



The Graduate Writing Lab at the Center for Teaching & Learning

For the craft of researching, composing, and communicating:
ctl.yale.edu/writing/graduate

Writing through Imposter Stress for Military Veterans Going into Academia Ten Quick Tips

Imposter Syndrome (noun): When highly-achieving individuals do not internalize their accomplishments and worry that they are “frauds” who may be “found out.”

Tip 1: Recognize that You Come in with a Ton of Professional and Service Experience

- You’ve spent a lot of time doing what other people have been studying to do or think about
- You’ve seen and experienced a unique and challenging range of situations, contexts, and personalities
- You’ve received training in diplomacy, professionalism, peer and group mediation, and on-the-spot problem solving skills that people in academia dream of receiving
- Your experience might also mean that you might encounter behaviors that may seem unprofessional or un-diplomatic to you in academic settings!

Tip 2: Reorient Your Perspective: it’s okay to be slow and clumsy at first—we are “novice experts.”

- Learning new academic genres, styles, and research approaches is not about remediation or judgement—it’s about building your professional toolbox.
- Having the freedom and encouragement to question and critique ideas, people, and institutions is also a skill that may be new.

Tip 3: Figure out what your triggers are

- Assess the situation to see if it is something you can change and/or reflect on.
- Accept that sometimes it’s just about having a “bad day,” with no particular triggers. Get some sleep and set up shop for the next day.

Tip 4: Change the Narrative to focus on your merits.

- As students, “we already belong. Those whom we admire and hope to emulate have invested many hours vetting us [...] Their initial judgment is over, and we’ve won; our prize is being invited to join a community of scholars in our respective disciplines and contribute to them, albeit slowly and clumsily at first” (“We Are Not Imposters”).
- Recognize what you’re good at: use transferrable skill action verbs (managed-designed-led)
- Practice taking compliments without deflecting

Tip 5: Draw a clear line between feeling inadequate and recognizing areas for improvement.

Tip 6: Don’t fear peer review -- embrace it.

- You are always *already* collaborating on your reading, research, and writing.
- The most senior people in your field crave feedback from junior members (the latest hottest new knowledge!) Why shouldn’t you crave feedback from other people in the know to make your project stronger?

Tip 7: Recognize that there are different imposters around you in academia

- Just like less-than-helpful military personnel, there are senior members of academia who pretend to know what is going and actually don’t, or use ideas that are out of date

- Posturing and pretending to be confident is a factor in both the military and academia
- Don't let someone's false confidence warp your sense of reality
- Know that senior members of academia also struggle with imposter syndrome and often confidently admit it

Tip 8: (Re)Engage with your community.

- Become a mentor to someone newer to the program than you
- Seek out good mentors and advisors, even in other disciplines/institutions
- Join/form an accountability hang or peer review group
- Seek friendship from military and social networks outside the academic bubble

Tip 9: Practice self-care and admit when you need additional support.

- Remember: self-care is a form of resistance
- Admit when it's too big for you to make a change on your own
- Recognize that sometimes external factors are working against you: find a network

Tip 10: Just Keep Going.

- Read/write/research every day, for at least 15 minutes – scrap what you don't like; get in the habit of thinking you are a writer who has good and bad days
- Develop your own creative pacing approach (different writers handle different stages of writing, well, differently)
- Leave yourself crumbs at the end of your writing day: a fragment you complete the next day

Further Readings ranging from gov't-focused pieces, to academic studies, to public writing pieces, to classroom activities:

1. Janet Asante, "6 Ways Women of Color Can Overcome Imposter Syndrome" (2016)
<https://www.matermea.com/blog/diversity-in-workplace-advice-for-black-women>
2. Jacquelyn Gill, "How I Cured My Imposter Syndrome" (2012)
<https://contemplativemammoth.com/2012/04/25/how-i-cured-my-imposter-syndrome/>
3. Stephen J. Aguilar, "We Are Not Imposters" (2015)
<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2015/04/13/essay-how-graduate-students-can-fight-impostor-syndrome>
4. Penny Eckert and Monica Macaulay, "Imposter Syndrome" presentation for the 2015 LSA Summer Institute
<https://www.linguisticsociety.org/sites/default/files/Imposter%20Syndrome%202015%20Institute.pdf>
5. The Ada Initiative: Supporting Women in Open Technology and Culture (2011-2015)
<http://adainitiative.org/continue-our-work/impostor-syndrome-training/>
6. Antonio Centeno, "How to Deal with Imposter Syndrome as a Veteran" (audio podcast and transcript) <http://www.highspeedlowdrag.org/imposter-syndrome/>
7. Ellen Crocker, Lesson Plan for UK300-03, #IAmAWomanInStem (2016)
http://www.uky.edu/studentacademicsupport/sites/www.uky.edu.UGE/files/ImposterSyndrome_Crocker-ClassActivities9March2016.pdf
8. Valerie Young, *Secret Thoughts of Successful Women: : Why Capable People Suffer from the Impostor Syndrome and How to Thrive in Spite of It* (2011)
9. Ciarra Jones, "The Whisper Campaign of Academic Trauma" (2018)
<https://mystudentvoices.com/the-whisper-campaign-of-academic-trauma-fc917686fcc3>

10. Jenn M. Jackson, "It's Not 'Impostor Syndrome' When You're Black and Woman" (2016)
<http://watercoolerconvos.com/2016/04/20/its-not-impostor-syndrome-when-youre-black-and-woman/>
11. Holly Genovese, "Coding 'White Trash' in Academia" (2016)
<https://medium.com/the-establishment/the-coding-of-white-trash-in-academia-7d07ebe37aee#.6mk7mulv7>
12. Assari, Preiser, Lankarani, & Caldwell. "Subjective Socioeconomic Status Moderates the Association between Discrimination and Depression in African American Youth." *Brain Sciences* 2018 8(4). <http://www.mdpi.com/2076-3425/8/4/71/htm>
13. Dana Huff, "Imposter Syndrome and Class in Academia" (2017)
<http://www.huffenglish.com/imposter-syndrome-and-class-in-academia/>
14. Ximena Vengoechea, "How to Troubleshoot Your Troubles with Post-its" (2015)
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2015/03/24/how-to-troubleshoot-your-troubles-with-post-its/?utm_term=.83887ea70d13

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