

The Research Room

July 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

Feeling like an imposter? You're not alone

If Many postgraduate students experience imposter syndrome — that nagging feeling that you don't belong, or that your success is just luck. It's more common than you think, especially in research, where uncertainty and self-doubt often come with the territory ([Wang & Li, 2023](#)).

But here's the truth: you're not an imposter. You earned your place. Progress in postgraduate study isn't about always knowing the answer — it's about curiosity, persistence, and growth.

If you're feeling this way, talk to your peers, supervisors, or reach out for support. Chances are, others feel the same — and talking about it helps.

Want to learn more, including practical strategies for managing imposter syndrome in academia? Check out the [Taylor & Francis Blog](#) for useful insights and tips.

Dr William Eulatth 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



Jess and Margaret Hyland

Mōrena tātou!

Tēnā tātou katoa! Ko Jess Wilson tōku ingoa. Nō Amerika ahau, engari ko Ingarangi me Huītene me Nōwei te whakapaparanga mai. Inaianei, kei Te Whanganui a Tara au e noho ana. He taote ahau mo te tuhi auaha hoki. Ko tēnei taku mihi ki ngā tāngata whenua o te rohe nei, Ngāti Kahungunu me Te Atiawa me Ngāti Toa Rangatira me Ngāti Raukawa me Rangitaane o Wairarapa. Ka mihi hoki au ki ngā tohu o te rohe nei. Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

Good morning!

My name is Jess Wilson; I was born and raised in the northeastern United States, southeast of the White Mountains and near the Charles River, on the land of the Pawtucket, Massachusett, and Wampanoag peoples. I am descended from several waves of British and Scandinavian settlers, who arrived in the US between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. I am also, now, a Doctor of Philosophy in Creative Writing, thanks to the International Institute for Modern Letters, here at Te Herenga Waka, Victoria University of Wellington. I acknowledge tāngata whenua, Ngāti Kahungunu and Te Atiawa and Ngāti Toa Rangatira and Ngāti Raukawa and Rangitaane o Wairarapa. I acknowledge the important landmarks of this area. Thus, my acknowledgement to you all.

Members of the Faculty of Graduate Research, supervisors, guests, my parents who are visiting Aotearoa for the first time ever, and fellow doctors! It's an absolute pleasure and an honour to be here with you today.

There is a particular problem inherent to being someone who not only likes to walk really long distances but also likes to write about it. That problem is that whenever anybody asks you to talk about any other kind of journey—literal or figurative—the lessons and metaphors fly so fast and thick and obvious that they offend my sense of nuance and subtlety.

Oh, shall we talk about the accruing power of incremental daily advances toward reaching a goal that at the outset seemed impossibly distant? Shall we? Shall we do that?

Have you entertained the notion that the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time? Ever thought about that one?

Is it possible that the real treasure was the friends we made along the way?

Perhaps the most enraging thing about every insight on this list is that it is dead to rights, incontestably true. I am defenceless against the relentless force of the banal epiphany. The most profound epiphanies generally are banal, at least in my experience, and perhaps someday, when I have achieved more wisdom than even a PhD can confer, this truth will stop annoying me.

At the risk of blundering through the muck of the obvious in a manner not unlike the nine hours I spent wading through mud in Raetea Forest: doing a PhD is very long and very hard and frequently leaves you suspecting that not only are you a fraud, you are an incompetent one, which is surely salt in the wound. I was struck at multiple points throughout the process by the bone-deep knowledge, reverberating in my core, that the thing I was trying to do—whatever the “thing” of the day or week or month was—was in fact objectively impossible; that no one in human history had ever successfully written a research proposal or obtained ethics approval, let alone completed a PhD; that any stories you'd ever heard otherwise were all revisionist conspiracy histories likely driven in some inchoate way by the neoliberal deep state; and that probably every international student ever enrolled was ultimately deported for failing to write fast enough. Some of you may recall a news story that circulated in early 2022 about a Hamilton-area farming couple whose dreams of holding the Guinness World Record for World's Largest Potato were shattered when Guinness wrote to gently inform them that their 7.8-kilo specimen—which they had taken to calling, what else, Dug—was in fact something called a gourd tuber and not a potato at all. The previous record—a measly 5-kilo spud—held. Who doesn't love a quirky human-interest news item? Who doesn't love potatoes and the potato-adjacent? I sent this story to any number of people, appending it with the commentary that the reporter had erred only in failing to note that my PhD research proposal was, in fact, the world's largest not-a-potato.

So often it was, and still is, hard for me to look squarely at my own work, or to see my efforts as more than inept flailing. But it's never been hard for me to see my fellow PhD candidates clearly. How hard they work, how sharply they think, how much they care. That cohort includes the people who blazed the path before me—but it also includes people climbing the mountain alongside me, or still wading through the estuary fifty miles back. People like my friend the brilliant linguist, who started her program alongside me, almost immediately went on maternity leave; who returned to the program and then, two years later, on the way to pick up her toddler from daycare, fell on the sidewalk and broke both arms – and who is

still pursuing her project. Or my friend the brilliant novelist who not only survived a brain aneurysm that ought to have killed her, followed by a 29-hour surgery after which the doctor said “If she talks again it’ll be a miracle”, but who has recovered with such fierceness and purpose that she is now back in the program, looking down the barrel at thesis submission. Or my other friend the brilliant novelist, who had a run-in with a concrete beam, got a concussion so bad that a year later she could barely read for more than fifteen minutes at a time, and who, come 2pm this afternoon, will be over in the FGR examination room defending her thesis. Or every newly minted PhD in this room.

Many of you, I know, have also felt like imposters. I can tell you that you, at least, are wrong. By example and through friendship, you have inspired and encouraged me. You’ve offered the joy of both intellectual community and war-buddy camaraderie. My supervisors and program director have been models of what care and engagement in research and in art look like. Our program admins are the only reason anything ever functions over there at all. My examiners gave the gift of their close attention. We pull each other up the mountain.

Te Araroa begins up at Cape Reinga and immediately proceeds down Ninety Mile Beach, Te-Oneroa-a-Tōhē. Ninety Mile Beach is only 55 miles long, which is a discussion for a different day; but even 55 miles is a very long beach, and one thing that walking it does is completely upend your sense of scale and distance. In a space so vast, everything seems at once enormous and tiny, close and far away. Is that speck ahead of you a smallish bit of driftwood that’s ten minutes away, or a massive washed-up tree trunk you won’t reach for an hour? There’s something about pursuing a PhD that feels, to me, similarly dizzying. You dive so deeply into a thing so niche that nobody else has ever gone into quite these specific crevices, and yet whose contours seem to expand the deeper you go.

Or, to invert the spatial metaphor: We slog up mountains in search of that nebulous target – “an original contribution to human knowledge”—and lo, we reach these lofty peaks only to find that each of them is, as Reddit is fond of reminding us, merely a pimple on the ass of human knowledge. You know what? I don’t regret it for a second.

Long walks are so frequently spun as hero’s journeys, and I spent a good portion of my thesis expressing irritation at the reductiveness of this idea. You can walk three thousand kilometres, but if you’re harbouring a wish that you’ll emerge radiant and transformed, you are liable to be disappointed. In hiking as in postgraduate study, you are in fact likely to emerge somewhat battered, with mysterious stains on at least one sweatshirt and some really unsustainable sleep habits. If you are prone to anxiety, or bouts of self-doubt, PhD study is unlikely—in my assessment—to cure you of these ills.

And yet.

Is through-hiking ridiculous? Is getting a PhD ridiculous? The answer to both questions is the same, which is “Utterly, and also not in the slightest.” Because what’s a world without space in it for us to pursue even impractical passions?

I don’t know if I’m a hero, although I’m certain all of you are. But the fact that I’m here with you today, having walked the length of a country, navigated a pandemic, finagled my way into a PhD program and—somehow, miraculously—actually finished it, tells me something about not discounting dreams that feel too big to reach. That fact that you’re here with me tells me you might know the same thing. I have more of those impossibly big dreams waiting. (If there are any prospective publishers or prospective employers in the room, uh, please come find me.) But we did this thing and so what other enormous dreams might lie ahead? There are always more mountains on the horizon; there are always more paths waiting to be born.

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

Dr Jessica Wilson, Victoria University of Wellington

Useful resources

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

Struggling with NVivo? If you're just getting started, check out this [NVivo Basics Resource](#). Also, the three short videos below are a great introduction and will make things much clearer:

- [Intro & Import](#): Overview of what NVivo does, and how to import data
- [Organize](#): A first look at how to code, note-keeping options, how to create cases and give them attributes.
- [Explore](#): Run a word frequency query and create a word cloud, then create a simple chart showing opinions on an issue.

Want to go further? These advanced videos are worth exploring:

- [Thematic analysis using NVivo](#)
- [Real-time collaboration](#)
- [Accelerating your Literature Review with Citavi & NVivo](#)
- [NVivo Transcription](#)
- [Mixed methods research with NVivo](#)

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	04 Jul, 05:00 NZST	Here
	Qualitative analysis (Online)	11 Jul, 05:00 NZST	Here
	A practical guide to Data Analysis (Online)	18 Jul, 05:00 NZST	Here
Zenspeak Public Speaking Center	Overcome your fear of public speaking (Online)	01, 02, 06, 07, 08 Jul Different time options	Here
Skillsme Academy UK	How to turn your presentations from boring to brilliant (Online)	02, 09, 16, 23, 30 Jul, 05:00–06:30 NZST	Here
WIMTACH	Data analysis using Python	05, 12, 19, 26 Jul, 02:00– 05:00 NZST	Here
Turpin Communication	Presentation skills for Subject Matter Experts	10 Jul, 03:00–04:00 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>)	07 Jul, 09:00–10:30 NZST	Here
	Monday morning writes (<i>In person</i>)	14 Jul, 09:00–10:30 NZST	Here
	Balancing life, work and study as a Postgraduate (<i>Online</i>)	15 Jul, 14:10–15:00 NZST	Here
	Monday morning writes (<i>In person</i>)	21 Jul, 09:00–10:30 NZST	Here
	Polishing your PG academic writing (<i>In person</i>)	22 Jul, 14:10–15:00 NZST	Here
	Powerful presenting 3-week series: Preparing for presentations	16, 23, 30 Jul, 10:30–12:00 NZST	Here
	Monday morning writes (<i>In person</i>)	28 Jul, 09:00–10:30 NZST	Here
	Supporting your writing with evidence: citing and referencing (<i>Online</i>)	29 Jul, 14:10–15:00 NZST	Here
Wellington Careers and Employment	LinkedIn Basics (<i>Online</i>)	04 Jul, 11:00–12:00 NZST	Here
	Interview Basics (<i>Online</i>)	04 Jul, 13:00–14:00 NZST	Here

FGR

Faculty of Graduate Research
Te Here Tāura Rangahau

FGR works to ensure that your experience as a thesis student is a positive one. For more information, visit our [website](#)

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