

MARIAN HASSAN

My Story



I should probably introduce myself, my name is Mariah Hassan and I graduated from Minaret College last year with an ATAR of 99.80. I did Biology and Text and Traditions in Year 11 and Chemistry, English, Maths Methods, and Further Maths in Year 12. I was fortunate enough to achieve a perfect score of 50 in Biology and in English. Now I'm enrolled to study Medicine at Monash University.

A typical school day involved me waking up, going to school, not studying in any of my free periods, woops, unless I had a SAC next or something like that. I would read the newspaper or maybe do some light maths homework. I'd generally get home around 4.15pm, then I'd unwind, have a snack etc, until around 5, then I'd study until about 7.30. During this time I tried to finish all the assigned homework I had, text book questions, assignments, things like that. From 7.30-8.30 I'd have a break while eating dinner. I timed it that way so I could watch prime time tele like Masterchef and X factor without feeling guilty. Then from about 8.30-10.30 I'd study some more. This time slot would usually be dedicated to studying for a SAC or test or something like that. I think even though tests and SACs might not be worth that much, it's really important to take them seriously and study for them. Once it came to exam time I felt that I already knew most of the material because I'd already revised and studied the concepts before my test/sac. There were a few things I wasn't tested on in class and because I was slack and didn't revise them from my own volition, when it came to exam time I had to spend a lot more time revisiting those concepts.

I'd always have Friday night off and a Saturday morning sleep in. I'd try to study for about 6 hours on Saturday, then have Saturday night off. But if I had something on during the day then I might've left the studying until Sunday afternoon.

Sunday mornings were dedicated to TSFX masterclasses. I went for Biology in Year 11 and for English and Chemistry in Year 12. The thing I liked most about the masterclasses was that I was being taught by VCAA assessors, which none of my school teachers were. So obviously if they're marking the exams they know exactly what to teach you to maximise marks.

I got home around 2-2.30pm so I usually gave myself the rest of the day off, unless it was a really busy week and I had a SAC the next day or something. I think it's really important to remember in VCE that you're not a machine and you need some guilt-free time off! Keeping healthy and exercising is also really

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important and a good way to relieve stress and get your mind off things. I'd try and go for a jog or bike ride at least once a week as well as going swimming once a week. If I was just not in the mood for studying and feeling overwhelmed or stressed a good jog would do wonders. Sleep is also really important! I never used to study past 10.30 and I'd try and get about 8 hours sleep a night. I personally didn't have a job in Year 12, but I was school captain, so it wasn't all study, study, study, I managed to make time for other things as well.

In terms of how I studied, it depends on each subject, but generally, as a rule, I tried to understand concepts rather than memorise. This is especially applicable for subjects, like Chem and Biology where the exam is full of application type questions and the only way you'll be to answer them is by having a deep understanding of the concepts. Without that, even if you memorise the entire Biology textbook, you'll be lucky to score more than 20% on the exam.

A good way of ensuring that you do have a good understanding of something is by explaining it to someone else in your own words. And that's actually what I did most of the time, it's something that TSFX taught me, 'Teach the Dog' not sure if you guys have heard of it yet, but you will soon! I always studied aloud. If I was trying to learn something or commit it to memory, I'd pretend that I was explaining it to somebody else and it would stick. The only problem with that was that my mum would think that I spent the whole night talking on the phone and I'd have the difficult task of protesting my innocence.

I'll admit, I did spend a lot of my study time staring aimlessly at the wall in front of me, so a way that I overcame that was by sticking notes up on the wall in front of my desk with things that I needed to memorise, like definitions, formulas, quotes, things like that, so instead of fixating on every crack and scratch on the wall, I was absorbing information I needed to know.

I didn't work well with a study timetable, instead I worked towards task completion rather than time limits. So I'd have a checklist and say for example, these are all of the things I need to do before the end of the day or before my next break.

In terms of writing notes, I wrote my own summary notes for Biology and for Chemistry Unit 3 which I compiled throughout the year. The TSFX notes really helped me with this as they were really thorough and comprehensive, so I relied on them a lot. With Chemistry Unit 4, I realised that I simply didn't have time to write my own notes, considering all my other subjects, so I used my TSFX notes as a summary.

In the lead up to exam time my entire study routine could be summed up in two words - practice exams! Literally, my schedule would be wake up, chem prac exam, break, further prac exam, break, methods prac exam break, then an English essay. I used to do the English essay last because I seriously lacked motivation for it, so if I procrastinated that, then at least I wasn't eating into the study time of my other subjects. Obviously that system wouldn't work for all subjects, but I'm trying to emphasise the importance of practising exam style question under timed conditions. Just as an indication, I did about 30 trial exams per unit for biol and chem and about 40 for further and methods. Don't be disheartened if you're making lots of mistakes at the beginning, that's the whole point, to go back and learn from your mistakes!

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Another thing that I really wanted to emphasise is the importance of English (or ESL, or Lit, or Eng Language) and the importance of having a commitment to improving your writing. And I don't mean being really committed 3 weeks out from the exam, I mean being committed from now, because English is not a subject you can cram for. To be honest, I cruised through Year 10 and 11 without focusing on English much and as a result I had to play catch up throughout Year 12. If you're in Year 11, focus on English from now. If you have a good foundation from Year 11 it'll really help in Year 12. But if you're in Year 12 and you've neglected English so far, you've got a whole year to read, read, read (the newspapers, the works of good authors, the assessors reports, high scoring essays etc), look for words you don't know, keep a word bank to expand your vocab, I kept a word bank on my phone so I'd always have it accessible and easy to add to. But most importantly, practise writing essays (try write an essay a week if you can)! My TSFX English teacher told me that VCE English rewards hard work over natural talent and my score is a testament to that. I've got a Maths/Science brain and I've never been motivated towards English. In the GAT last year I got 38 for Written Communications (I did my best BTW). This year, after countless practice essays, I got 50 for the written communications section and that was a reflection of my score. So trust me, the more essays you write, the more you improve!

The most important thing to remember in VCE is to give it your best shot, but if it doesn't all work out, it's not the end of the world. You'll definitely face plenty of hurdles throughout the year, but never lose hope. I know I was devastated in September when I got my UMAT result, which was much lower than required for an interview for Monash Medicine and I found it difficult to refocus. But thankfully in the end my hard work paid off and I was offered a second round interview. So never give up!

At the end of the day, Year 12 is your last year at school with your friends, so try and enjoy it as much as you can!

I wish you all the best, and good luck!