

Not to rub it in, but I think it's fair to say that my friends and I are pretty glad the HSC is over. I definitely don't envy the position of the current year 12s. However I definitely look back on the past year with fondness, I smile at how overwhelmed I felt, and feel extremely grateful for all the opportunities I had, all the friends and teachers I grew closer to and all the new things I learnt obviously within the syllabus, but also way, way beyond the confines of those pesky dot-points. Today I feel very honoured to be back here to tell you a bit about how I navigated year 12 and tried to make it as meaningful as possible.

Obviously most of us would appreciate that the HSC is important - after all, it seems that our secondary education is sort of geared towards this culminating point. But in order for you to reach your goals or achieve "success"- whatever you may define that to be - I think you should take a few moments to ask yourselves whether you think Year 12 really matters.

As someone who has crossed that bridge, I think I am beginning to appreciate why Year 12 mattered to me.

The first obvious reason - the truth is - at the end of the HSC - you get your ATAR which is one of the main ways you can get into tertiary education. I personally, knew for a while that I wanted to do something with Law and possibly international relations or humanitarian work. I decided to embrace the HSC as a stepping stone to achieve my broader 'life goal.'

In saying that, let me tell you that there will be people who don't get into their course of choice. And it's not because they didn't try hard or they weren't good enough. At the end of the day, though, it's okay - there are numerous pathways to get to your destination, not to mention that as a 17 year old, although our perspective of what our ideal future looks like - may be clear in our minds, it might not be exactly what life has in store for us - we can find our passion elsewhere, completely different to what we thought we were good at or meant to do.

REGARDLESS of the outcome.

It's like the skills that you nurture in this short, intense - relatively short period of your life - you get to see how well you can multitask, how many different skills you can gain, and be flexible but maintain a good work-life balance - all that stuff is what counts. It doesn't matter what you end up doing - whether it be Uni or TAFE or job - your life education is what you should be focusing on. Even if you fail in a subject or etc... it doesn't matter - the broader picture is what actually matters.

And now for the deeper, philosophical part.

More importantly, I think we should try our best to reach our potential because education in a broader sense matters. Disclaimer - these are just recent thoughts, randomly talking to my sister... - Even though we may tend to question the relevance of the things we are actually learning - I think it is empowering to be able to understand and realise things about the world around you and the more you are educated - more you can contribute to different forums.

- If educated, it broadens your perspective, whether it be about science or music, etc - makes you appreciate new things

And as I said - these aren't things I thought about daily, but just some things to put what you're doing every day at school, in perspective

Now for some specific tips, words of encouragement

1) Success is subjective. It's up to you how you define it, and don't let anyone else define it for you. Especially true in Year 12 - where for the first time - a big responsibility for your own studies. To achieve success -

whatever you may define that to be, you must first believe you can. And to believe you can - genuine belief - track record - that's why junior years count - not because what you literally learn, but if you set yourself goals and strive to achieve them, then you begin to believe that will some willpower and effort and help - you can achieve bigger goals

This also applies to music and speech and debating - each opportunity try to stretch yourself a little further, you'll begin to have this quiet sort of confidence in yourself

2) Get into a rhythm - get into good habits. If you're finding it hard to change yourself - procrastination, being able to concentrate - acknowledge very hard to change people - it's easier to change your environment

What does that look like?

- get away from people who sidetrack you or annoy you
- be proactive in class - ask questions if you don't understand

3) Go talk to your teachers as much as possible - they're not there to feed you information and expect you to get everything - email them or schedule a time to meet them - when it's nearing exam period - do past papers, ask them to help you with questions you found hard - if there's something you don't get - ask! All throughout high school, but esp yr 12 teachers - they will go out of their way to help you understand.

4) Self-doubt. Some people might think they're not good enough. In that horrible waiting period - Everyone questions whether they did their best.

Talk to people you trust - be honest about issues and don't get caught up in the nitty gritty. I think you should take it one day or one lesson or one little study period at a time.

5) Don't ever sacrifice sleep. sleep is what you need. Unless you are a serial procrastinator and have no choice. Procrastination can sometimes be positive - intense burst of doing work sometimes greater than consistent but less intense periods

6) most importantly - be inspired. Read books, watch films, travel... Appreciate friends and family

'Achievement is wonderful when you know why you're doing it and when you don't know, it can be a terrible trap' - Natalie Portman

To the class of 2017 - let's make it a fulfilling year. Find purpose in what you're doing, try your very best, raise each other up. It won't be an easy year, but it will be worth it.