

First ever student to obtain a DBA from Milpark Business School

By [Rudeon Snell](#), issued by [Milpark Education](#)

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My DBA journey started off as more of a challenge to myself than a particular objective I wished to reach. A challenge to see whether I could achieve a specific ambition I set for myself. A challenge to see whether I could make a meaningful contribution to my field. It has been a journey of self-discovery; one filled with twists and turns, and many lessons.



I've discovered a lot about myself and I've been stretched in ways I never thought possible. Ralph Emerson once remarked: "A mind, once stretched by a new idea, never returns to its original dimensions." Those of us who embark on a DBA journey will find this notion to be true, especially considering that the knowledge we strive to produce must be relevant and serve the needs of today's business and societal life.

Here are the top five things I've learnt along the way. Hopefully they will help you in your DBA journey.

1. Get into good habits early

When I started my DBA, I had the advantage of having previously completed two master's degrees, so research wasn't

that new to me. However, the ability to not feel overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the task at hand, in addition to the amount of work required, is essential for your mental health and sanity. The way I coped with the demands of my DBA was to do a little bit at a time, consistently. Consistency is key. Write one page a day, five days a week. Read one or two articles a day. Writing is an iterative process, so don't be concerned about getting it perfect the first time round. Jot down your ideas and keep refining your work. Finding a 'work groove' is essential for producing quality results. Keep moving forward, little by little.

2. Work-life-study balance is crucial

Life doesn't stop because you have decided to embark on a DBA. You will probably still have a day job, and you will definitely still have family and friends you engage with. It is important to prioritise how you spend your time. There is often a perception that you need to live, eat, sleep and breathe your dissertation. It's okay not to. There is still a life outside of your dissertation. Having said that, it's okay to say no to things. If you explain, people will understand. Do not wear yourself out trying to keep up with the life you had before your DBA. The number of hours in the day has not changed, but your time consumption has increased, so something else needs to give. There will be tradeoffs. Being able to harmonise life, work and studies during this time goes a long way towards creating an environment conducive to quality outcomes, especially when the going gets tough; and, believe me, it will. Working hard, and often, doesn't mean you have to forget who you are or what you love.

3. You are not in this alone

The DBA is a marathon. It's long, difficult, sometimes tedious, often exhausting and at times you may wonder why you are bothering to do it! Your supervisors are likely to be a pillar of strength during these times. I certainly would not have been able to complete my DBA without the support of my supervisors. Every supervisor works differently, so it is important to learn how to work well with yours. Some are much more hands-on than others in terms of contact and writing. Set expectations and establish a clear working relationship early on through transparent and direct conversations – it will save a

lot of time later on. It also helps to have people around you who have gone through the journey before. Find those people and draw on their experience for guidance. Finding a DBA study group also encourages you to keep moving forward, one step at a time. Do not look towards the end of the road; only focus on the next word, the next sentence, the next reference, the next paragraph and keep moving forward. Family and friends are often able to remind you of the reasons you chose to walk this path. Mine did and their encouragement gave me renewed strength and energy.

4. It's a lonely process

As much as you are not alone through the process, it is a lonely process. Long nights, early mornings, lots of papers, and writing completed by you and you alone. Not knowing whether what you are doing is right, lots of self-doubt and questioning your ability to conduct original research. These are some of the challenges that I faced. Finding out how to tap into your support structures during these times is essential to avoid feeling overwhelmed. The DBA journey is one of self-discovery and learning. And ultimately you alone are held to account.

5. A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor

One of the hardest things about a DBA is that it is not a linear process. Neither is it purely objective. Setbacks will occur, iterations will be multiple, frustrations and doubts will surface, and critique will be plentiful. These challenges are not a bad thing. However, they can seem dreadful when you are experiencing them. In the end, they will improve your dissertation and deepen your understanding of the topic, so try to develop the muscle of tenacity. Many things during your DBA journey will elicit strong emotions. Never act on them. Let the feelings pass and after a while you will respond with a much clearer mindset and more understanding. As previously mentioned, the DBA is a marathon where things are often less urgent than they seem. Take your time.

In closing, doctoral studies are important not for the sake of the degree, but for the chance to learn a systematic method of approaching issues and argumentation based on facts. To demonstrate original thinking and application is essential to help tackle the challenges of tomorrow and leave this world a little better than we found it. I hope my journey can help you with yours.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rudeon Snell is Doctor of Business Administration alumni at Milpark.

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