

Major research essay: Professional Practice And Culture

40% of total mark

2500-3000 word final essay

Due date: Friday 9 June

Task

Students are expected to demonstrate their capacity to synthesise the material studied during the semester and to apply it as appropriate to a research project by:

- formulating a research question;
- carrying out research that can address the question adequately
- presenting the research and analysis in written form using the conventions of academic presentation.

The research and essay should be on one of the following topics:

- an analysis of a piece of professional practice by yourself or some other person working in the arts/media/cultural industries
- a case study of a specific artistic/cultural/media profession with respect to the impact of social, economic and/or technological changes.

The topic for the essay is to be approved by your tutor after negotiation and discussion in class and in UTSONline. The final topic is to be confirmed in UTSONline, with an indicative list of references, by Week 7 (Friday 30 April), and the essay is to be submitted by Friday 11 June.

The project should include the following elements:

- a discussion contextualising the theoretical perspective you have adopted within in the range of perspectives discussed this semester (approx. 700 words)
- an empirical account (approx. 1000 words)

- an analysis of the situation in the light of one or more of the theoretical perspectives discussed during the course (approx. 1000 words)

Learning Objectives

Assessment for all work in Professional Practice and Culture is done within the set learning objectives of the subject. These are:

- to acquire a critical understanding of professional practice in socio-cultural production, and contemporary debates about the activities of some of the key professions;
- to apply some of the major scholarly approaches to researching and thinking about the role of the professions;
- to contribute constructively and critically to face-to-face and online discussions of the subject matter of the course;
- to produce written work for assessment that demonstrates a critical knowledge of the major scholarly debates in this subject area.

Assessment Criteria

Your work will be assessed for the quality of its:

- scholarship (knowledge of the relevant academic literature);
- rigor, adequacy and insight in the empirical account;
- ability to apply theoretical critique to empirical phenomena;
- effective use of written sources;
- clarity and strength of the argument presented
- presentation of written work (references, bibliography, literary style)

All written work lodged in hardcopy for assessment must be typed (A4, double-spacing, 3 cm right margin), properly referenced using the Harvard style and have a full bibliography attached, and with a coversheet on the front. Your bibliography should be alphabetical and include all the resources that you've consulted.

How to creating a topic outline

In order to come to an agreed question and method you are expected to submit and have approved on UTS online a topic outline which includes:

- an outline of your question,
- a methodology
- a theoretical framework and
- an initial list of references.

A good topic outline will provide an important roadmap and help you develop a clear well argued essay.

Topic Outline: The Question

Your topic should formulate your major concern in a **specific** question or statement for discussion. It is important that you are specific in order to create a manageable area for your investigation.

Non-specific question	Should become something like:
Are journalists intellectuals?	How does the work of SMH journalist Margo Kingston in her web diary project, relate to the classic definitions of the intellectual?
Are journalistic ethics one of the defining characteristics of journalism as a professional	Discuss the ethical and professional issues raised in the John Laws cash for comment enquiry.

Topic Outline: Theoretical Framework

The outline should include a short description of your

- research concerns, and
- theoretical framework

For the Web Diary example you would note the variety of theories of the intellectual but might indicate you would primarily be pursuing a “Gramscian” view. You might also indicate that you would be looking at a range of theories of journalism but that theories of civic/public journalism would have particular relevance to your question.

Topic Outline: Method

You must also include a brief description of

- what data you intend to analyse,
- how you intend to collect it and
- what type of analysis you intend to undertake.

The **web diary example** might look something like this:

The essay will analyse two weeks of postings on Webdiary from x to x (*Is this random or does it relate to a specific period such as the beginning of the war in Iraq and if so why etc*). This will be complimented by a face-to-face interview with Kingston and an email questionnaire with two of her key contributors (*Again why? What do you want from these interviews?*)

Topic Outline: Initial references

This would include 5 to 10 references that provide a starting point for building your theoretical framework. It would most likely include a number from the class readings but ought to include some that you have sourced independently.

Some tips on essay writing

Good Essay Writing Is Creative Writing

A good essay is driven by a passionate engagement with the subject. It should demonstrate a broad understanding of the area under investigation but it is not about recycling other people's theories.

The development of a good essay is a gradual and creative process where you discover what it is that you have to say about a topic

Two key aspects of academic scholarship that assist this process of discovery are:

- Synthesis,
- Relationship building

You need to find creative ways of condensing big ideas and a variety of theoretical models in ways that communicate the essential points. Then you need to show how these different ideas and theories relate to each other and to your empirical data.

Discovering and describing research relationships should not just focus on the complimentary relationships but should also explore areas of conflict.

Be Clear About Your Structure

The key to writing a good essay is establishing an appropriate, logical and efficient structure.

A good essay should move from general theoretical concerns to conclusions about the specific question at hand. It should flow something like this:

- Introduction and definition of terms
- General theoretical introduction
- Development of specific theoretical framework that you will focus on

- Introduction of data and method
- Initial analysis of data and identification of key questions
- Discussion of key questions with reference to theoretical framework
- Conclusions and identification of questions for further research

The following is a very good example of an essay structure used by a student in this course last year:

Discuss the professional field of journalism and its prescribed code of ethics with reference to the Cash for Comment Inquiry and 2UE radio presenter John Laws declaration, "I don't pretend to be a journalist. I'm an entertainer. There isn't a hook for ethics" (in Johnson, 2000:16).

1. Introduction

2. Professionalism & Ethics

2.1 Journalists' Code of Ethics

2.2 Broadcasting Services Act 1992 & the Commercial Radio Codes of Practice

3. Cash for Comment: Case Summary

3.1 Panel Findings

3.2 New Conditions of License

4. Is Laws a 'Journalist'?

5. Professional Responsibility in Talkback Radio

5.1 Which Genre is Talkback Radio?

5.2 The Power of Talkback Radio

5.3 Talkback Radio & Professional Accountability

6. Further Reflection: Addressing Ethical Gaps

7. Conclusion

8. References

Follow Your Question And Define Your Terms

A well-formulated question should include some of the key theoretical terms that you will explore and will implicitly point to ways of organising your data.

One of my students last year wrote an essay exploring some of the professional consequences for journalists and government PR officials raised by recent controversies in Britain. They used a key quote from the Phillis report into government communications to formulate their question.

How do the current 'cultural, structural and behavioral issues' affecting government communications in Britain, as identified by the Interim Phillis Report, challenge traditional models of government media relations?

Those three terms – cultural/structural/behavioral – and the specific way they had been elaborated in the published report, provided a structure to analyse a very complex set of issues.

The key role of a structure or typology, such as the one this student identified from Phillis, is to provide a framework that enables you to:

- Organize your data
- Identify discrete issues or approaches
- Establish relationships and conflicts between these different elements

Method Is Critical

Defining and describing your method is also a key element of good scholarship. It enables the reader to judge how they should read your conclusions.

A study that analyses 1000 articles is very differently to one that analyses 10 articles.

A study that analyses 1000 articles is attempting to draw representative conclusions from a large data set that, with the right statistical analysis, might come up with some generalisable conclusions.

Smaller studies can be equally important in areas like journalism studies but their claims are different. They seek to show, through case study data, some of the specifics of journalistic practice. This is indicative rather than generalisable evidence.

You must be sure that you are matching your conclusions to the type of evidence gathered.

The type and size of the data set will also influence the way you analyse it. A smaller data set will allow you to perform a detailed analysis that plays close attention to key textual elements:

- form,
- style,
- different possible interpretations,
- context etc

where as a very big data set will probably be analysed statistically through a much less detailed reading.

How to write a good methodology section in your essay

In your essay you should include a detailed description of your data and method. Elements in your method section should include:

How you collected your set of data for analysis? Be specific:

- “I identified x articles through a search in the x electronic database using the search terms x x and x.”
- “I conducted x interviews with x and x, they were open-ended interviews/questionnaire based interview/ face to face/ on the phone”
- If you used a questionnaire include it as an appendix.

How did you organize your analysis:

- Did you look for common themes, if so what typology of themes emerged?
- Were you more interested in the participant’s views or their allegiances or their rate of participation or the relationship between these three factors?

Identify precisely what you were seeking to identify from the different elements of your data and how they relate to one another. For example in the Webdiary example you might say something like:

- The analysis of the two weeks of postings allowed me to identify common themes discussed/ the number of participants in the project/ the political allegiances of participants etc.
- This was complimented by my interview with Kingston, which allowed me to identify her aims and perceptions about the project. In my conclusions I will analyze the relationship between these aims and the themes I have identified in the postings.

Working with your data

Use your data creatively combining a general overview with specific examples.

For example with the Webdiary example:

Start with a general overview, which would include:

- some numbers: x articles/ x men/ x women/ average length – don't get bogged down with the stats in small scale studies, you should just give enough information so that the reader can get an idea of the *range* of the data;
- some general impressions: posts focused on six key themes/ mainly followed existing discussion threads/ mainly initiated new points for discussion.

Then move to a set of detailed very specific examples to flesh out your general points,

Use a range of direct quotes as examples when arguing your points don't just use vague summaries of views expressed. If you are working with article texts or interview data it is the direct quote that will give your essay flavor and depth.

Bring your essay to a strong conclusion.

A good conclusion:

- reiterates the main points of your essay;
- it completes the circle linking back to your introduction and its statement of key terms and intent;
- it identifies any unfinished business and questions for further research;
- it ends with a strong statement of your main argument with reference to both your theory and empirical data.

Presenting strong arguments or conclusions should not be confused with unsophisticated black and white statements. Conclusions should not just satisfy definitions they should have explanatory power.

Conclusion as brute statement	Conclusion with explanatory power
Margo Kingston's Webdiary is definitely an example of a contemporary intellectual project because she fulfills all of Said's definitions of the intellectual.	Although Kingston's Webdiary is a complex and multifaceted project I have argued that one useful way of looking at it is as a Gramscian intellectual project. Looking at it this way enables us to conceptualise some of its key strengths and weaknesses such as....

Conclusions should tell the reader not only why your assertions and framework have some validity, but why they are useful and important.

Some Dos And Don'ts

- Always provide references or evidence from your data for assertions even if you think it is a commonplace or commonsense assertion.
- Present critiques as well as descriptions of theory. Don't just relate what Bourdieu has written about "Habitus" but explain the views of those who have critiqued his theories. Indicate your own point of view but back it up with argument and/or data. "In the context of this study I believe

that Habitus is best understood as....” My analysis of x and x will show that....”

- Avoid simple cause and effect arguments. The situation is usually more about a range of factors influencing a position or a change.
- Stay on track, be specific, stick to your main argument.
- Show that you have taken into account other “off-track” matters with the judicious use of footnotes. This highlights the depth of your research but keeps your main narrative flowing.
- Revise, revise, revise! The clearer and more polished your expression the easier it is to make a convincing argument.
- Use sub-headings intelligently to help you map the narrative of the essay.
- Look at the way paragraphs and sections follow one another. Is there need for a linking sentence or sentences?
- Sign-post your arguments and research strategies: indicate what you are setting out to prove at the beginning, indicate what body of theory will form the major framework for your analysis, indicate if you will be returning or developing a particular point later in the essay. If you promise to return to a point later - make sure you do!

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Professional Practice and Culture
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