

The Research Room

November 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

Streamline your literature review with innovative tools

Automated tools like reference managers and systematic review software can significantly streamline your literature review process, making your research journey much smoother. By efficiently organizing, annotating, and categorizing your sources, these resources allow you to focus on analysing and synthesizing information rather than manual data collection. Take time to explore the features of your chosen tools to fully leverage their capabilities!

One such innovative tool I've come across is Litmaps, which is changing the way researchers approach literature searches and reviews. Litmaps is an online freemium literature search, management and visualization tool. You can find research on your topic, manage collections of articles, and create visual literature maps of your work. Litmaps is entirely unique in how it recommends papers. You'll get paper suggestions based on the citation network, or how papers are connected via citations and references. This, combined with advanced search features, lets you quickly find the most important papers on your topic quickly and stay up-to-date on the newest, most relevant research effortlessly. The Litmaps community includes 300,000+ students, researchers and professionals worldwide. To learn more simply [go to the app](#) go to the app or check out [Litmaps YouTube](#).

As you explore these tools, remember to keep your supervisors informed about the resources you're using. Their guidance can be invaluable, and staying aligned with our university's [policy on the use of artificial intelligence](#) will help you navigate your research journey with confidence.

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

Journeying with Joy: Balancing Transnational Motherhood and PhD Challenges—Ha Ngo

I'm a Vietnamese mother who moved to Aotearoa a couple of years ago, thanks to the Victoria Doctoral Scholarship, which made it possible for me to pursue my passion for researching quality assurance and

international education. From the moment my family and I arrived, we fell in love with New Zealand's stunning maunga (mountains), awa (rivers), and moana (oceans), quickly making it our second home. But with that excitement came the weight of my cultural expectations. In Vietnamese culture, being a "good mother" is deeply significant and we believe that con

hư tại mẹ, cháu hư tại bà—when a child is unwise, the mother and grandmother are to blame (Vietnamese idiom), as a child's academic success and social achievements are closely linked to family pride and reputation. This blend of Confucian ideals and socialist beliefs has sometimes left me wondering: am I balancing my role as both a mother and a student effectively? Are my choices aligning with both my aspirations and the responsibilities I feel so deeply?

Navigating the complexities of transnational motherhood has truly been a journey. I began my PhD when my little one was just 74 days old, balancing breastfeeding with prep for supervision meetings—it quickly became my new normal. Moving across continents for my research has deepened my gratitude in ways I never expected. My family's sacrifices reflect the Vietnamese saying, *ăn quả nhớ kẻ trồng cây*, which means to “remember the tree when eating the fruit.” I carry this reminder daily, knowing I owe so much to my family's unwavering support. Despite the challenges, the values my family instilled in me give me strength and keep me moving forward, knowing I have their unwavering support behind me.



Me as a mother

As my daughter grows up, life has become a balancing act! Between full-time work, a cross-border research project with the Vietnamese government, a university job, and a role at a New Zealand education agency throughout my doctoral programme, it feels like I'm juggling all day long. Sometimes, I daydream about going back to my childhood and meeting the tooth fairy from the old tales—this time with a grown-up wish for 72 hours in a day instead of just 24! But here I am, navigating the adventure of motherhood with my five-year-old, especially now that she's started school. Mornings can be a challenge, like when she refuses to budge as the school bus arrives. Missing it means scrambling to rearrange our whole day! Even when we finally make it out the door, she sometimes fights wearing her raincoat, even in a downpour. And I'm not

just standing still—I'm multitasking, throwing dinner in the oven, giving her a bath, and connecting with co-authors miles away. It's chaotic, but there's so much love in the whirlwind!

Every day brings its own challenges. I often find myself asking, "Am I doing the right thing? Am I a bad mother for pursuing this?"— On top of that, there's the constant juggling act of managing my time. But through it all, I've found some key strategies that have helped me navigate this journey. I hope they resonate with you and support you on your path, too!

One of the best parts of doing a PhD is the flexibility it offers! It's been a game-changer for balancing my studies with family life. By crafting a schedule that fits my parenting needs, I can carve out focused time for research while still being present for my family. It's all about making it work together!

Master your time, beat procrastination, and unlock your potential. Even with the flexibility of PhD work, effective time management is essential for balancing studies, work, and family life. I've found that setting clear priorities and breaking tasks into smaller pieces keeps me focused. Calendars and to-do lists keep me organized, while the Pomodoro Technique—working in focused bursts followed by short breaks—keeps procrastination at bay and boosts my productivity. These strategies truly make my day brighter!

Seeking support is the first step towards success. Don't hesitate to lean on your support systems—I definitely do! I'm lucky to have understanding supervisors, supportive peers and family who offer both emotional and practical help. Regular check-ins with my supervisors have been essential, not just for my academic progress but also for balancing my responsibilities as a mom. The university community is a fantastic resource, too. When I presented my doctoral research at the New Zealand International Education Conference KI TUA two months ago, I felt a whirlwind of emotions—excitement mixed with nerves! Thankfully, timely advice from my supervisors and William at the FGR office turned my anxiety into motivation. Their insights were invaluable, and now I feel much more confident about my upcoming presentations at the New Zealand Association for Research in Education and the Australian Association for Research in Education conferences next month in Hamilton and Sydney.



Me presenting at KI TUA, which brought together over 500 domestic and international delegates from across the New Zealand international education sector.

Prioritizing self-care. Taking care of yourself is important! I've found that yoga, journaling, and connecting with supportive friends really help. Don't forget to carve out some time just for yourself!

Every conversation is a chance to turn differences into agreements. Juggling parenting and academics has taught me a lot about negotiation. I've found that giving my daughter choices can really smooth out our routines. For example, if she's reluctant to put on her raincoat, I'll let her choose between her pink raincoat and a blue umbrella. On a chilly day when she wants to wear shorts, I offer her a purple sweater or a pair of black shorts. This parenting approach has also influenced my PhD work! Learning to compromise and present options helps me negotiate timelines and expectations in my academic life, making everything feel a bit more manageable.

Embracing a bi-cultural journey. Raising my daughter in a bi-cultural setting has been a rewarding adventure, complete with its challenges. Watching her embrace multiple languages is a joy, but it also means navigating her questions about identity. To help her feel connected, we celebrate both Vietnamese holidays and New Zealand customs, blending traditions seamlessly into our daily lives. We have open discussions about our cultural backgrounds, which helps her explore who she is. Connecting with other transnational families has also been a source of support, as we share our experiences and celebrate our diverse heritages together.

Embracing my bi-cultural identity has transformed my journey into one of resilience, collaboration, and community. My bi-cultural identity reminds me that my journey isn't just about personal success; it's about being a resilient role model for my child. I try to keep a positive mindset—if life hands you lemons, why not

make lemonade? Instead of letting the guilt from Confucian values about family weigh me down, I chose to share my story and reflect on my experiences. Connecting with fellow PhD mothers has been a game-changer, helping me balance my roles as both a scholar and a parent. Together with three other Vietnamese PhD mothers from Auckland, Vietnam, and Japan, we merged our research insights to explore our transnational mothering experiences and turn them into a publication. Our collaboration resulted in an autoethnography, published earlier this year in *Culture and Education*, a top journal in our field. If you're curious to learn more, please [check it out!](#) I've found that connecting with other students and families creates a warm sense of belonging. Whether it's through casual study groups or parenting networks, these relationships bring encouragement and understanding when times get tough.

Unleash your inner powerhouse by focusing on your strengths. Instead of getting overwhelmed by challenges, I choose to celebrate my strengths as a transnational mother. This positive mindset not only enriches my research but also fills me with hope and motivation.

Speak up, stand out, and advocate for your needs. Don't hesitate to ask for what you need! Whether it's online resources or flexible deadlines, communicating your needs can make a huge difference in your academic journey. I've been doing this, and it's been incredibly helpful!

Navigating the journey of transnational motherhood while pursuing a PhD has been a blend of challenges and rewards. While I've faced hurdles, I've also discovered incredible opportunities for growth and connection. Reflecting on my experiences, I realize that my proudest accomplishments—like having ten papers accepted by top-tier publishers, developing important policies, delivering presentations, and preparing to submit my PhD thesis in the coming months—pale in comparison to the joy of my family and the balance I've found with them.

I've learned to celebrate the small victories, like my daughter's language development in a bicultural setting. This journey has taught me to prioritize what truly matters: nurturing her while striving for academic success. Balancing work, academia, and family life is possible with grace, determination, and a sense of gratitude.

As I wrap up, I want to remind you that you are not alone on this journey. Many of us share similar struggles, and by sharing our experiences and strategies, we can support each other in navigating these complexities. Embrace your journey, celebrate

your achievements, and don't hesitate to seek help along the way. Together, we can thrive!

Ha Ngo, School of Education, Victoria University of Wellington

Useful resources

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

[Consensus](#) and [Scispace](#), two tools that are making a difference in academic and research work. Both are designed to support researchers by helping them access, synthesize, and organize scientific information more effectively.

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
Human Ethics Team, Victoria University of Wellington	Human Ethics: Training session (<i>dual delivery</i>)	13 Nov, 11:00 – 12:00 NZST	Here
Student Learning, Victoria University of Wellington	Get writing done (<i>In-person</i>)	11 Nov, 9:00 – 10:50 NZST	Here
	Transition to postgraduate studies (<i>In-person</i>)	12 Nov, 14:10 – 15:00 NZST	Here
	Academic integrity workshop (<i>Online</i>)	14 Nov, 15:10 – 16:00 NZST	Here
	Get writing done (<i>In-person</i>)	18 Nov, 9:00 – 10:50 NZST	Here
	Research proposals (<i>In-person</i>)	19 Nov, 14:10 – 15:00 NZST	Here
	Get writing done (<i>In-person</i>)	25 Nov, 9:00 – 10:50 NZST	Here
	Developing your argument (<i>In-person</i>)	26 Nov, 14:10 – 15:00 NZST	Here
ISANA NZ	International education research seminar (<i>Online</i>)	05 Nov, 12:00 NZST	Here
Queensland University of Technology	Conference: Exploring the potential of AI in research (<i>Online</i>)	26 Nov, 10:00 – 16:00 NZST	Here
OECD	Understanding international differences in maths: Does a country's culture of mathematics' really shape its success? (<i>Online</i>)	06 Nov, 01:00 NZST	Here
	Are foundation skills the building blocks for success in the AI era? (<i>Online</i>)	23 Nov, 01:00 NZST	Here
Taylor & Francis	Introduction to open research (<i>Online</i>)	07 Nov, 01:00 – 02:30 NZST	Here
	Excellence in peer review: How to be an effective peer reviewer (<i>Online</i>)	13 Nov, 21:30 – 23:00 NZST	Here
	Choosing quality journals (<i>Online</i>)	20 Nov, 21:00 – 20:30 NZST	Here
Complete Dissertation by Statistics Solutions	Quantitative analysis workshop (<i>Online</i>)	08 Nov, 07:00 NZST	Here
	Qualitative analysis workshop (<i>Online</i>)	15 Nov, 07:00 NZST	Here
	From template to first draft (<i>Online</i>)	16 Nov, 09:00 NZST	Here

Organizer	Event	Date and Time	Register
Lumivero	Navigating ethical challenges in qualitative research: Leveraging AI responsibly <i>(Online)</i>	14 Nov, 12:00 EST	Here
Niche Academy	Proving the value of soft skills <i>(Online)</i>	13 Nov, 14:00 US Eastern	Here
Views Professional Development	Professional resume and cover letter writing <i>(Online)</i>	06 Nov, 16:30 – 17:00 NZST	Here
	Dream career masterclass: Find a job you'll love, in 5 easy steps <i>(Online)</i>	20 Nov, 16:30 – 17:00 NZST	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