

How to Deal With Imposter Syndrome in Academia

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“What am I doing here?”

“Do I belong here?”

Have these questions plagued your mind making you feel like an imposter? Well, you are not alone! The “imposter syndrome” runs thick in veins of academics, right from early researchers pursuing PhD to experienced senior researchers. It can be very painful, damaging, and almost paralyzing. Therefore, to lead a successful academic career, it is important to know how to overcome imposter syndrome.

This behavioral health condition is deep rooted in the academic ecosystem. A recent [review of 62 studies](#) revealed that over 82 percent of people report having self-doubt or

personal incompetence. In this article, we will discuss several ways to overcome imposter syndrome in academia.

What is “Imposter Syndrome”?

Imposter syndrome is a feeling of self-doubt and incompetence, despite your accomplishments. It is a psychological pattern that causes researchers to doubt their successes, perceive themselves as under achievers, and experience unsettling fears of being exposed as a fraud.

What Causes “Imposter Syndrome”?

Academia is considered as one of the best careers for personal and professional growth. However, what may sound like a smooth road to success, is also paved with a few setbacks.

Imposter syndrome is often said to manifest itself in [feelings of uncertainty](#) and self-doubt. Nevertheless, there are multiple potential underlying factors that combine to trigger it.

1. Competitive atmosphere gives rise to imposter syndrome where judgments are made on the basis of your merit.
2. Imposter syndrome may also have its roots sinking in from your childhood. It arises if your parents pressured you to do well in school, compared you to others, criticized your mistakes sharply, or emphasized your natural intelligence.
3. Personality traits such as perfectionistic tendencies, low self-confidence, fear of taking up new responsibilities, etc. can also trigger imposter syndrome.

How to Deal with Imposter Syndrome in Academia?

Imposter feelings are volatile and won't last longer if you know exactly how to overcome them. Here are a few suggestions to internalize and put your imposter syndrome to rest.

1. Acknowledge Your Thoughts

The first thing that will help you move past this feeling of being an imposter is to realize that you're not alone. As much as you are unaware of what your peers are thinking, so are they. Therefore, it should be you to first acknowledge your thoughts and remind yourself exactly how you've won a particular scholarship or academic posting. Do not give-away your hard-earned achievement. Furthermore, maintain your integrity by being honest with yourself and others about the credibility of your work and findings. You must learn to differentiate facts from feelings.

2. Value Constructive Criticism

Your ability to accept constructive criticism and implementing the same makes you a successful academic. Such criticism encourages you to look for positive feedbacks. In the end, the objective of a researcher is to disseminate research findings to best understanding of the audience. Therefore, valuing feedbacks to present and deliver your research findings in a better way is crucial. However, you must learn to differentiate between a sugar-coated truth and a positive criticism.

3. Reskill Yourself

Don't confuse your capacity to learn and improve with pre-existing knowledge and miss out on any learning opportunity. If you find a [crucial skill or technique](#) that you are not good at, try to acquire it. This consequently makes your work more effective and productive. However, remember that chasing perfection has led many scientists to suffer from imposter syndrome.

4. Avoid Comparison

Comparison is the biggest thief of a successful academic career and can often be demoralizing. Furthermore, being surrounded by intelligent, high-achieving people can be quite intimidating. However, do not see their successes as your failures. Rather, remember that everyone has different strengths. While they may excel in one area, you excel in another. Most importantly, you must focus on what you have accomplished, not as compared to what you had hoped to accomplish.

5. Ask for Help

Do not shy away from asking for help from others, as you'd be surprised to see how many of your colleagues must be feeling the same. Find comfort in talking to your colleagues about their experiences. These are people who really see you and can be honest about you and your work. Discuss the challenges you are facing and ask them if they had similar ones. Welcome their suggestions and think about incorporating them in your work.

6. Develop Positive Relationships with Colleagues

Working in isolation often takes you away from building relationships with your colleagues. Try to [build new connections](#) with your colleagues and be affable to everyone. You need not be friends with them, but a cordial positive relationship can be helpful. Remember, honesty is a two-way street! Your colleagues must praise you when it's required, and suggest you for improvement in your work. Subsequently, overestimating your abilities can trigger imposter syndrome.

7. Avoid Falling in the Social Media Trap

Every time you log in to your social media platforms, you may find at least one post about someone sharing their story of success. Should you be intimidated by that? No! You are a smart person and you wouldn't reach where you are right now if you didn't

deserve it. Don't doubt your abilities based on other people's achievement [posts on social media](#).

8. Embrace Lack of Overconfidence

Overconfidence drowns you in the sea of reality. Researchers with delusion of success are often hiding their imposter syndrome. Furthermore, overconfident researchers are usually unaware of their weaknesses. Such researchers run the serious risk of being imposters. In a field as advancing and competitive as academia, you may not always know everything. Therefore, researchers must accept that they do have areas for improvement, and don't have answers to all questions. You must accept your shortcomings and improve them.

While everyone wants to feel validated when they succeed at their work, imposter syndrome can turn this into an impossibility. How often have you felt intellectually inferior than your colleagues? Have you ever felt like you don't deserve to be in the program? Stop overthinking and implement the above-mentioned ways to overcome imposter syndrome in academia. Let us know about your experience while dealing with imposter feelings in the comments section below!

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