

The Research Room

August 2025

Tips of the month

Here are some tips and tricks you can use to make your research experience at VUW much more productive and enjoyable

Action first, motivation later

Have you heard of behavioural activation? It's the idea that changing your behaviour can actually change your mood.

We often wait to feel motivated before tackling big tasks—like writing a thesis. But when it comes to difficult or overwhelming work, waiting for motivation might leave you stuck.

Instead, try flipping the script: take action first, even if you don't feel ready. Start writing, even if it's messy. Just showing up and doing something can kickstart your motivation.

I believe progress creates momentum. Momentum builds motivation. So next time you're staring at a blank page, don't wait—just write. The motivation will catch up. Curious to learn more? Check out [this article](#) from Times Higher Education

Dr William Eulath Vidal, FGR, Victoria University of Wellington

Share your story

When utilized effectively, stories can be powerful tools to motivate and change minds. If you need an extra dose of motivation, this story should help you out

The slowest rollercoaster—Mariel

I wasn't sure which part of my journey to share with you here, and this article reflects that. It's been the rollercoaster that was promised during my induction, just a really, really slow one...I mean, can you imagine being on a rollercoaster for this long?

Before it began. I was born in Uruguay, a small country nestled between Argentina, Brazil, and the ocean, which you might not have known existed until now. I graduated from university in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay, in 2010 with a degree in translation. While my true passion

was translating literature, I paid the bills by working with legal documents and chemical patents. However, after years of working in highly technical fields, I decided it was time to pursue a more creative career that still offered a liveable salary. So, in 2019, I began a master's program in localization in Spain. No, nothing to do with a GPS—everything to do with adapting content, whether software, an app or a website, for a particular culture.

It was all smooth sailing until March of the following year. I'm sure you can guess why. By the end of my studies, with no on-site classes, no

conferences, and no opportunities to connect or meet prospective employers, I found myself at a standstill. Or was I?

Going back to school after a five-year hiatus reminded me just how much I love learning. And maybe, once again, learning was the answer to my current predicament. A PhD seemed like the most logical choice. After many hours of research, I narrowed my options down to two universities: the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom or Victoria University of Wellington in Aotearoa. Since Warwick's application period had just concluded, VUW's presented a considerable advantage.

Over the next few weeks, I contacted my potential supervisor, wrote my application and was on my way. While I was a shoo-in for the School of Languages and Cultures, the scholarship I needed was a no-go. Darn! Back to the drawing board? Luckily my amazing supervisor did not give up so easily. She encouraged me to revise some sections of my application and try again. After highlighting all of my strengths and achievements in a way that does not come naturally to me, I was accepted. Wow. What would come next?

Year 0. When I was accepted in mid-2021, New Zealand's borders were still closed. I officially started my PhD in November 2021 as a remote student and patiently waited for the chance to apply for my visa. Unable to access my scholarship funds while overseas, I continued working to support myself for what I thought would be a few weeks, maybe months. With that assumption, I opted for full-time study instead of part-time. Not one of my brightest moments, as it turns out I do not thrive in remote learning environments. And while I had the support of my supervisors and did my best to stay afloat, the lack of access to the assistance and resources I would have had in Wellington took its toll. My first year was slow as I navigated a new academic system and degree, all while being completely out of context.

Visa applications fully reopened in August 2022, and after a couple of months of medical tests, document gathering, translations, and endless form-filling, I finally received my visa. Yay! Piece of cake! Said no international student ever.

I arrived in New Zealand on November 7, and that's when the journey truly began. I remember landing at Wellington Airport, greeted by Gandalf and the eagles, and **wearing one of the**

broadest smiles I'd had in a while. About two weeks later, I gave my proposal presentation and felt, at last, that I was finally heading in the right direction.



Anything that can go wrong. I would love for Murphy to be wrong, but I am definitely not the exception to his law. I've loved my PhD journey from the very beginning, but it's been filled to the brim with unexpected challenges.

I came to New Zealand with two preexisting conditions: one physical, one mental. Beyond the financial burden of not being covered by insurance, these were like two backpacks I was already lugging around. I got COVID for the second time in December of 2021. Very mild, like the first time earlier that year. But the third round, in April 2022, was not so kind. I experienced frightening chest pressure and pain, and it took me a month just to go from the lounge to the kitchen without feeling exhausted. Then, in December, I fell and injured my tailbone—another two months of recovery. After that, I got COVID again. Then I fell off a horse. You get the idea.



Each time I got sick or suffered an accident, I thought ‘it’ll be a couple of weeks, and I’ll catch up.’ But each time I caught up, something else happened, and catching up became my daily routine. So did stress and anxiety. Tutoring was the only task I could consistently manage. It had clear goals, a clear path, and places to be at specific times. When it came to my thesis, there were days I would sit in front of the office computer for hours, unable to do anything but watch mindless videos.

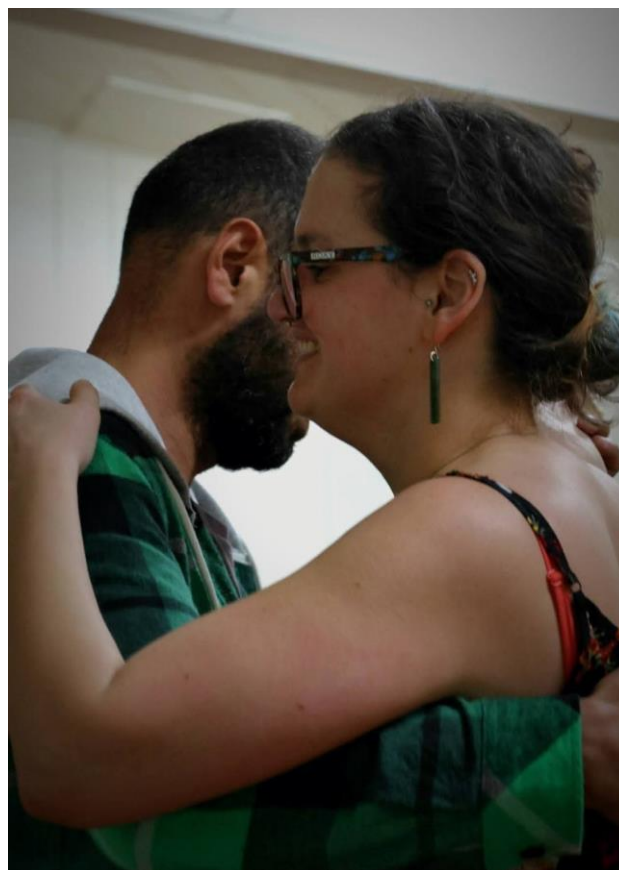
Fifteen months after arriving, I knew it was time to get help. I am proud to say I requested a three-month suspension in early 2023 to focus on my mental recovery. If I’d had a crystal ball for the series of unfortunate events, I would have done it sooner.

While my suspension wasn’t exactly restful, it served its purpose. I was able to continue teaching, which helped me maintain an income and plan for what would be my final year of thesis writing. I also had to move twice and attend several medical appointments during that time, but compared to what came before, it was far less dramatic. At least until ten days before submitting my thesis, when I woke up to a call from my sister: my aunt had passed. It was sudden and unexpected, and I was thousands of kilometres away from my family. I guess I’d had a break from injuries and illness, so...was it only fair?

Amid tears, I cracked on and submitted my thesis on 30 April 2025. Everyone tells you that clicking the submit button feels incredible. I was way too drained to feel much of anything. But the elation and relief did kick in the next morning, and it kept me going for a while. I highly recommend it.

Silver linings. I know. I have painted a pretty awful picture. And I know students whose picture looks even scarier. I really hope your PhD experience is far less ‘exciting’ than mine.

...But that smile I mentioned earlier? Well, it’s still here. Turns out, it’s pretty hard to get rid of.



Despite all that life threw my way over the past three and a half years, I wrote nearly 100,000 words I am genuinely proud of. I’ve met close friends who have made the journey not just easier but better. I’ve met dozens of other beautiful people, not just at Victoria, but in Wellington’s dance and comedy scenes, which keep that smile on my face week after week. I’ve taught Spanish for the past two years and loved witnessing students grow in confidence and learn at lightning speed. I went on dozens of hikes—some scary, all invigorating. I pet-sat the most adorable animals and got to stay in beautiful houses. I visited Hobbiton! I improved my bachata and kizomba skills. I performed in the Fringe Festival. I’ve learned to feel ‘hot’ in 23-degree weather. I became a student representative and helped build a community for my peers. I discovered I actually enjoy the sauna! I’ve even survived cold plunges afterward. And much, much more!

Most of the time, the real rollercoaster isn’t your academic journey—it’s everything else happening around it. I not only survived it but thrived in it by leaning on others, asking for help, and holding on tightly to all those amazing experiences.

*Mariel Lettier, School of Languages and Cultures,
Victoria University of Wellington*

Useful resources

Explore our list of research-related links that will help you throughout your research studies

Struggling with 'R'? Check out these resources to get back on track:

- [R for Data Science](#): It helps beginners turn raw data into clear insights and cool graphs—fast, fun, and easy with R and RStudio!
- [R Programming for Data Science](#): It's a great intro! It teaches you how to work with data, write your own functions, and fix and speed up your code—all in a beginner-friendly way.
- [Cookbook for R](#): It's packed with easy solutions to common data tasks. Each chapter tackles a specific problem.
- [R Graphics Cookbook](#): Your go-to guide for creating great visuals. Packed with easy-to-find solutions.
- [R for Everyone](#): A great beginner's guide. Learn how to work with data, write functions, and fix your code—no specialist skills needed.

Events happening soon

Looking for other events happening at the University and beyond? We go over some interesting events happening worldwide

Opportunities from other institutions

Organizer	Event	Date and Time	Register
Statistics Solutions	Quantitative analysis (Online)	08 Aug, 05:00 NZST	Here
	Qualitative analysis (Online)	15 Aug, 05:00 NZST	Here
	A practical guide to Data Analysis (Online)	22 Aug, 05:00 NZST	Here
Zenspeak Public Speaking Center	Overcome your fear of public speaking (Online)	Different date and time options	Here
Skillsme Academy UK	How to turn your presentations from boring to brilliant (Online)	06, 13, 20, 27 Aug, 05:00–06:30 NZST	Here
Ideas on stage UK	Increase your impact: 5 principles for captivating any audience (Online)	21 Aug, 03:00–03:45 NZST	Here

*By listing these events we are not endorsing any organisations but rather compiling and sharing a list of resources that may be helpful.

Happening here: Events at our university

Organizer	Event	Date and Time	Register
Student Learning	Monday morning writes (<i>In person</i>)	04 Aug, 09:00–10:30 NZST	Here
	How to research, what to research, how much is enough (<i>In person</i>)	05 Aug, 14:00–14:50 NZST	Here
	Monday morning writes (<i>In person</i>)	11 Aug, 09:00–10:30 NZST	Here
	Qualitative and quantitative methodologies: An introduction (<i>In person</i>)	12 Aug, 14:00–14:50 NZST	Here
	Monday morning writes (<i>In person</i>)	18 Aug, 09:00–10:30 NZST	Here
	Monday morning writes (<i>In person</i>)	25 Aug, 09:00–10:30 NZST	Here

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Contact

Postgraduate Research Student Advisers: FGR-postgrads@vuw.ac.nz

- Enrolling in your doctoral or master's programme.
- Candidature management changes. Online forms for thesis candidature changes can be found [here](#).

Thesis Examinations: FGR-Exams@vuw.ac.nz

- Submission or examination of theses.

Doctoral Admissions and Scholarships: pg-research@vuw.ac.nz:

- Doctoral applications or the doctoral application process
- Scholarships

Learning and Development: william.eulatthvidal@vuw.ac.nz