

MA Information Design

For students entering in 2006

Awarding Institution:	The University of Reading
Teaching Institution:	The University of Reading
Faculty of Arts and Humanities	Programme length: 12 months (FT)
For students entering in 2006	Date of specification: October 2004
Programme Director:	Paul Stiff
Board of Studies:	Typography & Graphic Communication, Board of Taught Postgraduate Studies
Accreditation: not applicable	

Summary of programme aims

The programme aims to provide a thorough grounding in the principles and methods of information design. It aims to develop fluent, articulate, and reflective designers who are well-equipped to influence the direction of their subject and profession through their effective problem-solving abilities, through originality in their application of knowledge, and through their exercise of sound professional judgement under uncertain conditions. Information designers must by necessity be lifelong learners, so the programme aims to equip students with skills which will enable them to answer that need with pleasure.

Transferable skills

The course encourages the development of these transferable skills:

- effective communication in speech and writing
- critical analysis and coherent argument
- researching and evaluating evidence
- undertaking independent study
- project management
- using IT for complex design tasks
- using IT for research and information management

Programme content

			<i>Credits</i>	<i>Level</i>
1	TYMIDP	<i>Information design: practice</i>	90	M & H
2	TYMIDC	<i>Information design: core module</i>	30	M
3	TYMIDD	<i>Information design: dissertation</i>	60	M

Part-time/Modular arrangements

None as yet

Progression requirements

The University's taught postgraduate marks classification is as follows:

<u>Mark</u>	<u>Interpretation</u>
70 – 100%	Distinction
60 – 69%	Merit
50 – 59%	Good standard (Pass)
<u>Failing categories</u>	
40 – 49%	Work below threshold standard
0 – 39%	Unsatisfactory work

For Masters Degrees

To pass the degree of Master students must gain an average mark of 50 or more overall and have no mark below 40 in modules TYMIDD (dissertation) and TYMIDP (practice). In addition the total credit value of all modules marked below 40 must not exceed 30 credits and for all modules marked below 50 must be less than 60 credits.*

Students who gain an average mark of 70 or more overall including a mark of 60 or more for the practice module and have no mark below 40 will be eligible for a Distinction. Those gaining an average mark of 60 or more overall including a mark of 50 or more for the practice module and have no mark below 40 will be eligible for a Merit.

For Postgraduate Diplomas

To pass the Postgraduate Diploma students must gain an average mark of 50 or more. In addition the total credit value of all modules marked below 40 must not exceed 30 credits and for all modules marked below 50 must be less than 60 credits.*

Students who gain an average mark of 70 or more and have no mark below 40 will be eligible for the award of a Distinction. Those gaining an average mark of 60 or more and have no mark below 40 will be eligible for a Merit.

For Postgraduate Certificate

To pass the Postgraduate Certificate students must gain an average mark of 50 or more. In addition the total credit value of all modules marked below 40 must not exceed 10 credits.*

* The provision to permit a candidate to be passed overall with a profile containing marks below 40 is made subject to the condition that there is evidence that the candidate applied himself or herself to the work of those modules with reasonable diligence and has not been absent from the examination without reasonable cause.

Summary of teaching and assessment

Teaching and assessment will be by means of lectures, seminars, oral presentations and writing assignments, including the dissertation (weight 33.33%), and by means of practical design projects and supervised professional assignments (50%) and core module (16.66%).

Admission requirements

This programme will suit qualified or experienced typographers and editorial designers, editors, and possibly people with backgrounds in professional communication and technical writing, applied linguistics, applied psychology, ergonomics, or usability engineering. Candidates for admission are normally required to have obtained a good first degree in a design or design-relevant subject. For exceptional candidates without such a degree, we ask for convincing evidence of relevant professional experience. We may ask for material evidence (e.g. of writing or design work) from any candidate. Candidates for whom English is not a first language should provide evidence of fluency in English, in accordance with The University of Reading's published guidelines.

Admissions Tutor: Mr Paul Stiff

Support for students and their learning

University support for students and their learning falls into two categories. Learning support includes IT Services, which has several hundred computers and the University Library, which across its three sites holds over a million volumes, subscribes to around 4,000 current periodicals, has a range of electronic sources of information and houses the Student Access to Independent Learning (S@IL) computer-based teaching and learning facilities. There are language laboratory facilities both for those students studying on a language degree and for those taking modules offered by the Institution-wide Language Programme. Student guidance and welfare support is provided by Programme Directors, the Careers Advisory Service, the University's Special Needs Advisor, Study Advisors, Hall Wardens and the Students' Union.

The University Library has a number of outstanding collections, including a major collection of British publishing archives (Bodley Head, Hogarth Press, Longman, Macmillan, Routledge, Chatto & Windus); the Mycroft Type Collection; the Rickards and John Lewis collections of ephemera; the Otto & Marie Neurath Isotype Collection; the Hans Schmoller collection of twentieth-century type specimens.

The Department of Typography & Graphic Communication provides introductory sessions on resources in the University Library and on Departmental collections and resources, and also induction in health and safety matters. New students receive the *Handbook for taught postgraduate programmes* (also available online).

Students are offered a number of optional lecture and seminar series (from other Master's or final year undergraduate modules) which may enrich their understanding of the subject. We hold regular postgraduate seminars and staff research briefings, where research -related issues can be discussed in a more formal environment. A small number of Departmental computers are dedicated to postgraduates, who may draw upon Departmental IT support.

The Department enjoys particularly close links with the St Bride Printing Library and Oxford University Press. It maintains informal connections with design institutions in Europe, the USA, South America, Australia, and India. It has links with a number of professional and scholarly institutions including Pira International, the Information Design Association, the International Institute for Information Design, and the Communication Research Institute of Australia. It also maintains a good informal network of contacts with the information design profession.

Career prospects

Graduates of the MA Information Design programme may expect to find their skills and experience in considerable demand among information design companies, periodical, newspaper, and book publishers, electronic publishers, museums and galleries, and also in higher education.

Opportunities for study abroad or for placements

None presently available.

Educational aims of the programme

- To provide an integrated education that develops a range of transferable skills (intellectual, professional, and social) through the study of the principles and methods of information design
- To provide high quality teaching of information design, informed by research in the subject
- To develop students' ability to work and learn effectively, both independently and together with others
- To provide students with the knowledge, experience, and skills necessary for further study, professional practice, and lifelong learning

- To provide a supportive learning environment in which students will be stimulated to develop their own interests within the broad field of enquiry offered by information design.
We aim to enable students to:
- build a base of knowledge derived from research and professional practice, experience, and skills, for the reflective practice of information design; and
- cultivate the skills of observation, evaluation, and analysis in support of creative practice.

Programme Outcomes

The programme provides opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate knowledge, understanding, skills, and other attributes in the following areas:

Knowledge and Understanding

<p>A. Knowledge and understanding of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Principles of information design derived from professional practice and research. 2. Design processes and methods 3. Main currents of thought and practice in the development of information design 4. Competing interpretations, policies, and practices within information design. 5. Two specific areas of the subject in depth. 	<p>Teaching/learning methods and strategies (below, m = module)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Practical design projects and professional assignments (m1); lectures, seminars, exercises in core module (m2); dissertation (m3) 2. Practical projects and professional assignments (m1) provide insight into design process and methods. Professional assignments involve students in close contact with external clients and technical staff. 3. Lectures, seminars, exercises in core module (m2) 4. Lectures, seminars, exercises in core module (m2) 5. In-depth knowledge of two specific areas is acquired through researching and writing a dissertation (m3) and through conducting a personally directed project (m1). <p>Assessment Principles of information design (1) are assessed through a mixture of practical design projects and assignments, performance in module 2 exercises, and the dissertation. Design processes and methods (2) are assessed by projects. Main currents of thoughts and practice (3), and competing interpretations, policies, and practices (4), are assessed in module 2 exercises and the dissertation. Two specific subject areas (5) are assessed in coursework and the dissertation.</p>
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Skills and other attributes

B. Intellectual skills – able to:

1. Exercise independent judgement
2. Locate, analyse, and explain relevant literature
3. Critically review and evaluate literature
4. Find, analyse, and explain complex information under time pressure.
5. Analyse and solve complex design problems.

Teaching/learning methods and strategies
(below, m = module)

- 1, 2, 3. Dissertation (m3): introductory seminars and workshops in research skills, and independent study in consultation with a supervisor, develop research skills.
4. Timed exercises in m2 (study briefings, position papers, design criticism reviews) simulate professional research tasks.
5. Project and professional assignments provide the opportunity to analyse and solve complex design problems.

Assessment

The dissertation is the primary vehicle for assessing students' research skills (1–4); this is supported by the time-pressure exercises in module 2. Coursework projects and professional assignments assess ability to analyse and solve complex design problems.

C. Practical skills – able to:

1. Use appropriate working methods, produce and maintain a well-ordered and comprehensive work record
2. Analyse the problem posed by a brief, formulate an appropriate brief in response to a client's account of a problem, including an inventory of deliverables
3. Show independent initiative and explore alternative approaches to a problem
4. Apply synthetic skills in order to propose a creative, appropriate, and persuasive solution to a design problem, showing evidence of sensitivity to the needs of readers and users, visual judgement, and the ability to recognize and create genre attributes
5. Demonstrate craft skills and professional competence, such as fluent mark-making, accuracy, good use of tools, an understanding of the design aspects of production, and the planning of clear and comprehensive specifications
6. Present a body of practical information design work in a professional manner, supported by well-documented files of preliminary work and showing evidence of understanding of the design process.

Teaching/learning methods and strategies
(below, m = module)

- 1–6: the environment for teaching and learning is provided by practical design projects and professional assignments (m1).

Assessment

1–6 are all assessed through practical design projects and professional assignments (m1).

D. Transferable skills – able to:

1. Effectively communicate in speech and writing
2. Critically analyse complex information and construct coherent argument
3. Research and evaluate evidence
4. Undertake independent study
5. Manage projects
6. Use IT for complex design tasks
7. Use IT for research and information management

Teaching/learning methods and strategies
(below, m = module)

- 1: Dissertation (m3), core module (m2), projects and assignments in m1.
2. In all modules but in particular in dissertation (m3) and core module (m2)
3. Dissertation (m3) and core module (m2)
4. Dissertation (m3), core module (m2)
5. Projects and in particular professional assignments in m1.
6. Projects and professional assignments in m1.
7. 2. In all modules but in particular in dissertation (m3) and core module (m2).

Assessment

1–7 are all assessed through practical design projects, professional assignments and the dissertation (m1, m2, m3).

Please note - This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if he/she takes full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detailed information on the learning outcomes, content and teaching, learning and assessment methods of each module can be found in the module description and in the programme handbook. The University reserves the right to modify this specification in unforeseen circumstances, or where the process of academic development and feedback from students, quality assurance processes or external sources, such as professional bodies, requires a change to be made. In such circumstances, a revised specification will be issued.