

The Research Room

August 2024

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

Writing a thesis is like a flight

If I think about what writing a research thesis entails, a clichéd but clear image comes to mind – a flight. Like a flight, research has a departure and a destination, an ideal path to get there based on previous experiences and data, and alternative routes in case circumstances change. And like a flight, research can be smooth or bumpy or, in most cases, both. It is important therefore to stick to it and see your flight through to the end with the advice of expert flight attendants, your supervisors. So, remain confident in the path you have chosen to follow but also open to change direction if needed and prepared for an emergency landing if necessary. And once you touch down, you will miss being airborne – because that is exactly what research does: it gives us wings to fly! Now: are you ready to take off?

Prof Marco Sonzogni – School of Languages and Cultures, Victoria University of Wellington

My top tips for structuring your thesis

Writing a PhD thesis is an exciting but challenging journey. Remember your thesis format may differ from your peer's due to varying field expectations and individual styles. At the University, there are some general requirements for all theses, but how these apply can differ by discipline. To make sure your thesis hits the mark, discuss the specifics with your supervisors. If you are struggling with structure, here are some techniques to help you out:

- Talk it out. Grab a friend or a colleague and discuss your thesis as if you're telling an exciting story. This can help clarify your ideas and flow.
- Create a visual map of your thesis: Grab post-its, jot down your thoughts, stick them on a whiteboard, and connect them with lines and colours. Mind maps work great for this too.
- Look at other theses in your field to see what works well and get inspiration.
- Don't be afraid to adjust your structure as your research evolves. Your thesis is a living document—It's okay to tweak the layout as you go along.

You've heard me say there's no one-size-fits-all structure for a PhD thesis, but here's a basic rundown of what you might include: Title page; Abstract; Acknowledgements; Table of Contents; List of Tables; List of Figures; Introduction; Literature Review; Methodology; Results; Discussion; Conclusion; References; Appendices.

Once a rough structure is sketched out, it is a good idea to assign each chapter a likely word length and, if you can, set a deadline for that first draft. Remember, each thesis is unique, just like your research. Embrace the process, and let the structure showcase the depth and breadth of your amazing work.

Dr William Eulath Vidal – FGR, Victoria University of Wellington

Launch of Hōkai, our new ethics management system and application portal

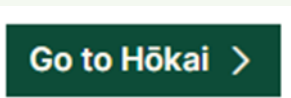
We are thrilled to announce the launch of our new ethics management system, [Hōkai](#)! This advanced platform, powered by OmniStar, has officially replaced the ResearchMaster ethics module and is now live. [Read the announcement](#) from Professor Margaret Hyland, DVC Research.

ResearchMaster will continue to support the Candidature Management side of research but will be replaced with Panoho in 2025. [Learn more about Panoho.](#)

Accessing Hōkai:

- University staff and postgraduate thesis students must log in to Hōkai using the single sign-on button. Users from the ResearchMaster ethics system have been migrated to Hōkai. If you have not accessed Hōkai or ResearchMaster for ethics previously you will be asked to register your account.
- Honours students, Master's by coursework students, and external applicants must [request access](#).

Visit [Hōkai Ethics Management](#) for more information.



Training and Support:

We've put together a [Quick Guide](#) to help get you started with Hōkai. This is available on the website as well as a download.

You can find more detailed support in the [Hōkai Nuku course](#). This course includes a Hōkai basics for everyone module, as well as tailored modules for research students, supervisors, and staff researchers.

External applicants or users can [register for Nuku online](#).

Why Hōkai:

Hōkai will support our existing ethics management processes and procedures, ensuring that the Human Ethics Committee (HEC) and Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) continue to uphold the highest ethical standards within the University. To minimise disruption, ResearchMaster will continue to be accessible for a period.

We appreciate your support during this transition. If you have any questions, feel free to contact the ResearchMaster Replacement project team at ResearchMasterReplacementproject@vuw.ac.nz.

Zoë Lenihan-Geels, Digital Solutions, 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

Navigating the PhD rollercoaster with ADHD – Maggie



When I was 22, I was suspended from university for failing several undergraduate papers, which ultimately led to my diagnosis of ADHD. During and after my diagnosis, I started to notice how ADHD research was heavily deficit-based, often referring to ADHD as a “burden”. This framing frustrated me quite a bit, as it contradicted my ethos as a Youth Worker and what I was seeing in the ADHD community; both perspectives offering a more nuanced understanding of young adults and ADHD. Not wanting to just sit with my feelings, I used that frustration as well as hope to motivate me when I was allowed to return to university. My hope was to one day be accepted into the PhD programme and create holistic research in Aotearoa that focuses on both the challenges and strengths of young adults with ADHD.

So, what does doing a PhD look like for someone with ADHD? Well, overall, I’ve absolutely loved it. I’m researching an area that I’m passionate about and can lean into many of my ADHD strengths thanks to the flexibility of the PhD programme. This flexibility gives me the time and space to express my creative side and to learn a variety of new skills. Despite ADHD often being depicted as a disorder where we are unable to

learn, many of us actually love learning —we just need the right environment and time to learn in a way that works for us. This is why a PhD programme is so great! The element of flexibility allows me to think outside the box, a skill that ADHD enhances, and apply it to my research. For example, I created a graphical information sheet for participants I’ll be interviewing, which will hopefully be more accessible than the usual text-based information sheets. This example is just the beginning, and I’m sure there will be plenty more as I head into the second year of my PhD.

Tackling a PhD is a monumental task, and it comes with its fair share of challenges. For PhD students with ADHD or those researching their own communities, these challenges can be accentuated. I thought it would be helpful to address some specific hurdles you might face in your journey. For any PhD student, the process of digesting and prioritizing information, as well as verbalizing thoughts on paper, can be daunting. This challenge is often magnified for those with ADHD. As soon as I started my PhD, I quickly realized that to conquer the colossal task of writing a PhD thesis, I needed to lean into the support systems available to me. So, one of the best decisions I made was signing up for monthly sessions with a Student Learning Advisor. Thanks to her support, I was able to develop not only my writing and articulation skills but also broader skills like prioritising tasks, which will benefit me in the long-term.

Another challenge that I have encountered during the PhD programme is learning how to manage my wellbeing when reading research that heavily demonises people like me on a daily basis. Challenging deficit-based research motivated me to enter academia, so I was aware of the content I would encounter. However, once I started, I realised how vital it was to look after my wellbeing. Some strategies I implemented include participating in free staff yoga, maintaining a research journal to vent, and developing and maintaining relationships with students and staff who ‘just get it’ which includes my three very supportive supervisors. I also suggested installing a ‘rage room’ to the School of Health, but alas, there’s no luck on that front yet.

Since starting my PhD, I've explored a range of tools and strategies to support my journey. One essential skill that I've developed is being able to advocate for what I need. Whether it's recording supervision sessions, using YouTube videos as supplementary material, or meeting with a Student Learning Advisor, finding the right mediums to support our learning can make a huge difference. As PhD students, we're in the unique position where many of us are not confined to a one-size-fits all approach to learning. So, why not make the most of this flexibility so we can succeed?

As they say, the PhD journey is a rollercoaster and for neurodivergent PhD students, the highs and lows of

this journey can be especially pronounced. Throughout this journey, there seems to be a never-ending list of challenges that we PhD students must face, and it can be hard to 'see the light'. When I'm in a low point I try and take on a similar framing to my research by also looking at the strengths that I'm bringing to my research. Rather than just focusing on everything that's challenging, I find that by taking a holistic approach, I have more hope and drive for the future, and I hope that my research provides that as well.

Maggie Shippam, School of Health, Victoria University of Wellington

Useful resources

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

[How to write a lot: A practical guide to productive academic writing](#)

Writing is a must for academics, but finishing dissertations, articles, books, or grant proposals can be a real challenge amidst a busy schedule. How do you juggle writing with everything else? Paul Silvia's guidebook offers practical tips to help you overcome writing hurdles and maximize your time.

Events happening soon

Looking for other events happening inside and outside VUW? We go over some interesting events happening worldwide

Organizer	Event	Date and Time	Register
Student Learning, Victoria University of Wellington	Academic speaking (<i>In person</i>)	07 and 14 Aug, 15:10 – 16:00 NZST	Here
	Oral presentations (<i>In person</i>)	13 Aug, 14:10 – 15:00 NZST	Here
Sage Research Methods Community	How to collaborate across paradigms: Embedding culture in mixed methods designs (<i>Online</i>)	08 Aug, 03:00 NZST	Here
Taylor & Francis	Excellence in peer review: How to be an effective peer reviewer (<i>Online</i>)	14 Aug, 20:30 NZST	Here
Complete Dissertation by Statistics Solutions	Preliminary data management and testing statistical assumptions (<i>Online</i>)	29 Aug, 08:00 NZST	Here
Dissertation by Design	Dissertation comeback: Overcoming setbacks & navigating challenges (<i>Online</i>)	27 Aug, 04:00 NZST	Here
Science Media Centre	Tips on communicating your research & Social media and online safety (<i>Online</i>)	29 Aug, 10:00 NZST	Here
WIRe	So you lost your job, now what? (<i>Online</i>)	29 Aug, 10:00 PT	Here
Gerald Parsons	The seven secrets to highly effective communication (<i>Online</i>)	22 Aug, 05:00 – 06:00 NZST	Here

Organizer	Event	Date and Time	Register
David McCrae	Public speaking masterclass <i>(Online)</i>	26 Aug, 07:00 – 08:30 NZST	Here
Language and Culture Pty Ltd	Designing culturally responsive presentation <i>(Online)</i>	21 Aug, 21:30 – 22:30 NZST	Here
Elisa James The Voice of Confidence	Speak with confidence, clarity and conviction - Public speaking masterclass <i>(Online)</i>	13 Aug, 21:00 – 23:00 NZST	Here
International Institute for Learning	Generative AI for creative thinking <i>(Online)</i>	09 Aug, 03:00 – 04:00 NZST	Here
Digital Marketing Institute	How to stay ahead in digital marketing <i>(Online)</i>	06 Aug, 19:00 London Time	Here

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

FGR

The Faculty of Graduate Research (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-Masters-Exams@vuw.ac.nz or PhD-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