

Master's survival guide

By MA Education students,
for MA Education students



The most valuable resource that all educators have is each other. Without collaboration our growth is limited to our own perspectives.

- Robert John Meehan



Stay organised

Set yourself deadlines

Even just 30 mins of reading or writing at a time helps you keep on track.

Get a couple of books on your research specialism

You can use them for every essay.

Write tasks on post it notes and put them up in your study space

Helps you remember things.

To do list

Keep note of every task, no matter how small, stops them popping into your mind at random times!

Folders

Have a general folder and one for each essay, to keep things together.

Electronic folders

Access useful links wherever and whenever with something like Google Drive or OneNote.

Schedule your Master's work

Set aside a regular time and switch off all work emails so you're focused and not switching between the two things.

USB stick

Handy for saving journal articles and for having a draft assignment handy.

Back up your work

If you're juggling a job and a Master's then you don't have time to lose your work, always keep a second copy of your work.

What we wished we'd known before we started



Julie:

"Before I started, I was concerned about how much time it would take. Part of me wished I had a year out to focus solely on the Master's, but I didn't. I didn't realise how proud of myself I'd be for achieving this, now I've got to the end of it I think I needn't have worried about any of it."



Beth:

"I needed a student loan to do the course. Some of my course mates applied for the full amount, whereas I applied only for the amount that I needed to pay the fees. I wish I'd applied for the full amount because they used the additional funding in positive ways. I wish I'd known."

How to fit a Master's in around work



Julie:

"It takes real determination to make it work. I would block out some Saturdays and do it then. Some of my course mates would wake up at 5am to do a couple of hours of uni work before heading their jobs. Scheduling certain times works and reading in bed helped me too. I also delegated tasks I could delegate, for example I got a cleaner and that frees up two hours per week for me."



Beth:

"Ordinarily I'd be at school until 6pm but I made it non-negotiable that on one day every week I'd get home before 4pm. I'm not available on that day and I don't make any compromises. I use that time for academic reading or assignment work. I also made sure to plough through quite a lot in the half-terms."

What surprised us about the course



Julie:

"I was surprised by the amount of personal attention - I got sent a lot of feedback and there was always someone available to talk to when I needed it. I was surprised about the variety of different people on the course, not everybody was a primary school teacher and that was really interesting."



Beth:

"The turnaround of assignments is quick, but the tutors are very good at realising that a lot of people work full-time. They understand that you might need to ask for an extension, and it's very much encouraged. Sometimes it's worth doing if it means you can do better work and not rush it."

How working in a school complements the course



Julie:

"I was able to build a case study for my dissertation based on my job. It saved me a lot of time because it was something I already had a lot of knowledge about, and I could essentially do my research at work. But it did mean I spent most of my time thinking about work, so you want to pick a dissertation subject that you're passionate about!"



Beth:

"It's good for access, for example if I want to interview teachers, I can email people at school and they're willing to help. Or you can ask the school to approve you to do research with children. The Master's gave me a new perspective on my job, it helped me to change my practice in some ways and reflect to see how I can do things differently."



*Education is the most
powerful weapon
which you can use to
change the world.*

- Nelson Mandela



Best bits



Julie:

"When I did my first degree, it was to get into teaching. But now, I'm learning for learnings sake. It's a joy to completely immerse myself. Being able to research, wrestle with ideas, and come out with something at the end is the most satisfying thing."



Beth:

"I like getting feedback from assignments. I find it satisfying when I get good feedback because even though I'm working full-time, I'm still managing to fit in additional study and doing well with it. It's also great to be doing something that makes you think differently about your job because you usually have a teacher hat on, but stepping outside of that with the Master's hat on further helps your teaching practice."

Making the most of your tutors and course mates



Julie:

"The students would do occasional weekend meet ups to help each other with the work. We also had a WhatsApp group, which would help when doing essays and sharing information."

The Personal Development Tutor (PDT) sessions are excellent. Your tutor will ask questions to make you think about what you need in your assignment; and you can bat around ideas with them. They're also very good at noticing when you push yourself too hard and supporting you through that so that you can strike a balance that works for you."



Beth:

"My course mates and I have met up a few times to chat and reflect on our practice together, talking about what we can improve on and making suggestions to each other. We feed off each other which is nice. The lecturer is brilliant, she's an ex-teacher and she's very good at making suggestions using her experience. It's helpful to share your struggles as well as your successes."

Advice for a prospective MA Education student



Julie:

"Take the risk and do it. It is time consuming, but it is worth it. Make the most of everything that's offered to you. Make it your hobby. Use the library and get an NUS card for student discount."



Beth:

"Allocate time to do it each week; don't save it for your holidays. Talk to senior leaders in your school about doing a Master's, sometimes you'll have a lot to do and if they know what you're going through then they will help if they can."

Wellbeing tips

Try to create a healthy work/life balance

Eating well, taking exercise and good sleep are all keys to your success.

Have something to your personal life to look forward to

For example watching your favourite movie or going for a meal or a walk; and celebrate the little successes as you go!

Plan so that you are prepared for tasks

Consider both your schedule at work and your Master's course and plan how you are going to fit in both things.

Get a support system

This will be different for different people; it could be moral support or practical support (like help with childcare or other tasks to free up your time to study).

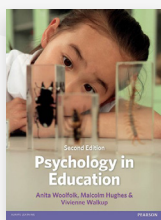
Check out what your university offers in terms of mental health and wellbeing support

That way you know what is available should you start to need it.

Education Support is a charity set up to support teachers and education staff

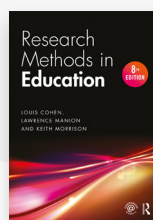
They offer free mental health and wellbeing support services to all people in the sector.

Helpful academic books



Psychology in Education

by Woolfolk, Hughes and Walkup - explains theories in a very concise and simple way.



Research Methods in Education

by Cohen, Mannion, and Morrison – intense but good for the understanding research methodology.



Researching Social Life

by Gilbert and Stoneman - another good one for research methods.