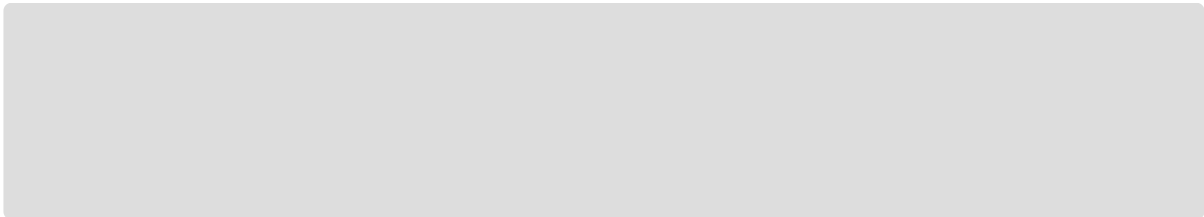


Why coursework matters



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I had a feedback session yesterday with a small masters cohort about their impending coursework deadlines and we chatted about the different assignments and wotnot, and one aspect I always stress is the practical nature of what we are doing. It made me think later about how much my own degree work has had an impact on my working life, both degrees (MSc Multimedia and MA in L&T). Remember I didn't bother with degrees until I was over 40, and yet I can think of several coursework assignments that have had direct impact on my CV, and on my actual knowledge and ability *in the real world*.

In my MSc, two courseworks were really very important: a group work assignment on research and innovation where we had to scope a new app, that me and a friend probably did most of the work on ;), which we called Google On The Move. It was what it sounds like, a connective app that used location to deliver smart results on all kinds of aspects of life and even included a Google Pay type idea. I almost included this little project in my thesis but decided against it. It was a brilliant idea in 2006. Then, an assignment on a piece of writing to do with research projects listed on the Cordis website that were of interest - one of the ones I wrote about was a live social TV/film media streaming app, where ppl chatted and shared what they were watching in real time. Today this is normal behaviour, but then it was technically impossible and unheard of to do. Selecting this project helped me to build confidence in how I thought about things, what I thought was of interest, or 'had legs'. Both these assignments were in the same module. There are other courseworks on that MSc that were also useful if you saw them for what they were, i.e. not just about getting a grade.

In the MA, the absolutely most useful aspect was a module about assessment. This module has impacted how I assess work in a direct fundamental way, and I continually think of it when I'm making a new rubric. I like to think of myself as a strong, good and fair assessor of work, and have even been asked to grade moderate on a masters course when there has been conflict between other academics. I take that as a good sign. It was such a good way of learning about how to assess work that would be an equivalent of how other lecturers would (or should) grade things. Again I took it really seriously, and frankly I think all lecturers should attend this kind of module as a mandatory requirements. I have only received low grades from people who probably weren't very aware of what they were marking (I know this is a contentious statement but I think secretly a lot of lecturers or students might agree).

I have always seen the work itself as more important than the grade I got, and have made a big effort to talk with students (or lecturers if they want to listen/discuss it) that *coursework should be very much about practical application of skills and knowledge, not just spurious exercises that are detached from life. Our 'duty' if there is one, is to bring theory to life, not just teach theory of itself.*

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