



Please Take Your Time: A Research Perspective

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As a PhD student midway through my candidature, I distinctly recall my supervisor telling me to take my time and read as widely as I could, because from this point forward, my life would only become busier. He explained that soon I would no longer have the luxury of time to indulge my learning in the same way that was currently possible. I can't recall how I responded but remember shaking my head as I walked away thinking that I was already really busy! Fast forward 20 years and I now find myself giving the exact same advice to my own students. I am sure they don't entirely believe my words, as I didn't when the same advice was given to me, but I persist anyway for a number of reasons, which I expand upon below.

The first reason is learning the fundamentals. I am concerned that my students, and many others, aren't investing the time to understand the basics of good scientific research. They are in too much of a hurry, and this is in part a symptom of the world in which we now live. I urge students, and anyone undertaking research, to take the time to learn all they can about methodological design, as this underpins all good scientific research. I urge them to take those extra statistics courses too, and I assure them that they will come in handy! They need to be able to understand their data. They need to emerge themselves in the research culture and learn all they can from as many people as they can.

The second reason, which overlaps with the first, is related to the ability to scrutinize scientific evidence. On a daily basis, we are literally bombarded with information, and the information is so readily available. Too often, we see Twitter and other forms of media as a sole source of information gathering. Whilst such sources are beneficial for awareness, they do not replace reading and fully scrutinizing a research paper. I can unequivocally state that in my student days, there was not one research paper that I didn't fully read if I had taken the effort and time and monetary investment to go to the library (which I had to do), locate the journal and paid the

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photocopy fee. We virtually never go to the library anymore because we can download everything we need, usually for free. I therefore see piles of unread articles on both mine and my student's desks. We fall into the fallacy that we have done the work by simply printing the paper and reading the abstract. Too often, we rely on the authors' conclusions. This is not good enough, and we must always question the methods and the conclusions of all scientific research, and then form our own judgments. Consider all the evidence, not just the loudest voice.

Beyond the academic contribution, we also need to consider the impact our research makes in terms of its contribution to the economy, society, culture or environment. Metrics are important for a number of reasons but they are not everything. Our primary outcome should be asking the most relevant questions and conducting the best possible research we can. Take research seriously but also love it and have fun doing it, as that is what makes it all worthwhile to both the scientist and their audience!