finding one that you can refer to will not be hard. For example, just because Action Research is clear to you (and the course leader), you still need to reference action research as discussed in the academic sources.

**Clarity is key:** When making arguments in your text, think about the reader; will the reader understand the argument I just made? Strive for clarity in your text, this will make it easier for you as a writer to argue for your case, and it will make the reader understand where your arguments are going. Maybe add a sentence or two at the end of an argument to sum it up – this makes it easier for the reader to understand the point you are trying to make.

**Analysis paralysis:** Sometimes you will find yourself stuck in the writing process. Writing for hours on end might not always benefit the text, sometimes a break is really what is needed to open up new thoughts. Maybe go for a run, meet up with a friend (why not outside of academia for once?) or make some food. Good ideas will come to you when you are less stressed and more open to solving that tricky analytical problem.

**Summing up:** Leave about a page to allow yourself to sum up what your essay has brought to the table, what interesting findings did you uncover, and what was the outcome of your analysis? This is a perfect opportunity for you to connect your text and analysis to a larger field, as well as argue for the importance of your research. A conclusion might sometimes

seem like a repeat of the text that has come before it, but it is a good way of leaving a little room for speculation, summing up, and presenting entry points for further research.

**Peer review:** This is a good way to get someone else's perspective. Trade your essay with someone you trust, and critique each other. Be constructive here, the point is to help each other out, not point out flaws in the text (hence the tip to trade with a fellow student you trust). Don't only focus on the things that can be improved, but also point out the essays strong points. Boost each other!

**Leave time for editing:** Writing an essay is hard work and takes a lot of time. Try to leave a day or two until deadline when you feel 'done', just to give yourself a few opportunities to read it through again with a fresh pair of eyes, after a good night's sleep. This makes it easier to spot small mistakes, or sharpen your argument.

**Use the mentor meetings:** The mentor meetings are there for you, so use them! It's a forum away from the classroom to discuss the literature, problems or just to indulge in interesting concepts from the lectures. There are no stupid questions here.

Hopefully these tips will be helpful in essay writing! Good luck!