

## **Defining Your Purpose - What are we doing here?**

Everybody has their own reasons for embarking on a uni course. But whatever your personal reasons are, you are now joining a group of scholars that share a wider purpose. Their efforts are directed at making knowledge in their field, which is much larger than the uni department that you now belong to. This field is a vast international community of people who share interests and practices, and who communicate ideas and information via publications in books, reports, and journal articles. Your reading will take you into that conversation in print, and your writing should be framed as a contribution to it. Even if your lecturer is the only person who will read that writing, you are being trained as a member of the scholarly/professional community, sharing its purposes.

Your course will introduce you to the state of knowledge in your field, and to the questions that its members are currently exploring and arguing over. You will need to be alert to

- what those questions are
- why people agree or disagree about the answers to them
- what perspectives or approaches you find helpful, and why
- what problems or limitations you find in the approaches you encounter.

Many of your assignments will focus on one or more of these points.

You will also need to pay attention to the conventions that have developed in your field for writing within this conversation. In each field, there are certain kinds of texts that are commonly written, each with a characteristic structure that is suited to its purpose. You can read these texts more efficiently, and write them more effectively, if you are aware of the way they are usually structured. (“Usually”, because not every text will conform to the usual patterns; but many will.) Finally, each field has conventional formats for recording what sources (= “references”) you have used in your research, and you are expected to use the format specified for “referencing” in each of your subjects.

It can feel tedious to learn a whole new set of conventions, when you already have ways of presenting ideas and information that were used in your previous work or study context. But every context has its own culture, with its own particular values and practices for managing its work. Maybe it will help to think of yourself as a traveller in an unfamiliar place, where you have to learn the money and the transport system and appropriate public behaviour in a hurry! It’s not necessarily better than what you’re used to, and over time, you may be able to influence how things are done. But the first thing is to get your head around what people in that culture do, how they do it, and why they do it that way.

**Example - How is postgrad coursework different from professional development?**

While each course is different, and so is each workplace, it may help to be aware of some likely differences between your previous experience and the university course you are embarking on. If you have done an undergraduate degree at uni, you'll find that a postgraduate coursework degree is more vocationally-oriented, with more practical experience and real-world problem-solving. However, you probably expected this and chose the course for this reason. What may be less expected, if you have come from a workplace, are some of the ways that uni courses differ from the professional development offered to employees on occasion. In many PD courses, the time that is set aside for the course is the time you can expect it to take; and the materials you will use are all there ready for you. At uni, however, the time and materials are the tip of the iceberg, and the rest of that iceberg is your responsibility. You may have to spend two, three, or four times as long in independent study as you spend at uni, and you will have to do your own research beyond the resources provided in the course. Similarly, the aims of a uni course are more ambitious than with most PD. It's not done when it's done, because the aim is to learn about approaches you will continue to develop throughout your career; and to develop a critical perspective to guide your professional judgements about thinking and practice as you go on.

<b>PD for the workplace</b>	<b>PG by coursework</b>
Limited aims to be achieved during the course	Introduction to approaches, to be developed beyond the course
Work done mainly during session	Work done mainly in learner's own time
Most materials supplied	Many materials to be found by learner
Practical emphasis	Theoretical as well as practical
Develop technical skills	Develop technical skills
Acquire knowledge	Develop a critical perspective on knowledge acquired
Learn how to get answers	Learn how to frame problems
Now that's over with.....	No closure!