



MRes Design Northumbria

We believe that Curiosity + Dialogue x Impact = Positive Change

Subject Challenge



Inspired by D&ADs 'How to break down a Brief' activity and the increasing importance of being able to communicate your research verbally, this challenge is a 5-step exercise to create a powerful introductory script.

As an early career researcher, there will be many times where you will introduce yourself to other researchers or industry professionals. You might be asked with interest what your research is about, who is it focused on, and what makes it distinctive. You may also be inspired to explain why it matters, its proposed impact on others and what contribution it could make to society. Being prepared is important, so that you can summarise clearly the intention, purpose and ambition of your research to make a positive impression, and grow your network through productive conversations.

We've got a 5-step process for you to follow, to help you step with confidence into the arena of design research and make the most of those opportunities that will come your way. Hey, if you can crack this, then you'll be ready to join MRes Design and meet our MRes community in week 1!

Step 1: 1 hr - Creating a mindmap

Select your mind mapping media - will it be a mindmapping tool such as a [Miro](#) board or on [Canva](#), a large piece of A3 paper and Sharpies or post-it notes?

Now get yourself in your research headspace - is it in your workshop, study, at the kitchen table, in the garden?

Have a think about what your research is about, noting down all the words that come to mind and their connections on a huge mind map. Think about:

- words that describe who you are
- what qualities/characteristics you bring to your research
- what formal and tacit knowledge and expertise do you bring to your research
- who is your research focused on (e.g. a specific demographic, sub-category of society, designer, social movement)
- what is your research focused on (e.g. a specific product, part of the design process, area of design)
- which design discipline is it concerned with (e.g. fashion, graphics, architecture)
- who/what does your research aim to do (e.g. help, solve, investigate, identify)
- what problem might it solve?
- what process is it aiming to explore?
- what features make it distinct?
- do you know a particular research approach / methodology that you want to use (e.g. exploratory, disruptive/action research, UX, phenomenology)
- do you have specific tools/methods you are interested in employing (e.g. interviews, participant observation, survey...)

Step 2: 30 mins - Hierarchising your thoughts

Now, here comes the point of distilling your ideas, simplifying your understanding. As researchers, we often have grand ambitions and huge areas of design that we are passionate about exploring. On an Masters of Research, we have to know all the above, yet our research intentions have to be an appropriate scale to manage in the time we have (full time option = 1 year; part-time = 2 years). So, take a highlighter pen and highlight the word(s)/phrases that best summarise the following points:

- 1) **personal/professional**: who you are
- 2) **distinctiveness**: what uniqueness do you bring to the research
- 3) **discipline**: the key discipline that your design research is situated within
- 4) **approach/methodology**: the key approach/methodology that you want to use
- 5) **target**: who is your research focused on or who will it help
- 6) **feature**: what distinct feature will the research have
- 7) **benefits**: who/what will benefit

Step 3: 15 mins: Writing your script

Take the 7 words/phrases above and write them into 3 sentences. The order of information may flow a little like this:

Hello, I am X [personal/professional] with X [distinctiveness] knowledge/background

My research is about X [discipline], it takes/ uses a X [approach/methodology] to examine/investigate/explore/chart/map X.

It is focused on X [target] through X [features], it aims to solve/answer/determine [benefit] this conundrum/problem/issue.

Step 4: 10 mins - Practising saying it

The most expedient way to hear if these sentences flow and make sense, is to read them out loud. Do they have all the keywords in that you feel represent the most critical points of who you are and what your research is about. Can you imagine saying them to another person if you are asked by another researcher who you are and what you are planning to research. Edit until it flows comfortably, and you feel confident that it sums up the essence of what you are excited about undertaking on the MRes Design.

Step 5: 5 mins - Say it to someone else

Find someone who can be your 'critical friend'*. Critical in this context means a trusted person who will listen with respect, will offer helpful constructive feedback in a manner that will grow your confidence and even help edit your sentences. Tell them in advance what you are doing, the purpose of this exercise and that you want them to give supportive critical and subjective feedback along the lines of:

- does it sound authentic to you?
- did they understand what you said and was the description of the research clear?
- did you use appropriate style of communication (did it sound conversational, invite further questions, use appropriate research language)?
- does it stimulate the listener to want to know more?

Use their thoughtful feedback to reflect on your sentences and tweak anything that you think makes it clearer.

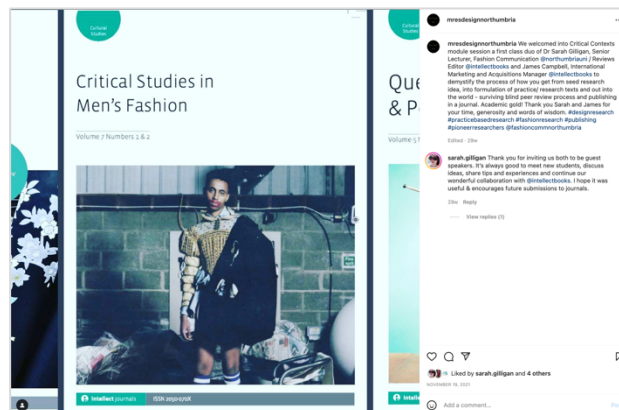
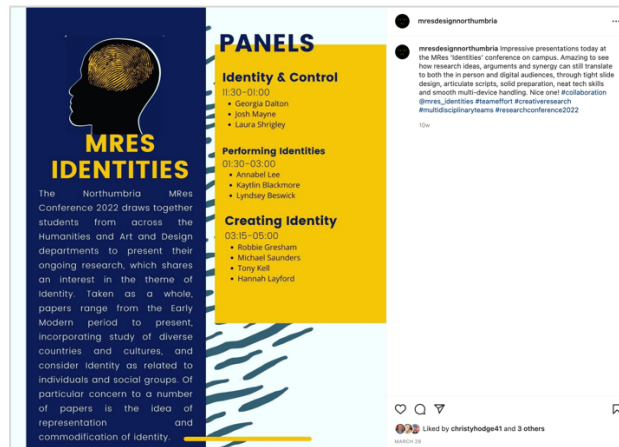
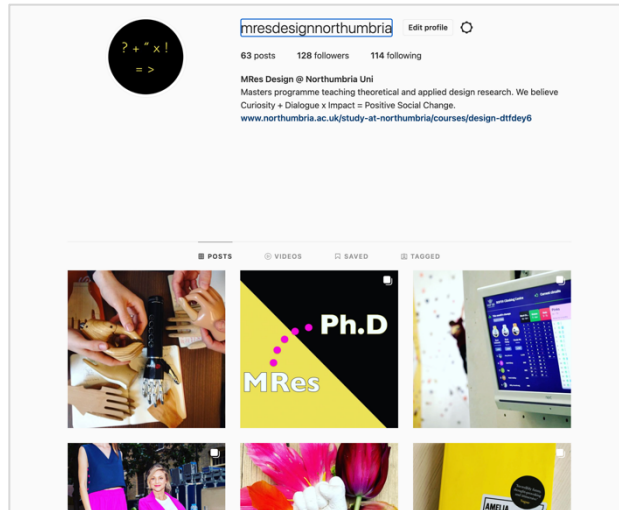
--

And that's it. Hopefully now, you feel clearer on your own research ambitions, what uniqueness you bring to it, and what you hope to start, explore and succeed in achieving on the MRes Design programme.

If you apply, we look forward to meeting you in Induction Week and getting to know you. You have a prepared and succinct introduction script and all the ingredients to start a valuable conversation as a confident early (early) careers researcher.

For a taste of MRes Design culture, follow us on:

Instagram: [**@MResDesignNorthumbria**](https://www.instagram.com/mresdesignnorthumbria)



MRes summer hot list - recommended reading, viewing and listening



Some starter suggestions to scan, pick and enjoy – bit of a 'pick and mix' approach...

The Power of Us: How we connect, Act, and Innovate Together – by David Price
Plenty of open access online resources on YouTube. Some great design case-studies too.

Start With "Why" – by Simon Sinek
Because, why not?

DOGA Inclusive Design – a people-centred strategy for Innovation
An inclusive design resource – great case studies, and toolkits too!

Case study of the Catalyst centre @ Newcastle
As above, inclusive design resource plus toolkits - worth delving into.

D&AD, 'How to break down a Brief'
Useful for you to apply as a decoding exercise on the MRes modules.

Research shows networking is painful, but it can be a lot better – by Libby Sander
The reasons to practice networking (*The Conversation*).

Through the Lens of a Critical Friend – by Arthur Costa and Bena Kallick
The valuable role of a critical friend - whether peer, lecturer, supervisor, pastoral mentor, friend and family. You'll need one, if not many, on a Masters! (*Educational Leadership: New Roles, New Relationships*, 51 (2)).

Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: A Pragmatic Approach – by David L. Morgan.
All chapters are interesting however if you want to scan any particular one – then Ch.3 is the one to start with. Also play around with the Methods Map on the right - you'll find yourself back on it in weeks once the modules start!

Invisible Women: Exposing Data bias in a world Designed for Men – by Caroline Criado Perez
Lots of open access resources, and she has started a podcast too.

After Lockdown - A Metamorphosis – by Bruno Latour
A thought-provoking bang up to date challenge to metaphysics, strange times and the potential of a new paradigmatic way of thinking. One to take in small bites.

The Simplicity Principle: Six Steps Towards Clarity in a Complex World – by Julie Hobsbawm
Keep. It. Simple. A great audiobook for the sun lounger.

The 'slow professor' could bring back creativity to our universities! – by Juliet Lefort-Favreau
A review of the book *The Slow Professor (The Conversation)*. If you like what it sounds like and it's a future direction of travel for you, buy the book. It's worth the paper, the time and the money you'll spend. It advocates for a slow burn, organic personal growth and professional self development, at the speed that is right for you, not the institution. There's a balance, and it's worth considering now.