

LABLINES.

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**GENERATIVE AI
FOR LABORATORY
OPERATIONS**

**THE SCIENCE
OF STRESS**

LIFE AFTER THE LAB

HINTS & HACKS LAB

**TERRARIUM GUIDE
MILK SWIRLS PRAC**

**FROM SCI-FI TO
REALITY: THE
FUTURE IS HERE**



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CONTENTS

Presidents Report	3
From the Editor	3
Terrariums	5
Milk Swirls	7
Generative AI for Laboratory Operations	9
From Sci-Fi to Reality: the Future is Here	13
Life After the Lab	15
The Science of Stress	17

SUBMISSION DEADLINES

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Hello everyone,

Hoping everyone came back to school at the start of Term 1 refreshed and have survived the busy period well.

We will be into Term 2, when you read this. We had some hiccups with the listserv and are still working on resolving them. Please have patience and hopefully things will be sorted out shortly.

Preparations for LABCON 2025 are well under way. We all face different challenges in our different schools, be it workload due to lack of people or unreal demands, insufficient funding in some schools for various reasons, unrealistic expectations of administration or others.

Challenges can wear us down, so make sure to look after yourselves. One coping mechanism that I learned long ago that I still use today is find a friend and ask them to tell you three good things from their day after sharing three good things from your day. It can make a world of difference when you are over stressed.

If others have good coping mechanisms, I would encourage you to submit them to our new editor, Sally, to share in our next issue. We can help each other even more, for that is a part of what makes our profession so enjoyable.

Mary Jones

LTAV President

FROM THE EDITOR

Dear readers,

Welcome to my first issue as editor- thank you for having me!

In this edition, we've got a wide range of topics to dig into. In our Hints and Hacks Lab, we explore milk swirls and terrarium building- simple, engaging projects with great potential for the classroom.

We're continuing our look at generative AI, with a focus on how it can support day-to-day admin and lab management tasks. And while we're on the subject of technology, we'll also reflect on how some of today's innovations are starting to resemble ideas once found only in classic science fiction.

Long-time contributor Geoff Gleadall shares his thoughts on life after retirement, and the importance of knowledge sharing in our field.

And finally, we take a closer look at the science of stress, a subject that matters both in and out of the lab.

I hope you enjoy the read.

Sally Dupleix

LTAV Lablines Editor



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PRINCIPLES and PRACTICE



How's life trundling along?
If not too well,
I have fixed a few.



Along with none of these...

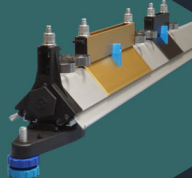
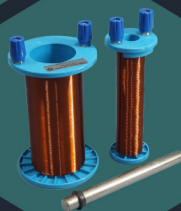
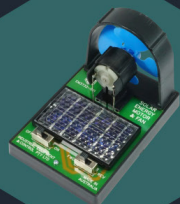
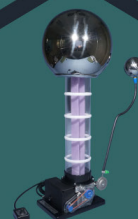
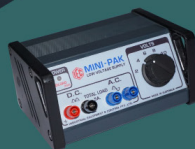
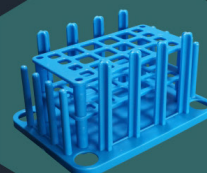
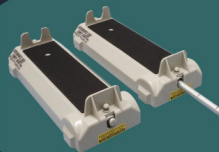


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TERRARIUMS

Hints & Hacks Lab

Submitted by Sally Dupleix
Warrnambool College

Terrariums are self-contained, soil-based ecosystems housed in glass containers, making them a visually engaging way to explore life science concepts in the classroom. They model real-world ecological processes such as photosynthesis, the water cycle, nutrient cycling, and ecosystem dynamics on a small scale.

Inside a closed terrarium, plants absorb light and carbon dioxide to perform photosynthesis, releasing oxygen and moisture. That moisture condenses on the container walls, mimicking evaporation and precipitation, and then reabsorbs into the soil, demonstrating the water cycle. Over time, students can observe producers, decomposers, and the effects of balance or imbalance in a tiny, living system.

Materials

Clear glass jar or container with a lid
Pebbles (for drainage)
Activated charcoal (prevents mould)
Potting mix
Small tropical plants
Decorative items like moss or rocks

Method

1. Begin by layering 1 part pebbles, 1 part activated charcoal, and 2 parts potting mix in a glass container. For best results, fill to just below the halfway mark.
2. Add your plants to the soil so that the roots are covered and gently press them into place.
3. If you wish to decorate your terrarium now is the time! Small rocks, moss, or an interesting piece of wood can add character and bring your miniature ecosystem to life.
4. Lightly water, then seal the container.
5. Place in indirect sunlight and observe!



MILK SWIRLS

Hints & Hacks Lab

Submitted by Peter Hill

The Milk Swirl Experiment is a captivating demonstration of how molecules interact, making it an excellent introduction to basic chemistry concepts.

Milk is a colloidal mixture containing water, fats, and proteins. When dish soap is introduced, it reduces the surface tension of the milk. The soap molecules interact with the fat molecules in the milk, causing them to move and create swirling patterns. The food colouring, which is less soluble in milk, moves with the fat molecules, enhancing the visual effect.

This simple experiment provides a visual understanding of molecular interactions and is a fun way to engage with basic scientific principles.

Materials

Milk
Food colouring
Dish soap
Cotton swab
Petri dish

Method

1. Pour enough milk into the dish to cover the bottom
2. Add a few drops of different food colouring to the milk.
3. Dip the cotton swab into the dish soap.
4. Touch the soapy end of the swab to the centre of the milk and observe the swirling colours as the soap interacts with the milk.

GENERATIVE AI FOR LABORATORY OPERATIONS:

Administrative & Lab Management Tasks

Submitted by Dr. Aneela Yasmin
Lab Manager & STEM Specialist
East Preston Islamic College

This is the second article in our series on the use of Generative AI (Gen AI) for laboratory operations. In the first article, published in the December 2024 issue of Lablines Magazine, we explored the basics of Gen AI, its potential applications in labs, and how effective prompting can streamline tasks for lab technicians and researchers.

Since then, the field of AI has seen exciting advancements, including the launch of 'Deepseek', a state-of-the-art AI model that has significantly enhanced the quality and accuracy of responses generated by AI chatbots. However, the principles and prompts discussed in this article are not limited to any specific AI tool, they can be applied to any Generative AI platform, including ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, Gemini, or Deepseek.

In this article, we will build on the foundation laid in the first instalment, focusing on how Gen AI enhances automation in administrative and lab management tasks through prompting.

These examples will help you streamline operations, boost efficiency, and prioritize what truly matters in your role as a lab technician.

Communication

Example Prompt: "Write an [email, memo, or training material] to inform staff about the [policy], explaining its importance and outlining the steps everyone needs to follow. Ensure professional tone. Use simple, clear language to ensure the message is easy to understand for all team members."



Inventory Management

Example Prompt: “Imagine you are a lab technician at a school science lab. Create a detailed checklist [for a new lab assistant] to conduct a monthly inventory audit of chemicals, glassware, and equipment. Maintain a formal yet instructional tone, ensuring clarity and completeness. Structure the checklist with clear categories, covering quantities, expiration dates, and storage conditions. Use simple, non-technical language suitable for someone with basic lab experience.”

Compliance Documentation

Example Prompt: “You are a lab technician. Develop a structured safety protocol for a new lab assistant on handling corrosive chemicals. Use a formal yet instructional tone. Cover proper PPE, safe handling techniques, spill management, and emergency procedures. Keep the language simple and non-technical.”

First Aid in the Lab

Example Prompt: “You are a lab technician in charge of first aid in the school science lab. Create a comprehensive guide for treating common lab injuries, such as chemical burns, cuts, and eye exposure. Include step-by-step instructions for each injury, a list of essential first aid supplies, and guidelines for when to seek medical attention. Ensure the language is clear and concise.”

Reducing Waste in the Lab

Example Prompt: “You are a lab technician responsible for promoting sustainability in the science lab. Create a guide for reducing waste in the lab [or specify experiment], with practical tips on reusing glassware, replacing hazardous chemicals, and recycling materials/ chemicals. Include a simple template for tracking waste reduction efforts. Use clear and encouraging language to motivate the team.”



Sustainability Awareness Campaign

Example Prompt: “Develop a sustainability awareness campaign that includes posters, emails, and workshops aimed at reducing waste, conserving energy, and promoting the use of eco-friendly materials. Ensure the campaign materials are engaging with motivating language.”

Compliance with Australian Standards

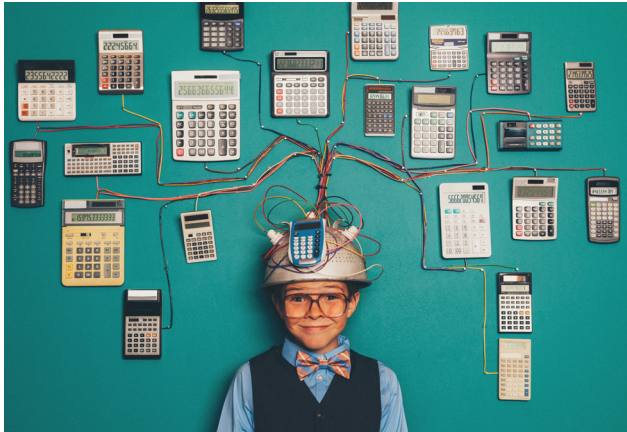
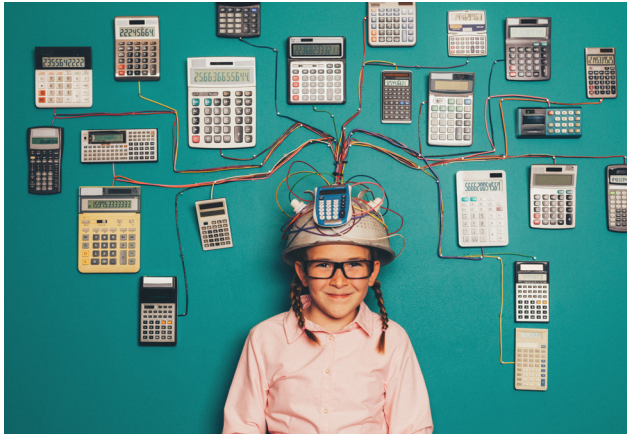
Example Prompt: “Imagine you are a lab technician in a school science lab. Create a checklist to meet the AS/NZS 2243.1:2021 (Safety in Laboratories) requirements, covering key areas such as [chemical storage, ventilation, and emergency equipment]. Include a template for documenting compliance. Use clear and straightforward language to guide staff through the process.”

Record Keeping

Example Prompt: “You are a senior lab technician. Create a structured template to log chemical quantities, usage dates, and disposal methods. Use a formal tone, ensuring ease of use. Keep the language simple.”

Safety Data Sheets (SDS)

Example Prompt: “Create a guide for accessing, storing, and updating SDS files, ensuring that all chemicals are covered. Include tips for verifying that SDS are up-to-date and how to keep them easily accessible to staff. Use clear language to ensure the staff can efficiently follow the safety standards.”



Integrating Gen AI into laboratory operations is no longer a futuristic idea. It is already revolutionizing how lab technicians handle administrative and compliance tasks.

As AI technology advances, staying updated on new developments is key to maximizing efficiency while upholding the highest standards of safety and compliance. Whether you're just beginning to explore AI applications or actively incorporating them into your workflow, success lies in using well-structured prompts and refining AI outputs to meet your lab's unique needs.

*In our next article, we'll explore how Gen AI can enhance Learning, Professional Development, and Social & Emotional Care in laboratory settings. I'll provide practical AI prompts designed to support these areas, helping lab technicians and educators foster more engaging and supportive learning environments. **Stay tuned!***

FROM SCI-FI TO REALITY: THE FUTURE IS HERE

Submitted by Jen Emery
Koo Wee Rup SC

As a science technician and an avid fan of science fiction, I've always been fascinated by the way futuristic ideas from books, movies, and TV shows eventually find their way into reality. Sci-fi has long been more than just entertainment- it's a preview of what's possible and I firmly believe that if we can dream it, we will build it (eventually). Many of the technologies that once seemed like pure fantasy have now become part of our everyday lives. Here are some examples of sci-fi concepts that have been turned into reality.

Tablet Computers In 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968), astronauts use sleek, flat-screen devices resembling today's tablets. Fast forward to 2010, and Apple introduced the iPad, making science fiction a reality.

Video Calls Long before Zoom meetings, Star Trek (1966) featured video communication as a standard way to talk across galaxies. By the mid-2000s, Skype and FaceTime brought this technology into our homes.

Voice-Controlled Assistants AI assistants like HAL 9000 from 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) once



seemed like a distant dream. Today, Siri (2011), Alexa (2014), and Google Assistant (2016) offer voice-controlled interactions that would impress even the most futuristic thinkers.

Self-Driving Cars KITT from Knight Rider (1982) and the robotic taxis in Total Recall (1990) gave us a glimpse of autonomous vehicles. Now, self-driving car technology from Tesla and Waymo is making driverless transportation a reality.

3D Printing While we don't yet have Star Trek's replicators, 3D printing- developed in the 1980s and widely adopted in the 2010s, creates objects layer by layer, revolutionizing manufacturing and medicine.

Smartwatches Dick Tracy (1990) showcased wrist-worn communication devices, a vision realized in 2013 with the Pebble smartwatch and later by Apple and Samsung.

Augmented Reality (AR) Glasses The concept of AR glasses appeared in They Live (1988), revealing hidden truths. Today's versions, like Microsoft HoloLens and Google Glass, overlay digital information onto the real world.

Bionic Limbs and Prosthetics The Six Million Dollar Man (1973) imagined advanced prosthetics, and modern medical technology is catching up, with bionic limbs restoring mobility to amputees.

Drones and Aerial Vehicles The flying cars of Blade Runner (1982) haven't arrived yet, but drones, widely used for filming, delivery, and security- bring us closer to a sci-fi-inspired future.

Virtual Reality (VR) Headsets In Tron (1982), characters entered a digital world. Today, VR headsets like Oculus Rift (2016) let users explore immersive virtual environments.

Reusable Rockets Space travel in Flash Gordon (1936) and Star Wars (1977) made reusable spacecraft seem like a dream. Now, SpaceX's Falcon 9 rockets are transforming space exploration with reusability.

From retro sci-fi classics to the cutting-edge technology of today, the future imagined decades ago is unfolding before our eyes.

LIFE AFTER THE LAB

Submitted by Geoff Gleadall

It is a fact that we are, as a profession, an ageing population. Increasing numbers of us have retired or are about to retire.

We are also all aware that many of our colleagues find their early years in our profession represent a very steep learning curve. There is a lot to learn and we find our training does not cover many of the things we must do. The LTAV list and science ASSIST are a great help and the list is the most immediate help.

We rely heavily on “on the job” training but this is hampered severely by the fact that most of us work alone, and at the same time must cope with heavy workloads and poor resourcing. This is complicated, sadly, by unrealistic expectations on the part of some of the teachers we work with who often do not have a very good understanding of what we do.

So, what is the solution to these problems?

We rely heavily on help from our more experienced colleagues, indirectly or by direct contact.

With our demographics as they are, the number of experienced technicians is dwindling. This fact was identified with the survey done by LTAV (then called

LTB-STAV) , but this was nearly 20 years ago and the problem is now significantly worse.

When one of us retires, we are often disenchanted and ‘burned out’, but we also take with us years of accumulated experience and knowledge.

When I retired, I was tempted to just walk away, (I was also seriously ill at the time) but having been active on the list and being intimately aware of the inadequacy of our situation, I chose to remain a member of LTAV and also remain on the committee. It is also true that there are other retired members who also continue to support our younger members.

Our retired members who stay on and help, are a great resource and I would encourage all of you who are retired or approaching retirement to consider this by remaining a member and staying in the list. Your accumulated experience is worth a great deal, and without you, those still working must often re-invent things that we have learned long ago.

It does not mean a heavy commitment and need not interfere with your new life in retirement, but it is rewarding and can save our colleagues a lot of anguish.



THE SCIENCE OF STRESS

For Minds Curious About the Body-Brain Connection

Submitted by Sally Dupleix
Warrnambool College

Stress is not inherently bad, in fact it is a vital part of our evolutionary survival system. But when stress becomes chronic or overwhelming, it can hijack the brain, dysregulate the nervous system, and deeply impact our health.

Despite living in a time of unprecedented convenience, chronic stress is more pervasive than ever. Our basic needs for shelter, food, and connectivity are more accessible than at any other time in human history, yet our nervous systems are under near constant strain. This paradox is rooted in the demands and design of modern life. We are bombarded by information 24/7 and tethered to devices that blur the boundaries between work, rest and play.

Notifications, emails, and endless to-do lists keep the brain in a perpetual state of low-level alert. At the same time, many of us lead increasingly sedentary lifestyles that fail to support the level of movement humans have evolved to depend on for optimal bodily functioning. Add to that the ever-present hum of global uncertainty and economic pressure, and it's no surprise that the body's stress response, designed for short-term, immediate threats, is struggling to adapt to the chronic, low-grade demands of modern living.

So what's happening to our bodies when we feel overwhelmed and how can we restore balance?

The Stress Response: The Brain on High Alert

At the heart of the stress response is the amygdala, a tiny almond-shaped structure in the brain's limbic system responsible for detecting threats. When the amygdala perceives danger, real or imagined, it triggers what's known as an "amygdala hijack," overriding rational thought and activating the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis. This triggers a chain reaction in the brain, prompting the adrenal glands to release cortisol and adrenaline, hormones that prepare the body to fight, flee, freeze, or fawn. While essential in short bursts, chronic stress keeps the body on high alert, impairing immunity and increasing the risk of sleep issues, mood disorders, digestive problems, and cognitive decline.

Nervous System Dysregulation: Hyper vs. Hypo Arousal

Our autonomic nervous system helps manage how we respond to stress and how we return to a calm state. It has two main branches, the sympathetic nervous system, which activates our "fight-or-flight"



response, and the parasympathetic nervous system, often called “rest-and-digest,” which helps us recover and restore balance.

The parasympathetic nervous system has two distinct pathways. The ventral vagal pathway, which supports social connection and is linked to the fawn response and the dorsal vagal pathway which is linked to the freeze responses.

In a well-regulated system, the body moves fluidly between arousal and relaxation. However, chronic stress and unresolved trauma, can cause the nervous system to become stuck in patterns of hyperarousal or hypoarousal, leading to nervous system dysregulation.

Hyperarousal: This is when the nervous system is in overdrive and is usually driven by the sympathetic branch. You might feel anxious, panicky, irritable, or restless. Physically, it can look like a racing heart, rapid breathing, or feeling constantly on edge.

Hypoarousal: This state occurs when the system slows down excessively and is often driven by the dorsal vagal branch of the parasympathetic system. You might feel numb, fatigued, shut down, or disconnected. It’s like the body is trying to conserve energy.

Understanding this spectrum is key to self-regulation. The goal isn’t to never feel stress, but to recognize where we are and use tools to return to balance.

Common Stress Responses: The 4 F’s

Fight: Anger, aggression, irritability.

Flight: Avoidance, anxiety, busyness.

Freeze: Numbness, shutdown, brain fog.

Fawn: People-pleasing and over-accommodation.

These are automatic survival responses to perceived threat. Though often unconscious, they can be recognized and gradually re-regulated through awareness and nervous system support.



Strategies for Stress Recovery

Walking Outdoors

How it works: Gentle, rhythmic movement in nature helps regulate energy and reconnects the body and mind.

The science: Walking in nature supports emotional regulation by calming the amygdala through bilateral stimulation and reducing stress hormones like cortisol. It boosts clarity and mood, helping to soothe hyperarousal and energize hypoarousal.

Reframing the Narrative: “This Is Hard and I’ve Got This”

How it works: Begin by validating the struggle “This is really tough”, then follow it with an affirmation of agency “...and I’m doing my best to move through it”.

The Science: This technique blends cognitive reappraisal (a form of emotional regulation) with self-compassion, both shown to reduce cortisol levels and increase psychological resilience. By acknowledging the difficulty instead of denying it, we soothe the nervous system and by affirming our strength, we engage the prefrontal cortex, helping it stay online during stress.

Yoga and Mindful Movement

How it works: Combines breath with slow, intentional movement and body awareness.

The science: Yoga has been found to down-regulate the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal axis and increase GABA (a calming neurotransmitter). It also fosters the ability to sense internal signals which improves emotional regulation and self-awareness.

Gratitude Practice

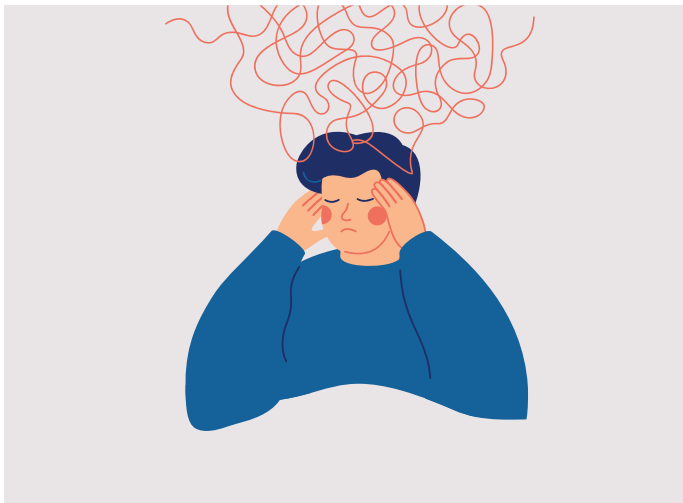
How it works: Writing or reflecting on things you are thankful for.

The science: Gratitude shifts the focus from threat to safety, increasing dopamine and serotonin levels. It helps counteract negative self-talk and rumination, reinforcing a more optimistic neural bias.

Tapping (EFT – Emotional Freedom Technique)

How it works: Gentle tapping on acupressure points (like the forehead, under eyes, and collarbone) while voicing affirmations.

The science: Studies show that tapping lowers cortisol levels and reduces amygdala activity. It engages both somatic and cognitive pathways, making it effective for trauma, anxiety, and overwhelm.



Control Diagram: What's Mine, What's Not

How it works: Draw two circles, one labelled “What I Can Control” (this could include your actions, words and responses), and one labelled “What I Can’t Control” (others’ reactions, the past and the weather for example). Redirect your focus accordingly.

The science: This practice supports executive functioning by helping the brain sort relevant from irrelevant data, conserving mental energy. It also counters the helplessness and anxiety that stem from trying to fix the unfixable, promoting clarity and agency.

Meeting Self-Doubt with Compassionate Curiosity

How it works: When negative self-talk or doubt appears, pause. Acknowledge it “Ah, here you are again”, thank it for trying to protect you “You’re trying to keep me safe”, and gently redirect “But I’m choosing to focus on what’s helpful right now”.

The science: This is a powerful form of internal family systems-inspired work, which sees “inner critics” as protective parts. By dialoguing with these voices instead of resisting them, we downshift emotional reactivity and create space for self-led decision-making.



Dancing

How it works: Moving to music, whether structured or spontaneous, re-engages the body and helps process stored stress or emotional energy.

The Science: Dance supports nervous system regulation by stimulating the vestibular system, increasing endorphins, and improving body-mind connection. In hypoarousal, it helps lift energy and reconnect with sensation; in hyperarousal, it offers a physical outlet to release excess activation and restore balance.

Rewiring the Response

The more we practice these strategies, the more we build what neuroscientists call neuroplasticity - the brain’s ability to rewire itself. Over time, we can reduce reactivity, improve emotional regulation, and enhance overall well-being. Stress may be unavoidable, but with knowledge and practice, it doesn’t have to control us. We can move from survival mode to thriving, one breath, tap, or stretch at a time. The next time you feel overwhelmed, pause. Ask yourself: Am I in fight, flight, freeze, or fawn? Then, gently guide your nervous system home.

If you have any tips of your own we would love to hear from you!

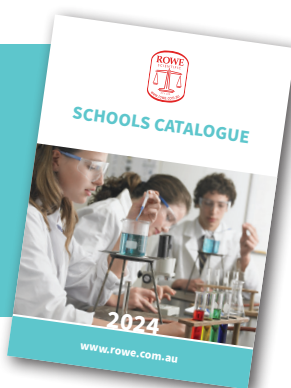
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