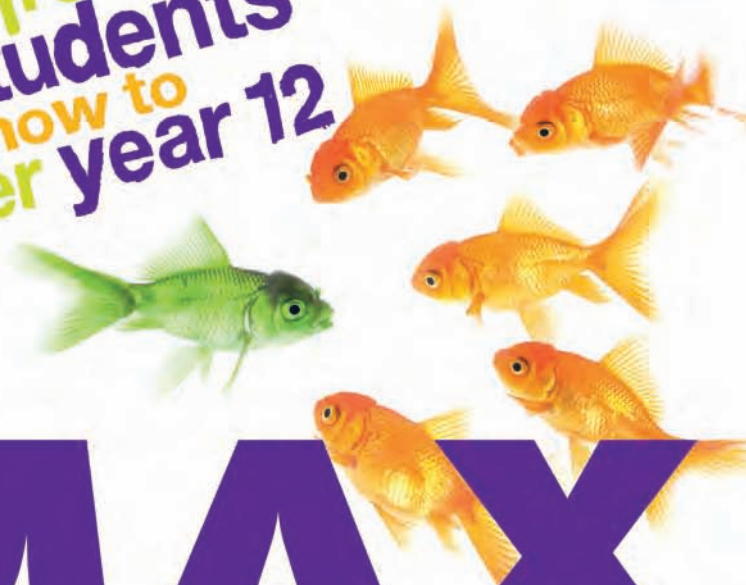


tips from
top students
on how to
conquer year 12



MAX YOUR MARKS

rowena austin & annie hastwell

**MAX
YOUR
MARKS**

First published in 2010

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Allen & Unwin
83 Alexander St
Crows Nest NSW 2065
Australia
Phone: (61 2) 8425 0100
Fax: (61 2) 9906 2218
Email: info@allenandunwin.com
Web: www.allenandunwin.com

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MAX YOUR MARKS

rowena austin & annie hastwell


ALLEN & UNWIN

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Introduction

So you're about to do Year 12? This can be a formidable prospect, and it's quite understandable if you're nervous. Your family too, if they haven't been through this before, are probably bracing themselves and not sure what to expect.

Much hangs on this year, and the pressure can be intense. But why grit your teeth and treat it as a mere test of survival when you could aim high and get the most out of it? Sure, it's a bit of a race and you'll need to buckle down for some hard work, but there are ways to get the score you want and also enjoy your final year at school.

In this book, highly successful students from many different circumstances share the tips and tricks that they believe helped them to succeed.

The fifty students interviewed for this book all scored

over 95 in their Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) or, in Queensland, the equivalent Overall Position (OP). They came from all sorts of backgrounds: from those with medicine and law in the genes to those who are the first in their families to ever obtain their Certificate of Education; from government and non-government schools; from families of all shapes and sizes.

Many of the students were lucky enough to have had devoted teachers and enlightened schools where they got great support and advice; others worked it out for themselves. In the book, they talk about all aspects of their final year at school, from how they dealt with stress, how they stayed sane and maintained friendships and a social life, to the practical ways they organised their study space and study time. They discuss distraction and procrastination, and the challenges of living in an era when the computer you are working on is also tempting you to network and chat with your friends. They reflect on the roles of teachers, parents, food, exercise and sleep in that final important year.

The good news, too, is that for these students, Year 12 wasn't just about slog, staying home on Saturday nights and missing all the magic moments that the last year at school has to offer. They worked hard but organised themselves so they could play, too.

They've been where you are about to go. The stories they have to tell will help demystify what's ahead, and inspire you to shine.

Note on Educational Terms

All Australian states and territories except Queensland use the same measure to rank Year 12 students for admission to tertiary education. The measure has different names: in Western Australia, the Northern Territory, South Australia and Tasmania it is called the Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER); in Victoria it is the Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER); and in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory it is the Universities Admission Index (UAI).

During 2009 and 2010, Australian states and territories (except Queensland) are adopting a nationally agreed name to replace those listed above: the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). The maximum rank available is 99.95.

In Queensland, Year 12 students wanting to study at tertiary level obtain an Overall Position (OP). The OP is used

to calculate a ranking equivalent to the ATAR for Queensland students who apply to universities interstate.

All students in *Max Your Marks* achieved a TER, ENTER, UAI or the equivalent OP of 95 or higher.

The most common senior school qualification in Australia is the Certificate of Education, known in the states and territories as:

WACE – Western Australian Certificate of Education

NTCE – Northern Territory Certificate of Education

SACE – South Australian Certificate of Education

VCE – Victorian Certificate of Education

TCE – Tasmanian Certificate of Education

HSC – Higher School Certificate (NSW)

ACT YEAR 12 CERTIFICATE

QCE – Queensland Certificate of Education

Senior students may choose instead to study the International Baccalaureate® (IB) Diploma Programme, which takes two years. The IB Diploma is recognised by all major tertiary institutions in Australia. IB Diploma points can be converted to an ATAR equivalent – IB students in *Max Your Marks* achieved the equivalent of a tertiary admission rank of 95 or more.



Part 1

**STARTING
OUT**



CHAPTER 1

Setting Goals

There are a million inspiring quotes that tell you it's best to know where you're going before you take those first steps towards getting there. At the beginning of Year 12 it all looks overwhelming, and is made more so by the constant advice and worrying from everyone around you. It can feel like a long dark tunnel with not even a flicker of light at the end.

Our super students didn't seem to feel that fear, though. Rather, they set out positively, determined to give the year their best shot. Most had a goal of some kind, even if they weren't yet sure of their career direction. Some were driven by the desire to please parents or teachers, or to beat siblings. Also, some realised that this final year of school would be a special one: a big year, when they balanced on the edge of adulthood. They wanted to organise their study well, so they could still have a really good time with their friends.

*A lot of students said they wanted
to make the most of their last year
at school*

stephen I suppose my goal in Year 12, not just with study, but with everything, was to do as much as possible, to just burn the candle at both ends for one year and see how far I could go with it.

matt You can plan all you like but if you don't have that desire to do well . . . I felt it's my last shot at school, let's do as well as I can and then I can get out and go to uni and do what I really want to do.

edward I didn't have a specific goal really. I was just kind of working as hard as I could and trying to make sure that when I got to the end of the year I wouldn't be looking back and saying, 'Oh, what if I'd tried harder.' I worked as hard as I could, so whatever happened at the end I would know that I gave it my best shot.

tom w I sort of always enjoyed school in general and I saw Year 12 as the culmination of it all; it did reflect all of your previous years of school.

patrick I wanted to leave school on a high note.

DID YOU HAVE A DESIRE
TO DO WELL IN YEAR 12?



DID YOU HAVE A CLEAR GOAL
IN YEAR 12?



IF SO, DID YOU PLAN YOUR
OWN GOALS?

morgan At the beginning of Year 12, I was really looking forward to it. I knew it was going to be a really good year. Even before it all started I was getting things worked out and planned and downloading curriculum statements and stuff. I wanted to get to the end of it and know that I'd

done really well for the entire year and that I'd put in a good effort to get into uni.

simon I didn't have any goals – I just dived in saying to myself, 'Well, I'm here for the year; I might as well do as well as I can.' I think I felt that once Year 12 finished everything would change.

sam In Year 2 I just knew I had to do it and knew where I wanted to go, so I just did it. As long as you've got that goal it is very much a motivating factor. Some days you'd be like, 'I can't do this anymore, it is too tiring,' and you'd just have a break and get back into it.

will I don't think I did it to get into university because I didn't have any high aspirations of what I wanted to do – I just wanted to do well for my own sort of self-satisfaction.

Others were aiming for a specific career

vithiyasagar I didn't want a whole thirteen years of school going to waste. I set my sights on an economics and law degree and that's what I'm doing now.

edward I knew to get into physio I would need really good marks, so I always had a desire to do

well in Year 12. I wanted to keep my options open because if I worked hard I could pick from a variety of courses at uni, rather than just limiting myself to a few things.

nina I knew I wanted to get into law, which had a TER of 98, but I figured, considering how high the TER was, that I could get in through other means if I didn't get the marks. Ultimately, I wanted to get above 95.

muji I set a goal from a long time ago to become a doctor and so I pushed myself to doing that. I even recall not taking my tennis racquet in the last few months of Year 12 so that I could dedicate my time to my studies . . . even though I needed the exercise!

Keeping goals short-term worked best for some

nicholas s I didn't really think about getting 20s at the end of the year because I found that a bit overwhelming. I just thought about the next assignment, test or exam that was coming up in a few days or a few weeks. I figured if I did the best I could in each separate assignment, then that would take care of the marks at the end of the year.

poya I started off with my goals, ‘I have to do this, I have to do that’, but as I went on I loved what I was doing and I wasn’t concentrating on my goals. One of the other students told me to do the best I can and later on it will pay off, not to worry about whether I get into med.

tom w I think I had a certain mark that I wanted to get for each subject. After doing it for a while and getting a feel – you are constantly getting feedback for your marks – I thought that getting 19 for each subject was quite feasible. After a while that became my goal.

yvette My main goal was to finish the year. This was taken one week at a time.

Some had no idea what they were going to do after Year 12, but wanted to keep their options open

farrin There was no particular course I especially wanted to do at uni so I guess I just wanted to get a decent mark, and whatever that mark was would help me decide what course I went into.

alex I think my clear goal was to get the highest mark I possibly could, to keep as many doors open as possible.

ashleigh I just wanted to get the best score that I could because I didn't know what I wanted to do so I figured just to keep my bases open I had to do the best that I could.

Most students said they came up with their own goals

xiang-wen I largely planned my own goals – my parents were still in Malaysia and so I took quite a lot of responsibility for myself.

shaheen I planned everything myself. In fact, my family was not supportive of my goals, I think because I was pushing myself too much.

nicole I've always been a new year's resolution kind of person, and I sort of thought out what I wanted to achieve at the end of Year 11.

stefania I did my own goals, even though I had external influences, like my dad would say, 'You have to be a doctor,' and I'm like, 'Yeah, not really.'

*A few were inspired or encouraged
by others*

tim My brother and sister both got scores above 90 and I just wanted to be in that category as well. That helped a lot.

trent I was probably inspired by my brother going through school. My mum and dad never went to uni and my brother and I are the first to have a tertiary education. That kind of inspired me and he got 99.9 and went interstate on a national scholarship.

cecilia I suppose my parents had a big influence. I knew they had high expectations so I had to keep up with that and my brother did very well, so I suppose beating him was one of my goals as well.

CHAPTER 2

The Myth of the Naturally Brilliant Student

There's a moment in about Year 11 when everything changes for the student who's cruised through school. It's when the tortoises start catching up with the hares, and the hares are taken by surprise. Many of our super students regarded themselves as tortoises. They said they had to really slog away in the lower grades, but the habits they'd developed by having to work hard began to really pay off as they neared the end of school.

Almost all said Year 12 was harder than anything that had come before, but that getting organised in Year 11 was what made the difference. A bit like training for the footy season, it made them a lot more prepared for that tough final year.

allie I am not one of those naturally smart people – I have to work hard to get good marks. But it comes naturally to work hard. If I don't put any work in, I'll do shite.

fiona I struggled a bit in primary school. It was probably only about in Year 8 or 9 that it became easier.

sam I always studied fairly hard and achieved good marks, but not as good as what I got for the HSC. In Year 12, I worked a bit harder and probably studied smarter.

tim I pretty much struggled all through school until Year 11. And then I just buckled down.

simon It had come naturally for most of my school life, but after Year 10 I noticed my As were dropping back to A-minuses and then I realised I had to work harder.

Getting into a study routine in earlier years really helped

nina Good marks came naturally in the sense that I'd always been reasonably confident with schoolwork and homework and things like that, but I'd been in a

routine since Year 8, which our school drilled into us a little bit and that certainly helped.

muji The getting of good marks was expected and so in a way it became natural. I had to work hard in order to achieve my goals. The changing of schools mid-year and moving states stopped me from getting the good marks straight away . . . but I was expected to pull through each time and arrange my passions accordingly.

george In Year 11, I started getting straight As and I just sort of followed on. In my mind I was worried about Year 12, so as soon as the year started I really pushed myself to get the best marks I could.

trent I didn't work any harder in Year 12 than in Year 11, but I think that's part of our schooling. They make years 11 and 12 relatively on par so they build you up to the whole idea of having to put in a big effort in Year 12.

thuy In Year 10, I relaxed a bit, but in Year 11, I really knuckled down as most of my friends were in different classes. I made new friends and met a more hardworking bunch. We were really competitive and I guess that helped.

vrinda By the time I got to Year 12, I'd developed a pretty decent study technique, so I didn't put in copious amounts of work. It was about being consistent – making sure I put in a couple of hours each day rather than heaps and heaps of time.

Even so, most said to expect to put in hard work . . .

patrick Even the smartest person in the country would have to work hard to earn a top mark, I reckon.

nicholas s There seemed to be a common comment on my report cards through school: 'Nick seems to do just enough to get by and doesn't do any extra.' And I think I probably did a little bit extra in Year 12.

nick m Throughout high school I got generally high marks but as I got on, it got more and more difficult – I had to work at it.

nick l The amount of study changed most in Year 11. In Year 10 I could still cruise through pretty easily but it all kind of stepped up a bit in Year 11. And then Year 12 just continued on from that.

*... but there are ways to make it less
of a slog*

tom w I thought Year 12 was quite easy in the sense that what you needed to know was really well described in the curriculum. In some of the earlier years, it could be a little ambiguous in terms of what material would be covered in a test or exam. But in Year 12 you knew what to expect.

catriona I think what Year 12 showed is that students who aren't necessarily considered as bright as others, if they just worked solidly and consistently through the year, they came out with some of the best grades. I think Year 12 is about solid, continuous work. I don't necessarily think it's a lot of work, it's just ongoing and it's about practising the examples to get the best marks you can.

edward It helped to do Year 12 over two years, so instead of doing five subjects in one year I chose to do three in one year and three in the next. I tried to work hard throughout the year rather than just waiting until the exams and then cramming. I didn't feel really, really stressed about the amount of work I had to do coming up to the exams because I'd been working pretty consistently throughout the year.

yvette I organised my study so that I completed what was asked of me on a weekly basis. So I was never overwhelmed by the Year 12 coursework because I was just going through the year like any other year.

CHAPTER 3

Having a Plan

In this final, high-pressure year it can seem as though every time you raise your head another assignment bowls you over, and meanwhile the revision you haven't done keeps on piling up. The super students were just as tempted to procrastinate as anyone, but they did have a good clear look, from the beginning, at how much they had to do, and, in their own ways, worked out a plan for how that could be fitted into their lives.

It wasn't necessarily a Grand Plan, but a routine that kept the work under control. Diaries, timetables, wall charts, lists – anything that reminded them what was due and what needed to be done.

*Most super students were fairly
well organised*

shaheen I think self-management is very important in Year 12. I would always plan ahead – every fortnight or every week I would have a timetable of what I was going to do during the week. I don't know what I would have done without making timetables and planning ahead.

sam I was very well organised and I believe that is fundamental to doing well: making sure you have a very well structured study timetable and having that really good routine. I just used an organiser. I'd set out my day in blocks of time.

hayley Most of the time I tended to break the study down into smaller activities instead of getting a bit confused by the whole and I'd often get the easiest things out of the way and break the bigger jobs down so I could tackle them more easily.

xiang-wen I had a school diary. I just pencilled in what tasks I had and roughly when I had to get them done by. By doing that I knew how much time I had to allocate to each and when I had to allocate it.

vithiyasagar I tried to develop a system in Year 12. I had a whiteboard up in my room.

Everything on the whiteboard set out what I needed to do, for the day or the week.

vrinda I was pedantic about drawing up timetables, which meant that I was able to balance hanging out with my friends and doing other stuff, like rowing. I had a timetable in my diary for activities I was doing all week, classes, etc., but when I had a dedicated study time I would plan it exactly, like, an hour for English, an hour for Maths.

matt I drew up a little table. And I found it really helpful because otherwise you can get bogged down in something that's not as important or that is not due soon. On the table I had *Important, Due Soon* as my number one; *Important, Not Due Soon* as number two; *Due Soon, Not Important* as my number three; and *Not Due Soon, Not Important* as my number four. I would try to apply that to each assignment or each subject. I think a lot of people put the *Important, Not Due Soon* below the *Due Soon, Not Important*.

kathy I had a book and a folder or notepad for each subject. I had my diary to keep track of all the stuff I was doing outside of school. I would regularly give myself a to-do list that could be a page long, and I didn't necessarily go through and tick everything

off, but the act of writing it down and prioritising made sure I didn't forget things.

irini I'd look about a month in advance at everything that was due for every subject and keep that in mind always.

edward I tried to make sure that I was reviewing things often. So, say, in terms two and three I'd try to set aside a bit of time each day or each week to check over things that I had done. I didn't try to get too far ahead. Throughout the year I was reviewing what we'd already done so that come exam time I wouldn't be so stressed. Things would be in my memory a bit better.

vrinda Using the curriculum is the best thing when it comes to organising notes and folders. One of the most important things about the HSC is that you don't want to be facing the unknown. I'd gone through the curriculum and had my notes arranged under those points. That way I knew I was really prepared and it made me feel more secure.

*Others still kept their eye on the ball,
but took a more organic approach*

nick l I never kept a diary and I never wrote stuff down, I just kind of planned it in my head. If I had

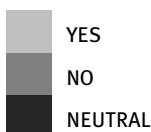
an English assignment due in two weeks I just said, 'Right, I'll do it in the first week,' and then I'd make sure I did it in the first week.

luke I'll certainly say I procrastinated. Although I always accepted what needed to be done.

ashleigh I left my assignments a bit late, but I used a diary and knew when everything was due.

poya I'm not organised. If I was more organised I would have done better. My papers were all mixed up. I didn't have a notebook, I just had spare paper and then I'd lose it.

DID YOU FIND THE ACT OF
STUDYING DIFFICULT?



WOULD YOU DESCRIBE
YOURSELF AS GOOD AT TIME
MANAGEMENT?

stefania I was very good at procrastinating to avoid the assignments that I didn't like; however, I knew that I had to set aside a certain amount of time to study for a particular test or do part of an assignment, so I would try not to be rushed or stressed before a due date. Once I actually sat down I was pretty into it and I would go for a solid couple of hours.

allie I found that the only way to study was to make myself busy in other ways. As in, I can't sit down and study for hours and hours on end. I just found it was all about time management. I did three musicals, four bands, I was head of Performing Arts, etc. etc., all during Year 12. Whatever time I had left to study, I'd spend studying.

stephen I am not the sort of person who draws up a coloured timetable and sticks it on the wall. Or decides that I am going to spend twenty minutes doing this and then have a break for five minutes. I tended to just get home from school, have something to eat and then plough through it for a couple of hours, take a break, and then keep going.

nick m I never worked in a set study pattern. The idea of working in set time constraints or locking myself in my room just doesn't sit well with me. I do

better work if I allow myself more freedom to just do work when I feel more like it rather than forcing it.

tori I would ‘work hard, play hard’, with no particular study pattern.

Most said they decided on their study habits before Year 12 began or early in the year, and then picked up the pace as the year went by

edward I tried to create a pattern or plan of how many hours I was going to do per week and when I was going to do them. I found that helped a lot, especially coming up towards exams, just to monitor where I was at, and to make sure I was doing the right amount of study.

matt I started setting myself up in the holidays before Year 12, just organising timetables and getting my desk set up, making sure I had everything organised from day one.

kathy Well, it really comes down to planning, but you know that it has to be done eventually so you get started and you work on it bit by bit and gradually you get it done.

olivia Towards the end of the year I started making a stricter study timetable for myself. At the start of swot vac I made a timetable outlining all my subjects and what topics I needed to cover before the exam, and then I worked through it all knowing that I'd cover everything I needed to.

Almost everybody said they were good at time management

tom w One of the reasons I did well in Year 12 was because there was a constant stream of things to do and constant deadlines. I think I work much better towards a deadline. Sometimes at uni, when there are things due so far in advance, it is a bit more difficult for me.

nicholas s I think time management is probably the one thing I did do well. So much of Year 12 is juggling the various subjects and giving each subject enough time. Sometimes it's easier to just think, 'Oh, that subject's not as important,' rather than giving it the time it needs.

edward I would always try to do my homework before doing other things. I stayed at the library after school and would try to do my homework before going home or playing sport or going for a ride or whatever.

sue-lin I know in Year 12 it's kind of cool to pretend that you've left everything to the last minute and still manage to do really well. But I never really thought like that. I planned my time and made sure that I'd allocated enough time for each subject and hadn't left everything to the last minute.

ashleigh It's important to prioritise what's due. Because you can fall into the trap of doing the assignments that are easy or interesting first. You just need to make a list of what's important to do at any one time.

cecilia When it came to the exam period and swot vac, my time management was, and had to be, perfect. During the year I was not as diligent with my studies and did not have study plans. For swot vac I had daily study plans in order to complete all my work before exams.

yvette My time-management skills are the reason I succeeded in Year 12.

CHAPTER 4

Believing in Yourself

There are always going to be dark moments in a year as full-on as this one. Even students doing well said that one bad test result could momentarily destroy their confidence and make them feel dispirited. What stood out among the super students was that they had ways of getting past those moments. They would get up, dust themselves off and go about regaining their confidence. Talking it through with family, friends or teachers helped in some cases. In others it was just a matter of giving themselves a good talking-to and focusing on the next thing. Almost unanimously, the super students said that believing in themselves made a difference to their results.

fiona Sometimes when it got hard, when I had a lot of work, I would lose a bit of faith. Then I'd do something that I knew I could do well. Like with Maths, I would struggle a bit and lose confidence, so I would go and do Biology or Geography, which I knew that I could do. That would make me feel a little more confident and then I could go back to the harder stuff.

kate If I got a bad test result or something my spirits would be dampened a little. So I would focus on what I could change and not what I couldn't. So, even though I couldn't change that I'd done badly in the past, I focused on what I could do in the future to improve my results.

sam There are times when you do doubt yourself. There are times when you get a bad mark and you think, 'Oh, I've just put all this effort in for nothing, I'm not going to get to my desired goal.' Teachers would be really good at helping. They'd just tell you, 'It's not over yet, there are more assessments to come,' and you do get over it and you just keep working harder.

stefania Sometimes I'd think, 'I just don't get it,' and I'd have a little cry. Then I'd go, 'Okay, just face it one more time,' and then I might get it or I might

not. But I think it was good that I knew I could do it because I just kept trying.

shaheen I relied on religion a lot. There wasn't a single test or exam that I sat without praying to God. If I got a low mark, sometimes my aims would become blurry, so I would pray and pull myself together and get back on track.

thuy I sort of emotionally broke down a couple of times, you know, cried, but then I learnt that crying was really counterproductive and I got over it and started flying through the rest of the year.

will I have always been very self-doubting. I knew I'd do well, but I am the sort of person who wants to prepare myself for the worst. I think I use fear as a driver in a way. You convince yourself you are not going to do well so you have to work incredibly hard.

shoba It went up and down. There were periods when I didn't really feel like I believed in myself. I would talk to one of my best friends – it was useful to talk to someone who had similar goals to myself.

edward I didn't really expect to do as well as I did. So maybe I didn't believe in myself as much as

I could have, but I think I believed in myself enough to get me through.

sue-lin I think everyone has moments of self-doubt in Year 12. I was very adamant that I wouldn't cry because I'd seen girls in the year above me breaking down in bathrooms. I couldn't understand what the big deal was, but when I got there I could understand why people do break down. Because I guess a lot is on the line, and at that point in your life it sometimes seems like that's all there is, which is completely not true. I thought it was really important to not get bogged down in the HSC.

hayley As you progress more and the physical evidence shows how you are going, it's hard to not believe in yourself. I think you just have to look at the facts. Whenever I was worried I'd just take time out, walk away completely, watch a movie, read a book, have a bath – just leave it totally.

muji Sometimes I excelled and other times I bombed out on the tests. So, believing in oneself was crucial. A poem is stuck on our mirror saying: 'Believe in yourself!' And I knew that I had to persevere, whatever happened.

simon My driving force was *not* believing in myself – I always felt I needed to be better prepared,

needed to know stuff so well that nothing could possibly go wrong.

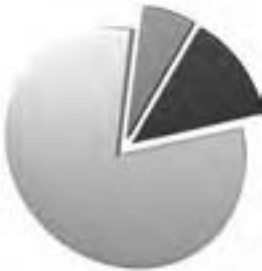
nicole I always thought, ‘If I think I can’t do something, then I won’t be able to do it.’ So I just overcompensated in the other direction and convinced myself I was great, regardless of indications otherwise. I do think confidence was a huge part of my success.

alex I think preparation is the key to good results. I think that helps my self-belief. Self-belief does help, it is a good motivator, but I think more than anything it was just trying to prepare thoroughly beforehand.

ashleigh I think it’s important for Year 12s to know that they haven’t stuffed up or they shouldn’t give up if they get a couple of bad marks. I’ve shown that you can not get your butt into gear till halfway through the year and still do it.

kate I don’t know whether not believing in myself made it harder or whether it made it better because I wanted to believe, so I’d work harder so I could believe in myself. For me I think that bit of doubt could’ve been a good thing. At the same time, if you don’t believe in yourself enough then I don’t think you are going to do well.

DID YOU BELIEVE IN
YOURSELF?



IF SO, DO YOU THINK THAT
MADE A DIFFERENCE TO
YOUR RESULTS?

morgan I know that for some students towards the end of the year the motivation fell off. Some students really weren't very happy with their results, in comparison with other people who kept working through to the end. I think the pressure is what separates people out.

trent I think you have to have a positive outlook, otherwise you're constantly thinking about failing rather than on getting that goal.

irini If you've got a crappy attitude about it then you're just going to feel bad all the time and you

know it's not going to be fun and you're not going to want to do it.

patrick It was a good feeling when I'd go into an examination with a sense of self-confidence, having studied, and also having faith in myself.

xiang-wen When you go into a test and you're confident in yourself, it helps you to solve problems – in a way you have to have a positive mindset before you do the exam.

hayley You just need to have faith that it will be okay. You have to keep telling yourself: 'You do know this, you've done the tests, you've done the practice exams, you do know what you're writing about – you just have to keep calm.'

thuy I found that talking to other people lessens the load on you and makes you feel lots better.

TOP TIPS

Believe in yourself

Aim high

Set your own goals

Don't be afraid

**Keep up your stamina and motivation
all through the year**

Expect to work hard

Make a study plan

Study consistently and efficiently

Develop ways to stop procrastinating

Don't fall behind

Celebrate your successes

Put setbacks behind you

Focus on what you can change

**Enjoy Year 12 – it's your last year
of school**

poya & shaheen

They arrived in Australia aged twelve and thirteen as refugees, barely speaking English. Just a few years later, Afghani brothers Poya and Shaheen both blitzed Year 12 with scores of 97.95 and 99.8 and are now studying dentistry and engineering respectively.

They're both young men who love friends and having a good time, but polar opposites when it comes to study habits.

'I'm not organised,' Poya says. 'If I was as organised as my brother, I would have done better.'

It's true, says Shaheen. 'My brother's study techniques were very, very different. He's an open guy, unlike me.'

Poya's favourite place to study was by the TV, with his little sisters and pet rabbits around him. Shaheen closeted himself in his room and worked so hard that the family began to worry about him. 'When it was study time, I had to just sit down and focus. If I couldn't concentrate, I wouldn't study,' Shaheen says.

Poya spent much of his non-study time kicking a soccer ball around. Shaheen did no exercise and says he lost weight and also a lot of sleep.

They were both driven by a real love of maths and science subjects. Their school recognised their potential early: Poya was given special permission to study Year 12 subjects when he was still in Year 9. He says he always made sure he got work done, but without any formal study plan. 'I wasn't actually *written-organised*,' he says, describing his habit of constantly

writing timetables and notes on bits of paper and then losing them. 'But I knew in my mind what to do.'

Shaheen's habits were the opposite. 'I don't know what I would have done without making timetables and planning ahead. I think it is very important in Year 12.'

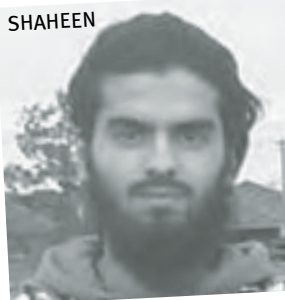
The boys are second- and third-eldest in a family of six children. Their older brother is also at university. They say they were motivated by their father's example. 'Our dad was a doctor and mum used to tell us about him, his efforts and stuff, and so we were just inspired by that and we wanted to be something in life. She would tell us it's important.'

They've also both joyfully grasped the educational opportunities Australia has to offer. 'In Afghanistan not many people can have an education – for us it is like a treasure, just to be this fortunate,' Shaheen says.

And they also gleefully enjoy challenging each other. At one stage when Shaheen was doing a Year 12 class in Year 11, they were in the same class and got a kick out of arguing the finer points of physics with their teacher.

Poya says he wished they could have taken more classes together. 'I would have liked my brother to be with me more often so we could really compete.'

SHAHEEN



POYA





Part 2

**LOOKING
AFTER
YOURSELF**



CHAPTER 5

Dealing with Stress

Super students may appear cool and confident, but most of ours admitted to stressing out at times during the year. What was interesting was that nearly all of them had worked out a way to deal with it. That panic-attack moment when you just know it's all too much – there's too much to do and not enough time to do it in – they dealt with in all sorts of personal ways: going for a run, playing with a pet or a younger brother or sister, baking a cake . . . They would find something absorbing and far from study, something that needed concentration of a different kind, such as juggling a soccer ball. Even if it was only for twenty minutes, it was enough to calm the brain and bring perspective and freshness back to the task at hand.

trent There were very few occasions when I thought I was overwhelmed and I wasn't going to manage and everything was going to fall apart. I realised it was better to set my own deadlines, to get an assignment done a few days before it was due. I'd get the stress trying to meet my own deadline, but I kind of knew I'd always get a relatively good mark because I'd started earlier.

jenna You get panic attacks and you think, 'My gosh, how am I ever going to get through this?' But that's where friends come in.

alex Sometimes I'd just go for walks and things like that. And listen to, not necessarily music, but I had this CD with ambient noises on it. Maybe read. Something that's not overly stimulating, like watching TV or listening to your favourite songs. So that you could return to study.

irini At the beginning of the year I was really stressed out, mostly because I was scared. I didn't know what to expect from the year, so the stress was overly anticipating the work that was going to come, but then once I got into it and I got stuff done and got good feedback for it – it became smoother and it wasn't as hard anymore.

george I made sure pretty much every weekend I was relaxing, so I'd go fishing.

will Often I'd go to bed. Because I found that if I slept on it, the stress was gone by the morning. I found when I got tired I got more stressed, so going to sleep was actually a coping mechanism.

vrinda The beginning of that three-week holiday before the exam I got a little bit overwhelmed, but then I sort of took things as they came and I was like, 'Well, there are twenty-four hours in a day and even if I sleep for eight of them I still have sixteen, and that is just so much time.' Just putting things practically in your mind like that reminds you how much time you do have and if you want you can use it effectively. Knowing there are a whole lot of factors you can control and knowing everyone else is in the same situation really helps calm the nerves.

trent I often used to go out in the backyard for a few minutes and just juggle the soccer ball on the grass. I used to try to make 100 or 120 and that takes a fair bit of concentration. It took me away from study for a while and then I'd go back to my chair and take a few deep breaths. I think it does relax you; I did feel my heartbeat slow down.

shoba I'd stress out and I might have a cry and then I'd be alright.

hayley I would talk to family members, mainly my mum, or other students, or teachers. With friends it was more about empathising and comforting, but I found that with teachers it was a bit of empathy but more of a practical approach. They would try to figure out what I could do to try to tackle stress.

vithiyasagar What I tried to do was have fun at school during the day and not take it too seriously, but at home it was really focused on work and study. So at school I wouldn't really be that intense in class, but I'd have a bit of fun.

farrin I went lap-swimming a lot, because you don't really have to think about anything while you're doing that. Otherwise you'd get too embroiled in it all and go insane.

nicole To vent stress, I would mainly talk to friends about how things were going, just take a break from whatever was stressing me out. I definitely broke water regulations with long hot showers.

allie I read a lot of novels and I'd sing – that was part of my music subject, but it also helped me to relax.

jess Running is my stress relief. I just have to focus on putting one foot in front of the other and listening to music. It's how I stay sane. And I still do it as often as I can.

sue-lin Sometimes I found that calling up a friend would freak you out more because you'd hear what they were doing. So sometimes it was best to do something with someone who had absolutely no connection with the HSC. I hung out with my mum quite a bit and my little brother.

nina It felt like it was going to be a long time till I finished and I couldn't really see it turning out the way I wanted to and I just wanted to stop studying for a week, but I knew that I couldn't do that. And not having the option of just stopping for a little while made it stressful, but that was only very rarely.

stephen My violin teacher tells me that if I am stressed with study I should play the violin, so I followed his advice.

WERE YOU STRESSED OUT
DURING THE YEAR?



*Staying ahead of the game helped
reduce stress*

nicholas s I suppose just working hard kept me the calmest. I think the most stressed you get is when you think you are behind and you don't know where you are going to start.

catriona While Year 12 was stressful at some points, preparation and hard work helped to overcome this.

kate If I got stressed it was because I felt I hadn't worked hard enough previously. I'd try to focus on the next day and what I could do then rather than dwell on the fact that I hadn't done enough and worry that was going to affect my exam results.

xiang-wen Just trying to get things organised in time so I knew how likely it was that I'd get things done on time helped me to reduce stress.

Some thought stress wasn't such a bad thing after all

alex I think that stress was a good thing for me because I don't like being relaxed too much. For me that tends to lead to laziness, so I think a bit of stress is good just to keep me motivated.

olivia It is important to have a good amount of stress. If you're not stressed out enough I don't think you're caring enough, but if you're too stressed I think it has an impact on how you're going to perform.

Taking two years to do Year 12 was a great way to halve the stress

edward I think I would have been a lot more stressed if I'd tried to do it all in one year. Doing it over two years helped. It meant that I was better prepared for tests and assignments and exams, so I wasn't so stressed at the last minute. I had the time to get things done well before the deadline.

*And just one student said he realises
now that he reacted to stress in all the
wrong ways*

simon I took up smoking heavily, spent a lot of time at home with family, had no outside outlets; even if I watched TV it would only be what was interesting and relevant. My mind was running all the time.

CHAPTER 6

Diet

Eating habits tend to get a bit knocked around by a heavy study routine. The super students all had plenty to say about the role of food in that all-important year. Constant deadlines usually mean even more excuses for sugar snacks and fast food, but a huge majority of our super students said that their eating habits during Year 12 were healthy, and that they thought this had a lot to do with their success.

*About a quarter said study definitely
affected their eating habits*

irini Some people eat too much when they are stressed and some people don't eat at all and I think I was one of the latter. But I think it was alright as long as I remembered to snack during the day on nuts and things. They're always good to keep your concentration levels up.

stefania In Year 12, because I wasn't home that much I couldn't really contribute to the cooking and shopping. So sometimes my dad would have to cook, but he's not the best cook in the world, and then I would take the leftovers to school to microwave for lunch, and that would be healthy. Otherwise it would be fast food, which would be really bad. But I would try to balance that with a piece of fruit.

shaheen I sort of lost appetite during the year, which was probably normal for many Year 12 students: too much thinking and stress. I found it very important to be in good health because I was sick for a month right before the exams. It was probably stress-related.

farrin I spent my exam period drinking coffee and eating Chupa Chups.

nina It's a general sort of idea that you put on weight in Year 12 because you're kind of stressed and hanging out with other people and living in your pantry.

jenna When I get to exams I eat toast a lot and cereal – comfort food. At least it is better than chocolate.

Mums generally got the credit for keeping up the supply of good food, so there was no need to leave the books and duck out for a fast-food fix

thuy Mum made sure I ate well. She makes me eat fruit every single day, a whole plate of it.

tom w My mum's a great cook, which was really helpful, so I'd have dinner almost every night with the family, which was really nice. We'd sit and watch the news and have something to eat and I think that routine element was probably quite useful.

kathy My mum was the one in our family who controlled what we were eating so I was actually eating very healthily at home.

sue-lin My mum's hobby is food. She's very interested in ensuring we have a very nutritionally balanced meal.

muji My mother has cancer so healthy eating habits were a priority in our household when I was studying, and it was further instilled by my grandfather, who is a retired psychiatrist and nutritionist.

And most thought food was a pretty important factor in Year 12

brad I think if you are going to go to school for eight hours a day and then come home and study for five hours that is using up a lot of energy and your brain is going to need a lot of replenishment. I think breakfast is really important – I've never skipped breakfast, ever. Staying hydrated is really important, too. I drank a lot of water in Year 12.

tim I wanted to be happy with the way I looked so it may have been eating healthy food for my skin or for keeping toned.

edward I tried not to eat too much junk food. I still enjoyed a Macca's every now and then. But I would eat well before the exams to make sure that I had enough energy to get through the three-hour exam

DID YOU HAVE HEALTHY
EATING HABITS?



OF THOSE WHO ATE HEALTHILY,
WAS THIS A FACTOR IN YOUR
SUCCESS?

or whatever it was. I made sure that I had a good breakfast so that I would be alert throughout the day.

matt I know of students who would stay up till all hours of the night on Red Bull and whatnot, and it just kills you the next day. I mean, you don't have to have hundreds of vegies and pieces of fruit every day, but just be sensible and don't overdo it.

sam Bananas really helped me, surprisingly: I'd have a couple with breakfast. Don't skip meals. I feel that

it is really important to make sure you stop, sit down and eat your meals.

stefania It was pretty important because I would get grumpy if I hadn't eaten the good food and I would actually lose my concentration. Even if I'd just eaten fast food I'd still be wanting the good solid food after a while. If I was eating unhealthily, I wouldn't do my homework properly. I'd procrastinate and do other things. But if I'd eaten something solid and healthy I'd feel better.

will Healthy eating makes your mind more clear and focused.

trent If you're tired and you want to keep studying and you think, 'I'll have some food that hypes me up,' and you have a block of chocolate or whatever, you'll get hyped up but you'll be too hyper to actually study. You'll have a fair bit of energy but you won't be able to concentrate and then you'll get a low thirty minutes or an hour later and you'll be really tired again.

CHAPTER 7

Sport and Sleep

Most super students also made sure they exercised regularly. Instead of clearing the decks for nothing but intense study, many decided before the year started to save room in their lives for at least one organised sporting commitment. Playing hockey or footy would mean time out with friends as well as exercise and a break from the desk. Not everyone was into team sports, though. Others preferred to go for a solitary walk or a run when the books got too much and they were feeling brain-dead. They nearly all agreed that exercise made a big difference to their study stamina.

And then, of course, there's the thing that you only really notice when you're not getting enough of it – sleep.

Getting the blood pumping cleared the head for study

matt I love running as well as basketball. I would go for a run after school when I could. I'd come home from school and it would re-energise me.

tom w We had a gym at school that we could use at lunchtimes. I used to go with friends just a few days a week and that was really great in terms of staying fit and the social aspect as well. You get very restless in Year 12 and I think you should work off your restlessness in a productive way rather than sitting down and watching a movie and thinking about how stressed you are.

irini I found running was a really good way to get out all that extra frustration and energy and all the stress, and it also gave me quiet time to think and sort through everything in my head. So that when I got home and had a shower and dinner, I could get into study and I had a clearer idea of what I needed to get done.

sue-lin It's actually better to take that one hour of exercise – because you'll be refreshed for the rest of the afternoon and evening – than not to do that and then just be really sluggish for the whole day. I think exercise is really good and it's actually an investment.

edward I enjoy mountain biking a lot, so I did a little bit of that. I took up squash as well in Year 12, which was really fun. It helped me to relax and to get away from study and to have fun, maintaining a balance rather than locking myself up in a room for two years.

stefania I would ride my bike to and from school each day, which would be twenty minutes each way. That would make me relax and not think about school, but just enjoy the ride and exercise. I would also sometimes get a DVD from the library and do some aerobics.

will I did water polo and swimming, and then I would run because I could fit running in whenever I wanted. If I had lots of essays and stuff coming up then it was much better to be able to go for a run before I started studying to clear my mind and make me concentrate more, and make me sleep well, too.

trent I think sport's really good to combine with study because when you're playing a game of sport you just completely forget about all your studies for the hour and a half or so that you're playing. You're just so much more relaxed afterwards and then you feel so calm and can think laterally about approaching your study.

DID YOU EXERCISE
REGULARLY?



DID YOU LOSE ANY SLEEP?

OF THOSE WHO EXERCISED
REGULARLY, WAS THIS A FACTOR
IN YOUR SUCCESS?



tori My exercise in Year 12 consisted of me participating in a hockey competition and walking five kilometres home from school twice a week. This was a quarter of the sporting commitments I had in Year 11. I think if I'd exercised more during Year 12, I would have been less stressed and happier.

It was easy to use the excuse ‘I’m doing Year 12’ to avoid exercising.

alex Exercise helps give your brain a breather and to maintain your concentration. Because I couldn’t study for huge blocks at a time, it would help me to refocus, especially towards the afternoon or the evening when I found it most difficult to study.

brad If I didn’t play all this sport I think I would have been driven up the wall by my study. I would have had to find a different outlet. My two outlets in Year 12 were my sport and my girlfriend.

luke There is a relationship between your fitness level and your academic performance, because if you are fitter you are able to endure longer in terms of working, in terms of trying to concentrate for longer periods of time, and therefore you perform better. That would then mean you could study more effectively and hopefully get a better result in the end.

vrinda It’s a natural high, it really improved my concentration, you get a good night’s sleep and it brings structure into your day. Even just a half-an-hour run, especially during the actual exam period, gets the blood pumping and really helps with relieving pressure.

nick l You go for a run for a few k's and your blood is pumping and you feel more energetic for the rest of the night, then you're in a positive mindset and you're feeling good and you want to do some more work. Whereas if you are sitting around playing computer games, you get a bit lethargic and you can't be bothered to do other stuff and work doesn't follow on from that. Sport forces you to plan your time a bit more. If you have rugby training in the afternoon, you know that you have to study that night.

thuy All of the things in your life are dependent on each other. Exercise does make you healthy, it makes you feel good and fit, and it clears your head, and that's why you have more of a capacity to learn.

kathy When you do go out and wear yourself out for an hour, hit something with a stick, it just clears your head and you feel a lot more awake afterwards. But I'm quite lazy when it comes to that aspect of life; if it wasn't organised sport, it just didn't happen.

vrinda Social netball was good. It meant that we saw each other, because with exams and stuff you may not be seeing as much of each other and it's really important to keep up with your friends.

*Lots of our super students were also
super aware of their sleep . . .
or lack of it*

ashleigh A lot of the time I would go to school really tired, but I was okay as long as I kept in my mind that I was doing it for a reason. It is only a year and at the end of the year you get three months off.

george I made sure I slept because then I'd study better, as well. As soon as I felt my head was out of it, I'd just go to sleep until the next day.

stefania During the week sometimes I would be a little sleep-deprived, but on the weekends I would try to get that back up to normal.

morgan Some people waste their nights away, just revising for hour after hour when it is probably better spent sleeping. So I tried to keep a good balance there.

poya As the exams got close we used to stay up really late and get up really early to study. We limited our sleep to six or seven hours. But it would make you feel content that you were doing something towards your goals; you knew it was going to pay off.

vrinda I probably had a lot more sleep than I usually do because sleeping was part of procrastination. If I'd been reading or doing a couple of practice essays and I felt really drained, I'd have a quick nap.

cecilia I was only sleeping about four or five hours a night. I did try to do things to get more sleep, to get tired out. I've always had trouble sleeping but it was a lot worse. I didn't even sleep before my exams.

trent I wouldn't eat anything sugary before bed like chocolate or ice-cream or anything like that because that hypes me up, and I'd try reading before I went to bed as that often relaxes me enough to get to sleep. There were a few nights in the exam period when I took a few hours to get to sleep or had a restless sleep, but I think that's just nerves, really.

tori I slept through free-study breaks in the common room. Because I was so exhausted, I'd know that I could sleep for forty minutes in my free and then go to my extra three hours of class.

nicholas s I think staying healthy full stop is pretty important – getting enough sleep and eating well and that sort of thing. If you get sick or you start to lose sleep then everything can start to get on top of you.

TOP TIPS

Reduce stress by being prepared

Don't get swept up in peers' stress

Work out what's causing you to stress

Find your own stress-escape and use it

**Share your concerns with someone
else**

**Don't replace doing study with
stressing about study**

**Exercise reduces stress, helps you
sleep and re-energises you**

Eat healthily and don't skip meals

Get enough sleep

Sleep is better than unproductive study

Jenna

Jenna is a typical, driven high achiever, who starred in Year 12 and is now studying medicine. Not easy for anyone – but particularly challenging when you have a disability that makes processing the written word quite difficult.

‘I’m naturally bright but I never got my good marks naturally. I am dyslexic, so I always had to work really hard, harder than a lot of people,’ says Jenna, who had a supportive school that recognised her problem and gave her extra help and extra time to get work done.

Her fellow students weren’t always so understanding, though. ‘I think there is a stigma attached to dyslexia and I think a lot of dyslexic students have trouble coping with that.’ She says there were people who resented the concessions that were made for her dyslexia because she was already a top student. ‘Friends have actually said, *You’re not dyslexic*. It created a lot of controversy.’

Dyslexia slows up reading and makes it harder to understand the printed word straight away. Jenna developed her own ways of getting information to stick. She found that her brain was quicker to pick up what it heard than what it read.



‘Explaining things out loud helped me heaps because I was never very good at putting words into a sentence on the paper. If I just explain something out loud I get to the point that I want to get to and that’s all I need.’

She developed her own unconventional study style, studying hard but without a timetable. ‘If I felt like studying, I would study.’ Her busy parents weren’t around much in Year 12, so in between studying her year was spent looking after a younger brother and doing quite a lot of cooking. The cooking, however, was far from a distraction – it was an integral part of her study routine.

‘Whenever I got really stressed and felt things were overwhelming, I’d get out the cookbook and start baking. And everyone loved it at school because I’d bake so much that I’d bring it to school the next day.’

Cooking time was also study time. ‘One of the things I used to do while cooking was to say things out loud; I’d start explaining concepts to myself, and I think when you try to explain something out loud, you learn it better.’

And she had an audience. ‘That’s where pets come in really handy because you can talk to a pet for hours and they won’t get bored; you can say everything to them. I have a very well educated pet now.’



Part 3

**GETTING
THE
BALANCE
RIGHT**



CHAPTER 8

Juggling Study and the Fun Things

When we asked this mob of high achievers about balance, the response was an overwhelming ‘Yes’ to keeping balance in your life. Don’t deny yourself a social life this year of all years, they said, and don’t give up all the extracurricular things you love. Plan your time so study can coexist with those things.

Most of the super students studied on weekends as well as weeknights, but made time in between to hang out with friends, play sport or curl up in front of a mindless TV program. They knew that allowing themselves those indulgences made them better able to study when they had to. And the end of a long week, Friday night, was a favourite time to abandon the books altogether and forget about routine for a while.

patrick Don't let study take over your life.

Have fun at the same time – you can still get good results if you do.

allie I couldn't have got through Year 12 if I'd just had study.

sam At times, looking back, I probably put too much emphasis on study because you definitely need that balance of lifestyle. You do need to work hard to get to your desired goal, but it is also important to have breaks, to play sport or whatever other extracurricular activities you are involved in. I played cricket and was involved in the SRC at school – so that stuff was a bit of an outlet. I did not actually work in Year 12, which I think was important. It just gave me a bit more breathing space. A job is a bit more stress that you don't really need.

matt I love my basketball. I played for school and for a social church team that only trained once a week and had a Saturday afternoon game, so it wasn't too great a commitment, but it was something I really looked forward to and enjoyed.

nina With social life and with friends and family and stuff there was always something to look forward to. I think balance is very important, otherwise I would have freaked out too much.

tom p I think if you get bogged down in too much study you get really stressed out and things start to shut down. I've heard stories about people who haven't been able to play sport during Year 12 and they kind of get depressed.

will I found if you studied non-stop, nothing would go in. In Year 11 my lifestyle wasn't very balanced and I tried to study the whole time and, I don't know, it just didn't work. I probably did more study in Year 12, but I also did more other stuff on top of that.

tori A lot of the girls in my year, they sort of stayed home, they didn't exercise so they weren't socialising with people, and it meant that they got depressed and were worrying about stuff too much. They just didn't have a proactive view of studying, which is just to go out there and get it done and then relax.

*Staying busy kept up the energy
for study, too*

stephen As I got busier with study, I sort of procrastinated by becoming incredibly busy with everything else. And it actually worked quite nicely, because I found that when I came back to my study I was fresh, I'd had a break, and I probably didn't

spend too much time on it because I didn't have much time.

kathy I would have gone insane if study was all I did. I always kept myself busy and searched out new stuff to do – I actually picked up new stuff in Year 12.

trent If you're doing one thing constantly then you just kind of get stale. If you study all the time every day and don't do anything else, then it gets unproductive. I thought it was great to do a variety of things.

jess I think it works better to have almost a limited time to study. I found on my weekends I was really busy so it would come to Sunday afternoons and if that's the only time I had for study, I would work really hard then. And because I had other things going on in life, when I did sit down and study I was really productive. I refined my skills by having that other balance in my life.

nicole Balance is such a cliché, but I guess it is one for a reason. Throughout the year, I played sport for school, worked for my parents, umpired, and was really involved in the music program at school. Knowing I had a lot of things to get through made me organise my time a lot better, as well as keeping

me that little bit saner. Towards the end of the year, as all my extra-curricular activities ended, I actually found it harder to study and concentrate.

*Most had their favourite ways to
turn off and relax*

matt Sometimes there'd be a basketball game on TV, but that worked out quite well because I'd work for a good one-and-a-half to two hours beforehand – and I'd work hard because I knew I was going to take the time off.

catriona I played volleyball in summer and hockey in winter. Just so, for your sanity, you can get through the year. It's a break and an opportunity to socialise and enjoy the company of the girls you are going through school with. It is the last time you'll spend all that time together, so you need to make the most of those opportunities.

nick m I still spent weekends going out with friends and stuff like that. I didn't really try to sacrifice my social life during Year 12 because I thought all the work was too stressful to take over all your time.

trent Year 12 made me enjoy catching up with friends even more because I'd have it in my diary and I'd look forward to it. When I didn't have any

motivation for study I'd think, 'Well, I'll get things done and then I'll feel good about going out.' I felt relaxed because of it – it was kind of a reward.

stephen I used to do some community service with friends. We'd go on a Friday night to tutor primary school kids and that's a fairly laid-back setting; you can tutor them with one corner of your mouth and talk to friends with the other corner.

tom w I had a girlfriend in Year 12 and it was a nice way just to have a bit of time out, to relax together or do something like go to the beach or watch a movie – all those clichéd romantic things.

trent I'd just sit in my chair and listen to two or three songs – often they were in French just to keep me in the study zone. I'd also talk on MSN to friends who I'd met on exchange in France.

rory I found reading pretty good and helpful – novels, that is, and occasionally the newspaper. Also I used to get trains to and from school and I'd use that time to just sit and think or listen to music or fall asleep.

hayley I'd study with a friend and we might combine that with a movie night or cook a meal or something.

stephen I would try to get out somewhere once every weekend, whether it was just for a short while to play tennis or for a longer time, for a party or something like that.

jenna When you get to exams you try to stay home more, but I would always try to find time for friends and things. I didn't want to lose my friends. I think that's what happened in Year 11: I spent so much time studying that I actually kind of lost contact with a couple of my friends; even though they were in the same classes, I just didn't give them any time, and I really don't advise that at all. I think friends are hugely important in life.

*Giving yourself a set break was
important . . .*

kate I never studied on Friday nights and I think that was good just to have a break.

nick l I never did work when I came back from rugby training, and Friday nights I didn't usually do anything. That was like, yeah, the week's over sort of thing.

tom w I gave myself Friday and Saturday nights off. To me, that was really important. If you can work out a way to study efficiently it makes such a

difference, and part of that was just giving yourself a few hours of studying without any distractions. You could be so productive. And when you stopped being productive, it was good to go and do something else, not just sit but an activity like seeing a friend, even if it was only for half an hour. You could then come back with renewed vigour and keep working.

nick m At least one night a weekend would be work-free.

olivia If I came home from school feeling really tired and needed a break I would always give it to myself. I wouldn't force myself to study because I found if I did I wasn't very productive.

poya Friday, you would finish school and it's like, off, it was break time. I would let myself go Friday – Friday was a good day, y'know.

jess I aimed for one night off a week. If I was going out on Saturday night, I would probably do a little study on Friday night instead. But if it was a quiet weekend, I would take one night off to watch a movie at home or cook something or read a book and have a bath.

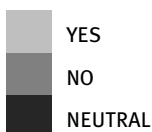
stephen I think informally Friday night became the break time. If I'd had a hard week then I probably wasn't going to do any work on Friday night.

yvette I generally gave myself the whole weekend off.

... though a few students deliberately chose not to have balance

hayley I knew what I wanted and I knew I had to make some sacrifices, not necessarily to my health but to my social life and so forth. I was willing to sacrifice that to get what I wanted.

WAS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE
A BALANCED LIFESTYLE?



DID YOU GIVE YOURSELF A
SET BREAK EACH WEEK, FOR
EXAMPLE, FRIDAY NIGHT?

CHAPTER 9

To Party or Not to Party

Year 12 is the year when everything revs up – study *and* social life – and having to choose how sociable to be can be quite a dilemma for the fun-loving student with serious ambitions. Year 12 is also the year of eighteenth birthday bashes, and most of these students said they couldn't deny themselves the right to party – but they set a few limits, knowing how hard it would be to pick up the books the next morning if they went too hard.

Lots said their social life improved in Year 12

alex The volume of work increased, but at the same time the social life got better. Because everyone's lumped in the same boat with the same pressures, you become closer with your peers than you do in other years and you have more fun. I had a quite good, balanced social life.

sam Everyone was turning eighteen in Year 12 so I'd always have a birthday party on – that was once a week there for quite some time. I'd still go to these events but it was pretty important not to drink in large amounts, so I could study the next day.

stephen Surprisingly my social life actually got much better in Year 12. Everybody suddenly turned eighteen, everyone was getting their licences, there was a lot more freedom. There are a lot of pressures, but I worked by the philosophy of 'work hard and party hard'. I don't think Year 12 and a social life are mutually exclusive. You do have to curb it a bit if you are used to going out every weekend, but I found there was quite a positive balance between the two.

tom w I think it was a very social year, which was pleasant because it really brought the school together. There was a bit of a sense of ‘we’re all in it together’.

farrin I think Year 12 probably improved my social life because of the structure of the IB program. It made the IB students into a very tight-knit social group.

poya Year 12 was more fun because you would see everyone studying, so you are all in the same boat. In other years everyone is everywhere: some study, some don’t, so there are groupings. But in Year 12 everyone knows what they are doing and everyone is mature so you socialise with them regarding the studies.

rory I tried generally not to sacrifice social life too much in favour of work, like I never said ‘No, I can’t come to your party this weekend, I’ve got to study,’ or anything like that. If I had an assignment due later I tried to stay calm and not devote all my time to worrying about it.

vithiyasagar I started going out more in Year 12 because of the number of eighteenth birthday parties. I tried to do most of my work during the weekdays and on weekends, so every Saturday night I would go out and see friends and have fun.

Parties were often the motivating factor that would get the students through a hard week of study

tom p I don't think I had a single Saturday night when I was unable to go out. I made sure that I got all my work done during the week so that I had Saturday nights to get away from it.

tim Usually Saturday night was my night for going out, and I found that a great way to release and socialise. That was the main driver for me: to work hard and have an absolute crap time during the week knowing that Saturday was going to be a good party. Each week there was a light at the end of the tunnel, which was definitely enough to make me work hard.

vrinda If you spend a good amount of time doing the other stuff – socialising and exercising – it means that when you do sit down to study you are motivated. I was always of the mindset that I was never going to let Year 12 massively stem my social life.

Alcohol was a factor to be considered

brad I really enjoy going out but I guess because I don't drink alcohol it doesn't have the effect of a hangover the next day. With a lot of people, going

out means they can't function the next day, where I am fine.

trent I never drank any alcohol during Year 12 – parties were usually called 'get-togethers' – just a catch-up at somebody's place; you'd have a chat, listen to music or go ice-skating or to the movies.

jess I don't go out to get drunk, so I didn't have to put myself on sober street. I probably eased off closer to exams and wouldn't even drink with my parents at home (I was over eighteen).

matt I went to a few parties but I am not a huge drinker, so although I enjoyed the company I was always conscious of having some assignments or work to do on Sunday.

yvette I think I drank regularly. I went out probably every fortnight because it was eighteenth birthday season. So, yeah, if I'd got all my work done I thought it was a bit of a reward.

tom w For most of Year 12 we were all still quite young, so most of the time people weren't drinking.

cecilia If I knew I had to work the next day then obviously I wouldn't drink as much or I wouldn't

drink at all. Or I would go home early. You do have to think about those things, obviously.

jenna I didn't drink any alcohol all year. I didn't see the point. I know this is what a lot of people did: they'd go out on Friday night and get trashed and because it was a Friday night it didn't matter. I was really anti that idea because then it impacts your whole weekend and you're not going to be able to study. I'd go out to parties on a Friday night and I just wouldn't drink. It didn't bother me. I don't see why you have to have alcohol. I can make fun without drinking.

nicole When I went out I would usually only drink a bit, or I tended to drive and not drink.

But lots of super students did put limits on their social lives, especially as the end of the year approached

charlie I wasn't invited to every party, every weekend, but also if I'd gone out the week before I was happy to stay home and watch TV or go to a movie or something.

irini I just went to birthday parties – I didn't want to miss those, but I didn't spend any time going to parties that didn't have a purpose.

edward Going up towards exams I tried to limit my social life. I didn't cut it out completely because I didn't want to go insane or anything before my exams. I chose to still socialise with my friends, still relax, but not in a way that would make my exams suffer.

stefania In general, people stopped having parties before exams or mid-semester exams, but even if I was invited I might only go until about nine o'clock.

nina When it got to term three we all sort of limited the social life to some degree, like we would generally go out once a week as opposed to twice a week. I think that decision was definitely affected by more diligent friends who didn't go out on particular nights; it made you question whether or not you should as well.

will I probably did choose deliberately to do less. But I mean I wasn't a recluse either. I did go out. But if I didn't care about my results I probably would have gone out a lot more.

vrinda I wouldn't go out before a major event and if I knew I wanted to get study done the next day I came home earlier.

simon I went out quite often but never enjoyed myself as much as I used to and never ‘got loose’. I started driving more – I would drive friends to parties. I became detached, more of an observer, mentally preoccupied all the time.

cecilia I was going out a lot at the start of the year, probably every weekend, and then I suppose when you get to any exam period you stop going out, say, two weeks before, or you don’t drink or you don’t stay out late. Because it is only one year.

jenna I gave myself a rule: only one party per week. When you get towards exams, fewer people are willing to get their house trashed.

catriona Towards the end I didn’t go out very much at all. Given that the formal and all those type of events were in the first semester, you kind of get that out of your system and really knuckle down after mid-semester exams.

tori It sort of just depended whether things were on. Towards the end of the year I definitely limited myself to just one night a week, and then not going out at all for the few weeks leading up to exams.

will I can’t cope with social situations when I’ve got an essay due or an exam coming up. I wouldn’t have

been going out if I'd been stressed. If I was going out I probably would have been relaxed already.

stefania I would try to be home earlier in Year 12, like twelve o'clock rather than two o'clock. So it was the duration of time being out and the intensity of the event – like, if it was a full-on party, I'd prefer to go to a friend's house and watch movies than go to the party.

nina Occasionally I had to say no to events I would otherwise have said yes to, but my friends and I maintained a healthy social life.

Social lives weren't just about parties – there were plenty of other ways to hang out with friends

hayley We'd have study nights: six or ten of us would get together with our study materials and just chat and support each other and say, 'We have no social life but we have each other.'

muji I am not a party animal, and just playing games with friends was my form of outlet. Also, as a Baha'i, I do not drink and scientifically I can see the damage of drink . . . so that has a huge influence on me.

jess We all turned eighteen, so there were many great parties, but we were also under the same pressures and appreciated a quiet night in. Having a supportive group of friends, striving for the same things, put everything in perspective.

*There were those who avoided
a social life . . .*

simon Before Year 12, I would go out on Friday and Saturday nights, and go to friends' houses during the week, but I rarely, if ever, went out in Year 12.

ashleigh I don't like going out, which is very odd for my age. I saw people who were partying all the time, coming to school drunk, and I do think it affected their grades. They weren't able to concentrate in class. I think if you want to do that, you need to limit yourself to special occasions. It is only a year and then you've got your summer holidays at the end.

john I think in the whole of Year 12, I probably went out and socialised two or three times. It sounds unreal, doesn't it? Prior to that, the year before, I was actually very social and outgoing.

*... versus party animals who still
pulled it all together*

cecilia I don't think I missed one party, but then people having parties in Year 12 didn't have them near exams, so it's not like you had to miss any. I just made sure I did my work before I went out. If I knew that going out would negatively affect my grades then I would stay at home, but generally I managed to do the work I needed to in the time I set aside.

tom w There was drinking throughout the year at different stages, but it was all quite measured. There are quite a few natural breaks and holidays, which are excuses for really big parties.

shoba Sometimes I would go to parties and come home at 2 a.m. on the Sunday morning and start the essay and at least get an idea about it and then go to bed, so at least I would have something to look at when I woke up.

Outside influences could be good or bad

nicholas s There's no point in modifying your behaviour if it's someone else's idea and you feel bitter about it – then it's just as bad as having a big night because you don't want to study. If you do modify your behaviour, it has to be your idea for the

right reasons, not because Mum thinks you shouldn't go out but study instead.

tom w I think I spent less time with friends who had dropped out of school. They did a lot more socialising during the week. It was hard because they had different expectations. When I said I couldn't come out with them because I had to study, I don't think they always appreciated the importance of it or that I didn't have a choice.

tim Because all the people I was hanging around with were also doing year 12, the parties generally finished at a reasonable hour, maybe around twelve o'clock or one o'clock, as opposed to being out till all hours.

HOW DID YEAR 12 AFFECT
YOUR SOCIAL LIFE?



CHAPTER 10

Online Networking for Good or Bad

Studying at a computer is hardly an isolating experience when your friends are teasingly accessible on social networking sites like Facebook or instant networking tools like MSN. Such sites provide a huge temptation to procrastinate, and some students had to limit themselves or they never would have done any work. Others made the sites work for them, using them to check facts with others and just to feel less lonely when studying into the night at home.

The majority of students networked online

luke If I was doing maths exercises I would have MSN open, but if I was doing an assignment I wouldn't. The difference there being that the assignment would affect my final mark but the maths revision wouldn't. I recognised it as a source of distraction.

vrinda Facebook was pretty massive and a very good way to procrastinate because as soon as you'd get on the computer, even if it was to download a syllabus, you'd inevitably end up going, 'Oh, I should just check Facebook,' but I got over it pretty quickly.

muji I splurged on MSN then sometimes dropped it for weeks, depending on the workload while I was studying.

allie I spent most of my time on MySpace at the same time as studying.

*Some found it wasn't a problem –
or was even useful*

ashleigh I found it easier to study with MSN open because your friends are there online and not only can you have a break and talk to your friends, but

it is very supportive because you know that they are sitting at their house doing the exact same thing. It's great because you can quickly ask them a question.

morgan If anything, that was part of the tools to study. Sometimes I'd spend nights on MSN just talking to other people in Year 12, exchanging ideas or working through a question or an assignment.

lucy Although I would have MSN on, I wouldn't be constantly talking to anyone. It would be more to have a break and have a chat to someone, or ask them a question about what you were doing. I don't really think it was too much of a problem.

tom p If I was on MSN, I would be doing homework at the same time. Just talking to friends and then every so often going back and doing some work. I'd do that between doing English essays.

irini Whenever you need help you can sign in and always find someone who can help you.

xiang-wen Occasionally we did discuss some problems on MSN and it was useful: it's convenient, it's free and it's easy.

sue-lin I'm really anti-computers. I don't see the appeal of talking online if I can talk face to face or

on the phone. Ironically, in Year 12, I actually used MSN whereas I hadn't used it before in high school. It was because of the comparative literature subject I was studying: as we were all over the state, we used MSN quite a bit – we used to send each other our essays and we'd sometimes do group projects.

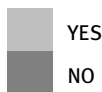
shoba I'd pretty much be online the whole time I'd be at home. It was a bit of a distraction but I also found it a good thing because I was one of those people who couldn't sit down and study. So if I was on MSN and I was talking to a friend I'd say, 'Well, I'm going to go and do this now and I'll come back in half an hour and talk to you,' and that would be a way of actually keeping me at the computer.

*Others had to avoid time-wasting
temptation by making rules for
themselves*

brad I used to spend a lot of time online in Year 11 and at the start of Year 12, so I cut my MSN account and stuck with that. This was deliberate, for study.

alex I used MSN and I had to cut down that time. I found it tempting when I had the computer on – I think I still do find it tempting.

DID YOU SPEND ANY TIME ON SOCIAL
NETWORKING SITES SUCH AS FACEBOOK?



nick l I would've liked to have spent more time online, but the sites were blocked in the boarding house. That's the advantage of boarding: you feel more connected. I mean, you can just walk down the hall and you speak to the person face to face and have a look at their work.

thuy To control myself I got someone else to change my password and not tell me what it was, so I couldn't sign into any of those things. Otherwise I knew it could be a problem.

tim I had a computer at my desk which was a terrible distraction, but then I realised halfway through Year 12 that I could turn off the screen and lock the computer, so that if I did need to use it I would have to go through this whole process of unlocking it and

turning on the screen; and through that process I'd realise I was procrastinating.

tom w I would actually stop work to do it, rather than study and do it, because I think that it is almost impossible to have both going on at the same time.

trent I was aware that the internet was a time-waster, although it can be very useful. Like, if you've got a chemical reaction and you don't know what it is you can type it into Google and get it within ten seconds. Sometimes I'd be invisible on MSN and then when I wanted to ask someone something I'd log on and then log off or become invisible again.

hayley It was more a waste of time than helpful. Just occasionally, if I needed to ask a friend something and they were on as well, it was helpful, but often I'd get caught chattering meaninglessly.

vrinda I'd give it, say, fifteen minutes to get it out of my system and then get back to what I was doing.

stephen The internet was the bane of my existence in Year 12; it was the distraction that was there and very hard to avoid. When I needed to study I put my computer away in a cupboard and put as many things on top of it as I could so it was not accessible.

irini I'd only go on if there was someone I specifically wanted to talk to, not just go on and see who was around.

stefania I hadn't really been online in previous years so I didn't spend that much time on it in Year 12 anyway. MySpace became popular and I saw that others were spending a lot of time on it, so I decided not to even join the craze.

tori I only used the internet for research in Year 12.

CHAPTER 11

Daring to Excel

The intellectual cringe is legendary in Australia – it's okay to be brilliant at sport but somehow not cool to be too good at schoolwork. Our super students, however, were quite upfront about the fact that they wanted to do well, so they weren't likely to be taunted for trying too hard, and they wouldn't have cared if they were.

They did tend to hang around with others who also wanted to get good marks, but even those who were the lone achievers at schools with no great academic traditions were usually treated with respect by the others. Maybe not being too entrenched with one group of friends was part of the secret, as nearly all of them said they moved between different social groups.

By Year 12 everyone was working pretty hard and the 'nerd' factor had all but disappeared

tom w Quite a lot of our classes were streamed from about Year 8, so the more academic students were in my class from Year 8 through to Year 12, which was really nice because we all became quite good friends and everyone was very supportive, and it did foster happiness in the class. There wasn't that stigma of working hard being seen as nerdy, and people didn't feel bad about knowing the answers.

alex In lower years it is sometimes seen as a negative that you're smart and do well, but in Year 12 I think everyone is trying to do as well as they can.

cecilia Most of my friends were top students as well, and everyone at my school was really motivated and academically focused.

morgan It kind of turned into a bit of a running joke because when we'd get our assignments back they'd be like, 'Oh, Morgan, only 98 per cent again, that's terrible.' It was never really much of an issue; it was more a jovial kind of way to lighten the air. It wasn't negative.

*Most said friends were
a positive influence*

george I was lucky. We had a good group of students in the year – there were about ten of us who were dedicated to study. And basically I was around those people all the time and what anyone else thought I didn't really care.

matt A lot of boys at my school were high achievers anyway. If anything, that kind of helped me more – being around people who were doing well – and getting the high grades pushed me a bit harder: 'Let's see if I can't work a bit harder and get there as well.'

nicholas s I had mates from all over. I had a couple of mates who did the same sort of study pattern as me and I talked to them a lot on the phone. Then I had another couple of mates who did a lot less, but it never became an issue.

trent I think you have to have friends around who can support you, and who want you to achieve what you want to achieve as well.

shaheen Friends had a positive effect on me as long as I had the upper hand: as long as I didn't give in to them by stopping my study.

alex Some people inspired me to do more because they were achieving more than I was. And some that had a more active social life than me would sometimes tempt me to do less study and more partying.

ashleigh I don't think it would have helped me having friends who weren't into study. It might have driven me away from the study.

morgan Your friends are a support group and also another resource, because you can bounce ideas off them; exchange ideas, things like that.

*For a few students, their friends
and classmates had a negative effect
on their study*

fiona Some of my friends found the pressure quite hard, so sometimes at school there would be a bit of a stressful environment, especially towards the end of the year. There would be girls crying and a lot of them getting worked up, which I think impacted negatively on the other people around because it made you feel stressed also.

tori In one class in particular I didn't have a lot of my close friends, and everyone was actually quite narky as to who got the top mark, and where

everyone was sitting in the class. I did find that some students found me a threat, and wouldn't help.

will I had a few friends who found it a bit strange that someone could care so much, and I suppose that came out in strange ways. It might be, 'Why are you such a nerd, come out with us on the weekends,' and stuff like that. Nothing too dramatic. In general, most people understood that I wanted to do well, and a lot of my friends wanted to do well as well, so that wasn't really an issue.

simon A couple of friends ended up quite worried about me. They would make joking comments about me working hard – normally I would take no offence but in Year 12, I became quite defensive and very intolerant.

john I think some people maybe get a bit of a jealousy streak. I reckon I found some people resentful.

kate I look at my sister: she's in Year 11 and she has a lot of friends who are not very studious at all. She will do study, and she thinks she's done a lot because some of her friends haven't done anything, but in reality she could have done a lot more. So I think friends have quite an influence, but it depends on who your friends are.

hayley There were other kids doing different courses who did think we were all a bunch of nerds, but I've had that since about Year 7. You just go, 'Well, I've got a great group of friends and a fab boyfriend and a great family and I'm achieving what I want, so bugger you!'

For some, being a high achiever meant more attention from other students, who often turned to them for help – and most super students didn't mind that at all

stephen People I'd never seen before would say hi to me, which was interesting. I did feel like I was a bit of a celebrity. At first it was difficult to deal with because you are not really sure why everybody is singling you out; then you learn to accept it, and it is quite nice to be known by people and to feel that they actually respect you.

brad I ran revision sessions at the end of Year 12 for the whole school. Although it looked like I was helping everyone else, it actually did help me as well. Because I was teaching everyone else, I had to know what I was talking about, too.

vrinda A lot of people came and asked me for help or for my notes, and I was totally okay with that. If I explain things to people then I remember it better

myself, and I knew a couple of my friends were stressed out and facing depression over the whole HSC thing, so I think it's always best, if someone asks you for help, to really take time out and listen to them and talk to them.

There were mixed feelings about whether studying with friends was a good idea . . .

poya Friends were a good influence on me; they would help me because otherwise I would have gone and done other stuff, but they kept telling me, 'No, we're studying for two hours,' so I would sit with them and study.

alex Unless you are at the same point in your revision as another peer, I don't find studying in groups useful. Unless you've got the same problem and you can discuss it.

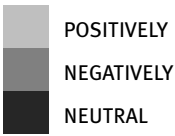
allie One of my friends lived with me for six months and we studied together because she was at my house. It was probably more of a hindrance than a help.

ashleigh At school between classes and in frees I would study in a group or alone depending on what I was doing. If I was doing a question sheet or

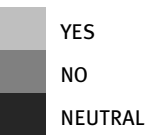
something, it usually helped to work with friends, but otherwise I'd sit on a computer and do my assignments.

fiona My friend and I would study a lot together and we'd each learn something, and once we felt that we knew it, we'd teach it to the other person.

AS A SUPER STUDENT, HOW DID YOUR
PEERS AT SCHOOL REACT TO YOU?



WAS IT IMPORTANT FOR YOU
TO CATCH UP WITH FRIENDS
REGULARLY?



vrinda In the boarding house, it was positive that if everyone was studying you'd say, 'Okay that's a good idea, I'll study, too.' But on the other hand if we got started on, like, a season of *The Sopranos* on TV, we would actually just be going all day long, so that was definitely a negative.

matt I was happy to do my own study and go to the teacher with questions if I had any.

sam I like to study alone; I find it a bit less distracting. I mean, study groups are good, but as long as you are on task. Because sometimes you just sit there the whole time and talk about nothing.

trent I was always very mindful of who I was studying with outside of class or even who I sat next to in class – mindful of who would distract me and who would actually help me study. I did catch up with two friends outside of school to study – I'd known them for quite a few years and they were dedicated students and were focused on ambitions and goals, and I knew with them I wouldn't be likely to muck around. You need to find friends who have a similar work ethic to yourself to be able to effectively study with them outside school.

xiang-wen If we had free time during school hours we would gather in the study area to study together a little, and we did discuss things on MSN.

edward With some subjects, like Physics, discussing and talking to each other about different theories and that kind of stuff is helpful. But at the same time I enjoyed studying on my own. I got a lot more out of studying by myself.

shaheen I guess some people might need friends to study, but I wanted to be alone.

irini It's a bit dangerous to go studying with friends because there's always the thing where you end up talking the whole time and not getting anything done. It's usually when the group gets big that more talking happens. But then everyone was pretty set on studying, so whenever we noticed that we'd spent a lot of time talking, we'd split up and go to our little corners and study.

tom w We'd all try to study together, which was really nice. It meant that I ended up with two groups of friends – friends who I'd started high school with and lived locally, and a group of friends who I would study with and ultimately ended up spending more time with just because we had a lot more in common by the end of Year 12.

tom p I had another close mate who was doing much the same subjects as me, and just before exams we'd study together and he'd ask me questions . . . being able to fully answer the questions helped me; teaching helped me learn.

. . . but there was a unanimous vote of 'Yes!' on whether it was important to keep in touch with friends

tori We kept each other smiling and laughing the entire time. We always made sure we did something on the weekends or that we caught up, and that we were a support for each other.

nick m It is what allowed me to get through so much work without losing my mind.

nina I found it very important to be able to call friends up and just whinge and procrastinate sometimes and things like that. With one friend in Indonesian, we just fed off each other. Like, we did research together and just talked all the time and that was really important I think for Indonesian.

vrinda It was important to catch up in a non-study environment and not talk about schoolwork.

trent I'd try to make a point of catching up with friends every weekend or every second weekend for a couple of hours. I wouldn't stay up late, just catch up for the evening from seven till nine or ten, or during the day.

edward When a lot of people are going through the same stresses as you, it's good to hang out and relax with them.

will It makes you sane, really. To know that other people are going through the same thing.

olivia I think if you isolate yourself too much it's so much more pressure, whereas if you do just stop for a while and go and relax with friends I think it's better in the long term.

poya Some kids were very serious: you would never see them, even at lunchtime. Whereas my friends and I would go and play soccer. I don't know how those other kids did, but I can tell you, it does not help – I would tell them to socialise a bit more.

simon I imposed a needlessly strict social isolation on myself.

hayley I thought we might go crazy if we didn't have each other. It was important to keep us real

rather than getting too worked up over what we were doing.

nicholas s It was important to catch up with friends out of school so you'd remember that you actually did have a life.

*There were some who preferred
a bit of alone time*

xiang-wen I don't require a lot of social activity – it's not as if I need to go out to parties to hang out with friends. Just seeing them at school every day and having my cousins and my aunt at home was enough for me.

sue-lin I love being around people but I also love being alone, so I found that being with friends from nine till four, five days a week, was plenty.

*Most said they had more than one
group of friends*

sam I had quite a lot of friends in Year 12. I tried to mix around a bit and get to know everyone. You'd have your good, good group of friends and then you'd have other groups that you were also friends with.

edward I've got a fair few groups of different friends that I mix with: friends at school and friends from soccer, and then I've got friends from church as well.

stefania I have a couple of different social groups but I would see one each weekend. My closest ones I would see every week, even if it was for a couple of minutes, or I'd MSN or email them.

vrinda I have several groups of friends: really good rowing friends, then the boarders and then normal school friends, and it was really cool just to jump between them.

nicole I had my main group of school friends, but I also had a group of friends through music, and a group from primary school, my boyfriend, and then people all through my classes who wouldn't really be in my group of friends, but I would consider myself to be friends with. I think that is just the nature of the high school environment.

muji I still have my friends in Queensland who are definitely not all academic high achievers. Some are apprentices in the building trade, plumbers, etc., but we simply enjoy each other's company.

TOP TIPS

**Balance your life with exercise,
socialising and entertainment**

Keep some interests outside study

Have regular study breaks

**Give yourself a night or two off
each week**

Don't think about study on your breaks

Keep in touch with friends

**Be prepared to make some social
sacrifices if needed**

**Set post-study rewards to keep you
motivated**

**Force yourself to be better organised
by having a busy schedule of activities**

**Use the internet as a study tool,
not a time-waster**

ashleigh

It's bad timing, really, that the most intense study time in your life coincides with the most intensely emotional years you'll probably ever go through. For Ashleigh, that's what threw her off track at the beginning of Year 12.

'Right at the start of the year I had this huge falling out with one of my friends and I kind of just gave up for half the year. I didn't actually start working really hard until halfway through the year. Mum took me on a holiday to Canberra and it kind of got me in gear and, you know, realigned my head.'

When Ashleigh did finally decide to hit the books and try to make up for lost time she also had a distractingly big family to deal with, including a lively three-year-old brother. She developed her own strange sleeping pattern, coming home from school in the afternoon and going to bed till midnight. She would then wake up and work through the quiet of the night and go straight to school next morning.

'I knew it was only for a year, so I thought to myself, I've only got to keep it up till I get to the end of my exams. So that is what I did. It worked for me.'

But the shortened timeframe Ashleigh had left herself unfortunately meant she became over-focused, a perfectionist.

'It started with the work. I wanted to get better grades than everyone else, which is unhealthy. It's better to compete against yourself, not others. It just developed into a very unhealthy image thing – I wanted to be better-looking than them.'

Ashleigh developed bulimia nervosa. 'I would binge on all kinds of ice-cream and lollies – anything, anything you put in front of me I would eat. And then I'd make myself sick.'

She miraculously managed to get through the year and achieve a Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) of 99.15, without anyone realising she was hiding an eating disorder. Her parents may have worried a little about the odd hours she was keeping, but they were supportive and non-pushy.

The teachers at Ashleigh's school were approachable and friendly and on first-name terms with the Year 12 students. Ashleigh says she found them enormously helpful. The real pressure on her that year was coming from within.



In retrospect, she says, given the late start and the stress she was under, if she could do it again she wouldn't aim so high. 'Now I realise that you don't have to get that perfect score. A lot of Year 12s don't realise this – that even if you get a lower score there are so many back doors into anything you want to do.'

'If you start a general degree, say a science degree, as long as you keep your grades up you can transfer into almost anything. The TER, I realise now, doesn't mean much outside the first year of uni.'

Ashleigh has since completed a degree in medical science, which she could have entered on a far lower score, and is about to start medicine.



Part 4

**STUDY
TIPS AND
TRICKS**



CHAPTER 12

Love Your Subjects

You can get quite dizzy from all the advice flying around about what subjects you should do to help you get the best possible Year 12 score. The complex grading systems mean you can lift your chance of getting a high score by choosing the harder subjects. But if you hate a subject, how easy is it going to be to spend hundreds of hours studying it?

Our high achievers chose as much as possible to study subjects they were interested in. If they were already set on a career, they were confident they would enjoy the subjects that led towards it. And those who didn't yet have a career in mind felt they would be starting off in the wrong direction if they didn't pick subjects they liked. In retrospect, nearly all were sure that liking their subjects had a lot to do with getting good marks. It seems picking subjects you detest just because they may give you an edge in the final results isn't likely to work.

*Everyone agreed on the importance of
choosing subjects you like*

alex It's incredibly, absolutely important. If you don't like what you are doing it just makes study so much harder. To motivate yourself to do a subject you don't enjoy is very difficult. And I think that attitude is a big thing.

kate I think enjoyment is the first consideration. It is really important. It should come first when you are choosing your subjects, before scaling or teachers.

george You will naturally absorb the information more easily.

stephen If you like the subject, you tend to be good at it, put time into it. It tends to be something that suits you. I have done subjects that I have hated and I generally do worse at them. Just because I am not interested, I hold them in contempt; I sort of sit in class and do nothing.

xiang-wen When you like a subject you can spend more time on it before you really get tired and sick of it. I was lucky that I did like quite a lot of the contents of my subjects, so studying wasn't a drag – the study itself could help to motivate at times.

nicholas s I reckon liking your subjects is the most important thing.

matt My liking of a subject came because it was something that I thought I could apply further than school and further than the textbook. That's why I liked Biology; I could see kind of where I wanted to head with medicine.

edward I think liking subjects is the key. If you pick subjects that you're not interested in, it's very hard to maintain a lot of study in that subject. I wasn't just going to go out and pick all the subjects that were easy, but I tried to tailor my choices towards things that I enjoyed. I didn't enjoy Maths so it was hard to study for it and put in the hours to make sure I'd get good marks. It was more like a chore than some of the others.

tom w One of the very satisfying things about doing the sciences was that you knew exactly what you had to know. The study was quite fulfilling in the sense that you could go and learn about what you needed to know and were unlikely to have a surprise question on papers, so you felt that your study was efficient.

sam All of the subjects I picked were ones that, when I sat down to study, I was happy to do – so I found them interesting.

kathy I'm one of those annoying people who always takes a positive attitude to everything, so I told myself from the beginning that I would enjoy every bit and I also chose subjects that I liked – I loved Drama, so even though Drama was a lot more work and took extra time, I didn't mind.

stefania I found Nutrition was really interesting; to note things like, 'What's the vitamin content in that?' I found I could modify my own diet to make me a healthier person. I'm not really good at writing essays. I've always been interested in the natural sciences. I like things that relate to real life.

*For some students, getting the
right balance between subjects was
most important*

xiang-wen I did English Studies as my sixth subject and that was something really new for me and was an interesting learning experience. It did strike a nice balance against all the sciences and maths.

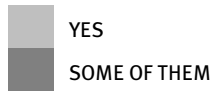
irini I love maths and physics so I did those, but I'm also sort of an artsy person, so I did English Studies and the languages. I found English was a nice break from all the numbers.

catriona What I loved about the science- and maths-based subjects was that you are either right or wrong so you know exactly where you stand. They were actually a really great break from my humanities subjects because you could always come to them, do a couple of examples and put them away. I loved my French, but that was a lot harder because you had to have the discipline to go out and practise your conversation skills and read books and watch movies.

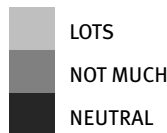
simon Until Year 12, I had always found humanities subjects easy and got good marks in English, but in that year I didn't enjoy English as much; it was a lot harder and scientific subjects became a bit of a mental break. Liking a subject did make it easier – I ended up loving Physics because of the way it appealed to my brain.

nick m A few never really came naturally – English and language subjects never did, so they were a bit more of a struggle, but the maths and science I found fairly easy, so I enjoyed them.

DID YOU ENJOY THE SUBJECTS
YOU WERE STUDYING?



IF SO, HOW MUCH DID LIKING
A SUBJECT HELP IN GETTING
GOOD MARKS?



jess I had a really good variety of subjects – I had the science things and then I had my creative subjects as well. So I really loved sitting down to do my studies; I found them really enjoyable.

nicole I was certainly more motivated to study and work hard in the subjects I found more enjoyable than others. My favourite subjects were probably Chemistry and English – this was because I not only enjoyed them, but found it possible to control how

well I did in them through practice. With a subject like Music, on the other hand, while I really enjoyed the challenge this performance subject presented, it was also a great source of distress at times – where I could practise for lengths of time, but my final performance could still be affected by an error.

nick l With Ancient History especially, there were big research assignments where you could get lost a bit and lose track and then lose interest, and a lot of kids ended up doing that and really suffered. Whereas I picked a topic that I knew I'd find interesting and that's what kept me motivated in it the whole way through.

And liking subjects definitely led to doing well, most of the students said

trent I think it's pretty hard to get good marks if you're not enjoying what you're doing, because you're not motivated to do the study and you're thinking about how much you'd rather be doing something else. We're really told to do the harder subjects because you're more likely to get scaled up, but do the subjects you feel comfortable with and that you enjoy.

sue-lin When I look back and think of how much I've learned, I'd have to say I got the most from the subjects I enjoyed.

tori I found that in Drama, because I loved the subject so much, I did a lot more research for my theory and my essays and my movie reviews. Whereas a lot of my friends sort of didn't enjoy it so they didn't put a lot of effort into it. They didn't do as well because they didn't really enjoy it or find it interesting.

nick m I think getting good marks in a subject helps you to enjoy it more because you are less pressured.

tim The ones I really enjoyed were also the ones that I was best at. For those subjects, I would spend a lot more time researching things outside the actual curriculum, just for enjoyment. Whereas for the subjects that I was really doing just to keep my options open, I just did what I had to.

john As an adult re-entry student, I chose the subjects I wanted to choose and, as difficult as they were, because I chose them my commitment and passion were there.

jess If you're unfortunate enough to do something that doesn't interest you then it is just a slog to get

through. The way you latch on to a concept is, if you are interested in it, then you engage with it a lot more and you can apply it to things you think about and things you do in your life. You need to do the subjects to get you into the course you want, but other than that choose subjects you like.

olivia With the scaling system, a lot of people choose subjects like Physics, Chemistry and Maths because they get scaled up. If you do a subject just because you think it's going to get scaled up but you don't enjoy it or you find it harder, you're not necessarily going to do well in it.

CHAPTER 13

Getting Down to It

It's no secret that you have to put in the hours to get the kind of stratospheric scores that these students achieved. Most of them went into Year 12 planning to work three or more hours each evening and a few hours each on Saturday and Sunday. They knew when they studied best – they respected their body clocks and generally shelved study if they were feeling brain-dead. It wasn't procrastination. They still studied: they just locked in a time when they knew they would be learning more effectively. Sitting and staring at books for two hours just because you've promised yourself you'll do two hours is a real waste of time.

Often the super students fitted study between the things they liked: maybe exercise first and TV or sleep later. They almost all agreed that there was a mountain of work to get through in Year 12, and that it was important to keep up the hours to stay on top of it.

Yes, for most, Year 12 was more work than anything that came before – and they said you need to be ready for it . . .

george It was by far larger than anything I'd done in all the previous years.

cecilia It was at least twice the amount I had studied other years. I suppose as well you are more focused on it – you are thinking about it all the time.

shaheen I did much, much more work in Year 12: I had to actually get a separate room in the house.

tom w I think the workload definitely increased, but because everyone is taking it seriously and tends to be in the same boat, it doesn't seem like the step up in workload is huge. But probably the main difference was that it was constant.

kathy It definitely increased, but because I kept on top of everything and did everything the whole way through – not just the assessable pieces but all the work and set homework – I didn't notice it increasing.

sam In Year 11, I studied fairly hard, which was important because it really got me into that routine of study. Some of my friends didn't do anything in

years 10 and 11 because they didn't think it counted. And so trying to get into the habit and routine of studying in Year 12 was much more difficult for them.

trent In previous years I'd never done any study during the holidays, maybe one day or two before school started, but during Year 12 I did a few days in the first-term break and then I did about four or five days during the mid-year break and pretty much spent the whole holidays after term three studying.

tim One of the main differences in years 11 and 12 was with assignments. In Year 10 if I did the assignment at night, then I'd just hand it in the next day, whether it was good or bad. Whereas in years 11 and 12, if it came to eleven o'clock and I hadn't finished it as well as I needed to, then I would spend all night until I was really happy to submit it. That was the main difference – I was willing to sacrifice my sleep and my social life a bit more just to do better.

. . . though not all agreed

kate I think the biggest jump at school would have been from Year 10 to 11. Because in Year 11 they prepared us really well for the work we were going to get in Year 12.

luke The amount of work in Year 12 was slightly more than in Year 11, but Year 11 was a lot more than the previous years.

vithiyasagar It's sort of up to you, I think. It depends on how much you want to put in, what you want to get out of it. I had the mindset that I wanted to put everything into this year, so I made myself do a lot more work than in previous years.

Most students worked out a study pattern that suited their lives

fiona I studied at night, after tea, for about an hour and a half. I would do different subjects each night – two a night, then swap the next night and do another two. I was doing six subjects. Unless I had assignments that were due, I stuck to this pattern.

sam After I got home, I'd usually go to the gym; some days I'd go and see Gran and Pop. Around 7.30 each night I'd do about two hours. I'd try to hit the books pretty hard and it worked well, like making sure I studied equally on each subject and didn't just focus on one or two, because that can derail everything. So, I probably did around four hours a night; some nights I'd be up fairly late. On the weekends I'd get probably seven hours in during the day or night; I'd try to break it up.

stefania I would stay at school to do my homework because I would have less distraction: I wouldn't have the fridge or the TV, or my brother to talk to. So that would give me more straight-on, solid time.

alex For revision for my exams, I drew up a timetable where I worked in my study time, which would be the bulk of my day, but in between my study time I'd include regular exercise during the week, some relaxation time and things like that, so it wasn't just a big block of study. It was little blocks, manageable blocks.

tom w I tried to make use of the actual school time for study. We had free periods and in most of them I tried to do some work, which was quite good because I had people from my Physics and Chemistry class in my free periods so we would often do our assignments together. I never did homework on Friday night or Saturday as a rule, and not on Sunday morning.

morgan I kept a diary and would plan out blocks of study every night: what has to be done for tomorrow, what has to be done for the next day, and I'd prioritise things. So maybe straight after school I might come home and do half an hour of Chem., and have a little bit of a break and do half an hour of

Physics, have a little break, and then work on a draft for an English essay, so half an hour on that, and so it would just be a couple of hours every night.

farrin I probably did an hour or so every day. My pattern varied depending on other commitments, but there were definite trends. In Year 12, I often skipped classes to work on things I thought were higher priority. I always took time off study if I felt I wasn't achieving anything, so it wasn't a rigid pattern.

xiang-wen If I knew I had some work to do I would try to estimate how long it would take and then try to just spread it across the number of days I had available.

vithiyasagar The night before I would look at what I needed to do the next day. I probably did four to five hours' study a day on average. We had one or two weeks every term when all the assessments were due, so leading up to those weeks it would increase.

stephen Simply put, I did the work regardless of how long it was going to take.

nick m I would probably do three hours on average after school and on weekends, although this was not strict sit-down study and varied a lot from zero to

five or six hours. Honestly, most of my work was done in front of a TV.

simon My study pattern was subject-based. I would begin with Latin and Classical Studies, the subjects I most enjoyed, to get me into the mood for studying; then I would move to Physics and Maths later at night. I would leave my English Literature studies until the weekend or when I had large amounts of free time, because I felt I needed to really think over the ideas without time pressure.

tori Firstly, I would focus on the assignments that interested me the most. Then I would look at the due dates for different tasks and work on them appropriately. I would always study for a few hours each weeknight.

yvette It wasn't a certain number of hours each day but more like getting as much work done during class time as possible. This resulted in very little work that needed to be done at home. In years 11 and 12, I continued to follow this pattern and sometimes used lunchtimes to study. This study pattern resulted in my time after school and on weekends being free to be with my friends and have time away from study.

nick l At boarding school, we were forced to do prep – two hours a night – so you always had a time when you knew you were going to be working. It makes disciplining yourself a lot easier. You have no choice so you may as well work.

cecilia I had two frees each day so I did most of my work in those, which was one-and-a-half hours a day. Weekends I did about three hours, plus an hour each weeknight. Not that much really.

simon I'd get up at 6.15 or so and do some reading, have breakfast with the family; then come home and study after school while I was the only one home. Then after dinner I'd do any other leftover work.

They tended to study at times that suited their personal body clocks

vithiyasagar I'd tailor study more towards the evening. I'm more alive in the evening than early morning.

shaheen I prefer studying during the early morning. I love studying in the mornings; for some reason I absorb the information very quickly then. From my personal experience I wouldn't recommend studying right after school; I would find myself very

exhausted and I wouldn't take anything in my head.
I would study during the evenings.

alex I went to sleep at regular times, didn't burn through the night, tried to keep it as normal as possible so I could keep my concentration at a maximum.

matt If I was really tired on Sunday I wasn't going to push myself and wreck myself for the week. I'd study when I knew that I could and I wanted to be as productive as possible.

sam I'd stay up later at night and study, rather than getting up early in the morning. That's how I work best. It is all personal preference. You know yourself.

stephen I found I worked better at 10.30 each night and I would have this half-hour window when I would become incredibly sentient and it was almost like I was on inspiration from 10.30 to 11. But I would try to go to bed quite soon after that because later in the evenings I found I just wasn't functional.

tom w I'd often come home and have a sleep in the afternoons, or a nap really, and then get up and do a couple of hours' homework and have dinner, or do a bit of exercise and then do a couple of hours of

study after dinner. It was quite an exhausting year sometimes.

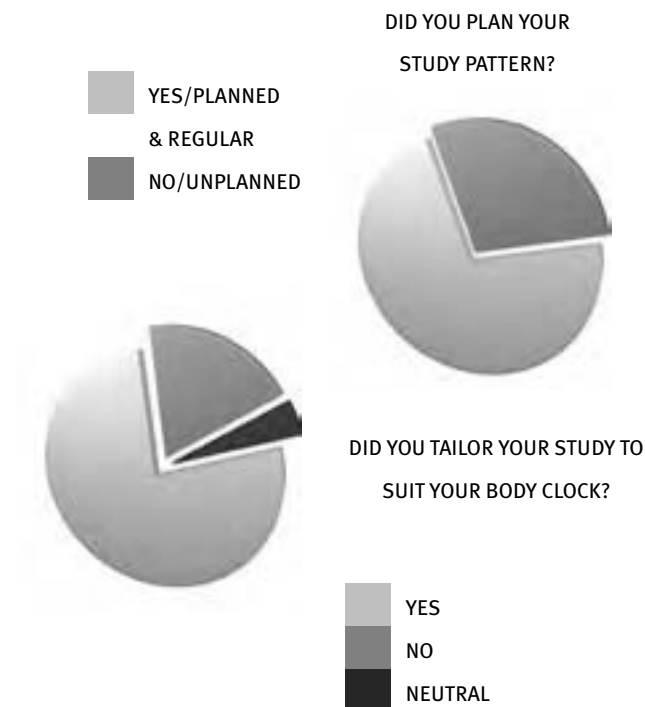
irini There were lots and lots of people who would stay up literally all night and study and I just couldn't do that – I didn't stay up studying past twelve o'clock the whole year.

edward I'm better in the mornings. I tried not to sacrifice too much sleep during Year 12 so I didn't have too many really, really late nights. I'd often get up and do an hour's study before school.

vrinda I prefer to study in the morning. Almost every day I had a powernap between 5 and 5.30 in the afternoon. I definitely knew I needed it because I'd get such a good sleep. I'd put on my pyjamas and an eye patch and set my alarm and get into bed and I would get such a good sleep – I'd wake up about a minute before the alarm went off, feeling so refreshed.

farrin In Year 12, I wrote a lot of my assignments early in the morning. I tended to get up around 5 a.m. because I concentrated better in the morning.

jess I need my sleep, so there were never any late-night sessions. I mostly worked from 4 to 9 p.m.



nick m I didn't work in the morning and was happy to just keep working until late if the deadlines forced me. I'm definitely a night person and would work that way.

nina My brain functions better during the day, so I never stayed up too late to study. I would always do it when I got home, then relax as it got later. It didn't particularly affect my sleeping patterns that way.

shaheen I would get up quite early for morning prayers. Depending on the prayer time, it would be about 4.30 or five o'clock. I just love the morning time: when everyone's sleeping and it is quiet, I can study the best.

*Rather than having a set study pattern,
a few just took it day by day*

poya I would come home from school and learn what I had done that day. During school I would think ahead and ask the teacher what we would be doing the next day – that way, if you sit in class and you don't understand what the teacher is saying, you can still get the emphasis.

nicole Study each night would really vary according to what other extracurricular activities I had on, what assignments I had due and so on. I would study about ten hours a week, including weekends, at the most.

morgan I pretty much studied whenever I had the chance. Sometimes, because it was a fairly long bus ride to school, I'd sit there and do a bit of reading on the bus. It's good to find those little moments when you can add on a little bit extra.

And the weekends?

nick m Occasionally weekends had to be sacrificed to some degree when assignments were due, but that was fairly rare.

irini I studied the most on weekends – during the day, because it's nice to have the weekend nights free.

trent Every day at school, after each subject finished I'd write in my diary what I thought I needed to revise and any assignments, and it built up during the week. There'd be a few things during the week that I didn't manage to do, and on Friday I'd write out a list of what I hadn't done and the assignments and stuff I needed to do that weekend and then I'd figure out when I'd do them.

tom p Weekends I tended to leave open. I tried to make sure I could go out on a Saturday night and I worked on Sundays. So if I had homework I would do it after work on Sunday, if I had to hand something in.

CHAPTER 14

Going Above and Beyond

Half of the super students firmly focused on their coursework alone – the rest took on extra amounts of study in various ways.

Depending on your school and where you live, there can be lots of opportunities in Year 12 to do extra study such as seminars, additional tutoring or special sessions run by teachers out of hours. There are also plenty of subject revision guides and notes available, as well as various commercial revision courses, though prices for these do vary.

If you prefer to run your own study life, you can widen your knowledge of the humanities subjects through general reading, documentaries and movies. The internet also offers limitless opportunities to research topics more widely (but avoid using Google as a procrastination tool!).

Some students tried out the extra study opportunities on offer around them

alex I bought study guides, which the school recommended, and I found them quite useful. I also attended some revision courses that are independently run for the different subjects. They were quite useful because they are comprehensive. They're reasonably expensive, but for what you get out of it I think they are good value.

thuy I recommend people go to seminars at the end of the year, in the lead-up to the exams. Go for the entire week, just to refresh everything that you've learnt throughout the year.

poya I did a course that really helped me in Chemistry. The notes they gave us were really similar to exam questions.

Others sought outside help specifically because they felt their schools weren't offering what they needed

muji I had extra tutoring for those areas where the school had not provided sufficient guidance or the teacher was somewhat lacking in skills to teach a newcomer to the state like me.

sue-lin I got tutoring for Maths because I didn't think my marks were strong enough. If you're putting in the hours and you're not getting fed the right information, I think there's every reason to go out and get that extra bit of help.

*Some students took advantage
of extra sessions put on by schools
and teachers*

sam I went to tutoring with some of my teachers. It was just our teachers volunteering their time for a group of us who stayed back after school to do a bit of extra work. It really helped. It really underlined the importance of having dedicated teachers.

matt Our Biology teacher offered an extra session on Tuesday and Thursday mornings; we'd go in for half an hour before lessons would start, and the teacher would be available and would go through the syllabus statements. I went to that every week; I think it started six or seven weeks before our exams. That was great, it was really helpful and I made the most of it. And, particularly leading up to exams, I made extra times to see teachers.

edward The school was good, actually. They ran a lot of extra sessions in the afternoons, like Physics help and English help and that kind of thing.

Rather than doing the bare minimum, I wanted to make sure I could utilise all those things that were available and try and maximise my marks.

Other students preferred to widen their studies by researching alone

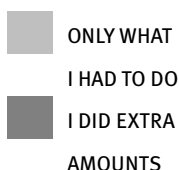
allie I did copious amounts of reading, which was outside the homework but I'd just do it when I had the spare time.

olivia There wasn't much opportunity for tutoring or anything in my town – I probably did only what needed to be done, but I would do extra reading and look up things on the internet.

nick l I did extra for the subjects I enjoyed – Ancient History and French – like reading on the internet and getting extra information. Whereas Chemistry and Biology I didn't enjoy as much, so I just did the coursework.

shaheen I always did extra. If I hadn't I would think I was not on the track. I was always ahead of the class. In fact, during the January holidays I went over almost the whole course.

DID YOU ONLY DO WHAT YOU HAD TO,
OR DID YOU TAKE ON EXTRA STUDY?



morgan I did my best to go a bit above and beyond the call of duty. In the end that is what makes the difference. My Physics teacher has a quote, ‘Do your best, and then some,’ which a lot of us took to heart throughout the year.

nicole A lot of my study would be work that was not set – I felt most comfortable going into exams if I had studied and revised work previously in my own time. In addition, if there were topics I didn’t understand, I would usually seek out some extra questions or books to give me a level of comprehension I was comfortable with.

trent There were revision courses but I didn’t do them – I just felt that I could probably make better use of the time studying myself rather than going

through things that I already knew, and I preferred to spend time on things I didn't know so well.

irini I asked the teachers questions when I needed to, and sort of did it by myself.

Half the students confined themselves entirely to the coursework

vrinda Looking back, I could have done a little extra stuff around the edges, but I was studying for the exams rather than through a thirst for knowledge. My studying was completely homing in on what the exams were going to be: teachers would tell us which topics were most likely to come up and I would just drill myself on them.

simon I only worked within the curriculum, but in a very detailed and close way. I became obsessive, especially about Maths and Physics. When I look back at my notes now, they actually look as if they are typeset. I had a ridiculously high neatness standard.

nick m I only really did what I had to do, because if I did everything that was required of me that pretty much filled up my time completely and there wasn't any time to do more on top of that.

jess I only did what I had to do along the course to get my grades. Unless something really interested me I wouldn't go out of my way to do more research. I don't think I would have had the time. I was kept pretty busy just staying with the curriculum.

CHAPTER 15

Working with Your Own Learning Style

Year 12 is a time when you have to cram a ridiculous amount of information into your brain and then make sure it stays there, at least until the exams are over. The super students had lots of quirky tricks to help them remember things. Some knew they retained information best through their eyes, so they reinforced what they had to learn by surrounding themselves with visual cues. Others had to actually use the information before it would stick – they learned by doing practice exams or problem-solving. Others made what they were learning more meaningful by relating it to their own lives. And some found that an audience helped, explaining things to friends, family – even pets. But none of these tricks was a quick fix: nearly all the students said they had to go over things again and again.

*By far the most popular study technique
was good old-fashioned repetition*

fiona I think my most important study habit was rewriting notes myself and then going over them later, while I was doing other things. I'd take notes down in class, and then I'd write them again, and then sometimes again, compressing them each time; I found the repetition really good. And then I would read them and talk out loud to myself when I was doing something else, like walking around the garden or running. If I was doing another activity at the same time it helped me to remember things, as opposed to just sitting down and trying to learn them.

luke I strongly prefer text-based learning from repetition – reading something, then rewriting or summarising or reciting it. Mind maps and flow charts weren't working for me, so I basically abandoned that way of learning. I went back to basics and I got the list of questions for each subject – in IB there are about 100 for each subject – and the answers to those questions are essentially the IB subject matter. For example, I got a study guide that was specifically tailored to the IB Biology units and I went back to reading the text. I realised that I needed to take charge of it because no teacher is

going to completely change their teaching style on account of one student.

shaheen The best way for me was to get the textbook, start from the very beginning and go over every sentence again and again until I understood every single sentence. For example, I went through my books three or four times and every time I would go over them I would learn something.

lucy I can't just read something. I learn by practising; doing things over again. So, if a textbook had practice questions, I'd do them rather than just read the theory.

nick l I'd write a massive essay on a topic and then I'd completely memorise it. By the end of Year 12, I got pretty good at it, like, I could memorise a big French essay in half an hour. I'd understand it and process it in my mind. I don't think I naturally have an excellent memory, but since I did it fairly often I got better and better at it. Then the last thing I'd do was to break it down into dot points and then memorise those. When I went into the exam I could just write down the dot points and everything would kind of fill in.

sam I learnt by continual repetition. I'd read aloud as if I was doing a speech; I found that really helpful.

edward What worked best for me was going over things – so, trying to revise things regularly rather than just learning something and then forgetting it. I would keep going back over it every now and then to make sure it was safe in my head.

yvette My dad always taught me to go over things within twenty-four hours of learning it.

john You've got to just keep chiselling away at it. I learn by going over the same thing again and again. I'll write stuff down on a piece of paper and always carry it around with me.

About half the students were visual learners and came up with techniques to suit

luke Flashcards were probably the most important study habit for me – on one side you would have a word or question, and the answer would be on the other side. I'd probably rank that equal to doing practice exams. It was a very helpful study habit in subjects where you think you are already quite strong.

tori In the shower I had diagrams, or flow charts, in plastic sleeves on the wall. In preparation for the final exams, I drew a web of where each topic

fitted into the subject as a whole on big pieces of butcher's paper.

nina With Indonesian, I had sticky notes around so I would wake up and see one and remember what a word or phrase meant. With Chemistry, there were lots of little rhymes and things to remember the elements.

cecilia I'd put my essays and things as background to my computer so I could just look over them; I wouldn't read them but they'd just be there. It helped me to memorise sentences.

alex Things I really didn't understand or that I couldn't remember I stuck up on the walls so that every day when I woke up I could look over things that I struggled with. So by the time I got to my exams I just had it so down pat that it wasn't an issue anymore. It's a recommended learning pattern – for long-term memory, if you keep reviewing things day by day, instead of in large blocks, over a long period of time you retain them a lot more.

olivia During swot vac I made a lot of posters for each of my subjects and I stuck them up on the wall, so every time I'd walk into my room I'd see them and

I'd look over them, and I really think it helped to get everything to stick in my mind.

catriona I used butcher's paper to write up diagrams and put them up on the wall so I was looking at them the whole time.

matt I'm very big on quotes, so in my room I pinned up famous sayings or quotes. They weren't anything to do with my subjects or my studies, just motivational. 'Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity', 'Our greatest glory is not in never falling but in rising every time we fall', just stuff like that.

sue-lin I used to memorise the structure of my essays for English and would remember what my points were through making up acronyms that I would remember.

jess I stuck things up all the time. I probably drove my parents insane. I remember sticking up notes on the outside of my glass shower door, so I could read them in the shower. It didn't last long, because I started to notice myself being reluctant to have a scrub. I guess you can't squeeze study into everything.

Quite a lot of students said they needed to understand and 'own' the information before it would stick

xiang-wen I tried to understand the concepts before I did anything else. Compared to many of my friends I put more time into my notes and textbooks and less time into doing questions – not that questions aren't important, but once you have a strong foundation in the concepts it makes it easier to answer the questions.

olivia I always wrote in my textbooks. I'd use a highlighter and even have a grey pencil to write down what my thoughts were so I could understand it my way.

thuy Before the exams I wrote a complete summary of the whole course, not looking at the textbooks but just using the syllabus as a guide to what I needed to include. Physics took sixteen hours, but I split it up over a whole week. It put things into my own words and made the exams a whole lot easier. In the exams I probably put down word for word what I had written when I was writing my little textbook.

farrin Rather than copying notes off the board or just taking down what was being fed to me, I would

listen to whatever the teacher was saying and then write it out for myself.

george I just tried to make sure everything made sense. Once it made sense it was all in my head, pretty much. And if I didn't understand it, I would ask. It is important to make sure you understand it.

alex I think that summarising notes after class is a great way to learn. Because when you get down to those final revision stages, when you have so much information to remember, you need to have it summarised. And doing it as you learn, each week, is the best way. Then you don't end up having to cram it all in at the last minute.

ashleigh I have to rewrite things. To learn Chemistry, for example, I actually rewrote the textbook in swot vac – it took me about a week.

Doing lots of practice exams is a great way to prepare for the real thing

patrick Redoing old exams would make me absorb the information and realise any weak points that I needed to work on.

vithiyasagar Do as many practice exams as possible, because you've got to know what to expect when you go into the exam room and that you've covered all the questions they could possibly give you.

charlie The most important thing is just doing hundreds and hundreds of questions – doing as many questions as you can that are likely to be in the exam or a test. There's no substitute for doing that. Do every past exam a couple of times.

tom w For the sciences, doing past exams and tests was invaluable because there are only so many ways to ask a question. You'd understand why they were asking the questions and the different ways of asking the same questions. You really reinforce your learning by going over it, as well.

cecilia Past tests were the best thing for me, especially in Biology, because a lot of the questions were just the same.

matt What I found most helpful were questions, particularly past exams. In most of my subjects I had a workbook that had a collection of past exam questions and answers. Just by going through them I could understand styles of questions and what they wanted in an answer.

vrinda Timed essays were important because you are going to be doing an exam under time pressure. On a typical day during my last week before the exam I'd wake up and get a practice exam for a subject and I'd give myself two hours to write it. Then I'd go over it or swap it with a friend and we'd go over it together. Then in the afternoon I'd do another.

Some learnt best by listening, either in class or in other ways

allie I liked to take down copious amounts of notes in class for each subject and then record myself. And I would listen to that whenever I had a chance, like when I was going to sleep or when I was walking somewhere. I didn't have a lot of time so I made the most of it.

rory I always tried to focus pretty hard during class. I never took many notes but I always found that doing any work that was set in class or for homework kind of cemented ideas in my head.

will If you can listen in class you can cut your study time by fifty per cent. Obviously there are times when you are going to drift off, but if you listen to what the teacher says, when assessment comes around you are going to find it so much easier to

understand, particularly in the sciences and maths, where you can't teach yourself formulas the way that the teacher can.

What you're studying can relate to all sorts of things in your own life – another trick to make it stick

charlie For Chemistry, for example, you'd learn about detergents and soap, so if you are doing the dishes and you can see the detergent working, then you can describe that to someone.

Some learnt by talking it through with anyone who'd listen

brad Teaching other people helped me. I would sometimes go through it with my parents, even though I knew they couldn't understand it. Just explaining it to someone else helped me.

jess Sometimes I'd force my parents to listen to me, because often describing something to someone would show me how much I knew. If I wanted to refresh what I'd done, I'd go and talk Dad through something and that would build my confidence up heaps because I'd realise I did know quite a lot about it.

irini I found it useful to talk about concepts and stuff, so discussing them was really good. When people came to me for help they were actually helping me, because by explaining something to them I was also reinforcing it in my own head.

poya Students would come and ask me to explain things – that would be reinforcement for me.

kathy With History, when I could explain it to my sister so that she could understand it I knew I had the basics, and then I could talk to Mum and try to figure out arguments. I'm someone who talks and reads and does things through oral means.

edward I had a lot of conversations with my parents, particularly my mum, about some subjects. It helped me to understand them more, and having someone else asking questions helped me to develop my own ideas a bit better.

hayley I'd tell Mum everything I knew about the subject while she was cooking dinner or something – basically do a little speech on the essay I'd be writing – because just going over it in your head doesn't necessarily work. I find telling someone else really helps.

vrinda In the boarding house all the girls were always explaining things to each other, which was really helpful in terms of retaining information. On the backs of all our bathroom doors and in the showers in plastic sleeves we'd have maths formulae and things like that.

Others just tried a bit of everything until they found what worked for them

sue-lin I tried a whole bunch of different things – visual, audio, practising essays. The more variety I had in my study routine, the more effective I was. You're not going to know if it works unless you try it.

CHAPTER 16

Secrets of Success

When our super students were asked about the bigger picture – what they thought was most important, in order to achieve good study habits – time management was the outright winner. And for many that meant using all those school hours to their best advantage. It might have meant they looked more conscientious than cool – listening hard, taking notes and asking the teacher questions – but it resulted in less slog at home and more time free on the weekends.

Next on the study habits priority list was being organised. That didn't necessarily mean colour-coded folders and a terrifyingly tidy desk: our super students had worked out what did it for them, and for some that meant organised untidiness.

The super students said the most important thing was to use their time well

allie Make what work you do count; when you're doing it, do it well. Don't spend laborious hours doing millions of things that aren't necessary.

brad Time management would have to go at the top. Making sure that you know you've got enough time to finish all your assignments when they're due. Like, if you've got five assignments due in the next four days that are going to take twelve hours to finish, you've got to make sure you've got twelve hours in the next four days to finish them. Concentrate your study in small blocks, when you have the energy for it.

kate Maximising the work you do in class is important.

charlie Make effective use of time – so, do as much work as possible in class. And when you are studying, actually do the work, don't just sit staring at the paper or into space. Really concentrate and use that concentrated study.

edward I think studying hard throughout the year really helps, rather than just waiting until the end-of-year exams to try to study hard.

matt Time management was the big one. Do simple things that make it easy for you to manage the workload, like breaking it down a bit. You need self-motivation to be prepared to do the work and to know that it has got to get done.

tom p Most of the classes I was in were quite good in that we were able to do some homework, so I was able to get a lot of my work done during class. I found that people who talked and sat around would always have lots of homework to do. If you get your work done at school then you've got more time to relax.

Being organised and mentally prepared really mattered

ashleigh Even though I didn't start assignments early, I made sure I understood them, so when I got them I would read through the question and make sure I knew what they were about. Because you don't want to get to the last couple of nights and realise you have no idea how to approach the question.

george High organisation is one of the most important things.

nick m I had stuff all over the place and wasn't organised at all through Year 12, and I found out that it was more important than I'd realised.

nick l Always being prepared for everything was essential. No matter what it was: even a class test or a little bit of work. A lot of people would go into a test and think, 'I've done pretty well this year, I know how it is,' instead of going through everything and making sure that you actually do understand the night before. If I was prepared I always did well.

shaheen Before you even open a book or get into your studies, first make a timetable and organise yourself. Being organised and having a plan is extremely important.

stephen Being organised was really important for me. Diligence, perseverance, staying on top of things, keeping up and making sure things got done. Other people perhaps find it difficult to know when to stop: they study excessively for something without realising where the limit is.

olivia I used my school diary. I was always writing everything down and then crossing it off when it was

done – that was something I found really fulfilling. At the end of the year I flicked through the diary and thought, ‘Whoa, that really is a lot of work that I did.’

tim I had a whiteboard and a huge calendar on my wall with all the due dates and exam dates and everything. I had a diary running and I had a big folder for each subject and each folder was divided up into topics, and I also had miniature folders with zips that I could take to school. The system was absolutely priceless when it came to revision because there were always people who’d find they’d lost some tests and assignments, and I had everything perfectly labelled and I knew where everything was.

*Students recommended asking teachers
for help – in or out of class . . .*

stefania Here’s my big tip: ask the dumb questions. Make sure you feel comfortable asking questions. I would always ask questions in class and outside of class. If you don’t understand, don’t just sit back and go, ‘Maybe I’ll figure it out later.’ Ask straight up. Even if it is trivial, there’s going to be someone else in the class who wants to ask the same question, so be the person to ask.

will I would ask questions and try not to feel stupid. I think the hardest part for a teenage boy or girl is trying not to feel like what they are about to ask will sound ridiculous. I'd ask in class or approach the teacher afterwards.

matt I asked for a syllabus statement from every teacher and they would go through each point through the year, so I would just tick off one of those each time . . . and that way you have covered the whole course.

. . . and some had other special tips

patrick Refresh and relearn things you learned earlier in the year, all the time, and do it all again before exams so you know you haven't missed or forgotten anything.

jess Sometimes it is good to write down a whole lot of definitions, which can be boring but you get those questions all the time in tests and they're 'gimme marks' that you should be easily able to regurgitate. For English I would write down a whole list of things I could start sentences with, because when you are writing three essays in three hours it is very easy to write 'however' over and over again. I'd also write down different ways to describe a character so my essays would be a bit fuller and not so repetitive.

shoba Know when to say no to people. When you feel like you're really thinly stretched and then someone asks if you can help them, sometimes it's just too much to try to shuffle around your activities for another person, and if you explain to them they understand.

charlie Spread the workload evenly so that every subject is covered adequately. Make sure you are happy with your level of knowledge in every subject and don't neglect anything.

sue-lin The HSC isn't a sprint, it's a marathon. You need stamina in order to hold on – it's so much about mental toughness. You also need to keep it in perspective – I spent a lot of time in Year 12 planning my gap year. Knowing that I was going to have a break and get out and experience life gave me something to look forward to. I'd also give myself short-term goals, like thinking, 'I can watch TV tomorrow night if I do this.'

edward Make sure you study before you relax. Rather than getting home and watching TV and then trying to psych yourself up for study again, I would try to do the study first and relax later.

jess Everyone says it, but it is true – planning. If I can get a visual picture about the timeline I've

got, I can mentally order things and give myself an idea of the speed and pace at which I need to be working. I think it is really important to have breaks, because I found I could go back with so much more energy. I think that also comes back to planning, because you can plan to have a break.

TOP TIPS

Manage your time wisely

Be well organised

Develop good study habits early

Choose subjects you are interested in

**Make use of free periods at school
for study**

Concentrate hard in class

**Take advantage of any revision classes
on offer at school**

**Consider external revision courses or
tutoring if you think you need them**

**Break assignments into smaller
chunks and start early**

Revise throughout the year

Do practice exams

Give each subject enough time

**Don't put off the things you find
difficult**

matt

Matt had set his heart on doing medicine. He did well in Year 12 but didn't get the score he needed. Instead of settling for something else, he decided to take the next year to pick up an extra two subjects to boost his ATAR, at the same time as working part-time in a hospital.

This meant a big change in schools – from a boys' independent school, where he had been a prefect in Year 12, to an adult public school. It was quite a different school environment. 'Attendance was a big issue at the adult college. At my former school if you missed class they'd call to find out why.' The adult college had a more relaxed attitude.

Matt says he found the standard of teaching the same at both schools, but the self-discipline he had been taught in earlier years at school gave him an edge. Unlike many other students, he engaged with the teachers and asked for help when he needed it.

The extra year between school and uni also meant he could have some space to rethink his future. During the year he found that his interests widened. 'Things just started to change a little bit and I started reading up about the law and I became interested in that.' He ended the year with the entry score he needed for medicine, but instead chose to study law and health sciences.

Matt says taking an extra year to get the score he wanted worked well for him. 'I think the reason I did better that year was because I had a bit more confidence. I knew I had managed

to get through five subjects and do reasonably well. If you go into Year 12 being confident you can do well.'

Hard work over natural ability was the key to his success, Matt says. 'I've always had a reasonable work ethic and I am pretty self-motivated. If I have to get something done or study for an exam, I find it quite easy to just sit down and do it.'

He also credits finely tuned time management as a big factor in scoring his marks. 'I'd do simple things to make it easy for me to manage the workload, like breaking down the work into manageable chunks so it didn't appear overwhelming.

'I think some students approach Year 12 as, *Oh, it's so scary and overwhelming*, but I didn't find it so. It was definitely my most enjoyable year of school, and the subjects were more interesting because I'd done the groundwork in the years before Year 12 started, so I understood the content a bit better.'



Year 12 is a short year, which panics many students, especially those who aren't in control of their time, but Matt saw that as an advantage. 'The fact that I could see light at the end of the tunnel really helped me get through the year.'



Part 5

**THE
WORLDS
AROUND
YOU**



CHAPTER 17

Life at School

If you're planning to be a star in Year 12 it may be a good idea to have a long, hard look at how you can make your school work for you. For the super students, their school and their teachers were huge influences. In Year 12, they said, the old 'us and them' divide fell away and the teachers became their friends. The teachers treated the students as adults, and the students felt they could trust the teachers to be there for them and be happy to help.

A good teacher can change the course of a life. Most of these high achievers could single out teachers who had a huge influence on them. 'Passionate', 'energetic' and 'approachable' were some of the words the students used to describe the teachers they will almost certainly remember all their lives. The students also liked to see that their teachers were working hard too, and that they loved and were knowledgeable about their subject. And a sense of humour was a big plus.

Some schools were ambitious about results

allie My school was very focused on academic results. They liked to see the best, which worked for me because I am a perfectionist. They said a lot of things like ‘Year 12 is very important, work really hard’; that kind of stuff really works for me. But it didn’t work for a lot of people, who said, ‘Screw you.’

fiona My school made it really clear what you had to do if you wanted to do well, and how many hours you should spend on things. Sometimes I think they put a bit too much pressure on – I didn’t find it too bad but some girls struggled a lot. There were a lot of high achievers at school, so sometimes it would be a difficult environment. The teachers would also get stressed because I think that high marks were very important to them.

yvette My school organised Year 12 very well and completely outlined what was expected of us. During the year you got a bit angry at all of the exams and stuff, but in the end it worked out that everyone got pretty good marks if they applied themselves.

catriona My school was a positive influence for me because it strived for success and I had

support from my teachers and peers. For some of my colleagues, however, I think it may have had a negative influence. School often had a competitive environment that may have hindered their performance.

Supportive schools focused on students

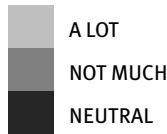
brad School was a huge influence. I couldn't have hoped to have done anywhere near what I did if I had stayed at my previous school. The school was positive in the way that it gave me the freedom to do what I wanted. For example, the opportunity to do a Year 12 subject, Maths Studies, in Year 11, which allowed me to focus on four subjects when I got to Year 12.

olivia We got a new principal that year and she genuinely wanted the students to do well, so I think her motivation helped us.

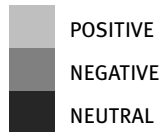
alex Our school structured things very well. There was very little we had to do in terms of timetabling ourselves; we just had to basically show up to classes and do the work that was given to us.

poya I really loved my school because it was very flexible with my requests, like I would ask them for something and they would let me do it. It was the

HOW MUCH OF AN INFLUENCE DID YOUR
SCHOOL HAVE ON YOUR STUDY HABITS?



WERE THOSE INFLUENCES
POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE?



first time they allowed a student to study VCE in Year 9, which I requested and they just allowed me to do it.

trent My school tried to give us an insight into what sorts of careers would be available from the subjects we were studying because a lot of students in Year 12 didn't know what to expect of life and how really important it can be to be prepared – they would get

in speakers every fortnight and have all of Year 12 listen to them.

thuy My school adopted a problem-based learning approach. Most of the teachers were just there for support, they didn't actually 'teach teach', and that might sound really bad but it wasn't because we were focused on collaborative working, so we learnt with each other as a group.

tim School was a huge influence, absolutely huge. I was surrounded by people who were doing better than me and were kind of inspirational in a way. If I ever felt I was missing out on a bit of my social life, I could always look at them and I knew they were studying even harder than me.

lucy My school didn't just have an academic focus. They said it was important but they also made sure we did other things as well. They emphasised balance. The teachers were much more willing to treat you like a person rather than a student.

*Some students had mixed feelings
about their school*

nina My school was very positive in many ways, but it was also highly controlled. It didn't promote independence or difference. It was highly

academically driven and concerned with its public image, sometimes over the wellbeing of its students.

simon My school had a very positive influence, although I was not heavily involved in it. Something about me didn't say 'team player', and I was not included in leadership, etc. because of it. However, this suited me well, and although others would have had a poor time in my situation, I very much enjoyed it.

tori My school was very supportive but also competitive. There was unhealthy competition between girls in my grade, and I thought the school could have handled this issue better.

*Most of the students said they
had teachers to thank for some
of their success*

sam My teachers were so committed and so dedicated – they were always marking essays; always putting on tutoring classes after school. So they had a really, really positive influence on me.

alex The teachers were great at my school. They did offer up a lot of their spare time. They really wanted you to get the best mark that you could.

shaheen They expected a lot from me and I really liked that. They expected me to be very responsible and I liked that. I wanted them to think of me as responsible, so I would be responsible.

kathy I always kept a really good relationship with my teachers. They're not the enemy. I've never had a problem going and asking for help, finding out the nuts and bolts of what they want us to do, and I engage with class discussion.

nicholas s My teachers were awesome, so willing to put in extra time for me. They didn't really need to push me, but I think I became pretty demanding at times, and they just rolled with it and kept up.

farrin Having good teachers allows you to develop in your own way. The teachers we ended up having were very individualist in their approach and that helped me to achieve more.

george My teachers were the best. They'd do everything. I had their numbers and could call them any time. Any time I needed help, they would help me.

trent You could go and talk to them about whatever, say, 'I really found that hard this week – maybe you can suggest some ways I can improve my study,' or,

‘I’ve been thinking about what I can do with physics after Year 12, what kinds of careers are out there?’ and they would be happy to look up stuff and come back to you the next day.

stephen Some of my teachers were amazing. They were the sort of people who would stay up till 3 a.m. to mark your essay and make sure it was back the next day.

There were teachers with tips . . .

tori The most amazing teachers I had in Year 12 would simplify exactly what students were required to learn. This approach meant that we did not learn anything that was unnecessary and kept the subject content to a minimum. They developed mind maps about a subject’s structure so we could see how topics interrelated and had common themes. These teachers also had rhymes and specific thought processes about approaching problems that were drilled into us by repetition. When I sat my exams, I could hear and see my teachers in my head, explaining main points or talking through approaches in the classroom.

vrinda My Modern History teacher was pretty cool and pretty alternative. She was very left-wing and broad-minded and would bring that approach

to everything that she taught. She advocated things like timed essay practice, which I found completely useful. She also really advocated sharing notes, especially in the lead-up to the exam. She was, like, 'We're in this as a team.'

morgan I think my Physics teacher would have been the most influential. He always offered excellent advice about how to study. He gave us instructions for the exams and it was this long list of all the things to do, like being able to summarise notes, and ways to read through and digest information. He said he always had a highlighter handy when he was reading information and so a lot of us adopted that.

tori My science teachers found a way for me to actually enjoy the subjects, which made it a lot easier to study. For example, they related it to lifestyle instances: we knew how washing powders and shampoos and conditioners worked. It was interesting and they made the information useful.

Teachers who inspired . . .

nicholas s My Physics teacher was basically a genius. He's just amazing. He gets about four hours' sleep a night and the rest of the time he was writing up these physics booklets and PowerPoints and all

these amazing notes and extra questions for us. The students ended up thinking, ‘This bloke’s getting less sleep than us and he does this every year and he’s putting in so much effort,’ so you just wanted to reward him by getting good marks.

fiona I found Maths hard, but my teacher had confidence in me and she would always make me feel better. I think that her faith that I could do well helped me to feel that I could.

allie One teacher took a great interest. He really pushed me and he’d set targets for me. I thought, ‘If he thinks I can get a certain mark, then I can.’ It was such a positive. I respected him so much.

jess The relationship you form with your teacher – it is both of you in it together, to try to get your best score at the end. I was really lucky to have a brilliant English teacher, and I could really understand the feedback he would write on my essay. I’d need to tweak it here and there and that would get me my 20. It really helped if the teachers were passionate about their subjects; it rubbed off on me quite a lot.

will I found that if you had a good relationship with your teacher you wouldn’t want to disappoint them and that would drive you to study.

tom w My English teacher really pushed me and challenged me in writing – it had always come naturally and I had started to coast along a little bit. He was really passionate about English and books and poems and things, and it was really contagious. When someone has that sort of joy and passion for something you can't help but be affected by it.

nina I had a really fantastic Maths teacher. She wasn't strict but she respected everyone and it made you want to do better and impress her to some degree.

Many students found that their relationships with teachers changed completely in Year 12

matt The teachers understood that Year 12 is an important year and that you are under a bit of stress, and they were more relaxed. I think 'approachable' would be a really good word to use.

ashleigh You referred to teachers by their first name, which always helps. Their offices were attached to the classrooms, so they were always there, which made it very easy to approach them. You became very friendly with them. There was an organised lunchtime sport competition that the teachers played in as well, so you'd go outside and

play footy with the teachers and come back into a class with them. They were very helpful, too. You were able to interrupt them at any time with questions and they didn't mind.

alex In Year 12 they teach good classes, they give you good material, they are willing to go beyond just the normal measure, they treat you like adults. They don't spoon-feed you anymore, it is up to you, but they do offer as much support as they can. That maturity earned a lot of respect from me.

tim By Year 12, most teachers thought we should be studying for ourselves, so they rarely checked up on homework. At the start of Year 12 that was great, because you wouldn't do it. But after a while you begin to realise that you are screwing yourself over by doing that. I think that teaching approach really works in Year 12, because I didn't feel that someone was on my back. I felt like I was doing this for myself.

luke I felt that Year 12 was fairly pivotal for me and it would have a fairly strong influence on the rest of my life. I saw Year 12 as a rite of passage, and with some teachers you felt that they believed they were also going through a rite of passage or a test by getting students through the subject. It was easier to take those teachers seriously because you think that

they are better equipped to understand the difficulties or challenges that you are facing.

tom w I think the student–teacher relationship changes in years 11 and 12, where you can have a laugh and be more open; our teachers might swear in front of us occasionally, which was ridiculously good for morale. They didn’t create a sense of competition between the students. They wanted everyone to do well. They never played us up against each other. If they invoked any sense of competition, it was with other schools or other classes.

Teachers brought a range of teaching styles to the classroom

thuy Some of the teachers who took the whole lesson to lecture us made the class boring and made us all sleepy and we just didn’t want to learn. The teachers who lay back a bit and encouraged discussion in the classroom helped us excel because they made learning so much more fun.

yvette The teachers I liked best let me get on with my work and did not disturb the whole class when one person had a problem. This allowed the students who understood the work to finish it and move on, while the students who needed extra help were given one-on-one time with the teacher.

tom p Giving good answers is really important in teachers – I had one teacher who was not very good at answering questions, which left me to learn quite a lot of the subject on my own and that was a bit annoying.

will I think the best teachers are those who don't have a strict model for everyone. They recognise that there are differences in the way people learn and need to be taught, and they acknowledge those differences. If you expect all your students to have exactly the same study habits and to achieve exactly the same results, there is no flexibility and I don't think that works.

Students appreciated toughness . . .

stephen My English teacher took a sort of mothering approach. She put the fear of God into people and if you hadn't done your homework she would give you the treatment and make you feel so horrible that was the last time you made that mistake. That was a very good thing.

kate If a teacher doesn't mind if you don't get things back on time it is harder to work.

brad Honesty is a huge thing. If you do something stupid you want them to tell you; you don't want

them just to wet-nurse you. The amount of feedback that they give is an indication of how much they care.

. . . and teachers loving their subjects

lucy The best teachers had infectious enthusiasm for the subject and were really good at it themselves. A sense of humour helps, too.

irini Passion and an understanding for their topic are important. Accessible, a strong personality to make them interesting, memorable, and being young at heart, because then they can relate to the students, as well.

stephen My teachers were academically quite brilliant. It was almost alarming to think that they were teachers because they could have done anything else in the world that they wanted, yet they had chosen to teach. They were really passionate and interested in what they were teaching.

CHAPTER 18

The Competitive Buzz

Competition is the adrenaline of study and these students were happy to admit to their natural competitive urges, especially in an academic race like Year 12. What emerges, though, is not a picture of cutthroat high achievers looking nervously over their shoulders to see who might get the better of them. The majority said their most serious competitor was themselves, as they were determined to do better and better. Beyond that, they usually eyed off someone at their level and kept up a friendly rivalry. For others it ended as a team competition – they were happy to share resources and help each other because they wanted to do as well as possible as a school.

Most admitted to being competitive . . .

xiang-wen In terms of study, yes, I think I am quite competitive. I can drive myself quite hard to do well, especially when there's someone quite close to me in terms of performance.

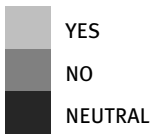
irini I'm going to say that I did everything for myself, but to be completely honest I did have in my mind that I wanted to be at the top.

muji I do not like failing and therefore that is the only instinct I have. Now I wish to be the best doctor I can be and know all areas to the best of my ability.

nicholas s I didn't want to get the score that didn't reflect what I could have achieved. I am a competitive person by heart. So I definitely used that element to keep me motivated.

shaheen There was no one ready to do as much as I was and nobody was ready to compete with me. In fact, I wanted someone to compete with me so I could push myself even harder.

DID YOU SEE YEAR 12
AS A COMPETITION?



DID YOU PICK OUT ONE
PERSON IN YOUR PEER GROUP
TO COMPETE AGAINST?

*... but didn't consider competition to
be a dirty word*

brad I think I am competitive, but happy competitive, if that makes sense. It's healthy competition.

xiang-wen The competition probably made me want to do better.

sam It is a really good idea to pick someone out to compete against because it encourages you to study more to maintain that edge.

Some students competed with themselves

allie I saw competition as a way to achieve. I wanted to top my school and region in two subjects, but it was more a competition against myself, as opposed to beating other people.

jess Generally the drive to achieve myself was much stronger than the drive to compete. Self-achievement was much more important to me.

will I like to think I was driven by self-satisfaction rather than competition.

Others felt that in a competitive system, you have no choice but to compete

luke I didn't feel as if I was competing against any individuals, but I did feel as if I was competing against the broad cohort and trying to do above average so that I would have a greater chance of getting into the university course.

jenna I think there is a lot of competition in Year 12 for the best marks. Especially if you are one of the top couple of students in a class: everyone really does compete to get there.

alex Year 12 was a massive competition in my classes, purely because I think that is the nature of high achievers. I am not a naturally competitive person, I just guess I don't like losing.

*Some preferred not to think too hard
about the bigger picture*

rory It wasn't on my mind that there were 50 000 other kids in the state who were trying to beat me. I clearly understood the competitive scoring mechanism behind the study scores, but I never felt I was personally battling against other people.

olivia I guess among the six of us in the class we did kind of push each other a bit, but you can't really think about all the other people in the state as well. You kind of just focus on your own work.

*Others felt that working together
had its benefits*

shaheen I think it is important to be open to your friends and share your knowledge with them and allow them to share their knowledge with you. It has a positive influence; otherwise it can become jealous and then that has a negative impact. I had to be happy if my friend got a better mark than me.

charlie I found it more helpful to work with my friends in class to improve each other. We weren't jumping over the top of each other or anything.

sue-lin After all the internal assessments, we all just helped each other like there was no tomorrow – before that it was very competitive.

poya You just share with each other, which is really helpful. It's a competition, but there are a lot of other students, so helping others won't put you down in the competition.

*Many students advised finding
a sparring partner*

ashleigh I think it helps – you don't do it openly, just in your own head. A lot of people would make the mistake of picking the top person in the class to compete against and then getting downhearted if they didn't do as well. Just pick someone at your level.

morgan I had a healthy competition going on with one of my best friends and it was always to see which of us could get the top mark in a particular assignment. It was just sort of a bit of healthy competition and it encouraged both of us to work harder.

brad I was competing all year with my Physics lab partner, who is my girlfriend now, to be the best in Physics and I think I beat her by about half a per cent in the end. It was definitely a healthy competition, as she was one of my best friends in Year 12.

alex I picked out someone to compete against but it was more a fun rivalry than a malicious rivalry. And I think we both gained from it, because we both did better as a result.

tim I pretty much picked the person I aspired to be like in that particular area. I wouldn't just see how good they were at that subject; I'd also look at how good their social life was and how many friends they had, just so that I could balance it up myself. Because if you picked the smartest people in the class, they'd be the people who wouldn't be going out on weekends.

luke There were a couple of people who were generally good performers and I felt that I'd like to get a comparable score to them because they were the benchmark in our cohort.

shoba My boyfriend right now – we were just good friends in Year 12 – told me that girls couldn't do maths and that he was going to get a better score

than me. That got me going, mainly because it made me angry, not because I wanted to be competitive.

irini There were the people out of my league and then there were the people around my grade who I wanted to do better than. It was a good driving force, but it wasn't the end of the world if they did better than me. We sort of joked about it more than anything.

simon There were people who I actually wanted to beat out of spite – to prove myself. I thought they had it easy.

jenna My friend was kind of like my benchmark, and every test I'd see whether I beat her. We were very competitive and it worked really well for us.

nicholas s I probably picked out the best person in each class to compete against; it turned out to be a couple of my good mates, and they probably used the same thing as well, and it kept us motivated. But it was never negative.

CHAPTER 19

Other Important Adults in Your Life

Big noisy families, only children, single mums, single dads, being away from home at boarding school – our students came from many different kinds of living environments. Things were generally harmonious at home, and super students' parents didn't seem to be very pushy. In fact, our students marked them very highly for that.

It seems the ideal parent of an ambitious Year 12 student provides food and is interested in what you're studying, but trusts you to get on with it without needing to be hassled. Parents, too, were handy for listening to explanations of concepts, checking spelling, or printing assignments off in the middle of the night.

Very few of the students had an inspirational mentor from outside their school or their home – most seemed to find the support they needed from within.

*Students appreciated parents who
didn't stand over them or nag*

sam I know some people's parents are always on their backs to study. Mine never did that, which was really good of them.

nicole I'm a fairly independent person, so I probably would have resented any sort of overbearing influence. My parents recognised my ability to sort it out myself.

tom w One of the things I thought was nice was that they didn't put any pressure on me and didn't set any expectations in terms of marks or what course I should get into; they said they would be happy if I worked hard and applied myself. They discouraged me from stressing about getting a really high mark or really wanting to get into a course.

rory They never really pressured me or directed me in the sense of, 'Stop watching TV, you need to study.' They mostly left me to myself.

matt I think because I have always been pretty self-motivated, Mum's never had the need to push me; she could see that I was coping and doing the work. But she's always looking out for me. Mum was very important with the little things, like cooking dinner

and waking you up in the morning and stuff like that. Very helpful.

nicole They trusted me to know when I thought it was okay to go out, how much study to do, and never really tried to influence me.

tom p They basically just left me alone. If they had kept pestering me too much I would have got a bit frustrated with them, but they were good enough to leave me.

will I have very un-pushy parents, but I didn't want to disappoint them. They were a driving force more than an influence.

patrick They trust me to do things for myself, which I think is a good thing.

In most cases, the parent–student relationship was good . . .

luke I studied fairly independently. But my family was definitely extremely supportive; having all your meals prepared, reassuring. They would occasionally ask me, if I was procrastinating, watching TV or something, 'Shouldn't you be studying now?'

alex They were very helpful, not over-analysing. They were just around when I needed them, not hanging around or anything, but just here when I needed to talk. They didn't have to stop work just because I was doing Year 12 – life went on.

brad My parents didn't have a level of education to enable them to help me with my studies. I think I was the first in my family to pass Year 12. My parents have always encouraged me to do well; they never pushed me, but they always praised me when I did do well.

. . . with the occasional hiccup

stefania Dad's stubborn and so I have to work around him to get many things done. I need peace and quiet to study and he wouldn't always give me that: he'd be, like, rummaging, talking really loudly or arguing with my brother because he is a teenager. So, that's why I would do my homework at school and not at home.

nina I think studying and having things to do made me sort of edgier with my parents; when they asked me to do chores and things, I'd think, 'Well, why should I? I've got exams in a few weeks.' It definitely puts pressure on those relationships.

*Some parents were a source
of inspiration*

jenna My father changed his career about ten years ago and went on to do psychiatry, and he threw himself into study. My mum did her masters degree just after he finished. And, you know, they're both very dedicated to study. So I had learnt that from them and I get my ambitions from them.

yvette From a young age my dad told us that we had to study and go well at school to get a good career and set up our lives. So study was a big factor in our lives from early on.

thuy Probably because my parents emigrated from Vietnam, I guess the way that I see it, they sacrificed their life coming over here for their kids, so I do think that it has influenced the way I strive for excellence.

vithiyasagar In Year 12, I wanted to make my parents proud. I was born in Sri Lanka. My parents went to Australia to give my brother and sister and me a better life. I appreciate that. I just didn't want to let them down.

muji Mum taught me that perseverance and faith are the keys to success, and for me to be who I want

to be, I have to have compassion. My mother was instrumental in my studying and was a huge influence on the need to study. As Baha'is, 'excelling' is of huge importance, and I should be grateful that I can study as many other Baha'i students are not allowed to go to school in Iran, even now.

tim My parents put quite a bit of pressure on me. They kept on telling me in a competitive way that I wasn't doing as much work as my brother and sister. It drove me on quite a bit. It was definitely good. They weren't mean or nasty about it – they put it in that competitive-edged kind of way. They tried to make it like a competition.

vrinda My dad was of the mindset that if I'm studying what I want and doing what I want I'll have a lot more fun, so he wasn't very pushy. Mum, on the other hand, got a bit stressed out over it. I definitely preferred Dad's outlook because it meant that the time I actually did spend studying was because I'd decided to do it, not because my parents had made me, so I was motivated and I enjoyed doing it.

*Most students really valued the support
their parents offered*

nicholas s My mother is probably one of the big reasons I got through. There was probably no need

for her to motivate me or worry about that side of my study. But she worried about everything else. She worried about how my stress levels were and whether I should have a night off and made sure I ate well and that sort of thing.

ashleigh They supported me in whatever I wanted to do, even my study habits, and they believed in me. They didn't push me hard. I was pushing myself.

rory They always made sure I had what I needed. I had a desk and a printer and a computer and plenty of paper, and they never played loud music and disturbed me or anything.

fiona My dad was quite good. Like, he'd understand that I had a lot of work. So when he was home on weekends he would often take the family out or make sure that I was left alone. That helped a lot, whereas my mum, I think she thought she was helping, but she would keep interrupting me and bringing me things.

tom w Mum always had great food, but I think they were happy to let me manage my own time, which was quite important for me. If I wanted to have a day off, or if I didn't want to do any study on the weekend, they were okay with that. They didn't try to get involved with organising my life and my

timetable, which I really appreciated. My parents accepted that it can be a difficult year and a very involved year, and they gave me space if I wanted it. They were always happy to read anything I'd written or to look over things, even just proofreading an English essay.

thuy Mum ensured that I ate well; Dad ensured that I exercised. They drove me around everywhere and were on call, any time.

olivia My parents were there for support when I needed it but never on my back. They never said 'You have to achieve this score' or anything, so it was good not to have to try to live up to their expectations as well as my own.

nick l If I called them from the boarding house and I was having trouble with an assignment, they'd always try to help me. Even if they couldn't help me with a specific assignment, they'd always try to think up good ideas and stuff. If you've got parents who care about how you are going and what marks you get then it gives you an incentive.

vithiyasagar They would stay up with me if I did a late night. My mum would stay up with me, make me Milo.

catriona During exam week Mum took some time off work to make sure she was at home with me. She would just prepare lunch and dinner.

nina I always came home to food and things like that, and I think that's all you can really ask for; just support and doing the little things before exams. Just asking how you are and paying a little bit more attention. My mum helped me out with research sometimes.

ashleigh When I was too tired, Mum used to drop me at school and she also used to run down to my stepdad's office in the middle of the night to print my assignments. They were very supportive.

*Some students were lucky enough
to have parents who knew something
about their Year 12 subjects and
could give advice*

george Dad is a teacher and English is his specialty. He taught me everything that I needed to write essays for Year 12. For the first few essays, I'd write them out and they weren't really good. And he'd show me how to do it again and he'd go through it and by the end I knew how to write an essay.

tori Mum and Dad actually knew quite a lot about how the Year 12 system worked and the weighting that would be given to different subjects, and how the score would be processed and valued. However, a lot of my friends' parents didn't really understand and that made it difficult for them when they were trying to pick their subjects.

simon Talking to my mother helped, as she is very experienced in the study of the humanities. The most helpful thing about my home environment was the support, but not in a wishy-washy way. My parents told me that they would accept any choice I made about my life and career, and I believed them. However, they also said that whatever I chose, I owed it to myself to try my hardest. So, while I was unsure what I wanted to do after finishing school, I applied myself wholly to the choice to finish school.

vrinda My dad knew that I was struggling with Chem. and so he sat down and studied with me. I would make my notes and go away and study them and then he would go over them with me and come up with little tricks of how to remember them, like acronyms.

yvette My dad helped me out through Year 11 and Year 12 with some of my subjects, as he had done some of the same at school.

*Parents were good at helping to
rebalance the scales*

edward I still had to do chores around the house, like feed the dog. It was probably a good thing and made me realise that I still had responsibilities to do other things, even though I was doing Year 12.

george I almost studied too much sometimes and my dad would always pull me back that little bit to relax me. He sort of kept me in check at first and then by the end of Year 12, I knew what I was doing and had it worked out. He could probably see that I was overdoing it and he'd say, 'Come on, it's time to go fishing. You need to relax.'

muji My mum encourages me a lot. She's quick to realise where I need help and attends to it. She jokes

DID YOU HAVE A MENTOR OUTSIDE OF
SCHOOL OR YOUR IMMEDIATE FAMILY?



a lot, mucks about a lot, sword-fighting, hide and seek (yep, even now) in order to de-stress me.

yvette Mum helped me if I did get stressed out. Took me on a break, shopping or something like that.

*Students had various thoughts
(and some complaints) about the role
of parents during Year 12*

kate I think that all a parent would need to provide is a happy and secure home; and that is what I think I had. Then it is my responsibility to do well after that.

alex Largely the Year 12 study thing is up to you.

stephen Sometimes parents can forget the pressures, or the situations that students doing Year 12 today are in. When my parents went to university it was all free and it was a matter of: you got the marks and you went. Nowadays there are fine distinctions, like, do you get a place with no HECS and a stipend or do you just get the place normally and have to work part-time. That was the pressure I was under and I don't think they understood that.

jenna They could have been home more. Things like cooking dinner and stuff just kind of takes all your time.

muji It would have helped if we hadn't shifted so much as I lost a lot of friendships and continuity. But on the other hand it has made me more resilient to life.

olivia Towards the exams I told my parents that they weren't allowed to mention exams. I had to think about them enough so I didn't want to have to talk about them as well, unless I felt I needed to. I just didn't want that added pressure.

luke The only negative was that I knew that they were worried that I was studying too much, and that made me anxious because I didn't want them to be worried. That was distracting at times.

thuy My family as an Asian family – I don't know whether it is the same with Caucasian families – is really competitive. I had three relatives and also family friends who were studying Year 12 as well, so it was really, really competitive between us. I am a competitive person so I don't get scared that easily.

For a few students, there was a significant mentor outside school and family

luke In Year 11 my mum got me a tutor in biology. She was a second- or third-year uni student so she

was a bit of a mentor. She did not so much teach me the material as gave me the confidence to learn it in the way that I wanted to learn it – as opposed to the way that was being taught to me at school.

sue-lin My debating coach was a mentor to me – a girl a couple of years older than me. I liked talking to girls who'd done the HSC relatively recently, rather than thirty years ago, and also girls who had done the HSC and done really well but managed to stay balanced human beings. My debating coach told me how much people at uni change degrees, switch courses and drop out, and looking back it is just so true.

vrinda My rowing coach was a really cool guy who I'd been friends with for three or four years, and he was someone I really respected. He reminded me how many hours in the day there are. He's a very successful climate change lawyer, so he worked really hard until late at night and then he'd turn up to rowing the next morning at 5 a.m. and just be bright and chirpy and get you motivated. He really taught me my time management skills, because he'd sit down and talk to us about what we wanted out of what we were doing and helped us decide on some short- and long-term goals.

CHAPTER 20

Sisters, Brothers and Boarding House Mates

Year 12 is the year when you'll probably spend more time at home studying than at any other time in your young adult life. And home most often means family, and families can be fun but also noisy and distracting at times.

Most of the super students had at least one or two siblings; a couple had lots. A majority of students said their siblings did affect their study life, but usually positively. Brothers and sisters could be distracting, but also useful for advice, to test you on things, or just as an excuse to take some time out and play. And by the sound of things, the same applied to fellow students in the school boarding house.

Some siblings were a good influence . . .

trent My brother is eight years older and he was always happy to help me when he was at home, but he went to Melbourne when I started Year 5. I always loved going to visit him and thought what he studied was quite cool – I thought all the maths he used to talk about sounded really fascinating, and I heard about all the uses for it and all the different kinds of jobs.

kate It was hard to concentrate at times because there were lots of interruptions, like after school and that sort of thing. But in my final exams my brother was also studying for his final university exams and I found that a huge help because we would study together and have our breaks at the same time and that was really good.

nick m My brother and sister had done Year 12 before me so I saw what they had done and how they had studied. I knew how much work I would need to do, to do as well as they did.

alex While we were both doing Year 12 and both lived at home, I didn't see my brother all the time. We didn't get in each other's way at all. We were studying different things and we both needed our own space. He was a positive influence when we

went out a few times together and had meals and things like that.

stephen If my older brothers came around, then they would take me out somewhere and I'd unwind for a while. I used to conscript my little brother to play tennis if I was getting too anxious. That probably had quite a good influence on me.

shoba I had access to all my brother's and sister's past notes and piles of textbooks, so I was never looking for textbooks to help.

tori My older sister gave me past tests and her old notes, which took her a lot of time. She wrote me out a sort of revision guideline for each subject and what the teacher would be looking for, so she helped me heaps.

simon My older sister, who had done very well in Year 12, became my crutch, especially during the exam period. I started to get very dark, not seeing the point of it all, and as exams approached I came to feel a sense of anticlimax. She helped – she would take me to the theatre and afterwards we'd go to a bar and talk for a while. I'd become insular and introspective, and it was refreshing to have someone else's opinion. A lot of people had tried the

‘reality check’ on me and it hadn’t worked, but she got through.

allie My oldest sister and I are very similar and we did similar subjects. You can understand sibling rivalry, so I had a massive goal to do better than her in Year 12 and I achieved my goal.

. . . some not so good . . .

lucy My sister is a bit wild, a bit of a party animal, so she’s probably a negative influence because if she’s out partying I don’t really want to study.

cecilia My brothers told me I studied too much, because my older brother doesn’t study at all. It probably would have been helpful if he didn’t keep calling me a nerd.

. . . and some a bit of both

tim My sister was away the whole time and my brother was home for the second half of the year. He was good in some ways and bad in others. In terms of distraction, he was great. It was always easier to talk to him than to go and learn. But at the same time he kept on reminding me how bad I was and to get back to work. We’re a competitive little family, but it is good.

yvette My older brother did roughly the same types of subjects so he helped me out if I had a problem. Other than that he was a pretty shocking person at studying. He's really unorganised: he leaves everything to the last second and does all-nighters and stresses out. So I learnt by his mistakes.

Little noisy ones could be usefully distracting, or just plain distracting

irini I felt really bad for shooing my little brother away all the time because he'd come in and say, 'Guess what I did on this game?' or try to show me what he was doing, so I felt bad, but then I made up for it in the holidays and I hung out with him lots.

poya I have two small sisters and when I had spare time I would go play tennis or volleyball with them and my younger brother too. But they were a positive influence. I knew that at the times to study, they wouldn't distract me. We had certain times of the day to go and play.

edward My younger brother was sometimes not such a good influence because he always wanted me to go and play with him. But at the same time it was fun mucking around with him when I had breaks. It gave me something to focus on after I'd been studying for a while.

*For the boarders, living at school had
its ups and downs*

will Boarding school can be difficult because you're surrounded by about twenty friends, so it's obviously a very good distraction if you want to take it. But it was helpful in the sense that we had a regimented study life. You knew exactly when you could study, and everyone was supposed to be studying so it would be quiet. Even if you didn't want to do any study you couldn't disturb others.

nick l There's always someone who's good at that subject in the boarding house who you can go to. Like with Maths or something, if you're having any trouble you can go and see them.

CHAPTER 21

A Study Space of Your Own

Half the battle of settling down to study is having the right spot to go to. Most students were able to have a space of their own at home during Year 12, and to set it up the way they wanted. In spite of that, a lot chose to sometimes study in the main part of the house surrounded by company. Some liked to study to music, or with the TV on; others needed total silence. For some, their bedroom was the ideal place to study, while others said they didn't want to sleep in the same place they spent so much of their time working.

Students chose a spot that suited their study style

allie I stole a room from our house and just made it my study room. I'm a very messy person so I needed somewhere where I could leave everything the way it was. If I was halfway through an essay I could just leave it and come back to it later.

ashleigh My room is small so it was important to have a desk next to my bed so I could spread my books out on the bed and sit at my desk. I just had to make use of the space I had.

george My bedroom is right at the back of the house, so I don't hear any noise. I prefer total quiet.

luke The bedroom I studied in was quite roomy so I had a lot of space to put books around and organise myself. I cleared the desk and had one thing on the desk at a time. My room was upstairs and the living room/kitchen and a lot of sources of distraction were downstairs, so once you'd gone upstairs and sat down to concentrate, you were quite away from going back downstairs and being distracted by television.

thuy My room has got lots of big windows and I think that helped. I open the doors wide and the

curtains so it is really nice and bright: lots of sunlight every day. I don't like it dark and stuffy; I couldn't work in those conditions. And it has to be a really neat room as well. If it was really cluttered then I couldn't work either.

tim I am pedantic about having a clean room and having everything in its place. So my room was kind of like a study zone. I just had my bed, desk and computer – absolutely no distractions at all. My room is at the very back of the house. It kind of meant, because of the distance, that I was escaping every time I went there.

nicole My parents handed me down an old laptop for Year 12, which was fantastic. I didn't have to move heaps between the computer room and my room if I needed the internet and all that sort of thing.

xiang-wen Concepts go into my head most effectively when I'm studying alone and when it's relatively quiet – my room was good for that. It was just across the corridor from my cousin so we could easily discuss stuff that we needed to.

stefania I had two desks, although they were quite small. One desk would be cleared and one would have books and papers on it. One faced a

window, so if I were to look up I'd see into the front garden, which was sometimes a bit distracting as I'd daydream into the garden. It was my own private little space.

stephen I can't study with distractions. By the time the exams came around, before studying I would clean my room. I would get everything off the floor, everything off my bed, everything off my desk and put it all away so I had a very clean, almost austere environment, and then I could sort of sit down and focus on something.

muji I do enjoy my own space, de-cluttered of unnecessary paper but surrounded with my mementos.

shaheen My room was very organised. At the start of the year I bought tables and a proper chair – I made myself comfortable.

*Some wanted to keep study and
sleep separate*

tom w My bedroom was completely separate from where I studied, which I think was really useful. If I was in my bedroom it was only ever for relaxing and socialising.

matt I didn't study in my room. It was a bit small. We've got a dining room with big glass windows that has plenty of light and stuff, and I would study there. It has a massive table so I could spread out. It was somewhere I could call my own for the year.

vrinda I had a really roomy desk that was out the back, not in the same place where I slept. It was a bright room, which is important, with a lot of natural light. I always feel really sleepy under fluorescent light. My mum was good about keeping the room clean because often you procrastinate by saying, 'I have to tidy up,' so it was really nice to come into a clean room.

*For others, finding their own study spot
threw up dilemmas*

brad The fact that I had to live in two houses was difficult. I lived half and half. It was a pain in the arse, because sometimes I'd have to drive from Mum's to Dad's to pick up my textbooks. It would have been a lot easier to study if I had been at one house. I concentrated most of my study at Dad's just because I wanted one place to study.

irini I never did any study at all in my actual bedroom. I used the study, but even then sometimes it just got too noisy. We're a loud Greek family. I went to study in the library and that was really great because it's just silence and you're in this little booth thing and nothing distracts you and you're absolutely focused.

trent I studied in my room, but with hindsight I think it is better studying in the library, which I did towards the end of Year 12 when I had big chunks of time. I never had a computer in my room – I think that is a great study tool but always a great distraction. It was in another room and I went there to look things up.

alex Studying at home in my room was great in the respect that all my resources were at hand, but the disadvantage of studying at home is that there are also quite a range of distractions, such as the kitchen – you can just eat when you're distracted or bored – and the TV. The advantage of studying at a library or school is that there are fewer distractions around, but the disadvantage is that you have to take all your gear with you: all your resources and all your food.

*Music was a plus for some, a distraction
for others*

kate I hate studying to music; I like it to be quiet so I can concentrate, and my room is really good for that because no one else goes in there normally.

tom p My desk in my room is too cluttered so I would just study on the dining-room table and there was a TV on in the background. I usually listened to my iPod and it was a good way of calming me down; and it was a good incentive for studying because I would get to listen to music at the same time. I'd just churn through the work. The technique of having other things going on worked for me, especially for the subjects I studied because there is not really much independent thought.

morgan I don't have the TV on but sometimes I do listen to music; I think it depends on what sort of task I'm doing.

brad I would listen to music unless I was studying something really in-depth, something really difficult, then I would study better in silence. I never watched TV in Year 12.

sue-lin When I was thirteen or fourteen I used to listen to the radio and my mum used to tell me not to

because she'd read somewhere that some boy always studied with music and he got into the exam and he wasn't used to the silence so he couldn't do the exam.

kathy When I studied, if it was anything to do with numbers then I would listen to rock music quietly in the background. Anything with words, it was classical or baroque music.

trent I don't think music is an effective way of studying because you're half concentrating on the lyrics, but if you're trying to get into your study and you can't, then play a few songs and try to get into study then turn the music off.

shaheen I like it very quiet when I study, no music. I want to put my head down and concentrate very deeply. If I couldn't concentrate I would stop studying.

*Some students found they got too
restless studying in the same place
all the time*

sam I'd find at times that studying in my room would become monotonous, so I'd go to other rooms in the house. I prefer not to have people around. I like quiet music when I am typing up notes, but when trying to memorise notes I need a quiet space.

poya I would put a table anywhere, even in the lounge room or kitchen. I would just start studying at it and my mum would move the table and I would bring it back, so my place for study would keep changing. I would usually put my table in the lounge room and study where the family would watch TV. I would watch with them and study as well.

sue-lin Towards the end of stu-vac, when I was studying every day, I found that it was really helpful to change my environment just because it added variety and I could concentrate better. If I was studying from nine till twelve, say, in my room, then I'd study in the dining room after lunch. That was much more productive than sitting in the same spot for hours on end.

TOP TIPS

Keep a good relationship with teachers

**Ask questions in class; there are no
dumb questions**

**Choose someone to have a friendly
competition with**

Or, compete against yourself

Learn by sharing knowledge

Use your family as a sounding board

Use sibling rivalry as a motivator

**Learn from the experiences of older
brothers and sisters**

**Set up a study space you're
comfortable in**

**Keep Year 12 in perspective – there's
lots more to life**

John

Not everyone doing Year 12 has their family bringing them late-night snacks and tiptoeing around so they can study better.

John was a single parent in his late thirties when he decided to change the direction of his life and go back to school. The turning point came when he found himself on WorkCover after a back injury, staring at a possible future of unemployment or reliance on the health care system. Education was a way of creating his own future. 'I don't want to be employed by anyone anymore. I've got to create my own employment opportunities.' He went to an adult public school and chose multimedia and photography subjects, aiming to eventually start his own business.

Going back to school was hard, especially for someone who says his memory isn't so great. John learned by going over things again and again, putting in four or five hours each night. Quality time with his son was cut short; his social life disappeared. Living by himself, with little spare time, he went from being a diet-conscious healthy eater to a slightly overweight fast-food snacker.

'At times it felt like – what am I doing to myself? I want to bomb out, you know?' John says, looking back on the year. 'Sometimes when it gets too hard you kind of look for the easiest way out.'

What did keep John going were supportive friends and a single page of career goals that he wrote early in the year, and would re-read every time he felt downhearted. These goals

weren't just about study – they included wider aims like joining a camera club, entering photographic competitions and reading widely around his chosen subjects.

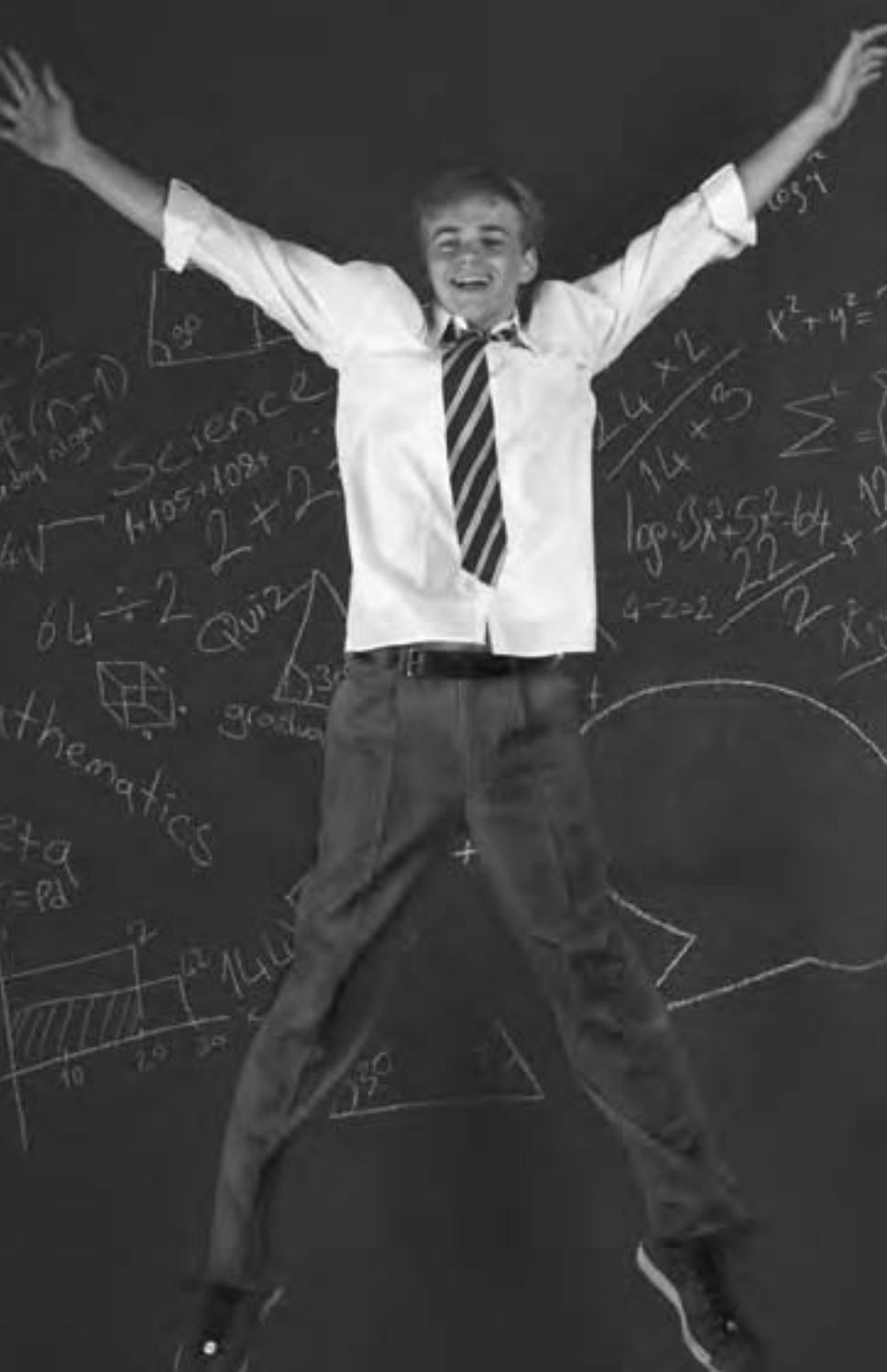
He says it was a very tough year, during which his mental, spiritual and physical health all deteriorated, but he came through with a TER in the high 90s and went on to study commercial photography. He's now finished that – as an award-winning student – and is set to make his business dream come true. He puts his success down to passion, commitment and keeping that page of career goals handy at all times.





Part 6

**LOOKING
BACK ON
YEAR 12**



CHAPTER 22

Driving Forces

Keeping up the energy to stay on the books, remain focused, not be put off by the occasional bad result – it takes a special sort of stamina, and that stamina needs a powerful driving force. Nearly all the super students had to pause and have a think about exactly what drove them to keep going at the level they needed to get the marks they wanted. The answers were varied, but almost without exception they were driven by *something*, and in only one case was it fear of failure.

*Many did it for their own
satisfaction . . .*

luke What drove me through Year 12 was the desire to achieve excellence and wanting to be part of the group of people who were in the excellence group. I wanted to be in the intellectual tier of society; and to approach life by being analytical and smart and so forth.

will It was wanting to be self-satisfied; wanting to be proud of myself. Also I suppose, to a certain extent, not disappointing my parents. I knew from the end of Year 10 that what I was doing wasn't about getting into any sort of university degree; it was honestly just about wanting to satisfy myself.

*. . . or simply out of a general desire
for success*

sam I think if you aim high, like if you aim for one hundred per cent, when you don't get that hundred per cent you're only going to fall a little short each time.

lucy I want to do well. I don't want to do anything half-heartedly.

*Others had their eyes firmly on
the future*

jess I probably never start anything without having an aim at the end. I don't think I could. Things like the score I wanted to get or getting into medicine, those things are sort of a driver. I really need to feel like I have achieved something.

morgan It is sort of a need for success in my later life and a way to get there. It's a matter of seeing the bigger picture, and getting through Year 12 is a means to an end, I guess.

fiona I really, really badly wanted to do medicine and that was everything that I worked towards.

brad I guess I could picture at the end of it having a really good TER and being really proud of that. The end justified the means. I didn't want to waste the year. I didn't want to do Year 12 and give it a half-arsed job. I wanted to put everything into it.

trent I knew that the subjects I was doing could get me into anything at uni, and knowing I could do a diversity of things was a motivating factor. I don't like doing one thing.

patrick While I was studying and doing the exams, I was imagining how good it was going to feel after it was all over and I had a nice score to reflect my efforts.

vrinda Partially I was motivated by wanting to make my parents proud, partially by wanting to have success in the future and knowing that the way to get the stuff that I want to get in the future is to walk down this path in doing well in Year 12.

irini I want to be useful – that’s why I chose engineering. I want to be in a field where you can actually be a help to someone and do something that you know is useful, like building a house or an office complex or a bridge or something.

For some it was about competing

nick l I never wanted to have someone ask me, ‘How did you go?’ and for me to say, ‘Oh yeah, fair.’ I always wanted to be able to say, ‘I did really well.’ I don’t brag about it or anything, but I have always been competitive and wanted to do well, to beat other people.

tim Competition. Just keep on finding people to aspire to: to get the same job as them or to get the same mark as them.

For one, fear of failure was the driving force

alex To be blatantly honest, fear. I had a big fear of failing. The pressure doesn't worry me, I think it was good. I did fail some things and it was a bit of a . . . well, no one likes failing things . . . but it was good to learn how to deal with failure.

A few weren't sure what had motivated them, if anything

thuy I don't know. Maybe I just wanted to please my parents.

farrin I was never particularly driven. I suppose I expected it of myself and it didn't really occur to me that it wouldn't happen.

For others, the need to succeed was part of their personal story or personality

vithiyasagar I didn't want to waste the opportunity that I'd been given from my parents. Life could have been a lot different for me if I'd stayed in Sri Lanka. Having that in the back of my head all the time motivated me to do well and not waste the opportunity Australia can afford.

stefania To understand the world around me.
I've always liked to learn.

sue-lin I really love life and I have had a lot of experiences that make me believe that the more you put in, the more you get out of it. I think you may as well embrace every opportunity you have. I wanted to reflect back on Year 12 knowing that I had done all that I could have done.

hayley I like achieving things and I like learning things, so particularly if I don't know how to do something I really get great pleasure in finding out how to do it or in finding out how something works – it's like unlocking another piece of the world or another piece of the universe – and just learning more really drives me.

simon I believed that if I succeeded, people would accept me. It wasn't really fear of failure, just a feeling that if I'm the best, everything works: it's a drive to simplicity.

CHAPTER 23

If I Had My Time Over

Regrets. The super students had a few, but not *too* many. Half said they wouldn't change a thing about the way they tackled Year 12. Some thought they'd studied too hard – well, yes, easy to say that when you get a brilliant result, but they really thought they'd gone over the top and missed out on some of the social aspects of Year 12. Others felt they could have studied more, but why worry when you got where you wanted to go? All of them agreed it was a very special year, which they had wanted to get the absolute max out of, in terms of both study and socialising.

alex I'd maybe put in a bit more effort at the very start. The start of anything is quite deceptive because there is not a great deal of pressure. I think that is when you need to put the most amount of pressure on yourself. If you can get most of your work out of the way early, it makes life so much easier at the end, when the pressure really starts mounting. That pressured feeling, like you haven't prepared enough, takes a toll on you physically and mentally. It is so hard at the start because no one else around you is doing that preparation, but you know in the back of your mind that it will help you along, and it really does.

simon Although Year 12 was emotionally and physically turbulent, I feel that I am the person I am now because of it. Objectively, I had a terrible time, being sick and socially isolating myself, but subjectively, I enjoyed it because I found another side of myself. I discovered that I could work hard, and that I could do extremely well if I applied myself. I wouldn't change anything, because had my experience been any different, I might not have gained such an appreciation of my own tenacity, which is, today, a very important part of me.

ashleigh I'd probably aim lower, actually. Now I realise that you don't have to get that perfect score; you can get a lot less and there are back ways into

the course you want. I thought I had to be the best and now I realise that I don't.

fiona I think I would have studied a bit more, probably. I could have made a few more sacrifices in my social life and maybe cut down on a bit of sport. I don't think I necessarily would have done better, but I would have found it less stressful towards exam times.

charlie I wouldn't really change anything. While I obviously didn't do everything perfectly, the mistakes made were important learning experiences.

luke If I had my time again I'd probably encounter the same difficulties I had the first time around: shortage of time, difficulties prioritising, and the stress of learning. I'd do far more of the practice exams and fewer of the conceptual exercises. Towards the end of Maths, the concepts got quite multi-layered and sophisticated, and basically I thought the best use of the limited time I had was to try to learn the concept really well. If I had my time again I would just go through the motions of trying to answer difficult questions because that seems to work better.

nick l I'd probably go out a bit more and make a few more friends outside of school. I didn't use up all

my free weekends in the boarding house. You only do Year 12 once and I probably would have enjoyed going out and meeting new people.

sam I would have gone to the gym more than I did. Making sure you stay healthy is really important.

stefania I would stop procrastinating and use the ability to do it then and there and not leave it till later. I'd maybe spend time knowing other people in my classes other than my closer friends.

thuy I don't think I regret anything at all, because everything that happened contributed to my development as a learner.

kathy I would engage more with my friends and get to know them better, and develop more as a person as well as a student.

trent I'd definitely be a bit more curt with my friends when they pressured me to come out and catch up on weekends. There were occasions when I really didn't feel comfortable going out but I did because my mates would say, 'Oh, come on, you haven't been out with us for a week.' I'd definitely be a bit more disciplined about that.

patrick I'd keep refreshing on things we'd learnt all through the year, instead of having to remember it all in the last few weeks before the exams.

tori I would exercise more so I would be less stressed and healthier. I would not listen to how others were doing in their grades and would not get involved in discussions about my grades with other students. At the end of the day, you should only judge your successes against yourself. I would make more of an effort to be organised and develop good studying techniques, in preparation for university. I would also not fuss over my grades, because university is when your grades really count, not in Year 12.

irini It was the best year of high school – you know everyone, you're most comfortable, the school is your place, it's where you belong. I wouldn't do anything differently. I could have studied more, but I wouldn't want to because that means I'd have sacrificed other things.

sue-lin I wouldn't get as stressed out. I really only needed a score of 96.3 but I sort of said, 'I want to do as well as I can.' Looking back, maybe I didn't need to do that.

catriona I think it is very easy to lose perspective in Year 12. With everyone around you in the same

boat, studying and stressed, and pressure from the school to succeed, I feel that students believe it is the 'be-all and end-all'. It is not. As soon as you leave school, you realise how insignificant it all is. As you progress in your university studies, your TER becomes less important if you want to transfer courses or undertake other avenues of study. I studied a huge amount in Year 12. If I had my time again, perhaps I would have socialised on the weekends more and taken advantage more of my last year at school. I was so determined to get a high TER that occasionally I forgot to enjoy myself.

vrinda I had an amazing time in Year 12. I loved everything I did. The stuff that you do in life that's the hardest is the stuff that's most fun in the end, and because Year 12 is so hard, because you have to balance so much stuff, it ended up being the most rewarding thing that I've done.



nicholas s



If Year 12 is a competition, then Nicholas is a winner. Not only did he finish school with a TER of 99.95 and five perfect scores, he was also a prefect, captain of the school's First Eighteen football team, and a member of the school orchestra.

The secret? When asked for his top study tip, Nicholas said it was getting enough sleep.

'I don't deal with things well without sleep. It not only messes up the next day, but it really sets the tone for the next week. One of the best disciplines is to go to bed at a decent time.'

After a bit of quizzing, he admits there was a bit more to it than just bedtime routine. For a start, he made a point of getting advice from others. 'I knew how I was going to approach my study and the revision stuff from talking to a few people who had done Year 12.'

One of the hints Nicholas picked up was to constantly revise. He started revision straight away by writing up notes for each subject in little A5 books. 'In Year 12 you get a syllabus saying *this is exactly what you need to know*. I would write down the syllabus and then notes under each section.' He would then summarise the notes, then summarise his summaries. He says the process of continually reducing the information was a key way to make sure concepts were thoroughly learnt. 'It gave me a good idea of exactly what I needed to know, and I didn't get

surprised by any questions in the exam.'

Nicholas says he found the workload in Year 12 a lot harder than in previous years, and that he had to really work for some marks, especially English Communications. His other subjects were Chemistry, Maths Studies, Physics and Biology. His own special technique to keep himself calm was to work even harder. 'If I kept studying and kept my work up, then my stress levels stayed pretty low because I was sort of ahead of everyone else.'

He did, however, keep study separate from the things he loved. Friday night was kept free and Saturday was devoted to footy – school and club – and friends. Then it would be back to the books. 'Spending all day Sunday, from about eight in the morning with a couple of breaks, was the key to catching up on all the work, and getting a head start for the next week.'

All year, Nicholas aimed to get perfect scores in each subject; then about a month before the exams he lost a little of that confidence. 'I started talking to people who had done the exams and I started to doubt whether I could do it.' Luckily by that stage he had done so much work that even a crisis of confidence couldn't set him back.

Two years into university, he looks back at Year 12 with few regrets. 'There are always some things that you feel you should've done differently during the year, but I like where the choices I made then have got me today, so I wouldn't change too much.'

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Meet the Students

alex

SCHOOL Independent boys'

Alex lived at home with his mum, dad and a twin brother who was also studying Year 12 – but very different subjects. Alex is the more academic one; his twin is musical and creative.



allie

SCHOOL Independent co-ed

When Allie was at home – between musicals, bands and performances – she had the support of a mum, dad and two older sisters, one who motivated her and one who calmed her down.





ashleigh

SCHOOL Government co-ed

Ashleigh found her own study peace in a house of four brothers, including a boisterous three-year-old, by waking at midnight and working through the still hours.

brad

SCHOOL Government co-ed

Dividing time between his mum's and dad's places added another dimension to study for Brad. He concentrated most of his time at his dad's to make it easier, but it was still a pain when he left textbooks at the wrong house.



catriona

SCHOOL Independent girls'

Catriona did a couple of Year 12 subjects in Year 11 to take some pressure off – still, as school captain in Year 12, she had plenty of responsibilities, and she was also involved in sport, music

and debating. Her family unit comprised her mum, dad and a younger sister.

cecilia

SCHOOL Independent co-ed

Cecilia lived at home with her mum, dad, two brothers and a dog, who Cecilia walked three or four times a day during intense study periods just to get out of the house.

charlie

SCHOOL Independent boys'

One of Charlie's tricks was to apply his study to everyday life at home: as a result, his dad, mum and younger brother and sister now know the scientific principles behind washing-up detergent.

edward

SCHOOL Independent co-ed

Edward's family unit was his mum, dad, an older brother who was at uni in another city, and a teenage younger brother who was a useful distraction during study breaks.



farrin

SCHOOL Government co-ed

Farrin lived at home with her mum, who didn't tell her when or where to study but just left her alone to get on with it.

fiona

SCHOOL Independent girls'

Fiona's dad worked in another city during the week but was a great help on weekends, often taking her mum and younger sister out to give Fiona some quiet time.



george

SCHOOL Government co-ed

George's father, a teacher, not only passed on his essay-writing skills but also took George fishing whenever the study became too intense. His mum and a younger sister completed the family unit.



hayley

SCHOOL Independent co-ed

During Year 12, Hayley lived at home with her mum, dad and a teenage brother. As well as letting her off chores, her mum became a great study sounding-board.

Irini

SCHOOL Government co-ed

Irini is the middle child in a Greek family that was incredibly supportive, but sometimes when the decibels got too loud she would take off to a local uni library for some quiet study time.



Jenna

SCHOOL Independent co-ed

Jenna didn't have to look very far for study inspiration – a few years before she tackled Year 12, her mum did a masters degree and her dad became a medical specialist.



Jess

SCHOOL Independent co-ed

Jess says she drove her parents insane by talking her subjects through with them. But they've been through it all before with her older brother and will probably have to do it again with her younger brother.



john

SCHOOL Adult public school

John was thirty-seven years old when he decided to do Year 12 at an adult public school. He had the additional responsibility of sharing custody of his son with his ex-wife.



kate

SCHOOL Independent co-ed

Kate lives at home with her mum, dad, two older brothers and a younger sister. During the final exams she would study and have breaks in sync with a brother who was in his final year of uni.



kathy

SCHOOL Government co-ed

At the end of Year 11 Kathy's mum put the family on a healthy diet, which made a big difference with study, although Kathy didn't realise it at the time.

lucy

SCHOOL Independent girls'

Lucy's family unit consisted of her mum, dad, an older brother, and a younger sister who was a bit of a party animal. If her sister was out partying, it was hard for Lucy to keep the study motivation up.

luke

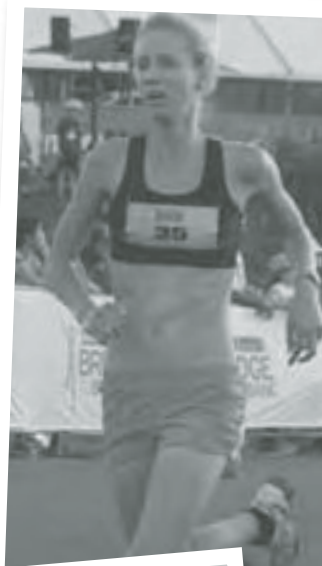
SCHOOL Independent co-ed

The oldest of three boys in his family, Luke says his parents were supportive by simply believing in him – knowing that he knew what to do and letting him get on with it.

matt

SCHOOL Independent boys' / adult public school

Matt did Year 12 at an independent school and then picked up another couple of subjects at an adult public school the following year. He lived at home with his mum and the family dog.





morgan

SCHOOL Government co-ed

Morgan lived at home with his mum, who was always there to organise the non-study stuff and to provide feedback on drafts. At only sixteen, Morgan was one of the Year 12 ‘babies’.



muji

SCHOOL Independent co-ed

Muji went to four high schools in four states – the last move was in mid-Year 11, so he had to get up to speed pretty quickly. He says it made him more resilient, but he couldn’t have done it without the support of his mother and grandparents.



nicholas s

SCHOOL Independent boys’

Nicholas started the year with a goal to get five perfect scores, and he did it. He credits his mum for worrying about all the other stuff and letting him focus on study. An older and younger sister made up the family unit at home.

nick l

SCHOOL Independent boys'

For Nick L, there were a couple of big positives about living in the school boarding house: a routine study time each night, and always having someone around who was doing the same subjects.



nick m

SCHOOL Independent co-ed

Nick M lived at home with his mum, dad and an older brother and sister who had both already done Year 12. So from the outset he was aware of how much effort he'd need to put in to do as well as they did.

nicole

SCHOOL Independent co-ed

Nicole was the baby of three kids and wanted to live up to her siblings' good results, which was a strong motivating force. As a result, she says, her parents didn't feel the need to do any pushing.



nina

SCHOOL Catholic co-ed

Nina lived at home with her dad, an older brother and her super-organised mum, who pulled this very disorganised super student together and did a great job of all the supportive stuff.



olivia

SCHOOL Government co-ed

Olivia's home is a small country town where tutors, revision courses and all those other external supports on offer in the city aren't available. She lived with her mother and father, and found inspiration in phone calls to her older sister.



patrick

SCHOOL Independent co-ed

Other than supporting him with all the survival stuff like food, Patrick says his parents trusted him to take care of Year 12 himself. He is the older of two boys.

poya

SCHOOL Government co-ed

Poya came to Australia from Afghanistan aged fourteen and lived at home with his mother, three brothers and two sisters during Year 12. His younger siblings were far from being a nuisance – they provided an excuse for a welcome break from study.



rory

SCHOOL Independent co-ed

Home for Rory, who lived with his parents, was a great place to study, but also full of interesting diversions that were hard to resist, especially when he had a mental block about a piece of work.



sam

SCHOOL Government co-ed

By Year 12, Sam's brother and sister had moved to other cities and he was home alone with his mother and father. Sam's grandparents, who lived nearby, were a huge support – he tried to see them every week.





shaheen

SCHOOL Government co-ed

Unlike most of the students, Shaheen says his family did not support his goals because he was pushing himself too hard. While his brother Poya, another super student, liked to study with distractions, Shaheen needed to shut himself away in complete silence.

shoba

SCHOOL Independent girls'

Shoba really benefited from being the last person in the family to do Year 12. Not only did her parents leave her alone to study, her two siblings also offered lots of advice, past notes and piles of textbooks.

simon

SCHOOL Independent boys'

Simon admits he studied excessively in Year 12, choosing to spend a lot of time at home with his parents and an older sister rather than going out. The most helpful thing about his home environment was the family's strong support for his choices.



stefania

SCHOOL Adult public school

Stefania lived at home with her dad and a younger brother. It was a noisy household, so she preferred to study at school. Although ‘not the best cook in the world’, her dad was a great support by keeping meals under control.



stephen

SCHOOL Catholic boys'

With parents who had both studied hard in their day, and two older brothers who had already completed Year 12, Stephen was expected to do well and he was motivated to try. His younger brother was in Year 10 and studying pretty hard, too, so they didn't get in each other's way.

sue-lin

SCHOOL Government girls'

Sue-Lin describes her family life with her mum, dad and younger brother as pretty ideal. Her parents had always emphasised academic achievement but didn't apply any pressure in Year 12, just support.



thuy

SCHOOL Government co-ed

Thuy thinks her push for excellence is partly because of the sacrifices her parents made for her in emigrating from Vietnam. They made sure she looked after herself, and were available at any time to help. Thuy also has a younger brother at home.

tim

SCHOOL Independent boys'

Tim was pushed along by the healthy sense of competition in his family. His parents would remind him that he wasn't doing as much study as his older brother and sister had done, and it worked as a great motivator.

tom p

SCHOOL Independent boys'

As the youngest of four boys, Tom knew the Year 12 drill and says his parents didn't need to push him too hard because he knew what he had to do. His brothers gave him good advice.

tom w

SCHOOL Government co-ed

Tom lived at home with his parents, who didn't set any expectations in terms of marks but left him alone to study and discouraged him from stressing. Family dinners ('Mum's a great cook') were a welcome break from the study routine.



tori

SCHOOL Independent girls'

Tori lived at home with her mother and father, who were both high achievers, and she had the benefit of wisdom from afar from her older sister at uni interstate. All this gave her 'sort of a need to go well'.

trent

SCHOOL Independent boys'

Trent was inspired by his older brother, who was the first in the family to attend uni and won a national scholarship to study in another city. His parents did all the right things to make studying easier for him.





vithiyasagar

SCHOOL Government co-ed

Vithiyasagar's parents went all out to support him – his mum even stayed up to make hot chocolate during late-night study sessions. His family had moved to Australia from Sri Lanka, and Vithiyasagar says he was motivated to make them proud.

vrinda

SCHOOL Independent girls'

Vrinda found good and bad influences in her school boarding house: it was great when everyone was studying, but a whole day could go by if they got started on a season of *The Sopranos*. The best thing her parents said was: 'It doesn't matter how you go, we still love you.'



will

SCHOOL Independent boys'

Will lived in the school boarding house from Year 11, when his parents moved overseas. He says they were very 'un-pushy', which he liked, but that they still stayed in constant touch. The only negative for Will was a lot of travelling in the holidays, which disrupted his studies a bit.

xiang-wen

SCHOOL Catholic co-ed

Xiang-Wen worked hard in Year 12, but was still very surprised by his five perfect scores. He moved to Australia for the year, leaving his family in Malaysia, and lived with his aunt and two cousins, one of whom was doing Year 12 at the same school.



yvette

SCHOOL Independent co-ed

Yvette learnt from her older brother's mistakes – he tended to be disorganised, and left things to the last minute in Year 12, but he was good for giving advice on specific subjects. She lived at home with her mum, dad and another brother.

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About the Authors

rowena austin is a freelance editor and writer based in Adelaide. In the past she ran a communications consulting firm for a decade and was a journalist on metropolitan newspapers and magazines in four states. The idea for *Max Your Marks* came to her when she couldn't find an inspiring book for her own Year 12 students, James and Grace.

annie hastwell is a radio and print journalist. A former ABC broadcaster, she now works freelance producing features for Radio National and writing for magazines, as well as lecturing in journalism. Her original career as a teacher has left her with a keen interest in educational issues, especially having now gone through the dreaded Year 12 experience three times with her own children.