

GETTING THROUGH YOUR HSC: A PRACTICAL GUIDE

CENTRE FOR
CONTINUING
EDUCATION



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

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Study works best when you have some personal goals in mind. If you are experiencing a lack of motivation, try to think of some personal long-term goals for your HSC.

STAYING MOTIVATED & KEEPING FOCUSED

After more than a year of your HSC, you may experience periods when you lose your motivation. You might feel a reluctance to engage in your subjects, or even study at all.

Losing motivation and having trouble staying focused are natural feelings, and will most likely happen to all HSC students at some point. It is important that you recognise these when they occur and identify the source or sources of your frustration to overcome them.

Most people are motivated by a combination of internal and external factors or short and long-term goals. External motivators are external factors that motivate us. Said another way, we don't own those motivators and are unable to exert any control to change these factors. External motivators generally represent more short-term goals.

Internal motivators arise within us and we own them ourselves. We have control over internal motivators and create them ourselves at any time without having to rely on external factors or things over which we have no control. Internal motivators represent more medium or long-term goals.

Research shows that both types of motivators are important and used by learners, but internal motivators result in greater engagement and a more enhanced kind of learning.

University entry, your desired ATAR and future career, are all external motivators. Try to think of what your own internal motivators for the HSC are.

Think of some of your own internal motivators and write them down:

1

2

3

Write some motivators into a list and place in your study environment. Add more as you think of them, and use these to remind yourself of the bigger picture of your HSC.

SOME EXTERNAL MOTIVATORS

- High marks
- Parent and teacher expectations
- University entry
- Doing better than others in your school

SOME INTERNAL MOTIVATORS

- Interest in a particular subject
- The wish to improve your knowledge
- Desire to give yourself greater future opportunities
- Seeking knowledge because knowledge is power

ANXIETY

Anxiety is the most common enemy of motivation. A little anxiety can be a good thing because it will energise your study program, but when difficulties become overwhelming and self-doubt sets in, anxiety can act to decrease motivation and sometimes cause physical effects.

Be aware of anxiety. Focus your thoughts on those internal reasons for studying. A consistent balance between internal and external motivators will yield the best result.

If your anxiety or frustrations cause you a level of discomfort, it is important that you seek support. In addition to your family and friends, support can be found from **Lifeline Australia**. Lifeline provides 24-hour confidential telephone counselling to anyone within Australia. You can talk to them about any problem, big or small.

Call **Lifeline Australia** on 13 11 14 or visit www.lifeline.org.au.



HEALTHY STUDY METHODS

- 1 Don't eat your meals while studying. Allow yourself the time to concentrate on something else. Preparing your own meal, such as a sandwich, can be a simple way to relax your brain.
- 2 If possible, eat meals with others, such as your family. This will give you time to talk about topics other than the HSC.
- 3 Go to bed early the night before an exam, and wake up early the next day. Allow yourself the time to do your normal morning activities such as having a healthy breakfast.
- 4 Remember, it's quality not quantity that makes your study valuable. Set some obtainable goals before each session, and stop to rest once they have been reached.

If you find it difficult to make time for healthy eating, exercise, or social and personal activities, then schedule them in as part of your study plan.



A HEALTHY HSC

The HSC can be both mentally and physically tough, and (especially at the final stage) it is important that you ensure your good health: it is just as important as your study.

EATING WELL

Good nutrition is even more important at the final stage of your HSC. You may think that Coke, chocolate, caffeine and foods high in sugar will help you through late night study because of the burst of energy they give, but these foods have a negative affect on overall concentration and memory.

Try to drink at least 1.5 litres of water daily - buy a bottle that holds just this much and fill it before each study session. The brain needs to be hydrated to be functioning at its best. Coffee and soft drinks will lead to dehydration, which can affect your concentration and cause fatigue and irritability.

SOCIAL & PERSONAL TIME

Although it may sometimes seem that the HSC is the most important thing in your life, you should not neglect the things that entertain you and bring enjoyment.

Time spent with friends and family is important to your mental well-being.

In addition to social time, try to spend some time by yourself doing something you like to do.

EXERCISE

Not only is exercise good for your overall health and fitness, but it also boosts your mental wellbeing.

Exercise will help keep you calm during exams. You'll feel more energised and refreshed, and that in turn will help you perform better in your studies.

During exams you may feel unable to take much time out from studying. Instead of giving up on exercise altogether, try taking small, regular breaks to refresh yourself and clear your mind. A 15-minute walk can be enough to revitalise the mind and unscramble your thoughts.

See our basic pre-study exercise techniques on page 8.

SLEEP WELL

Your brain is powerful, but to work at optimum capacity it needs to have time to rest. Ensure you have adequate sleep in the weeks leading up to your final exams, especially the nights before an exam.

An extra hour of sleep can be more beneficial than an extra hour of study.



RELAXATION

Here are some simple relaxation techniques to try before or after a study session or exam.

VISUALISATION

This technique uses visual imagery and body awareness to move a person into a deep state of relaxation. Imagine a peaceful place and then focus on different physical sensations, moving from the feet to the head. For example, you might focus on warmth and heaviness in the limbs, easy, natural breathing, or a calm heartbeat.

BREATHING

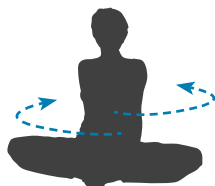
In breathing techniques, you place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly. Take a slow, deep breath, sucking in as much air as you can. As you're doing this, your belly should push against your hand. Hold your breath and then slowly exhale.

MUSCLE RELAXATION

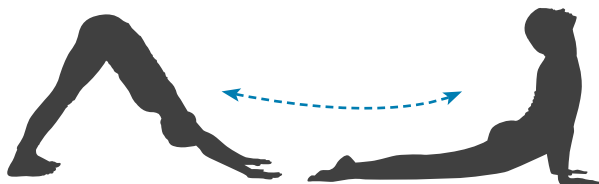
This technique involves slowly tensing and then releasing each muscle group individually, starting with the muscles in the toes and finishing with those in the head.

MEDITATION

The two most popular forms of meditation include Transcendental Meditation (repeating a mantra - a single word or phrase) and mindfulness meditation (focusing your attention on your thoughts and sensations).



1. Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position with your back straight.
2. Breathe in and feel your spine extend and your chest open. Breathe out and twist to the right side planting your right hand gently behind you, and your left hand against your right knee. Stay here for ten breaths.
3. Breathe in and come back to the centre. Breathe out and twist to the left side. Repeat several times.
4. Come onto your hands and your knees. Then extend both your arms and legs and walk your feet to your hands ('downward-facing dog').
5. Place your palms on the floor and come to a standing forward bend (feel free to bend your knees).
6. Start to roll your spine upright by coming up very slowly one vertebra at a time. Don't rush this!
7. Once you're standing completely straight, roll your shoulders up and back and don't feel silly about puffing up your chest a bit. Feel free to roll back down and then upright again several times.
8. From a standing position, slowly breathe in and raise your arms to the sky.



9. As you breathe out, (carefully!) dive forward from the hips and place your palms on the floor or mat again. Breathe in and look up slightly.
10. Breathe out, bend your knees and step your feet back to a plank position so that your chest and legs are parallel to the floor. Your arms are straight.
11. Breathe out, float your body down by bending your arms. Breathe in, extend your arms again, keep your legs straight and open up your chest ('upward facing dog'). Breathe out to 'downward-facing dog'.
12. Breathe in and walk your feet to your hands in a standing forward bend. Breathe out. Roll up to a standing position and repeat at least three times.

BASIC PRE-STUDY/EXAM EXERCISE

BY KEITH KEMPIS, HSC TEACHER & JIVAMUKTI YOGA INSTRUCTOR

No matter how you spin it, the HSC can be pretty stressful. But it can also be a great time to discover the easy ways to gain mental clarity and well being.

Steal quiet moments during the day to simply sit and breathe. Sit with a straight spine and silently breathe in ('let') and breathe out ('go') as many times as you can during the day. This simple exercise can act like emptying stones out of your pocket. With practice you may find yourself breathing in this mindful way quite naturally. No-one ever need know you're actually meditating.

The above routine is a simple way to relax physically and mentally before or after a study period or exam. Remember to take a moment to sit and reflect before and after the routine.



THE FINAL EXAMS

The final HSC examinations can be long and complex papers. Many courses include a number of electives and modules from which different candidates and schools make choices. You need to be aware of the electives and modules you have studied and know what questions apply to you.

You are given a short time (usually about ten minutes) before the exam begins to read the examination paper and to think about your answers. There is no single best way to spend this time - it will depend on the exam and your own methods - but this time is invaluable, so don't waste it.

At the very least, use this time to take some deep breaths, get comfortable at your desk, familiarise yourself with the structure of the paper, and the sections you are required to complete.

WHAT'S THE QUESTION?

Remember, exam questions may vary from those you've used as part of your study. Exam questions are not only designed to reflect the main terms of the syllabus for each subject and elective, but also to test a candidate's ability to perceive and decode the key points in the question itself.

That said, an exam question is not designed to trick or defeat you. If you do not immediately see how the question fits into your course of study, think briefly about the syllabus guidelines and consider what part the question may be testing.

If you are still having trouble deciding what the question is asking, consider all the key words and ask yourself if you understand the meaning of each. You will be familiar with words such as *evaluate*, *explore*, *compare*, *contrast*, but make sure you don't neglect to think of these words in their most basic form.

QUESTIONING THE QUESTION

- 1** **Read** the exam question once and briefly consider the main issues and your immediate response. Do you have an immediate response that involves a basic argument and idea?
- 2** **Re-read** the question and **mark** the key words and ideas - don't do this in your head, use a pen or highlighter.
- 3** **Re-think** your original response against the points you have just highlighted and quickly **draft** some notes.
- 3½** **Take** a breath.



BEFORE THE EXAM

People use the time just before entering an exam in many different ways. You may want to review notes, talk with friends or just spend some time alone.

Here are some tips for pre-exam preparations:

Arrive early to the exam - about 20 to 30 mins if possible. This will give you enough time to settle and familiarise yourself with the environment.

Ensure you have eaten properly and taken adequate water before arriving. Take a light snack with you for before the exam.

Take a short walk - this will get you breathing and your heart beating at an even pace. Oxygen increases your mind's attentiveness.

Prepare and check all your tools (pens, pencils, calculators, etc.) 20 mins before the exam, and then leave them alone.



AFTER THE HSC

Completing the HSC is an achievement for which you should be proud. Not only is it testament to the hard and focused work of your last year of schooling, but also represents the summit of 13 years of learning and development.

It is a time for you to celebrate your intellectual growth and maturity, and look forward to the many opportunities that follow.

Many students will head in one of two directions after completing their HSC: further study, or employment.

UNIVERSITY

Which degree should I choose?

University is about you – choose the course that interests you and which will bring you intellectual fulfilment and personal enjoyment.

Think of which HSC subjects or topics really motivated you. If you really enjoyed Chemistry or Biology, perhaps you should look at further studies in science. If

you enjoyed English and History, perhaps an Arts degree will best suit you.

While larger goals such as your career or future salary can be important in choosing your degree, there's no substitute for the motivation and natural aptitude you will get from doing something you enjoy – and no matter what you do, if you do it well, you will get where you want.

Who should I talk to about which degree to choose?

If possible, the best people to talk to about a degree in which you are interested is a current student. Many universities have forums for prospective students to connect with students, or online testimonials.

Open days are also a great place to meet current students and staff from specific faculties.

If you are seeking advice on which degree may be most suitable for your career aspirations, there are also a number of online resources to assist you – see opposite.

What if I don't get into the degree I want?

It is true not everyone will gain acceptance to the degree of their first choice. This may be disappointing, but this is not the final card in pursuing future studies in your area of choice.

Many areas can be studied through a number of degrees, and it is often possible to articulate from one degree to another after a year of studying.

Remember, degrees usually take three or four years to complete and many students will redefine their direction a number of times.

Mature Age Entry

For those who do not enter university directly after high school, there are a number of pathways to gain entry down the track.

If your ATAR was not sufficient for entry most universities offer a Mature Age Entry Scheme for those over 21 years of age.

TAFE

TAFE (and a number of other private colleges) offer a wide range of vocational qualifications - study focused towards hands-on skills for specific industries.

These courses are structured towards industries that require a high level of specialised technical skills, such as hospitality, property services, community services, light manufacturing, and local government

Many qualifications completed at this level, such as Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas, can also articulate into university study.

EMPLOYMENT

For those who do not wish to continue on to tertiary study, you will most probably be seeking full or part-time employment.

Apprenticeships

You may consider entering employment in a particular trade as an apprentice.

Apprenticeships offer paid work whilst gaining on-the-job experience and skills in a particular trade. In general, apprenticeships do not require any previous qualifications or experience and usually result in a nationally recognised qualification up to an Advanced Diploma.

Once completed this qualification can lead to continued employment, self employment, or further training and education.

USEFUL LINKS

Centre for Continuing Education: cce.sydney.edu.au/courses/hsc

The University of Sydney (Course Search): sydney.edu.au/courses

MyFuture: www.myfuture.edu.au

TAFE NSW: www.tafensw.edu.au/career

Australian Apprenticeships: www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au

University Admissions Centre: www.uac.edu.au



HSC PREPARATION COURSES

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TAKE YOUR HSC TO THE NEXT LEVEL

HSC PREPARATION COURSES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

The Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) at the University of Sydney offers an extensive HSC Preparation program in some of the most popular and competitive subjects and topics. Plus we offer a range of complementary study skills courses for HSC students to help maximise their HSC results. Taught by experienced and practising senior HSC teachers with hands on knowledge of the HSC syllabus, assessment guidelines and examination procedures, these courses are designed to give students the invaluable knowledge and skills necessary to make their HSC studies effective and successful, and boost HSC results.

Content taught is highly relevant and designed to be transferrable to any individual HSC elective or module, as well as being specific to essential syllabus and assessment requirements. Individual courses can be grouped into a progressive three part program scheduled within each holiday period, allowing students to pace themselves throughout the year, prepare for HSC key dates and check in with our experienced teachers along the way.

HSC Preparation courses are available in:

HSC Biology

HSC Business Studies

HSC Chemistry

HSC Economics

HSC English

HSC Legal Studies

HSC Mathematics

HSC Physics

HSC Study Skills

HSC Exam Preparation

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Visit cce.sydney.edu.au/courses/hsc or call us on **02 9036 4789**

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