

DANIEL ELKINGTON

My Story



I'll begin by telling you a brief story.

In a magical forest there once lived a huge collection of dragons, and butterflies, and fairies, and wizards, and little green aliens, and big orange aliens, and a tiny house filled with even tinier little men. They all had the most wonderful lives filled with balloons, and toys, and birthday cake, and tug of war matches, and nobody ever told them off when they were late home for supper.

However, there came a day when the Voluminous Conquering Audacious Aardvark (VCAA for short) invaded the forest, raised himself up to his fullest height, and made an announcement.

“Dragons, butterflies, fairies, wizards, little green aliens, big orange aliens, and tiny little men in a slightly bigger house, it is my solemn duty to inform you that there's more to life than balloons, toys, birthday cake, tug of war matches, and coming home late to supper. Because in a short while I'm going to make you do some exams, so we can rank you all. Cheerio.”

The dragons, butterflies, fairies, wizards, little green aliens, big orange aliens, and the tinier little men in the tiny little house were shocked at this, and they each behaved in a different way. Some ignored the VCAA's words, and decided to continue to play with their balloons, toys, birthday cake, tug of war, and kept coming home late to supper. Some decided to rely on their natural ability and felt they didn't need to prepare. And some began to work very hard indeed to ensure that they did well on the upcoming exams.

That's enough of that, however, I'm here to tell you a little bit about my experiences last year in dealing with what VCAA decided to throw at me.

I developed what turned out to be a very useful strategy that you may wish to try. As long as you have a reasonably large wall where you do your study, this may also work for you.

Simply get a whole heap of A4 pieces of paper, cut them into thirds, and stick them to your wall in the shape of an enormous calendar month, in rows of seven. On each piece of paper write a number representing a date, just like a real calendar. I did this so I had two months side by side – the current month, and the next month.

DANIEL ELKINGTON

My Story

Each day before you begin to study, grab the bit of paper that represents the current day, and, starting at the top, write the study you are planning to do that day. For example I might write “4:30-5:30: Methods exercise 4.3”, and under that I might write “5:30-6: Learn Economics page 47-48,” and so on, until I’d allocated the tasks I going to do that day.

I did this to keep me on track and motivated to get things done quickly. If, for example, I was half an hour into the one hour I’d allocated for maths and I’d hardly done any of the maths exercise, I’d look up, realise I only had half an hour to go, and work extra hard to try and get it done in time. If I happened to go a little bit over the allocated time, I’d be working extra hard on the next activity to try to catch up to where I was supposed to be up to. In this way I was able to keep myself working quickly and efficiently most of the time.

Suppose I had just learned something new. It might be completing the questions in a maths exercise for the first time. It might be teaching the dog (or in my case, teaching the pet bird) a couple of pages from my Economics textbook. I knew that in order to remember it I’d need to revise it after one day, one week, and one month. So, on my giant calendar on the wall, I’d go to the next day, and, from the bottom of the piece of paper, I’d write “revise Economics page 47-48”, I’d go down a week and do the same, and then go across to the next month and do the same there on the same date number. As a result of this, for each day in the future, there’d be a small list, from the bottom of the piece of paper, of things I needed to revise.

Then each day when I was creating my schedule for what I was going to study, when I began writing the tasks I was going to do from the top, I’d notice these little revision tasks at the bottom. So I’d schedule them in. I’d make sure I allocated 5-10 minutes for each revision task. Using this method forced me to regularly revise, and otherwise, I’m sure I would have forgotten all about it. To keep it going continuously, at the end of each month pull down the pieces of paper representing the month just gone, and put up new pieces of paper for the month after the next one.

Like everyone, I often find that it’s very difficult to get my head around new concepts. However when doing the VCE I found that there was a relatively simple way to grasp new concepts a lot quicker. Simply attend TSFX head start lectures. I found these very useful in giving me an overview of the semester ahead. Whilst I didn’t get everything the first time when they were taught at TSFX, because I’d already heard it explained once, it made a lot more sense when my teacher taught it to me at school.

Now there’s this subject in the VCE that everyone would love, if everyone happened to be English teachers. I am not an English teacher, and therefore I didn’t really enjoy it. To be honest, I hated English. I was rather dreadful at it. But there were a few tips I was able to implement to try to overcome this.

Firstly, there’s a very simple tip for Text Response that you’ve probably heard but which I will repeat. Most of you will probably have one text response text per semester like I did. Every day, I’d take the text relevant to the current semester, and read ten minutes of it out loud. One of my Year 12 texts was a film, so I watched 10 minutes of it every day. I was able to remember to do this simply by making it the first thing I scheduled every day. After ten minutes I’d bookmark or pause where I was up to, and continue the next day, and when I got to the end of the text I’d just continue from the start.

DANIEL ELKINGTON

My Story

Of course, some people may feel a little unsure of this because they don't like the idea of others in their house listening to them reading their texts out loud. Because of the structure of my house, my family mostly didn't hear me, but in Year 11 at one point when I was studying Shakespeare's *Macbeth* they dragged me on a "fun" family holiday someplace out in the wilderness where we stayed in a very small cabin. I got up early in the morning to study, and my parents heard, floating through the wall, me saying,

*Hang out our banners on the outward walls;
The cry is still 'They come:' our castle's strength
Will laugh a siege to scorn: here let them lie
Till famine and the ague eat them up...*

My parents came to the conclusion that the VCE had driven me insane, but let me tell you it was absolutely worth it, because I never needed to sit around memorising quotes or writing up quote lists, ever, in the whole time I was doing the VCE. I became very familiar with my texts, to the point where I could just memorise huge chunks of them without all the horribleness of sitting down repeating the same phrase over and over. Even if you're normally good at memorising quotes, I would still recommend this method, because you notice something new every time you go through the text, and you pick up unusual quotes that not many other people do.

Of course, the number one thing you can do to get better at English is to just write essays. I hated this, and really had to force myself to do it. The essays I hated most were context essays, until my teacher heard about how I had a massive Julia Gillard poster on my wall, and realised that I was very interested in politics. So she suggested I try writing a political letter to Tony Abbott. For the rest of the year for all my Context essays I wrote letters to Tony Abbott, and found it much more fun than the simple expository stuff I had been doing before. So be creative when it comes to Context, and try to find a writing style that you enjoy.

As for my other subjects, by revising each topic one day, one week, and one month after I'd learned them, towards the end of the year I found, unlike many students, I didn't need to go back through my textbooks and notes to revise every topic again. It was still all fresh in my mind. So I went straight into doing practice exams. Even with the early practice exams I did, I found them a lot easier to do than some other students.

I believe this was because during Year 12 I went to TSFX weekly Masterclasses in the city. Yes, it was very beneficial having a different teacher than the teacher at school so I could get a different perspective, but even better, many of my TSFX teachers were examiners or were in touch with examiners, and were able to give me advice on what examiners were looking for in my answers. I was also given a heap of Exam Style questions for each topic throughout the year, and as a result gained the skills needed to tackle the unusual ways that examiners ask their questions.

I also attended the TSFX exam revision lectures, not because I had forgotten everything and needed to learn the whole course again, but because the lengthy in-depth TSFX lectures covering *everything* often drew my attention to little areas I had missed, little things that could mean the difference in a mark or two here and there that separated out the study scores.

DANIEL ELKINGTON

My Story

Sometimes people ask me how balanced my life was in Year 12. While I must say I did spend an awful lot of my time studying, I did make time for things I liked to do. There's this TV show I'm a huge fan of, you might of heard of it, called Parliament Question Time, where a bunch of politicians ask questions to each other, before they yell too much and get kicked out for disorderly conduct. Anyway, I often made time to watch the latest episodes, and continued to do this right up to the exams. In the week of the English Exam the latest season was airing, and even at this critical time I took 70 minutes off each day to sit down and watch it. The season final  for that particular mini-season was actually on the day of the English exam, so I raced home from that horrible English exam to get back in time to see the episode live, even though I did have exams the following week, because a balanced lifestyle is very important.

As for doing the exams themselves, I'm a big believer in doing the exam from the easiest question to the hardest which means jumping around the paper and NOT doing it from the start to the finish. I recommend this even if you think you'll be able to finish it all.

There was a really hard question that looked easy in Specialist Maths Exam 1 last year, and when I first attempted it I realised that it was actually very tricky and skipped it, before coming back to it at the end when I'd done everything else. It was really quite tricky, and I got to a point in my working where I just didn't know what to do next.

Eventually I had thirty seconds left, so I just decided to guess. I'd worked out it was a multiple of $\pi/12$ somewhere between $-12\pi/12$ and $12\pi/12$, so I had a 1 in 24 chance of getting the answer right. I decided to guess $\pi/12$, so I wrote it down. With fifteen seconds left I changed my mind and decided the answer was minus $\pi/12$, so I put a minus sign in front of it. With five seconds left I decided that that was too simple, so haphazardly rubbed it out and wrote $7\pi/12$. Just as I wrote it the supervisor said "pens down."

Outside the exam room all the students had the "post-exam discussion" that we're not supposed to have because it makes us all really nervous and stressed. But I asked what others had gotten for that question. There was only one person who thought they'd got it, and he said he'd got... $7\pi/12$. When I got home I checked the solutions people post online, which we're not supposed to check because they make us stressed, and sure enough, the answer was $7\pi/12$. I wasn't sure I'd get full marks for the question, because in my working, I'd jumped straight to the answer from halfway through with no clear explanation how I'd gotten there, but when I paid VCAA to get a Statement of Marks (which you're not supposed to get because they can make you feel disappointed about something you can't change) I actually got full marks for that question! Moral of the story: if you really can't do a question have a really good guess.

Perhaps you're interested to hear the scores that all this eventually translated to. I certainly was. I managed to get raw study scores of 42 in English, 44 in Accounting, 45 in Economics, 46 in Specialist Maths, and 50s in IT Software Development and Maths Methods.

All these numbers left me with an ATAR of 99.80, which was enough for me to get into a University Scholarship where they pay all of my University fees. I can say with confidence that attending the TSFX programs helped make the difference between very good scores and great scores, and I doubt I would have managed to get this scholarship without attending these.

DANIEL ELKINGTON

My Story

In the end some of those dragons, butterflies, fairies, wizards, little green aliens, big orange aliens, and tiny little men from a tiny little house ended up with a score they could be proud of. A score that truly reflected their best effort. I did it. And you know what? I know that any of you can do it too.

Daniel