

KATRINA IANNELLA

My Story



My name is Katrina. I'm an ex-Willoughby Girls High School student, a current UNSW student studying Commerce/Science and I work part time as the Student Ambassador for TSFX. I am a HSC survivor and this...is my story.

Flashback 4 years from now and I was sitting in this very hall. English, Maths, Biology, Legal Studies & Society & Culture all seemed to be the ingredients for some hypothetical recipe to make the perfect ATAR...except that I just didn't know what it was going to look like...

Is it about doing well all year? Nailing the exams at the end? Making yet another year 12 Facebook page to share notes? For me...it's about one main thing:

The process – and maximising the opportunities presented to me. I still remember Irena, TSFX's CEO a few years ago telling me, "If you're not going to do it right THIS time, when will you have time to do it right NEXT time?"

Rather than constantly fearing the HSC and the marks you should've/could've/would've gotten, embrace the learning experience and your marks will naturally follow. One thing that I promise will make your experience a lot easier...is TSFX. Thankfully, I'm not going to boast like a television ad and tell you that TSFX will improve your marks by 27.83%...because it won't.

It'll do so much more.

TSFX run a series of lectures at Sydney University, presented by experienced HSC markers and teachers who know exactly what they're looking for. They provide incredibly comprehensive notes that go through each dot point of every syllabus, filling common gaps in students' knowledge. Particularly for subjects like English – hearing about the texts you learnt about 10 weeks ago when someone out there can't even remember the name of their module...puts YOU ahead of the game.

Further, I can't even begin to describe the dedication of the TSFX lecturers. For example, on the morning of my Legal Studies seminar in 2013, the lecturer was a couple minutes late...not because she missed her morning bus or because she was stuck in traffic... but because she was printing media articles about cases that had occurred THAT SAME MORNING. What does this mean for you? It means that you're receiving information that is so contemporary it hasn't even been published in a textbook yet...!

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These are the moments in which TSFX creates, that will literally leave your examiners hi-fiving each other.

Now before I move on and talk to you about my study regimes, my ATAR, and how I even decided what to study...I need to debunk one thing. My HSC year was not easy. I was a pretty good student up until year 12. But then ...before my first Trial exam, I walked downstairs to find my mother crying because she'd just been diagnosed with breast cancer. I watched my Mum go through surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, emotional pain, and guilt. It suddenly felt like all my years of hard work were about to come crashing into a turbulent pile of redundancy and hopelessness. And it could've.

But there was one thing I loved to do more than anything else.

Flamenco Dance.

In year 12, I joined a Flamenco Dance studio, where I found a fantastic community of doctors, businesswomen and even teachers...who had all come together under their one common love for dance. I cannot stress the importance of extracurricular activities enough during year 12.

- Sporting teams, dance groups, joining a music class... can all teach you determination, working towards a common team goal, resilience in high-pressure circumstances, and stimulate endorphin production, which actually HELP you focus more.
- I also took piano lessons every Friday night, joined the school choir, debate team, and was voted president of the Year 12 Formal Committee.

Some people say that I joined several groups to distract me from my mother's illness ...and to an extent, they're probably right. But all of these activities provided me with a way to connect with different people with unique talents, perspectives, backgrounds and friendship. So... I guess the moral of the story, is... instead of letting one challenge during your HSC year swallow you up whole...acknowledge it, and keep busy. The busier you are, the more you will get done.

My study practises since year 12 haven't changed all that much... some things I do are obvious, some are a little quirkier.

- **I didn't study every night.** But I did study fairly consistently. Since the HSC is a measure of dedication and effort, it is impossible to cram and actually do well. So have a good study space in which you genuinely WANT to be immersed.
- **I decorated my study room wall with inspirational quotes.** Any time I heard a quote I felt was motivational or helped make me focus a little more...it went on my wall. That wall had only grown to this day, with my favourite quote being, "If you're dreams don't scare you, they're not big enough."

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After the trials, collaborate your notes.

I totally understand the pressure to hide notes so that you can secure a higher rank than everyone else. But if there's one secret you should know.... it's that the second the trials are over, it's all about how you perform as a GROUP! So I joined my year 12 Facebook page and literally uploaded every single essay, creative writing piece, case analysis that I had. If I wrote it and I did well...it went up on the page. The beauty of sharing knowledge, unlike tangible items like food and toys...is that when you share it...you don't actually lose any. In fact...you might actually generate more.

I wrote my desired ATAR on the first page of my school diary and looked at it everyday.

This was a piece of advice given to me by a university school visit. Apparently, some guy took this a step further and actually made his desired ATAR the number plate of his car! Since I didn't have a car...my diary had to do...but viewing it every day helped ingrain the number into my brain. You become what you think about. If you want to gain entry into a particular degree...write that down. If you want to enjoy the world's most epic gap year...write that down. If you want to make sure that you pass all of your HSC subjects and not actually have unwashed greasy hair by the end of year 12...write THAT down! You do you. But write it down...and watch what happens.

I made class conversations part of my everyday conversations.

This one might feel a little weird at first, but I promise it'll only serve you well. Essentially, if you're discussing the John Hardie Asbestos case in Legal Studies, or how cellular ribosomes are the site of protein synthesis...**tell your friends/siblings/parents about it.** Now that I'm studying Microbiology and International business at UNSW, I *still* tell my Dad all about the role of various enzymes and bacteria and how quorum sensing prevents the Hawaiian bobtail jellyfish from being eaten by various predators.... I can guarantee that a good percentage of the time, he has *no idea* what I'm talking about...but the point is that I do...and when I get to the exam room...suddenly, recalling course facts that I discussed over dinner last weekend AND in the classroom AND with my friends during sport....isn't so difficult anymore.

I regularly checked in with my teachers.

HSC teachers are magical creatures that genuinely want you to succeed. Provided they're willing, send them emails, write up draft essays, get feedback, question course theories, form your own perspectives and be passionate. The more help you seek, the more likely you are to succeed. Why attempt to do the HSC all alone when you have 1 specialised teacher per subject who is professionally trained and willing to help you?

I attended TSFX seminars for each of my subjects at least ONCE.

Whilst I didn't attend TSFX seminars for all of my subjects every single time they have lectures running...I did try to go to everything at least ONCE. Even if you think you're nailing a subject, still go to the lecture. I can promise you that you will **STILL** learn new things. And if you don't...hearing content from another teacher only reinforces it more, which makes recalling it for your final exams even more efficient.

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So...what ATAR did I get? Before I tell you, I just want to let you know 3 things:

- 1) The ATAR I wrote in my diary was 98.
- 2) My goal was to get into a Commerce/Science degree at UNSW
- 3) The ATAR excludes bonus points

That being said, the ATAR I received was 97.95. I was also fortunate that year to be my school's only HSC All-Rounder and made it into the North Shore Times for "flamencoing my way to a 97.95 ATAR."

Please do remember that at the end of the day...I'm not here to tell you about my achievements for the sake of me...I'm here to tell you that doing well, even when you think you'd found a dagger in the road ahead of you, is totally possible.

The fact that you're here RIGHT NOW, shows me AND you that you're using the resources around you, like TSFX. Their carefully selected notes, syllabus summaries and past HSC questions were there to guide me through those mind blanks, seemingly impossible maths equations and unfortunate lack of 'Discovery' past questions.

Keep doing what you're doing... and please, please always remember that the HSC is a marathon, not a sprint. Pace yourself, keep positive, keep active, use TSFX's resources...and just watch what happens.

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.

Katrina