

UC Riverside

UCR Honors Capstones 2025-2026

Title

HOW TO OVERCOME THE FEELING OF AN IMPOSTER

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/752712k6>

Author

Georgy, Micheal

Publication Date

2026-06-15

HOW TO OVERCOME THE FEELING OF AN IMPOSTER

By

Micheal Georgy

A capstone project submitted for Graduation With University Honors

May 09, 2026

University Honors

University of California, Riverside

Approved

Dr. Robin Russin

Department of Theater, Film, and Digital Production

Dr. Begoña Echeverria, Howard H Hays

University Honors

Abstract

In research conducted with 28 medical doctors, 12 said that they had experienced Imposter Syndrome in some way, shape, or form(LaDonna et al.), and at least 24 percent of medical students experienced Imposter Syndrome (Feigofsky, Suzanne.). Imposter Syndrome is the feeling of being a fraud in your field as well as the notion that accomplishments made were by luck or chance, and you currently do not belong where you are (Shanna, Slank). Imposter Syndrome causes feelings of self doubt, and inferiority to peers, which can lead to negative effects in work and scholarly environments, like student work overload, and disinterest in given tasks. The purpose of my capstone project is to create a short-film that details the causes, manifestations, and results of Imposter Syndrome as well as the precautions against it. It hopes to inform undergraduate students about Imposter Syndrome, so that they are better able to detect and manage it.

Acknowledgements:

I received a lot of support for my project, thank you to Dr. Russin for helping me create the script and for informing me on how to take the next steps in my project. Thank you to Dr. Kalu, and Jovana Isevski, for helping narrow down, and discover a good topic for my project. Thank you to Mrs. Carrie Cruce for helping me find sources. Thank you to Mrs. Jane Kim for informing and introducing me about the capstone project. Finally I would like to thank Dr. Echeverria, and Mr. Jovan Smith for helping me with formatting my project.

Introduction

Symptoms of Imposter Syndrome can vary. Of the 28 interviewed, some physicians stated; “You sort of realize there are a lot of really smart people here, and they are smarter than I am...” (LaDonna et al., 2017). Others said, “...I was doing the best job that I could do, and that was enough for me.” (LaDonna et al., 2017) Physicians that have made mistakes in their line of work have experienced Imposter Syndrome and self-doubt, some to the extent of being paralyzed and unable to operate on patients. Imposter Syndrome affects many people differently, and there are many manifestations of Imposter Syndrome as explained by (Rakestraw, 2017).

1. The perfectionist (workaholic) feels like they have to prove themselves by being perfect at everything they do; otherwise they are inadequate.
2. Lucky Duck Imposters are those who feel like everything they accomplished was through sheer luck, so they always fear exposure.
3. Con Artist Imposters feel like they get through life because of their looks or personality rather than because of their skillset and hard work so they tend to dull themselves to see if their skills match where they are.
4. Chameleon Imposters always fear exposure, so they avoid confrontations with other people.
5. Procrastinating Imposter, fear failure so much that they end up not contributing to their work at all.

Purpose

My short film aims to help incoming undergraduate students target the types of Imposter Syndrome that are most likely to cause low grades and procrastination: Perfectionism Imposter Syndrome and Procrastination Imposter Syndrome. Perfectionism Imposter Syndrome puts a lot of stress on students. Because students want to prove themselves, they are more likely to burn out by taking on more than they can handle. Furthermore, they do not want help from others because to them this would mean they could not do the work on their own, which leads to their burnout more quickly. Procrastination Imposter Syndrome freezes the student from performing at their best. It makes them fear failure to the point of not performing at all; they think if they tried and failed that means they were never good enough, so they would rather not try at all.

The causes for Imposter Syndrome are many, the first being a big change in someone's life. Someone new to a position might interpret their lack of knowledge as their being unqualified for the job (Rakestraw, 2017). Often, when someone is hired for a new job position, they are new to their environment and work requirements; this often manifests in first-year students who feel like they are entering a new path where the course difficulty goes up, and they feel like they do not understand the material.

A big part of the project will be creating a questionnaire that asks about students' experience with Imposter Syndrome, how they think it originated, and how they were able to overcome it. This will make the short-film more realistic to the audience and give a larger array of student exposure to Imposter Syndrome.

As seen in the research paper conducted by Dr. Nancy Rivera (Rivera, 2021) and her colleagues, giving an Imposter Syndrome workshop to medical students resulted in 90% of participants stating that they will use information presented in the future. 90 percent of medical

students who attended a workshop learned something new that they would use in their future, but undergraduate students also need guidance on how to navigate Imposter Syndrome.

The short film I plan on making is about a compilation of my experiences as a first year college student. The written script is broken into many parts that each explain different types of Imposter Syndrome, and ways to deal with each type. The purpose of the film is to show the effect of Imposter Syndrome on work ethic, how the pressure affects the student's studies, and the short-cuts the student takes to deal with this mental phenomenon. So far I have written a script that deals with the different types of Imposter Syndrome. For future iterations of the script, I plan on making it more complex by adding how the student's goals in life are affected. How they miss academic opportunities, change their ambitions, and compromise for less.

Imposter syndrome is a hindrance to many undergraduate and even graduate students. It leads to procrastination and burnout, and is overall a setback to the academic community. To effectively raise awareness on Imposter Syndrome, my capstone project focuses on writing and filming a short-film to help students recognize and deal with Imposter Syndrome, so they can prevent procrastination, and become more self-assured in their own abilities.

Methods and errors:

For my research, I used Google Scholar to accumulate information on what Imposter Syndrome is and its effects on people. Research was an important part of my capstone to prove that Imposter Syndrome has a real effect on students. It was also helpful in helping me categorize and lay out the different types of imposter syndrome in my script.

Celtx: With guidance from my Faculty mentor I used celtx to write a cohesive script that follows the general rules of a movie script. While using celtx, I noticed many errors in earlier iterations of my script: dialogue was way too long for most parts of the script which would not

work because it would translate to a really slow film, so I had to shorten many parts of my script, add more cohesive dialogue, and make sure that I included all required elements that would be in a script, which included time of day, and setting of where the scene is being shot.

During the writing process, one of the main goals was to get different perspectives regarding Imposter Syndrome. I set up a table in the center of campus, and asked people to fill out a 3-question survey, about their knowledge of imposter syndrome, and their attitude and experience with it. Unfortunately, this method was unsuccessful, for various reasons. Primarily, I was not able to properly show my intentions towards the students whom I asked to fill out the survey. I only had a plain table and a QR code that led to the questionnaire, and every time I asked for someone to fill out the form I would be brushed off, or ignored.

Conclusions and Future plans:

I have decided to break the film into multiple sections, from my previous idea of only having one long story. This is to make the film go into more of an instructional direction. Further plans are to shorten monologue-like parts of my script, and to start filming the project. To start filming there are some steps that I have to complete first, namely trying to attain consent to film on campus, and consent from lab managers to film in labs. Before filming I have to coordinate with my faculty mentor, i.e. what the best camera would be to shoot the film, and if I have to add any music or songs into the film.

In regards to outside research conducted by interacting with other students at UC Riverside, I plan on buying materials like cloth and creating a poster to add to my tabling sessions, so that when students come by they are more interested in answering the questions. There will also be a change when it comes to requesting students to write their answers on paper; instead, I will ask the question directly, and record what is told to me.

To conclude, Imposter syndrome is a mental phenomenon that causes students, professors, and doctors alike to exclude themselves from social situations because they may feel unfit to share their opinion, and is shown to have multiple manifestations. My project uses literature reviews and life experiences to write a short informative film about the effects of imposter syndrome and how to combat it. My current progress has led me to finishing the script, and now my main goal for the project is to find student actors willing to be part of the project.

Bibliography

- Chen, I.-P., Belk, R. W., & Yannopoulou, N. (2012). Characteristic color use in different film genres. *Empirical Studies of the Arts*, 30(1), 39–57. <https://doi.org/10.2190/em.30.1.e>
- Dharaniya, R., Rajesh, R., & Suresh, M. (2023). A design of movie script generation based on natural language processing by optimized ensemble deep learning with heuristic algorithm. *Data & Knowledge Engineering*, 146, 102150. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.datak.2023.102150>
- Digital Theatre Plus. (2022, January 21). *Key concepts in set design* [Workshop]. <https://edu.digitaltheatreplus.com/content/workshops/key-concepts-in-set-design#about>
- Feigofsky, S. (2022). Imposter syndrome. *HeartRhythm Case Reports*, 8(12), 861–862. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrcr.2022.11.001>
- Gresham-Dolby, C. (2022). Imposter syndrome: An opportunity to positively influence mentees. *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching & Learning*, 14(2), 130–132. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2021.11.019>
- Harris, N. (Director). (2016). *Touch* [Film]. Kanopy. <https://www.kanopy.com/en/ucr/video/3993902>
- LaDonna, K. A., Ginsburg, S., & Watling, C. (2017). “Rising to the level of your incompetence”: What physicians’ self-assessment of their performance reveals about the imposter syndrome in medicine. *Academic Medicine*, 93(5), 763–768. <https://doi.org/10.1097/acm.0000000000002046>
- Ott, M., & McLaughlin, C. (Directors). (2008). *Kid Icarus* [Film]. Kanopy. <https://www.kanopy.com/en/ucr/watch/video/5800821>

- Rakestraw, L. (2017). How to stop feeling like a phony in your library: Recognizing the causes of the imposter syndrome, and how to put a stop to the cycle. *Law Library Journal*, 109(3), 465–478. [HeinOnline](#).
- Rivera, N., Feldman, E. A., Augustin, D. A., Caceres, W., Gans, H. A., & Blankenburg, R. (2021). Do I belong here? Confronting imposter syndrome at an individual, peer, and institutional level in health professionals. *MedEdPORTAL*, 17, 11166. https://doi.org/10.15766/mep_2374-8265.11166
- StudioBinder. (2022, December 5). *Movie genres explained — Types of films and the art of subverting film genres*[Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDVVE8ZHJ3o>
- Slank, S. (2019). Rethinking the Imposter Phenomenon. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 22(2), 205–218. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-019-09984-8>.
- Vreeker-Williamson, E., Gill, H., Barclay, L. J., & Powell, D. M. (2024). The good, the bad, and the ambiguous: A qualitative approach to understanding workplace perfectionism and job performance. *Canadian Psychology / Psychologie canadienne*, 65(3), 176–187. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cap0000385>

HOW TO OVERCOME THE FEELING OF BEING AN IMPOSTER

By: Micheal Georgy

Cast: Narrator, Marcus, Jason, Hank, Mike, Father, Professor,

Random student 1, Random student 2

SETTING: BIOLOGY LECTURE

INT: LECTURE HALL-DAY

Narrator, Curly hair, 22, with Glasses. Sits on Chair speaking to the camera.

NARRATOR

Surely you must've felt like a mole
before, like the group of people
around you are all a complete set, and
you're just an outlier, someone who in
a team is less athletic, in a
classroom less knowledgeable, or in
their job less competent. But at the
end of the day these are just
feelings, and most of the time they
aren't true.

One place these feelings may stem from
is a pattern of thought named Imposter
Syndrome. It is a phenomena where
people, especially in competitive
settings, feel like they don't really
deserve where they are, that they
don't match the skill of their peers.

To see what I mean, let us quickly
shift our focus to Ike, Ike is a
recent high school graduate who was

accepted into UCR. This is his first
ever midterm review.

Int. Behind the Narrator into a classroom - Day

PROFESSOR

What are the Cell's organelles, and
what are each of their functions?

RANDOM STUDENT 1

One of the most important organelles
in the cell is the Mitochondria, it's
the powerhouse of the cell

RANDOM STUDENT 2

The Golgi Apparatus packages material
for transport

Marcus, late teens, Freshman. looks at the slides during class, confused.

MARCUS:

(Why don't I know any of this? how
do people know this? What am I
supposed to do? I've been
studying for this course for this
past week now, and I don't know
why I feel so lost in all of
this.)

INT. Narrator, now looking into the camera with contemplation.

NARRATOR:

Where do you think X's head goes after all of this thinking,
how does he feel about himself?

The truth is, X will most likely feel like he is the problem, or
rather that something inherent is wrong with him, but in
reality this is just his first quarter. He is just new to college
lectures, and he needs to adjust his study habits.

After knowing what Imposter syndrome is, it is important to
also know that it isn't just a feeling of inadequacy, it is also
characterized by other
subtypes: each of which has different actions/reactions to
challenges they may face.

INT. HOUSE, OUTSIDE A ROOM- AFTERNOON

NARRATOR

As said before there are subtypes of Imposter syndrome: 5
of them,

Perfectionist, SuperHuman, Natural

Genius, Soloist, and the Expert. Each experience and react
to imposter

syndrome differently.

The Perfectionist, as the name

implies, needs to perfect whatever it is they are working on to feel a sense of accomplishment, otherwise they believe that their efforts were in vain. Think about that friend that is never satisfied with their grade...

INT. IN THE ROOM BEHIND NARRATOR, INSIDE THE ROOM HANK IS SITTING AND IS TALKING ON THE PHONE WITH HIS FRIEND

JASON:

Hey man the exam scores released
Earlier today, how did you do?

HANK:

Really? they released already? Let me
check how I did. I got a 80% on the
exam. What about you?

JASON:

I think I did pretty well, I got an
80% on the exam.

HANK:

Nice Jason, good stuff man, listen I
got to call you later I'm about to go
eat. Peace out.

JASON:

Peace.

HANK(VO):

Man I have to do better, I gotta
format all the info and get into it.

INT. HANK STUDYING ON HIS DESK AFTER 5 HOURS

HANK(VO):

I have to stop for today, the next
exam is in a month anyways.

INT. 2 WEEKS LATER MORNING

HANK(VO):

O God! it's been two weeks and I still
haven't studied the rest of the exam
materials. What am I going to do.

Narrator enters the room

NARRATOR:

Try your best and always study hard,
study for an A+, there is nothing
wrong with that. But always take
breaks, pushing yourself too hard in
the attempt at perfection will
eventually lead to burnout, and in the
end you could completely stop caring

about your grade/ GPA for the quarter.

Always remember to keep a Balance.

INT. SCREEN SHOWN- NOT A PHYSICAL SETTING

Natural Genius: the natural Genius sees that he/she must have every bit of information come easily to them, and when it doesn't they think that they are not smart enough to keep going.(Trim)

INT. INFRONT OF THE BELL TOWER- DAYTIME

MIKE:

Hey Jason Did you read that research paper, how was it?

JASON:

Yea I read it yesterday it was pretty good.

MIKE:

He already read it?

MIKE: (CONT'D)

I was planning on reading it tonight, it should be quick like you said though, I mean the Professor made it sound pretty easy.

JASON:

Yea It was pretty quick, should be an

easy read, anyways I gotta go, I'll
see you tomorrow at the gym.

MIKE:

Yea see you tomorrow

MIKE(VO):

What is this man, I've been trying to
read this for the past 15 minutes and
I still understand nothing. I mean
Jason said he understood it pretty
well, so what am I missing? Am I just
Dumb? Whatever I'll understand later,
maybe I'm just tired.

Mike leaves the room and walks to the gym, without reading his report.

Camera Pans to the report unfinished.

INT. VOICE OVER- ROOM

NARRATOR:

Having these feelings can account for
a big reason for procrastination, if
something doesn't come easy to the
natural genius they may just ignore it
completely... too scared to face a
subject they think they cannot handle,
it is also seen that they may be

focused on comparing themselves to their classmates. They think, just because their classmates did it quickly, they should be able to as well. But the thing is this is not how it works, somethings may come to people naturally, but not everything, Just as Jason may have a talent for reading research articles quickly, Mike can have other areas he excels at. The point is to focus on all aspects of learning even parts that don't come naturally to us, if we keep that in mind, we are more likely to focus on our weak spots and are less likely to procrastinate.

INT. SCREEN SHOWN- NOT A PHYSICAL SETTING

The superman needs to do everything all at once, and correctly, this may stem from seeing their peers accomplish many things, so to be like them they feel the need to exert all of their effort into multiple goals. (Trim)

INT. OUTSIDE ROOM- DAYTIME

NARRATOR:

When applying to medical school I
always compared myself to other
applicants.

INT. INSIDE ROOM- DAYTIME

Mike Is on his laptop comparing his application to others online.

MIKE:

There is no way these people were able
to spend this much time on their
research hours.I have to do more if I
want to be competitive.

Mike then starts an application to become a volunteer. Mike Starts another
application for research.

Mike starts a third application for a Job.

INT. TWO WEEKS AFTER INITIALLY APPLYING BEDROOM- NIGHT TIME. Mike
lays in bed looking exhausted.(Gf)

MIKE:

Man I cannot get any sleep lately,
actually I haven't been able to sleep
for a couple of weeks now, and I have
no time to study. I might have to give
up extracurricular.

But everyone around me is doing well,
how do those people on reddit get all
of this done? I'm not any less than
them, I have to keep trying.

INT. TWO WEEKS AFTER INITIALLY APPLYING OUTSIDE OF STUDENT
SUCCESS CENTER- DAYTIME

MANAGER:

We think it would be best to let you
go.

MIKE:

What? Why? What have I done?

MANAGER:

We have been checking on you and you
seem to not focus on your job, we
think it will be best to part ways.

Mike starts heading home on the way home he wonders...

MIKE:

(Possibility for an argument) So I
sacrifice grades and sleep and this is
how it ends up? I shouldn't have
gotten involved in this much work like
this, I should've taken it slow, do
one thing at a time.

NARRATOR:

Trying to focus on multiple activities
at the same time causes Role Conflict.
Which is then multiple roles in your
life clash, straining you and instead of
focusing on one or two things sufficiently,
now you cannot complete any of the multiple tasks you
put yourself to, which makes you feel
more incompetent. Don't do
more than you can handle so you can
focus on the tasks in front of you at
the moment. This Also Highlights the
importance of preparing and knowing
what you are getting into as soon as
you start your journey. If Mike is
in his last year of college, he would
feel pressure to complete all of these
activities last minute, to be able to
apply to Graduate after finishing his bachelor's
Degree.

INT. SCREEN SHOWN- NOT A PHYSICAL SETTING

The Expert feels the need to have a lot of knowledge, and they always fear being exposed as incompetent through not being knowledgeable. Many of us that have experienced Imposter syndrome think that we are less than our peers, so this might be a way for the expert to show others that they are just as knowledgeable as them, and that they are equal with all of their peers.

This shouldn't be a worry of yours, at the end of the day you are here to start your learning journey as a college student, you will learn as you move towards graduation, just make sure you put in the effort to learn.

INT. SCREEN SHOWN- NOT A PHYSICAL SETTING

The Soloist/ Lone wolf feels that they cannot have any help from the people around them, they think that receiving help means that they are not as naturally gifted as others, and the help they receive makes them weak.

INT. BEDROOM-DAYTIME

Mike wakes up from his bed and hears his father calling him from downstairs.

FATHER:

Mike are you ready to study with me
today

MIKE:

I think I will go over it alone

FATHER:

Are you sure kid, I've taught this
before I'll make it easy for you

MIKE:

Its okay Ill try to work on it alone

and the meet you guys for Dinner

FATHER:

okay then see you at the dinner table

8 hours pass and Mike is still struggling with his studies.

MIKE:

Come on I can do this alone, I just

have to focus.

MIKE: (CONT'D)

Dad, please help me out I've been at

this all day.

Mike's Dad enters the room and helps him with his studies. INT. MIKE'S ROOM NIGHT
TIME

Mike laying down in his bed

MIKE:

I wonder how others studied for this

exam.

INT. OUTSIDE THE ROOM- DAYTIME

NARRATOR:

The truth is most students had help

studying either from their friends,

the Professor or their parents.

INT. GENETICS BUILDING AUDITORIUM

Narrator is sitting in the middle of the auditorium, talking to the camera.

NARRATOR:

Imposter syndrome affects a large percentage of college students, and it will continue to affect many students even into graduate school. A quick summary of the past topics that we have discussed show that imposter syndrome can cause burnout, procrastination, role conflict, self doubt, and stubbornness in refusing help from others. So in what ways can you make these feelings subside so you could have a better university experience.

Show summary of the points on screen:

1. A good support system, 2. Realizing when you have too much on your plate. 3. Asking for help, and accepting help from others. 4. Knowing that it is okay to keep trying at the end of the day what is important is if you understand the material, not how quickly you do it. 5. Don't compare yourself to others. 6. The most important thing to remember is to always be hopeful.

The End

Created using Celtx