

SANJEEVAN PRABAHAR

My Story



I was doing a Google search when I was preparing this speech and I came across a headline on the Daily Telegraph which read “Today’s crop of HSC students are under more pressure than ever before as they battle family expectations and an education system more focused on marks than turning out well-rounded adults”. It might sound absurd, but it is sadly true.

Good morning everyone. Year 12 is a very stressful time indeed. The time when all of the years you have spent at school, all of the effort basically comes to an ‘end’. However, with good study habits and organisational skills, it could be tackled well. I will share with you things I learnt on the way regarding good study habits.

To introduce myself, my name is Sanjeevan and I graduated from Epping Boys High School last year. I came to Australia two years ago and joined school in year 11. It was a big change in my life but I managed to do quite well. I wasn’t here all along and I didn’t go to one of the top selective schools, yet I managed to end up with an ATAR of 99.00. So which school you go to, or which subjects you do for that matter, is irrelevant. I don’t have a ‘secret to success’, just study habits that I worked out on the way.

Mark Twain said “The secret of getting ahead is getting started”. Don’t put things for later, because often a time, later becomes never.

The Board of Studies, have ample resources on their website that would be essential for your exam preparations. From past exam papers to the notes from the marking centre, they have all the information you need to know about what is expected of you in the HSC exams. The content and skills examinable in the HSC are all outlined in the syllabus. Knowing the syllabus inside out means you know what to expect in the exam.

Constant revision is key. Revisiting material few days before the exam or cramming it the night before would mean it only sticks to short term memory and you need to spend time before each exam re-learning the same content all over again. Study strategies are personalised, what worked for me might not work for you. I am a visual learner, and have a clear memory of colours. So I used highlighters of several colours all over my notes. Palm cards were also very useful because I read over notes while travelling to and from school. The learning strategy that benefitted me most was group study and helping my peers. Helping others reinforces your own learning. Albert Einstein said “If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t know it well enough.” Yes, group study is often distracted but if done right, it is very effective. We had facebook groups for all our subjects where we would post up photos of questions and then worked out solutions. It is very quick as well, I mean whose phone doesn’t beep with an fb notification every few minutes?

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The varied natures of the subjects I did meant I had to prepare for each one differently. I personally found HSC English Advanced very challenging, probably because I came from a different country where my first language wasn't English. Also because I didn't have particular liking for the subject or writing essays in general. Preparation for English means knowing your texts inside out and being able to refer to them very well in the exam. You need to read (or watch in some cases) each text at least 3 or 4 times, because the more you do, the more you will see. Start writing practice essays early, don't wait for your teacher to tell you. Read, write, give it to your teacher or someone and get feedback and then re-write. It is an ongoing process and you just cannot master the subject by cramming over-night.

Mathematics, was I guess my thing. I loved math and was doing quite well at it consistently. However, I didn't have a shortcut for it. Just the usual: practice, practice and more practice. When you start learning new content, textbooks would be good. However, I wouldn't recommend using textbook questions as your guide when preparing for exams. Exams test many skills at once and therefore the style of questions are markedly varied to ones in textbooks. One question could cover several topics. Therefore, the key to doing well in math exams is doing past papers. I cannot stress how important this is. Save HSC math papers for until after Trials, because HSC questions (especially Mathematics Extension 1 and 2) are quite unique. I am referring more to the latter part of the paper, like the infamous Question 8 (now Question 16) of the Extension 2 paper. They are of high level of difficulty and are challenging to even the most gifted students. You get stumped, pretty much. I haven't seen many school trial papers that match that level of difficulty. So practising with those questions when preparing for HSC exams would be optimal. Besides there are hundreds of past school trial papers available online. Another key factor is time. Most people could do the questions in a math exam if you give them a lot of time. The point of the exam is to test how much you can do under timed conditions. So you need to have done at least 3 papers under timing to get used to finishing your paper and checking it again.

Physics, is based on mathematical concepts. However, the HSC Physics course and exams are structured such that they test more theoretical knowledge than calculations. So the key is knowing your syllabus, very well. I made notes for all 3 core topics and option under the syllabus dot points. I referred to several textbooks, notes from others and also the notes I received from TSFX in revision lectures. This meant, I had a look at different perspectives of looking at the same thing and picked the one that appealed to me the most. I think this is perhaps the best revision method for almost all other HSC courses. This ensures you know the syllabus well. Apart from that, the key is past papers. There are 5-8 markers in the exam that test how well you could synthesize, correlate and summarise information. Prior preparation for these questions would give you a competitive advantage.

I also did IPT, a less common subject. Preparation for IPT was quite similar to Physics: making notes under the syllabus dot points and doing past papers. IPT required students to have technical thinking, which is natural to some people, but is mostly acquired through practice.

Success in HSC and achieving the ATAR you want means doing well in all your subjects. As you may know, 10 units count towards the ATAR with 2 of them being your best 2 units of English. Do not neglect any of your subjects. If you are acing mathematics in the high 90s and not doing as well in English, let math be for a while and focus on English. Overall performance is crucial.

The HSC is the most important part of school life, but hey, it is not all. There is more to life than books and exams. At the end of the day, it is yet another exam. Enjoy your school life while you can. Have a balanced life, with time to spend with family and friends and other commitments you may have. But, the key is prioritising.

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Please don't get bogged down by the statistics and calculations associated with HSC marks and the ATAR. The Board of Studies and the UAC are paying their employees to do it. Your job, is to study hard.

“Believe in yourself, and the rest will fall into place. Have faith in your own abilities, work hard and there is nothing you cannot accomplish.” I wish I said that first, a guy called Brad Henry beat me to it.

Good luck for year 12. I am sure you all would do well ☺