



# THE MBA HANDBOOK

Skills for Mastering Management

Sixth Edition

**SHEILA CAMERON**

The Open University Business School

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# THE MBA HANDBOOK

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- Links to relevant sites on the web

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# Guided tour of the book

**Learning outcomes** introduce topics covered and summarise what you should have learnt by the end of the chapter.

→ 15 Writing assignments and reports

**Learning outcomes**

By the end of this chapter you should:

- appreciate the importance of clear written communications
- understand the importance of clarifying requirements for an assessment
- recognise plagiarism, and know how, why, and to avoid it
- know how to generate a range of initial ideas
- be able to structure these to produce an initial outline of your report, with appropriate subheadings
- be able to expand these into a first draft, using clear English, ways of showing numbers clearly and diagrams where appropriate
- be able to develop this into a well-presented final draft
- be improving your spelling and grammar, if these are problematic.

**INTRODUCTION**

Written communication skills are crucial for managers: they are likely to contribute significantly to your future career success. Documents you have written (whether paper based or electronic) may be widely circulated. A good report is likely to impress both superiors and clients. Much of your assessment is likely to be based upon what you write, so your skills in this area will have an equally strong influence on your success in your course.

To do well in written assignments you need first to understand precisely what is being asked. Then you need to construct an answer which is well structured, is clearly argued, covers the necessary ground and is in an appropriate style and format. Reports are still the most common form for substantial management communications, and some of your assignments will probably need to be produced in this format. Even where a report is not asked for, you are likely to find that a similar, clear structure will greatly improve your work.

**Assignments need to fully address the question and be:**

- in appropriate style and format
- well structured
- clearly argued
- evidenced
- based on theory
- your own work.

**Activities** feature throughout the text to reinforce learning by prompting thought and application to real life.

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**ASSESSING YOUR PERSONAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS**

Before going further it would be worth performing a quick assessment of your likely development needs in these personal skills areas. Obviously, this is only worth doing if you are prepared to be as honest as you can. Even so, if you can, seek other opinions on your skill levels.

**ACTIVITY 5.1**

The following self-assessment may prompt a rethink of your current skill levels. Fill it out to indicate how much time you may need to devote to these two chapters, and suggest those areas where you should devote your efforts. For each item give a score between 1 and 5 where 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = moderately often, 4 = usually and 5 = always (if you prefer, an electronic version is available on the website). You can keep a copy of the electronic questionnaire in your study file, and assess your skill levels at intervals during your course, and indeed subsequently. You may wish to address some of these areas during your work on Chapter 6.

→ C1.6

**Planning**

- I ensure that I have clear and measurable objectives
- I work out what resources I shall need to achieve my targets, and ensure that I acquire them in good time
- I ensure that any preparatory activities are done in advance of the event for which they are preparation
- I regularly review my progress on my various tasks and projects, and take action as soon as any problem becomes apparent
- I take action as soon as I start to get behind on a job, and take pride in meeting deadlines
- Colleagues regard me as highly organised

**Time management**

- I am extremely careful about planning my time to ensure that it is used to best effect
- I ensure that I do not neglect what is important because of the pressures of what is urgent
- I work on one thing at a time rather than trying to split my efforts
- I take steps to minimise interruptions at work
- I fit my work into a reasonable working day, and do not take it home with me
- Colleagues are surprised at how much I manage to achieve

**Managing stress levels**

- My job is well within my capabilities, and does not stress me
- I use my leisure time in ways that I find relaxing

**Information boxes** appear throughout the text offering either guidelines on how to tackle an issue, or a summary of key points from a section of text.

**Chapter linking arrows** highlight the connections between chapters and indicate where you can find further details about a topic or concept.

A METHOD FOR APPROACHING CASES 233

	Case	Cost	Profitability	Risk
Option 1	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★
Option 2	★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★
Option 3	★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★

**Fig. 12.3 Schematic for a 'Which?'-type approach to option comparison**

relationships are not understood, and the possible implications of each option thoroughly teased out, there is a risk that the case will be worse than the disease. Since forecasts are always guesses, it is important to have an idea of how likely your forecast outcomes are. And, as before, it is important to know how sensitive your forecasts are to your assumptions.

Once you have teased out the likely effects of your options, you can test these against the criteria you decided upon earlier. If there is a single criterion the process is relatively simple. If there are several criteria which you feel to be important, then you may wish to weight these, giving more emphasis to the most important criteria. If you are using quantitative criteria, then it may be sensible to multiply scores on each criterion by the weighting factor, and derive an overall weighted score. If more qualitative factors are important (and qualitative factors should never be excluded merely because they are harder to deal with in analysis) you will need to find some other way of handling the different aspects of your predicted outcomes. One fairly robust technique is to construct the sort of table found in *Which?* magazine, where goods are rated on a number of criteria, being given dots, rather than a number score. Figure 12.3 gives an example of this technique. This allows an 'at a glance' evaluation to be made of the table. The use of dots rather than numbers avoids giving a spurious impression of accuracy. This tabular approach is just as effective with policy options as it is with washing machines.

**10. Designing an implementation strategy**

In real consultancy you would be thinking about implementation issues as you worked through your analysis, even if this was not strictly within your remit. In case study analysis within a course, you may not be required to consider this aspect. After all, you will not usually be in a position to implement any of your recommendations. Nevertheless, it is important that recommendations are implementable, and you may well be asked to produce an action plan as part of your assignment. Successful action is much more likely in real life if implementation has been considered from the earliest stages. Whether or not you are strictly required to make recommendations for implementation of your chosen option(s) it is, therefore, worth at least thinking about how they might be implemented.

**Figures and diagrams** feature throughout the text to illustrate key points and clarify topics discussed.

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**Fig. 10.4 Relationship diagram drawn in the early stages of Handbook planning**

The convention for a relationship diagram is to use "words" sometimes enclosed in boxes, to denote relevant factors in a situation, and "lines" to indicate that there is some sort of relationship between them. It is as simple as that. But by constructing such a diagram, it is possible to identify key groupings of factors, which may help you to go on and draw a mind map, or a systems map or other appropriate diagram.

There are some practical considerations. The first is that it helps to minimise the crossing of lines. If not, you may end up with something which resembles a child's puzzle, and is very difficult to "read". Do a first version without worrying about this, and then draw a second version which is rearranged so that lines are clearer. This will normally involve moving the more closely interrelated factors closer together, rather than having them scattered all over the page with less closely related factors in between.

It may be helpful, too, to distinguish strong from weak relationships, perhaps by use of thicker lines for the former. Other than this there are few rules, apart from the general one applying to all diagrams, that, once complexity reaches such a point that clarity is lost, it is worth thinking about drawing more than one diagram, rather than trying to cram too much on to a single one. Figure 10.4 shows an example of a relationship diagram drawn in the early stages of planning this book. It convinced me that my intended simple structure would not accommodate so that lines are clearer. This will normally involve moving the more closely interrelated factors closer together, rather than having them scattered all over the page with less closely related factors in between.

**RICH PICTURES**

A more graphic and amusing form of relationship diagram is the "rich picture" devised by Peter Checkland for use at the problem-exploration stage of his soft systems

**Information boxes** appear throughout the text offering either guidelines on how to tackle an issue, or a summary of key points from a section of text.

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FURTHER SKILLS DEVELOPMENT 281

**EXERCISE 13.10**

Open a spreadsheet, and enter the numbers and formulae in Fig. 13.13. Then highlight the actual figures, and experiment with using the charting facility. (No answer given)

You can see that once you have set up a spreadsheet, which can be fairly time-consuming, it saves a lot of time. As in the above example, equations can be set up to reference cell positions rather than particular values, which means that those equations can be copied and pasted and the spreadsheet re-used with different sets of data. The time needed to set up a spreadsheet has been reduced by many shortcuts that are now standard features of the software. For example, the need to total a column or row is so common that Excel provides an 'Autosum' function which allows you to instruct a total to appear at a single mouse click. It is also extremely straightforward to calculate percentages, ignore negative values, round numbers to a given level, provide an average, or compute the rate of return on an investment. If you know present and future value, I referred earlier to the facility to calculate constants.

A further advantage is that you can use the facility the spreadsheet offers to draw bar charts, pie charts, scatter diagrams and graphs. (Excel provides a 'chart wizard' to make this easy.)

Rather than writing a further chapter (at least on how to use Excel, when you perhaps have a different package, I shall leave it at that). You should, early in your course if not before, become familiar with using spreadsheets, using whatever training resources are at your disposal. (There is a wealth of material available on the Web, if you have no printed material to hand. Some starting points are suggested in the further information at the end of the chapter.)

**FURTHER SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

The above treatment has, I hope, given you an idea of some of the things you can usefully do, once you are more familiar with numbers and basic mathematical techniques, and introduced the basics of the subject. There is no real substitute for practice if you are to become familiar with the techniques involved. Additional exercises can be found on the [website](http://www.pearsoned.co.uk/cameron). Alternatively, make up further equations for yourself, and try using equations you have made up to solve problems. What equation can you construct to tell you how far a car will go on 2 gallons of petrol if it does 56 mpg? How many miles to the litre will it do if there are 45 litres to the gallon? There are any number of such small equations that you can construct. Or you can obtain Graham and Sargant, *Countdown to Mathematics* (see Further Information), a GCSE maths revision book or Morris (2005) to provide further examples. Check that your chosen book provides answers, as you will need feedback on your work. If you do feel particularly weak in this area, and you have time to spare before starting your course, this is one form of preparation that will pay huge dividends. Good luck!

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**Exercises**

At key points in the text, practical tasks are provided which help to test comprehension and understanding.

PIE CHARTS 255

**Fig. 13.7** A very simple pie chart

confused by the 3D effect, professional though this may look. It then becomes necessary to print the percentage on each slice, and to label it, which rather negates the intended advantage of visual impact, as in Fig. 13.8. When there are more than four or five 'slices' you may find using a bar chart is much clearer.

**Fig. 13.8** A pie chart with too many slices

**EXERCISE 13.7**

Convince yourself of the advantage of bar charts by representing the pie chart (in Fig. 13.8) in bar chart form. You will see how much easier it is to compare the size of the different parts.

Note that, while bar charts can be used to show either a range of values, or, by fixing the height of the bar at 100%, to show proportions, a pie chart can only be used for proportions. It is totally unsuited to use it to show, say, sales figures for a number of years.

13

A **website icon** in the margin highlights where checklists, additional exercises, and other useful resources are available on the book's companion website ([www.pearsoned.co.uk/cameron](http://www.pearsoned.co.uk/cameron)) to further help you with your MBA studies.

**Helpfiles** offer 'back to basics' guidance to mastering key skills such as maths, grammar, and examination terms.

**Summaries** pull together the key points addressed in the chapter to provide a useful reminder of topics covered.

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**HELPPFILE 15.1**  
Glossary of terms used in examination and assessment questions

If you are not used to answering assignment questions in social science subjects, the following interpretation of terms commonly used may help you to be sure that you are meeting the requirements of the question.

**Analyse**  
This means to examine part by part. Thus, if you are asked to analyse a problem situation, you would be looking for the roots of the problem, rather than merely describing the symptoms which are presented. You would normally be expected to draw heavily on ideas and frameworks in the course being assessed in order to identify the root causes. The analysis may be the basis for suggesting possible ways forward and deciding between them.

**Comment**  
This terse instruction may appear after a quotation or other statement. You are required to respond in a way that shows that you understand the topic to which the statement refers. Thus, you might need to define any terms contained, explain the significance of the statement and possibly evaluate it (see below), or state the extent to which you agree and disagree, and give your reasons for this.

**Compare**  
This means look for both similarities and differences between the (usually) two things mentioned. It is very easy to forget one or the other, and safest always to think of 'compare' as shorthand for 'compare and contrast'. You would normally be expected to describe the similarities and differences, and perhaps come down in favour of one or the other. Sometimes it is possible to do this comparison using a table, with one column for each of the things being compared perhaps, with a third column for comments.

**Contrast**  
This is a subset of compare. You are expected to focus only on the differences between the things mentioned.

**Critically appraise/evaluate**  
This means to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of a proposition or theory (see 'criticise' and 'evaluate' below – you will need to incorporate elements of both) in terms of its logic, and the evidence on which it is based, and would need to identify any hidden assumptions.

**Criticise**  
This means to judge the merit of a statement or theory, making clear the basis for your judgement. This might be in terms of the evidence on which a theory is based, or the internal consistency of that theory, or the theoretical, logical or factual underpinning of an opinion.

**Further information**

offers sources of additional information for those who wish to explore a topic further.

**Answers to exercises**

allow you to check your knowledge and understanding.

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organisation should consist of keeping a good index to your materials, so that you can instantly put your hands on the notes on a particular topic if an assignment or a project requires.

Efficient reading skills and good note taking should increase your capacity to benefit from your studies many times over, a benefit which should be apparent in your assessment grades. The skills should be equally applicable at work. The time needed to develop them is therefore potentially an excellent investment.

**SUMMARY**

- Reading efficiency and effectiveness can both be improved.
- Reading speeds can be considerably increased if you are prepared to spend time on the exercises described.
- The decision as to what to read is important, and requires you to be clear about your objectives, as well as knowing what is available.
- There are several sources of help, including lecturers, librarians and colleagues.
- Different reading speeds are appropriate for different purposes, ranging from rapid scanning to slowly working through materials.
- It is important to read critically, questioning arguments and the evidence on which they are based as well as the additional value added by a text.
- It is important to identify the claims an author is making, and evaluate their internal consistency, and the strength of the evidence and reasoning given in support of these claims.
- Mapping the arguments can be a useful approach when evaluating an author's claims.
- Note-taking skills are important, and whether you work on paper or electronically, notes should reflect purpose.
- It is helpful in your notes to relate your reading to other materials on the same subject, to the author's purpose and to the context in which it was written.
- It is essential that you identify any direct quotes in your notes to avoid accidental plagiarism later.

**Further information**

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- Bee, C. and Nelson, M. (1997) *Accelerated Learning for the 21st Century*, Plurix.
- Russell, L. (1999) *The Accelerated Learning Field Book*, Jossey-Bass/Pfeiler.
- [www.austlii.com/au/austron/tutorial/](http://www.austlii.com/au/austron/tutorial/)



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# INTRODUCTION

- 1 Management, learning and the role of this book





# Management, learning and the role of this book

## Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should:

- appreciate the nature of the learning needed by today's managers
- have considered your own development needs and career goals
- understand how the skills developed in the book can contribute to meeting these needs and achieving your goals
- have identified those sections of the book which will be of most use to you
- be planning your work on priority chapters.

## INTRODUCTION

Managers today face more challenges than ever before. Most organisations now operate in highly competitive, rapidly changing environments. To build a successful career in this context, managers need a wide range of skills. 'Knowledge management', sense making, and virtual teamworking have been added to more traditional skills such as time management, problem solving, report writing and statistical analysis. 'Leadership' is in frequent demand. Continuing professional development is seen as crucial, and 'learning skills' are perhaps the most important of all.

Increasingly, managers are seeing postgraduate study as a route to career success, and this book is designed to help you choose – if you have not already chosen – a suitable programme, and then to study it successfully. Most of the skills you will need for successful study are highly transferable to managerial work. Thus, even if you choose to defer, or even reject, formal study, you will be able to use the book to develop a range of skills directly relevant to your career as a manager.

A glance at the contents pages will show you the breadth of the coverage of this book. Better communication, time and project management, teamworking, complex problem solving, writing, IT and number skills should make you far more effective at work. And above all, the ability to operate as a 'reflective practitioner' and learn continually from your experience should mark you for success. In an attempt to remain ahead of the competition, organisations are restructuring, delayering and resizing, merging, acquiring or being acquired. They are continually redefining their processes, adopting

new technologies, seeking to alter their corporate culture, and adopting whatever change initiative is the current 'flavour of the month'. To thrive amidst this constant change, you need flexibility and the ability to respond to new situations in a creative and effective manner.

If you decide to seek a qualification, this book will help you to gain high marks. But far more importantly, it will help you to exploit your studies to become a more effective manager. Managers often see obtaining a qualification as all-important: I would argue that the impact on your effectiveness at work is even more valuable. It is this, not the letters after your name which will do most to accelerate your career and lead to success.

The following comments by past students give a flavour of some of the benefits of management study:

*'My MBA course has altered the whole way I approach my job.'*

*'I am now far more creative in the way I approach problems.'*

*'I am now good at seeing what we need to do to fit in with overall strategy.'*

*'I find I am far better at coping with complexity – I no longer try to over-simplify situations in order to make them manageable.'*

*'I have become far better at setting priorities and managing my time.'*

*'My communication skills have improved enormously.'*

*'I feel far more confident when talking with our finance specialists.'*

*'I have become more aware of the range of stakeholders in my organisation, and of the ethical issues this raises.'*

*'Above all, I am a better manager as a result of this course – and I have already been promoted twice!'*

An MBA was once a rare qualification: this is no longer the case. MBAs are now widely available, and have been joined by a broad range of Master's degrees in management-related subjects. A Master's qualification is becoming almost a prerequisite for success as a senior manager. If you have already enrolled on such a programme, and want to prepare yourself for it, this book will help you assess which skills you need to develop to benefit fully from the course. These same skills should immediately transfer to your work situation.

If you are still considering whether to study, and which course to choose, the book will help you address these questions. Working through the next two chapters may make it clear that it is not yet the right time for you to enrol on a course. If so, decide which chapters will help you develop the skills that will make you more effective at work, and accelerate your career. They will also prepare you for eventual study. Obvious candidates are chapters which address improved time management, better team-working and networking, and more effective spoken and written communication. Developing these skills can help you to reach a position from which an MBA or similar programme is an appropriate goal.

Perhaps you have decided to do a Master's degree and are thinking seriously about choice of course. It is an important choice. Formal management study at this level is a

significant undertaking, and a major investment. It will not be easy – it would not be worth it if it were – and it will not be cheap. There will be personal as well as financial costs. Some students will inevitably fail or drop out before completing the course. Others will gain a qualification, but little else. Most, however, will find that their studies are fascinating in themselves, and lead to a transformation of their work experience and of their subsequent careers. The right choice of course will make this more likely, as will appropriate study skills.

The book helps you to choose a course which best suits your needs, and having chosen, to develop the learning skills to maximise the benefit from your study. It shows you how to manage your time effectively, how to deal with stress and how to gain organisational support for your study. It covers basic skills (numeracy, written communication, use of IT, teamworking) which may be rusty or new to you. It explores common aspects of management programmes such as learning from case studies, and doing projects or dissertations. It looks at how to approach the sorts of assessment you are likely to meet, and how to get good grades. It looks at how to go on developing your skills, and your career, once you have gained the qualification.

Although written primarily for the manager who is studying while working (in Europe, the majority of postgraduate management students are in this position), large parts of the book have proved useful to full-time students, particularly those with an academic background unrelated to management.

When the first edition of this book appeared, MBAs were the predominant management qualification at Master's level. Now enrolments on generalist MBAs have stabilised (though as I write there are signs of a slight upturn again). At the same time the number of specialist management-related Master's programmes is expanding rapidly. For continuity, I have kept the title as 'The MBA Handbook'. But the book serves equally well as support for a wide range of other management-related programmes at Master's level.

This Handbook is *not* a textbook – it is not designed to be read passively nor is it full of facts. It is closer to an interactive distance learning text. To gain full benefit you need to work through the activities and exercises provided as well as reading the words. Note that you are unlikely to need to use *all* chapters. Management students come from a wide range of backgrounds. Some have PhDs, others left school at 16, and have gained professional qualifications while working. Some are engineers, others studied arts subjects. Their needs with respect to learning skills therefore cover a wide range. Your own needs are likely to be some subset of these. To gain full value from the book it is suggested that you work out your needs, and actively manage your learning in order to meet them. Keeping a file devoted to your personal development can be a great aid in this.

If you have already chosen a course, you do not need to work through the chapter on choosing. Engineers will probably find the numeracy chapter completely unnecessary. If you have an English degree, you are unlikely to need the revision section on writing clear English. You therefore need to select those parts of the book which *are* relevant to you. This short introductory chapter aims to help you understand how the book is structured, to relate this to your own particular needs and thence to work out how best to use it.

## HOW THE BOOK IS STRUCTURED

- Ch 2, 3 If you refer to the contents list, you will see that the book falls roughly into three main parts. Chapters 2 and 3 deal with the period before you commit yourself to a course of study. What does postgraduate management study entail, and what benefits can you expect? Given your own particular set of goals and circumstances, is a Master's an appropriate goal, or is some other qualification more desirable? If so, which available course is most likely to suit your needs? Is part-time or full-time study better for you? If opting for part-time, do you need the discipline of regular class attendance, or would the flexibility of distance learning be better? Could you cope with a purely on-line course, or do you want some face-to-face component? Having decided on a type of course, what questions should you ask of possible colleges or other providers? Clearly, if you have already enrolled on a course, you have answered these questions to your own satisfaction, and do not need to work through the early chapters.
- Ch 4, 5, 6 The next three chapters deal with preparation you could usefully do if you have time available before starting your course. There are several possible reasons for not starting a course immediately. Many programmes run only once or twice a year. It may take time to obtain sponsorship. Your life may be too full at present to allow study. But if you have decided that you will study at some future point, you can start *now* to prepare yourself. This part of the book covers broad preparation – preparing the context in which you will study, and developing necessary personal management skills. These include planning and time management that will help you to make effective use of what will be your scarcest resources, time and energy. Also important are the assertiveness and negotiation skills you will need to protect that time, and the stress management techniques you will need for the times when the conflicting pressures of work, home and family become greater than is ideal. You will also need information-management skills to acquire and organise the large volume of information likely to be involved, and the ability to use IT to support your studies.
- Ch 5, 6 If you are planning a full-time course, the contextual issues will be different. But you may still need to develop the personal skills covered in Chapters 5 and 6. Even if you decide not to proceed with a qualification at this point, many of the skills addressed in this 'preparatory' part of the book are likely to be relevant to your job as a manager.
- Ch 7–13 Chapters 7–13 deal broadly with developing the more specific learning skills you will need for postgraduate study. This could be seen as a further part of your preparation, usefully done before your course starts. But the skills addressed are in a different category from the more general preparation of earlier chapters. If you have already started your course, you may be hard pressed to find the time to develop these skills. However, they are so important that you might perhaps select two or three chapters likely to be of most use, and focus on those. A key aim of this part of the book is to help you develop the habit of reflective learning. A personal development file will help you to manage your learning and capture insights gained. Because of the importance of continuing development at work, the skills involved will be relevant even if you are not at present studying.

→ Ch 14–19

Again, these skills are highly transferable. Organisations and their contexts are changing so rapidly that the ability to learn and adapt is a vital management skill. This is why course *learning* usually has a far greater impact on work performance and career success than being able to put MBA (or MSc or whatever) after your name. This part of the book should help you to maximise that learning, and the benefits it brings. Gaining a qualification is of course an important goal, and a valuable incentive to exerting the necessary effort. In order to pass the course, and certainly if you are seeking a distinction, it is necessary to do *more* than 'learn'. Unless you can *demonstrate* this learning, via whatever assessment is used on your course, you will not gain the qualification. Assessment is not the same as performance evaluation at work. It will probably involve a selection of written assignments, assessed group work, examinations and a substantial thesis or dissertation. You therefore need to develop a separate set of skills related to this aspect. Chapters 14–19 deal with this. Even if you have already started on your course you should find this part of the book helps you to improve your grades.

The final chapter is intended to help you consider your career goals after you obtain your qualification, and how you can continue to develop as a manager. In a changing environment continuous professional development is essential for success as a senior manager.

## PLANNING YOUR WORK ON THE HANDBOOK

You are unlikely to need to study every chapter. And as time is likely to be scarce, you need to target your efforts. To do this you need first to identify your development needs. There will be more on this as you work through the book, but it will be helpful to do a first rough pass now. This will start a thought process that will make the more detailed work in later chapters easier. Use the book chapter headings, together with any information you have about the course you have enrolled on, or courses you are considering, as prompts. It will be helpful to start a file for any rough jottings you make in association with the following activities. There will be suggestions for developing and organising this into a more systematic personal development file later.

### ACTIVITY 1.1

Think in broad terms about your preparedness to study, and areas which concern you. List these, noting down reasons for your concern. You will need to do this as a document which you can file for later reference.

Figure 1.1 shows how work on the various chapters might relate to milestones in an MBA or similar course. You should now study this diagram, and highlight those chapters which you think you will wish to use.

**ACTIVITY 1.2**

Spend some time skimming through one or two of the chapters which seem most relevant to your needs. Try to assess how long they would take you to work through if you were to do all the activities thoroughly. Then think about how long you can afford to spend working on them, either before your course starts, or while you are at the same time doing coursework. Try to be realistic in your estimates. If you have focused on more chapters than you know (being honest) you can find the time for, then be ruthless. Discard the least pressing. It is better to set yourself an achievable task, than to attempt too much, become discouraged and achieve nothing. You can always revise your targets later if you are getting on more quickly than anticipated.

Now decide on target completion dates for the chapters you have selected. Complete the chart below, or devise a more extended one. Be sure to note your target dates in your diary, too, to ensure that you do not forget to check your progress. You will need to bear your course timetable in mind, if you are already registered for a course, or your anticipated course start date if not.

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Target completion date</i>	<i>Notes</i>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

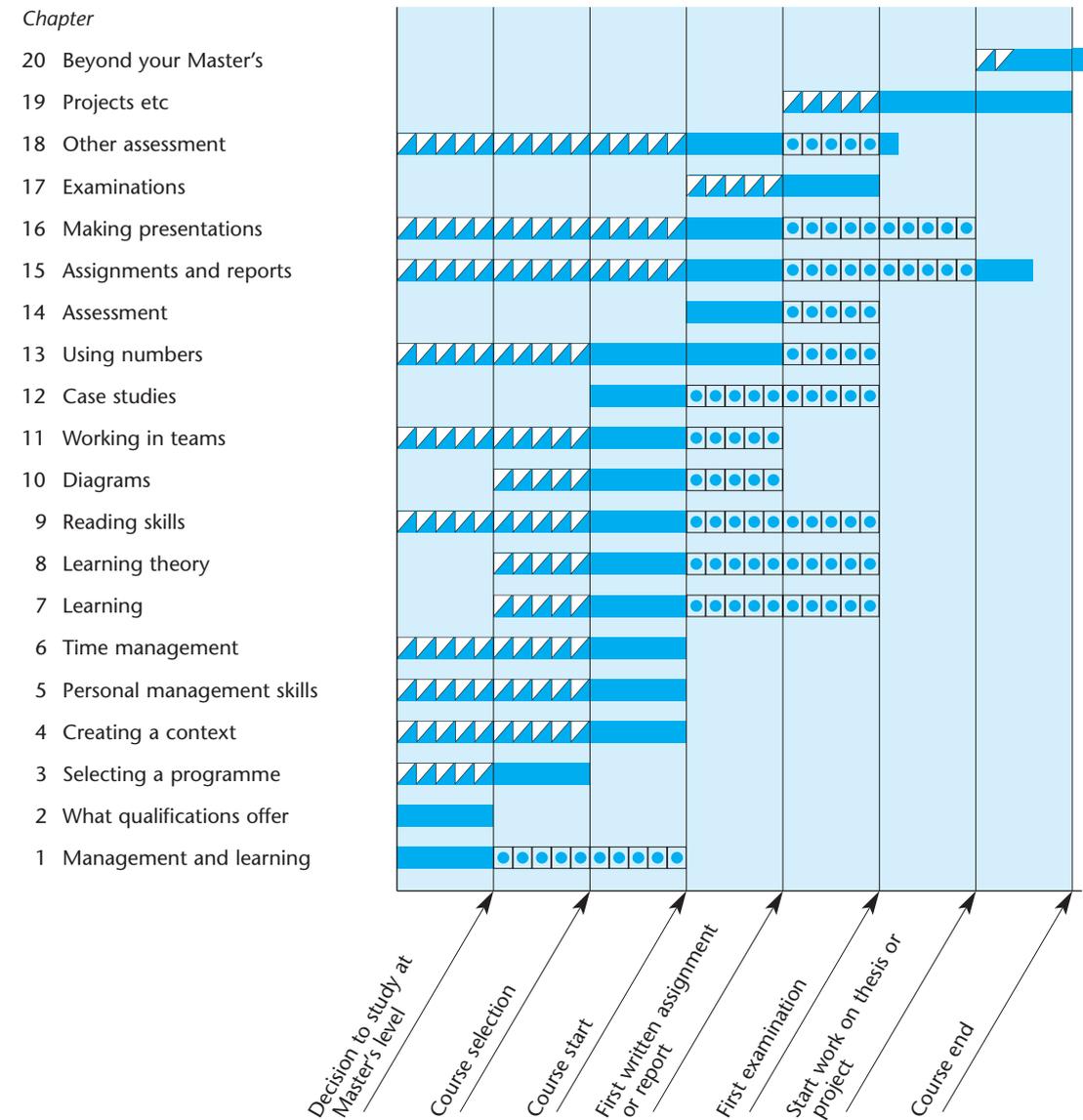
**Comment**

*The above activity should have introduced you to one of the key ways in which you are intended to use this book, that is, to write on it! By the end of your course you should have absorbed all you need from the book, and need to make only limited reference to it thereafter. So there is no need to keep it in pristine condition. Deface it as much as you like, provided this will help you. Indeed, it will be suggested that you deface other printed materials, too (provided that they belong to you, not the library), so you might as well start now. (If you prefer working with a computer rather than on paper, an electronic version of this and other activities is available from the Web page.)*

You should not be locked into your plan above. Course demands and other experiences will almost certainly cause you to revise your priorities and assessed needs. When this happens you should revise your plan too. You may sometimes wish to look at parts of the book you decided were not important, in order to check that your decision was right. The fact that your plan will probably change considerably does not invalidate it. Such changes should constitute improvements. It is difficult to make such improvements without an original plan to improve on. The key thing is that you *have* a

plan, and that you follow it, modifying it only to make it *more* effective. Because you will need to revisit the plan it helps to keep it on file, either paper or electronic. There is more on planning in general in Chapter 4, on study planning in Chapter 7. Chapter

→ Ch 4, 7, 8



Key:

- denotes optimal study period
- denotes scope for bringing study forward
- denotes period into which study could be postponed if unavoidable

Fig. 1.1 Optimal study times for Handbook chapters in relation to course milestones

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