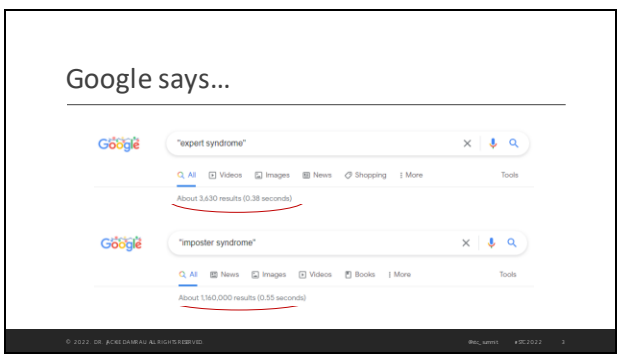

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Expert Syndrome (Dunning-Kruger Effect)

*A **hypothetical** cognitive bias stating that people with low ability at a task overestimate their ability…the bias results from an internal illusion in people of low ability and from an external misperception in people of high ability*

- Wikipedia

Source: Wikipedia "Dunning-Kruger effect." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunning%E2%80%93Kruger_effect

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Signs of Expert Syndrome

Suzanne Lucas (2017) says:

- They have an answer for everything.
- Research = Googling
- They don't ever need to check. ("I think it's X, but let me double check.")
- They (almost) always claim total consensus.

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Imposter Syndrome (or Imposter Phenomenon)

*A **psychological** pattern in which someone questions their skills, talents, or qualifications and becomes afraid of being exposed as a "fraud." … If it's not addressed, impostor syndrome can have long-term negative effects on your mental health and well-being.*

- Emily Stanislaus

Source: Wikipedia "Dunning-Kruger effect." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunning%E2%80%93Kruger_effect

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Imposter Syndrome (Phenomenon)

Figure 1: How you see yourself with Imposter Syndrome and without

Source: PowerSpeaking, Inc. 2017, July 26. "Imposter Syndrome in Communication: Six Practical Actions to Take Now."

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Which is right? Identity Crisis?

Stanislaus points out that even imposter has "two equally correct spellings: impostor and imposter."

It appears the movies don't know the right spelling either.

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Do TCs feel like imposters?

One might say, Yes! Why?

- We are often writing documentation as we're learning the product/service.
- Do we know everything?
- Of course not!

How we mitigate our imposter?

- Learn as much as we can before we write documentation.
- Do an audience analysis or interview SMEs.
- Extinguish the imposter by having a starting point or set of questions to ask our audience or SMEs.

Source: Write The Docs (n.d.) "Conquering Imposter Syndrome." URL:

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Imposters …

1. Believe their success is from luck or an outside factor, rather than their ability or hard work.
2. Are overly sensitive to criticism about their writing (helpful comments feel like an attack on their abilities and drive them to consider quitting).
3. Are afraid they'll be found out to be a fake or phony.
4. Feel their achievement or success as a writer (no matter how small) doesn't provide enough affirmation.
5. Continue to feel like a phony or fake.

Source: Wilderhaus, Kelly. 2021, May 20. "Feel Like a Writing Fraud? How to overcome Imposter Syndrome with these practical steps." Writers Guild

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Taming Your Internal Imposter #1: 6 Practical Actions (from PowerSpeaking)

1. **Manage self-doubt.** Take time to identify your core values and create your own definition of success
2. **Recognize the imposter.** Ask, "Are you making decisions to avoid something, or are you actively directing yourself toward what you value?"
3. **Embrace success and failure.** Use "I" language when you speak.
4. **Be objective.** Know what makes you unique and speak to those strengths around others.
5. **Be your boss.** Limit negative critiques and set clear expectations for how you want others to see you.
6. **Be an assertive speaker.** Use body language; use an even emotional tone; be an active listener; avoid submissive language.

Source: PowerSpeaking, Inc. 2017, July 26. "Imposter Syndrome in Communication: Six Practical Actions to Take Now."

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Taming Your Internal Imposter #2: 7 Advice Tips (from Write The Docs)

1. **Don't take the developer's word for it when you don't understand something.** Keep asking questions, keep reading. Acquire the knowledge you need.
2. **Don't dwell on the parts of your docs that you are most comfortable with.** Focus on the sections of your documentation that users need the most, even if those are sections where you are less knowledgeable.
3. If you are an introvert, **overcome your natural aversion** to hounding people for answers.
4. **Your role isn't to know everything,** but to synthesize the knowledge of everyone working on your product in a form that is of most benefit to your users.
5. **The knowledge gap might go both ways.** Communicate actively with all your internal stakeholders. Keep them in the loop about the work you are doing.
6. **Be honest about what you do and do not know.** Be upfront when you don't understand something or got something wrong.
7. **Relentlessly ask questions** and maintain a healthy thirst for more knowledge.

Source: Write The Docs. "Conquering Imposter Syndrome."

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In conclusion…

Remember

Be Yourself! **YOU** can do this.

No one can take away the knowledge you **DO** have.

Let them become the imposter and **YOU** the expert.

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Who am I?

DR. JACKIE DAMRAU
Sr. Business Analyst II

Dr. Jackie Damrau is an STC Fellow, the Book Review Editor of the *Technical Communication* journal, and Co-Chair, 2021-2022 Education Committee.

Jackie works for Cathedral Plumbing LLC (assigned to the MiView IS product team) to write user stories and documents for a commercial home builder application related to the plumbing industry. During her lengthy career, Jackie has encountered imposter syndrome and will share with you findings from her personal research.

In her spare time, Jackie enjoys raising her two grandchildren and reading murder mysteries along with other esoteric subjects. Find more about Jackie on LinkedIn (linkedin.com/in/jackiedamrau).

jdamrau3@gmail.com
214-505-0100
@damrauja
Jackie Damrau

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