

When I first started high school as a young twelvie in year 7, my priorities were mainly focussed on colour coding my timetables to perfection and trying not to get lost on the way to class. For the first few years the HSC seemed like this distant, far-off nightmare that I was kinda aware of, but was more focussed on smiggle pencil cases and making my title pages look fabulous. It wasn't until the end of Y11 that I really "discovered" that the HSC was kinda important and honestly I wasn't that prepared for the ups and downs of the year.

During the HSC, challenges are inevitable. But one of the biggest challenges for not just me, but the whole of Y12 was procrastination. Since I had done accelerated maths and did the bare minimum number of units, I had more frees than classes, which sounds amazing, (and it kinda was, not going to lie) but I procrastinated so much during my free periods because I had way too much time, which wasn't that great.

For me, procrastination in the form of TV was personally one of my major issues during the HSC. It wasn't my phone, and it wasn't social media, it was the fact that I just physically could not stop watching the bachelor every week; and when Richie chose Alex over Nikki, it basically became the hot topic of our conversations in the common room during our frees when we were supposed to be "studying."

Another form of procrastination was online shopping. I don't know what it is about the Iconic and ASOS but I'd always get trapped by those sale and 50% off emails and the fact that it was free shipping and free returns was fabulous for my wardrobe but not so great for my time management.

I'm pretty sure I'm not the only one who does this, but whenever I decided I needed to study, I would always look at the clock as another form of procrastination. If it wasn't what I considered, a "nice time" like 9.00 or 10.30 on the dot and instead was a gross time like, I don't know, 11.07, I just wouldn't study until 11.15. And if it happened that by the time I looked at the clock again and it was 11.16, I just wouldn't study until 11.30. This would continue on and on until I decided it was too late to study and I needed to go to bed.

As you can probably tell, procrastination was a huge challenge for me during the HSC. But what I learnt was that no matter how many motivational quotes you find on the internet, procrastination is going to be inevitable. The difference is, don't try to make excuses or waste time doing things like writing out a super cute timetable with pretty font that you know will never actually help you organise your time. That balance between having a break/ procrastination and working hard is difficult to find, and I honestly didn't really get it until halfway through the year, but it's also important to note that you should never feel guilty about procrastinating/ relaxing; everyone needs a break whether it be through tv or online shopping. But it's equally important to just crack down and get on with it no matter how painful studying may be.

Another massive challenge was stress. Ever since I was a kid, I've always been a major stress-head. Even just deciding whether or not to buy a dress or the thought of missing the train would stress me out. So you can imagine, when I was about to sit for an exam or get back some marks, I could literally feel pimples start to come out on my forehead and I would just break out into a massive sweat. Stress is an inevitable part of life, especially during the HSC. Everyone is going to stress out at one point or another, there's no way you'll not stress out in Y12. I'm not saying stress is bad, because stress can be definitely good; the

adrenaline that it gives you can give you that boost to finish off your English exams while your hand is falling off. But whilst stress can be good, too much stress isn't. I think the main thing I've learnt during the whole HSC process is to learn to relax. There's no denying that the HSC is a stressful time, but honestly Y12 is arguably the greatest year of high school you'll experience. Whether it be through house events or through sport and hobbies etc., it's so important to learn how to let go of some bad marks or the stress about your ATAR, because in the end, (and I know how terribly cliché this sounds) but the ATAR is just a number. The stress and the build-up to getting your ATAR is insane, especially the day when you get your results, but honestly once you get your ATAR you realise that all that stress was for a rank, and a rank definitely doesn't define you as a person.

Bad marks is also something that everyone deals with during the HSC. Everyone has ideal expectations of what marks they really want to get, and you know what, I'm telling you right here, right now, it's just not going to happen. No one is going to have smooth sailing throughout the HSC, and that's just a fact of life. I personally struggled with being super disappointed about getting marks that I wasn't too happy about until the amazing Ms Barnett our year director, asked our year group one day, "what would you say to make a sad man happy and a happy man sad?" And the answer is, "this too shall pass." That really helped me through the whole HSC especially when I got back bad marks and was unhappy about them because looking back, it made me realize that at that moment in time, that mark is just a mark, and a few bad marks definitely won't stop you from getting an amazing ATAR and fulfilling your dreams. I know at the time it might feel like the end of the world, and you might feel like "I'm not going to get into my course," but you know what, there's always alternate pathways into anything. Your ATAR definitely isn't going to limit your opportunities and your ambitions.

Finally, the most important tip I have for everyone is to help your friends. Share notes, teach each other and help each other in class. Instead of focussing on yourself, focus on building each other up to the top. It's so important to have a great support system within the year group because in the end you'll realise that if your whole class does well, you'll do even better.

To Y12; I really wish you all the best. This year is going to be an emotional rollercoaster, sometimes you're going to get to the point where you just want to flop on the couch and eat ice cream and cry, but don't give up, because in the end, it's worth all the tears and the stress and the hard work.