

KATHARINE CAMOBRECO

My Story



Hi, my name is Katharine. I would like to begin by giving you a brief background about myself. I completed my VCE in 2011 at Blackburn High School and the subjects I studied included Further Maths, Biology, Chemistry, Psychology, English and first year Biology at Monash University as part of the enhancement studies program, after being awarded the Monash prize for high achievers in 2010. For my VCE, I achieved an ATAR of 99.55 and am currently enrolled in a Bachelor of Science at Monash University.

I attribute my success in VCE to a number of factors including my personal commitment, self-discipline, focus, good study habits and extra studies I undertook at TSFX and with a private tutor. The focus of my talk today will be about my studying habits and techniques, in particular, I will share with you how I organised my daily studies and how I studied for SACs and exams.

All of my subjects had a very heavy workload including mid-year exams, except English of course. Daily homework included lots of questions and remembering a great deal of information such as definitions, body systems, chemical processes, formulae etc. In order to stay on top of things I had to be disciplined and organised. Two tools I found especially useful were a yearly wall planner and lists. You can buy a yearly wall planner at Officeworks or newsagents. Place the planner somewhere visible to you while studying such as above your desk. As soon as you have a date for a SAC or another piece of work write it on the planner. This way you can easily see when work is due and SACs occur, which always seems to be at the same time. The planner will help you to manage and prioritise your studies.

Before I began studying each afternoon I made a comprehensive list of specific tasks I wanted to accomplish in that session. I referred to the planner to ensure I was completing the most urgent pieces of work first. Also, when making a list I broke down general and large tasks, like studying for a chemistry SAC, into smaller, specific tasks such as re-read pages 30 – 45 or finish the chapter review questions. Little by little, you move closer to your goal of studying for a SAC. Your study sessions will be more efficient and effective as you won't be wasting time procrastinating about what to study, or worse, still put off studying altogether because you don't know where to begin.

By organising your studies in this fashion you will not fall behind as you are always completing the most urgent work first. Any tasks you do not complete should become the first priority on your list the next day. When making "to do"

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lists it is important to set realistic and achievable goals so that you feel good about yourself and stay motivated. Also don't forget to take short breaks to tidy your desk, organise notes and books for school the next day or grab a snack. It really helps you to re-energise and re-focus.

Another way to get the most out of your studies is to work ahead of your class and get a competitive edge over your peers. During VCE the work load is lightest at the start of the year and during school holidays between Units 3 and 4. During these times, many students do the least amount of work required of them, which is typically the set homework. If you push yourself and take the initiative to read chapters ahead in your textbooks and answer chapter questions before they are set you will be giving yourself a great advantage. When you come to learning about the topics you have already pre-read in class, you will be hearing the information for a second time, which will help to consolidate your understanding or revise your knowledge. Furthermore, when your teachers set the next chapter questions, that you have already completed, you will have no homework, which leaves more time to study for SACs.

Unlike my fellow Psychology students who were bogged down doing homework close to SACs, I worked ahead which allowed me to dedicate more time to revising for SACs. I got consistently great marks for my SACs and a perfect score of 50 at the end of the year.

Many of you are probably wondering how many hours I actually spent studying each day. To give you a better idea here is an overview of my typical week.

Because I completed Further Maths the year before and studied Biology by distance education or off campus mode at Monash University, I only had 4 subjects at school during Year 12. This meant I got home at 12.30 on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays and at 2.30 and 3.00 on Thursdays and Fridays.

The first thing I did each day was eat because we all need brain food. Then I organised my books and wrote my list of things to study. Usually, I studied until between 11 and 11.30 each night taking a main break for dinner and a shower. However, I set aside Friday afternoons and/or evenings most weeks to spend time with my friends. It was important to relax and have some fun after working so hard over the course of the week. It was like a reward to myself that helped to relieve any stress or strain I was feeling, and helped me to maintain a balanced life that was not totally consumed by my studies. Friday was a good day to take off as I was able to do any homework set that day over the entire weekend.

On Saturdays I spent most of my day at TSFX doing master classes. Depending on my workload, I sometimes went out on Saturday night, otherwise I studied. For half the year, on Sundays, I worked 5 hours at my part-time job as a retail assistant, except during exam times when I studied instead. As exam time got closer I usually stayed up till between 12.00 and 1.00 in the morning. As you can see from my study habits, I worked long and hard on a consistent basis to achieve great results; it didn't just happen by chance.

As I said before, I spent most of my Saturdays at TSFX doing master classes for Further Maths, English and Chemistry. Despite not being able to do much set homework on this day I found attending master classes was incredibly helpful because I was learning in advance of my peers at school, consolidating my learning or revising. This was especially useful during peak study periods when I was snowed under with lots of

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homework. Also, the notes that came with the master classes were very comprehensive and explained many things better than my textbooks as the notes included information from a wider variety of sources. Furthermore, the questions we worked through during these classes were exam style questions – which meant we were actually revising for exams over the course of the year. I found this increased my SAC grades as I was exposed to many different questions while most of my peers only did those prescribed from the textbook. Overall the master classes really deepened and extended my knowledge and I fully endorse them.

I also attended TSFX exam revision lectures for both Units 3 and 4 for all of my subjects.

The exam revision lectures were most helpful as the notes that were provided with the lectures were highly summarised yet thorough. This meant I didn't have to waste time compiling my own set of exam notes. Preparing for exams was less stressful as I was able to spend my time doing more practise exams. The lectures also pointed out the ways examiners trick students and common mistakes they make. I felt better prepared than my peers knowing these pitfalls and making sure I didn't make these same mistakes. I honestly believe that I wouldn't have achieved the ATAR I did if it weren't for attending TSFX master classes and exam preparation lectures.

Now I'll run you through the steps I followed when studying for SACs and exams. They are very similar for both.

First, I found out what was being tested. For SACs, I asked my teacher whereas for exams, the study design on the VCAA website clearly explains what material is examinable.

Next, for both SACs and exams I re-read the relevant sections in my textbooks and notes in my workbooks. For most of my subjects I had two textbooks, as in most cases what one book lacked the other book compensated for and it meant I had more chapter questions to practise with. While re-reading the sections I made summary notes that included definitions and other information I needed to memorise. For SACs, these notes were 4 to 5 double sided pages while for exams, I had around 10 -15 double sided pages. Additionally, for the exams, I re-read the TSFX notes given at the exam revision lectures and highlighted important information to memorise.

The third step in my revision for SACs was completing the relevant Checkpoint questions. The Checkpoint books contain past VCAA exam questions. I highly recommend doing the Checkpoint exam questions that are relevant to your SAC as last year on numerous occasions, the exact same or very similar VCAA questions were included on my papers. I found I had a great advantage over others as a result of doing this extra work.

Finally, when preparing for exams I completed many practise papers from a variety of sources. I did on average 25 practice exams per unit for each subject. After correcting each exam I read how the questions should be best answered and put this into practise during the next practise exam I completed. I researched any answers I got wrong to understand where I went wrong. I made a note of this in my summary notes so I wouldn't make the same mistake on the actual exam. I found doing practise exams extremely helpful because not only was I exposed to many different types of questions of varying degrees of difficulty, I also learned how examiners wanted you to answer questions.

DANIEL ELKINGTON

My Story

My final piece of advice to you is to never give up. I know this sounds cliché, but my focus and motivation made a real difference to my VCE results. For example, throughout the year I was getting B – B+ for my English SACs. I was aiming for above 40 in English but the marks I was getting suggested this result was unlikely. I was on course for a study score of about 37 which was going to drag down my ATAR. Around three weeks before the exam I was beginning to despair about English because all the extra effort and work I had put in hadn't made much difference to my grades, or so it seemed, especially after I got an average score for my first practice exam which counted as a SAC. I didn't finish all questions in the allotted time which had a significant impact on my result or grade. This was very disheartening in the lead up to the final exams.

Rather than give up, as a last resort I thought I should try an English tutor. I asked a couple of friends what they thought and most said not to bother because it was so close to the exam, it wouldn't make a real difference. I asked another friend who said I had nothing to lose but plenty to gain; he even recommended a tutor who luckily was able to fit me in at that late stage. I saw her around 3 times a week. She helped me with my weaknesses, gave me a strategy for my context and set me lots of practise essays to write. In the end I found the English exam the most enjoyable and surprised myself by getting a score of 45. I think my English result was my greatest VCE success and believe my score can be attributed to all the extra study and effort I put in during the year, which my tutor helped me to bring all together.

If I had given up on English I wouldn't have got such a great ATAR. So remember my personal experience whenever you are feeling overwhelmed, or when you are nearing the end of your studies and think that it is too late to make a difference to your result. Stay motivated and keep trying so that at the end of it all you have no regrets.

In summary, the keys to my success were:

- Commitment
- Self-discipline
- Organisation
- Consistent study habits which included working ahead, revising and lots of practice exams.

I can honestly say that I did the best I possibly could, and am very proud of my achievement.

I got 48 for Further Maths, 46 for Biology, 47 for Chemistry, 50 for Psychology, 45 for English and high distinctions (a score of more than 90%) for both units of first year Biology. My ATAR was 99.55.

I hope I have helped you feel more confident about the year ahead and given you some useful tips to help you get the most out of your studies.