

# Mid-Year Reflection

2026 has been a year of change for me. I finished my BSc majoring in Genetics and Biochemistry in 2021 and then went on to work for 4 years in a completely unrelated sales office job. It has been a big lifestyle shift returning to academia after such a long break. I went from being the go-to guy at work to being a student surrounded by mostly younger peers. Honestly, it led to me feeling slightly washed up. Did I really belong here? Did I make the right decision to return to studying? Am I smart enough to keep up with everyone?

It felt like everyone was so young and driven and knew all the content well, being fresh out of their undergrad. I remember spending hours at home revising the first few lectures of the general techniques course, thinking wow, am I really supposed to remember all of this from my undergrad? And shew – how am I going to catch up on all of these topics in just a few weeks? I felt anxious about the year ahead and was very uncomfortable with the fact that I didn't feel like I had a firm grasp on all the material.

As marks started rolling in for the early assignments and exams, I was pleasantly surprised to see that I was actually doing very well in a lot of the tasks that I had been anxious about.

I came to realise that I had just become so comfortable knowing exactly what I was doing in my job that what I was experiencing was in fact the very normal cognitive unease associated with studying and academia. Yes – perhaps the students fresh out of undergrad remembered the content better and were more familiar with it, but it was mostly the fact that they were used to being students and didn't have the same anxious and perfectionist attitude of 'I must know the answer to everything otherwise I don't know what I'm doing' that I had ingrained in me from working for 4 years.

It was easy for me to feel like I was in a bubble and that I was the only one feeling insecure – when in reality, I'm sure these thoughts and feelings were quite common among my peers too.

It has been interesting learning how to exercise my brain again. The bioinformatics assignments have been very creative and unconventional to say the least - from redesigning and improving the code for an asteroids game coded in an archaic language riddled with bugs, commented-out code and red herrings; to game theory social experiments in which the best course of action was for the class to collaborate in order to ensure everyone was able to obtain the best mark possible. We've been given just enough direction to know what to do but have otherwise been left to our own devices.

In essence, the first half of my honours year has been about learning how to be a student again. I've had to learn how to manage time better, learn how to motivate

myself towards tasks with an unclear/uncertain finish line and learn to trust in my capabilities. I m excited to learn more about myself and the process of conducting scientific research as we enter the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the year which is largely project and research driven.