Mid-Career Researcher Ideas for Navigating Challenges and Opportunities

Margaret A. Hoogland, MLS, AHIP[a]

[a]Associate Professor and Clinical Medical Librarian, University Libraries, The University of Toledo, Toledo, Ohio, https://www.orcid.org/0000-0002-9932-3605,
margaret.hoogland@utoledo.edu

In September 2024, we formed our inaugural Editorial Board. Each member contributed ideas, candid thoughts, and served as a sounding board and think tank for what proved to be a wild year. I cannot thank them enough for serving in this capacity.

Recently, we welcomed Jaclyn Morales to our Marketing Team and Carol Ng-He as our newest Associate Editor. Jacyln brings a wealth of experience, enthusiasm, and energy to our group. Carol will lead our efforts in creating and introducing a new submission category for *Hypothesis*. We encourage you to register on our website, follow us on social media, or connect with us on LinkedIn so that you can keep up with the latest news.

As a mid-career researcher, I am sharing approaches that I take for handling my current and future research projects:

1. *At most, I will join two research projects a year – depending on my other commitments, this might be one project.* This will allow me to fulfill my obligations and remain a faculty member in good standing[1]. When I need to decline an opportunity, I will happily share the opportunity with others.

2. *Capitalize on your strengths.*

- *Idea Generator* I come up with ideas very quickly – but most of the ideas will never leave the imaginary phase. If you struggle to come up with an idea, topic, or question – I love to brainstorm ideas and no idea is bad. I am always thankful for those individuals, who are willing to assist me in culling through my ideas to identify the good ones!

- *Energy and Enthusiasm.* I get excited very easily and I happen to have a lot of energy. How much or little energy I throw into a situation varies by how much I think the project or group needs it. When I run low on both or either of these, it is time to have a "check-in" conversation so that I can identify the issue(s) and then to find a way to get off a project, rework it, or accept that I just need to keep at it.

- *Browse the journal issue table of contents.* We are all "looking" for the gap in the literature or a way to reframe a question so that it might become feasible. One easy way to follow trends is to subscribe to the journal table of contents. If you are not able to attend a conference or if you are not sure research and/or scholarly activities are for you, this is a fantastic way to keep up with the trends in our field.

- *Avid reader.* This practice of browsing the issues means that my to-read folder and have-read folders are equally large and they are continuously growing. I have added subfolders within the have-read folder so that I can more easily find articles. Most weeks, I read anywhere from three-to-five articles. If you are ever in need of a citation on a topic, let me know – I likely have read something about it.

3. *Let your ideas hibernate and mature!*

I have time and so I can now justify messing up, trying new things, declining projects that do not "immediately" grab my attention, and refining a question or idea until it becomes feasible. Take advantage of this! When a team of enthusiastic new or emerging researchers asks me for

advice or invites me to join a project, I try to be extra thoughtful when I decline an opportunity, because I have experienced the pressure and stress they are facing.

4. *Trust yourself – your instincts are rarely wrong.*

Programs, projects, and campaigning for something new or reworking existing services go better when I follow my instinct. To minimize bias, I try to back up the instinct with data and I rely on feedback from individuals, who can provide insight and hold me accountable. At times, they propel me out of the phase, where self-doubt instead of the known facts are leading the situation.

5. *"The more I learn, the less I know.[2]"*

This quote highlights how experience, knowledge, interactions, and more influence our perspectives and outlooks. As evidenced by the chart, however, these qualities can lead to self-doubt and delays:

Initial Statement	Reframed Statement
The more I learn...	-The more experience I accumulate. -The greater knowledge I obtain. -The better I can anticipate the time needed to complete a project.
the less I know because...	-I am more aware of bias[3]. -Projects take longer to accomplish, because I spend extra time debating approaches. -I realize the importance of reworking existing study designs[4]. -I pilot test and adjust my data collection instrument multiple times. -I can reanalyze collected data and do more with projects[5,6].

When looking at this chart, the "less I know" entries are, naturally, greater than "the more I learn entries," because I am always learning. The "less I know" entries should not stop you from doing research or projects. Instead, recognize that every situation is different. Move out of your comfort zone and chat with others about your research problems or ideas. The process of preparing and then explaining the problem or situation to someone could result in a new idea or approach.

6. *Get comfortable with your quirks.*

Unconventional is the best way to describe my life and approach. If you met me on the street and did not immediately identify me as a librarian, I would consider this a successful encounter. I resist long term commitments for a project, services, course, etc. unless I can finagle the option to review and to adjust things on a regular basis.

Post-Covid and to the present, I adopted the mentality of planning with great detail for certain

things, but usually I deal with the big "must dos" every day, week, month, and year. Progress and especially the word "done or finished" excite me.

At times, especially since taking on the role of Editor, I have gotten discouraged and frustrated. The counterbalance is the satisfaction I get from changing and improving how I engage my faculty, staff, learners, and community.

I thank you for your interest in and support of *Hypothesis*. The Editorial Team and I look forward to working and interacting with you!

References

1. Paschke-Wood J, Gallaspy AF. Great expectations: Adapting a research agenda to changing scholarship requirements. J Acad Librariansh [Internet]. 2022 Jul [cited 2024 Feb 23];48(4):102527. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2022.102527

2. Hoogland JL. Quote. 2025.

3. Zeng L, Brignardello-Petersen R, Hultcrantz M, Siemieniuk RAC, Santesso N, Traversy G, et al. GRADE guidelines 32: GRADE offers guidance on choosing targets of GRADE certainty of evidence ratings. J Clin Epidemiol. 2021 Sep;137:163–75. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2021.03.026

4. Eldredge JD. Inventory of research methods for librarianship and informatics. J Med Libr Assoc JMLA. 2004 Jan;92(1):83–90.

5. Boscardin CK, Sewell JL, Tolsgaard MG, Pusic MV. How to use and report on p-values. Perspect Med Educ [Internet]. 2024 Apr 26 [cited 2025 Jan 9];13(1):250–4. https://doi.org/10.5334/pme.1324

6. Miettunen J, Nieminen P, Isohanni M. Statistical methodology in general psychiatric journals. Nord J Psychiatry. 2002;56(3):223–8. https://doi.org/10.1080/080394802317607219