



Senior School Success

prepared by \Paul Grover
Head Teacher English & History
James Fallon High School

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1 Life in Senior School – tips and traps

1 Study

- be organised
- have a study timetable
- develop plans for study tasks: research, notes, draft, redraft, polish
- study weakest subjects first, favourite subjects last
- work towards a reward for yourself: a weekly or monthly special event

2 Social Life

inside school...

- don't waste 'study' or 'free' periods
- don't get caught up in too many clubs, sports or activities
- work out your main social interest at school, and focus on that

outside school...

- be strict with yourself - make social outings a reward for study
- have one or two social events a week
- watch out you don't have too many sporting commitments
- be careful part-time work doesn't eat up study time

3 Sport

- you need exercise to study well
- build sport and exercise into your study program

- limit yourself to 1 sport if you used to do 2 or 3
- don't do sport and then try to study: you'll be too tired
- study first and then do workouts at 8.00pm to wake your body up
- in senior school sport is useful for study success, use it wisely and well

4 Teachers

- teachers see you as mature seniors aiming for an adult career
- teachers are ready to put in a special effort to help you achieve adult goals
- be dedicated and serious about your senior school subjects - your teachers are!
- there will be give and take - but don't take your teachers for granted
- give your own time for individual advice and discussing assessment activities

5 Part-time jobs

- great to have the money, but be careful about the time
- if work, money and social life are your No 1, then the HSC/VCE can't be No 1 as well
- if your goal is a uni course or apprenticeship, make that your first priority
- use a part-time job as a break from study & a time to socialise

6 Girlfriends/Boyfriends

- it's hard to be involved with someone who doesn't understand your study goals
- your loved one should be part of your reward system - phone after your study sessions, go out together as a major study week reward
- value your friends, and don't be hassled if there isn't one special person
- if you are in a strong relationship, talk about your study needs and career goals

7 Parents

- like teachers, they change in senior school!
- they care about your HSC/VCE progress, so let them know how you're feeling
- they can get over-anxious, so work out your study program and let them know
- let them know when exams and assessment tasks are coming up (in advance!)
- it's a give and take relationship too: so sometimes make an effort, and show you care about them too, eg 'Would you like a hand, mum/dad?'

8 Friends

- friends can help with subject problems or by forming study groups
- watch out if friendships are crowding out study sessions
- use friends to talk over problems: a real friend will give you time and support
- if you notice a friend looking down, give them some time and support too
- as friends, support each other's study programs and social/sport breaks from study

FINAL TIP...

Use the people who really know....student advisers, teachers who know you well, uni students you know well who've been through the HSC/VCE, careers advisers, counsellors: they're ready to give good advice, so ask them and then weigh it up for yourself. Aim for success in your senior school life.

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2 Making Homework Work for You

Do teachers enjoy punishing students by setting hours of torture every night, calling it homework?

Of course not. But if you think of homework as something you have to do for teachers or parents, a chore to get out of the way, then it will always feel like torture.

Try thinking of homework as a job you're doing for yourself - it's training you for the career you really would like in the future. It's your education, after all!

Homework is easier and more enjoyable if you know how to study well. No one is born knowing how to fix a car or design a house, but almost everyone can learn the skills required to do them. If you learn and practise good study skills, you'll be streets ahead when you begin the HSC or VCE in Years 11 and 12.

Here are some homework and study hints - why not try them for yourself? You may even begin to feel good about study as you become better at it!

- Δ Be comfortable when you study. But remember, a lounge or a bed are great for reading a novel, but the close reading of a textbook means you need a desk and chair.
- Δ A special place to study and do homework starts a good habit. When you sit there you'll be signalling to your brain that you're ready to study.
- Δ Your desk should be away from the TV and other distractions. You might say to yourself you can study while the TV or music is on, but if you just try concentrating in a quiet place without other noises, you'll see the difference. Your brain can seriously concentrate on just one task at a time.
- Δ Get your desk organised . Before you start make sure you've got all the gear you need: paper, pens, books and anything else for the study time. Be in control of your study space, so get rid of clutter.
- Δ Make sure the light is good . Studying in a dark corner leads to eye strain and then you tire more quickly. Put your desk light on the side which doesn't cast a shadow over your work when you write.
- Δ Sit at your desk. Actually sitting down and getting stuck into homework is hard - most people find getting started the hardest part of any difficult job. The best way to begin is to sit at your study desk, no matter how many other things suddenly look more interesting.

That's half the battle. Then make a deal with yourself - say, "I'll work on this bit for 5 minutes, then if I feel OK I'll do something else." You'll be surprised once you've started that it feels OK to keep going after the 5 minutes is up. You can then reward yourself later.

- Δ Make lists. Getting started can sometimes be hard because you don't know where to begin. Sit down at your desk and make a list of what you have to do. Break big jobs down into small steps and write each one down.

This clears your mind - you feel more relaxed and in control. Then when you finish a job cross it off, even just one small step – you've accomplished something, and you'll have energy and confidence for the next bit.

- Δ Study regularly. It's much better to study for an hour or two each night than try and put in a 6 hour stretch once a week. Studies show you learn more in bite-size chunks than by cramming too much in at once. Your brain needs time to absorb new information.

- Δ Be nice to yourself. Try and do homework early in the evening if you can. You will be fresher, and you can reward yourself. Tell yourself, "If I really concentrate and finish this work by 7.30 then I'll be able to watch some TV or have a go on the computer."

If you watch TV before you start homework, your conscience will nag at you, and when you start you'll feel tired and grumpy...and take twice as long to do the job. So be nice to yourself and try the reward system.

- Δ Stay healthy. Get plenty of sleep, eat nutritious food, and exercise regularly. Sound familiar? Well, now it really counts in your favour. You will concentrate better and feel more alert, and finish your work more quickly.

- Δ Take a break. Don't grind yourself down each time you study. After an hour, take a short break - walk outside in the yard, go round the block, play with the dog for 10 minutes - this makes your blood circulate faster, and pumps more oxygen to your brain. Study is the time you really need it!

- Δ Make notes. Reading a textbook is a different sort of reading to reading a comic or a novel. You're reading for information, not entertainment. Your brain needs to go into memory mode - so make notes on what you see is important.

This is really valuable because you are sorting out what is useful information, and the process of making notes helps you to remember what you study. Plus, you've got useful summary notes for revision just before exams or tests.

Make your homework work for you, and for your future.

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3 Eight Tips for a Better Memory – for study and exams

Study Strategies to make exams easier and study sessions better...

- 1 **Spread the memorising over a number of study sessions** - don't cram. Successful students say they worked best by preparing well in advance - staying fresh for each study session, and not wearing themselves down and feeling more stressed with one long cramming session.
- 2 **Recite out loud what you are learning** - research studies show that answering questions aloud improves recall by about 80%. So you need to study away from other people, away from TV, music and other noise - the sound of your own voice will help you learn faster and better - you read the work, see the work and hear the work and run your finger along the line - 4 senses at work - this is active learning.
- 3 **Expect to remember** - be positive and confident that you are going to learn this work. This way you'll make the most from each study session - your study is working for you, not you HAVING to study because parents, guilt, teachers etc are making you.
- 4 **Organise the material so it can be memorised in a pattern** - visual, clear layout, regular system of presentation. This way you are in control, and reshaping the work for yourself - getting control of it gets it into your own memory faster and better.
- 5 **Test yourself, and then retest, regularly** - when researchers studied the way professionals thought while they worked, they discovered 'internal chatter' going on, such as: "Now, what is the key point about this?", " OK, I'll check that again to make sure.", " What is this saying?", "So, there are 3 things to remember.". Key professionals working with specific knowledge areas - like lawyers, doctors, teachers, engineers etc were careful to reread phrases and double check their work for accuracy. It's important to them....and it is important to you.
- 6 **Overlearn** - this means recheck even when you can recite and write out the complete list of key points, or work a maths or physics question right out. Do another one, try it again - research shows that during an exam stress levels rise and overlearning helps you recall under pressure. This repeated learning is just the same way we learnt as children - wanting to do the same thing over and over again - it becomes solid knowledge by strong repetition.
- 7 **Use rhymes, mental pictures, silly sentences and catchwords** to help you remember key terms, formulae, facts and lists. Our brain works using patterns - so a pattern of remembering is always better than just rote-learning. This is why we remember nursery rhymes and childhood places so well – visual and patterned knowledge sticks in the memory longest of all.
- 8 **Do some memory work before you go to sleep** - research shows the brain stays active during sleep, and the last remembered items will be further processed, links made and strong memory connections created. It's just the same with the last song you hear on the radio - you can't get it out of your head. In the same way, work learnt before sleep works its way into your memory while you sleep.

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4 Studying – tips for success

A

Which sounds like you?

Study Success comments:

- “I can concentrate when I need to.”
- “I’ve got a career direction and I want to get there.”
- “I can hang in until the work is done.”
- “My time management is getting better.”
- “I can picture myself getting good results.”
- “I’ve got a study plan and I want to stick to it.”

Study Dropout comments:

- “I studied for the exam, but still did hopelessly. I give up.”
- “I don’t need help from my teachers.”
- “My mind wanders, I just can’t seem to concentrate.”
- “I hate school. I don’t know why I’m here anyway.”
- “I read a textbook but I don’t remember what I’ve read.”
- “I can’t get down to study.”

B

Time Control

Study success will mean saying ‘No’ to the voice in your head saying ‘Why bother!’ or ‘Let’s party’ or ‘I’ll do it later’. School doesn’t have to be boring and a real grind, but you have to learn to be in control of your time to make a success of study and social life.

Ask these questions about your own time control now...

- 1 Do I have a monthly or weekly calendar of major events? -
assessment tasks, deadlines, important exams or tests, special events and commitments
- 2 Do I have a weekly study plan? -
including study sessions, work shifts, social activities, sport/exercise, free time
- 3 Do I plan for study ‘breaks’? -
study for 1 hour then build in a break for 10 minutes: get a drink, talk to family, walk outside,
say g’day to the pets
- 4 Do I use my travel time well? -
if you travel on a bus then read your novels, read over summary notes from study sessions,
preview a chapter in your textbook, look over test notes

- 5 Do I make lists? -
make a list of what you have to do each night & each week - set your priority items, tick off what you've achieved, carry forward items you need to. You can be organised.
- 6 Do I reward myself for meeting goals? -
be serious about this: make the aim a movie on TV, going out with friends one night, getting a drink from the fridge, having a favourite biscuit/lolly - find out what motivates you and use it to motivate you! Big rewards for a week of study success, small rewards for each study session.

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5 Good Notemaking and Good Listening

1 Get Organised

- Decide on a notepad system - loose-leaf, spiral-bound or booklet format and then stick to it.
- Have manilla folders for each major topic in your subjects filed at home - and file your notes, handouts and study/revision notes as you finish a topic.
- Put the date and page number on each page for easy filing and location- and the topic heading.
- Hint: is white paper easy on your eyes? You might consider a pastel or softer coloured paper since you will be spending many hours looking at this paper day and night.

2 Set Up for Success

- Create a very wide margin for yourself - this allows you to add new points, note key questions, highlight major learning points and add study notes later.
- Use this wide margin in a study session to note key memory words - key words or terms which cue your mind to recall the main points of the topic.
- Leave a space at the bottom of this wide margin - this is where you create your own summary of the main ideas.
- You will make notes from class lectures, discussion lessons, private study and revision, video material, guest speakers and textbook reading - all valuable for your study success.

3 Making Notes

- You MAKE notes, you don't TAKE notes - create a system to help you learn best.
- You should create a clear, neat layout system for major headings, subheadings and points - so everything can be easily followed - even months later when you are revising for an exam. eg

1 _____

a _____

i _____

ii _____

b _____

c _____

2 _____

- Always leave plenty of room so you can add new points. Leaving plenty of space also makes notes easier to study.
- Draw arrows to show connections between key ideas.
- Use symbols, diagrams and drawings to simplify ideas and show key points - then you can visualise the key points for recall in an exam. eg a tree shape with labels to show the way plant biology works; a highrise building shape with labels to show a company structure hierarchy; a clock shape for a series of points that must be learnt in sequence.
- Keep your handwriting clear and easy to read - you want to be able to easily read your notes many months later, and during intensive study sessions.

4 Tips for Good Notemaking

- Whenever you are in doubt, write it down - you can ask questions later.
- In discussion lessons - jot down notes on key points, especially conclusions of the group.
- For new terms/words - spell them as they sound - check right spelling later.
- Use abbreviations and shortcut methods for words, and shorten sentences - this way you can listen more and keep up with class discussion. eg
govt = government; ie = that is; w/o = without; sig = significant; > = led to;
imp = important; bec = because; vs = versus; unnec = unnecessary; @ = at;
- Invent your own abbreviations - but be consistent so you remember what they mean.
- Omit vowels in commonly used words in your subjects - eg bkgd = background; mn = main

5 Good Notes Needs Active Listening

- Your teacher, guest speaker, class presenter or video narrator will give voice or body signals to cue key points:
 - listen for increases in volume or dramatic pauses
 - repeating a point is a cue to its importance
 - gestures can demonstrate a key point or conclusion.
- Think, reflect and ask questions - this keeps you actively involved and actively listening.

6 Make your Notes Active

- Show your teacher your notes from one study session or class discussion - get feedback on how complete they are for revision.
- Being active doesn't mean being a 'teacher's pet' - you are working for your own success and your teacher is an expert coach: let the coach work for you.
- Review your notes each week - use a highlighter for key points to learn. Research shows that notes revised within 24 hours have the strongest recall.

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6 Reading for Study = Rich Reading

Here are some tips and hints to show you how to get much more from a textbook or the notes you are studying, and not just sit there...

- 1 Use a pen to underline or mark key points - a pencil fades too quickly.
- 2 Use a highlighter to emphasise VIP information - you can use different colours in a system to show main points and subpoints.
- 3 Read a section or paragraph and then immediately go back and underline/highlight only the main points. This makes the learning active.
- 4 Use numbers in the margin for lists, sequences of events or items presented in order.
- 5 Put vertical lines in the margin to emphasise main points which last several lines.
- 6 Use asterisks (*) for main points and to link a point in the text to your margin note.
- 7 Put recall terms or phrases in the margin - these will jog you to recall the main points and important details - highlight or underline them for importance.
- 8 Underline all definitions - write 'def' in the margin. For examples or worked solutions put brackets around them - if you highlight or underline them you will have too much to review.
- 9 You might circle important concepts, ideas or subheadings, or use a box around key terms. This gives a visual prompt - like a headline or a title.
- 10 React to what you read - agree, disagree, question - stay involved with the information...then you are actively reading.

Like any skill - in a sport, in a hobby or in work - practice is the best way to learn. You can't drive a car by just listening to a lecture or watching a video of someone driving. Active Reading means you need to keep doing it to become better at it.

The payoff is you learn more, you learn faster, and you discover your study time goes quickly - and best of all, with better results for you.

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7 Exam Success

Here are some hints on preparing for the exams you will face in the future:

HEADING FOR THE EXAMS...

Stay positive - the 3 Rs

- remind yourself of the good feelings success brings.
- recall past success events you've experienced.
- refresh yourself with positive rewards for effective study sessions.

Keep fit and healthy

- take regular recreation breaks.
- for top performance be regular in your eating, sleeping and exercise patterns.

Get ready to go!

- as exams come closer, take time off from other activities if you need to.
- have a work plan which also allows you to be flexible - refresh best subjects, work harder on weaker ones.
- have short study sessions and a definite study plan - revise all subject topics separately, then again in the exam week.

Know your enemy!

- find out what exactly will be covered in the exam.
- list the things you must know and then rank order them in importance.
- know what types of questions you will face - essay, short-answer, multiple-choice, and how to tackle each type.
- know the time for each exam, how many questions, how the marks are allocated.
- get copies of past exams, and use them for practice. Your teacher will mark practice answers.
- form a study group of positive students and test each other.
- be sure what equipment you need for the exam - calculators, special pencils, etc.

IN THE EXAM ROOM

Plan your strategy

- use reading time to decide which questions, what types of questions, what is being asked, what you have to do over the whole paper.
- work out how much weighting different questions have - and so, which ones are more important.
- estimate the time you need to spend on each part. Keep your watch on your exam desk.
- allow time for proofreading your answers at the end.
- check your time after each part of the paper is finished.

Before you start

- breathe slowly - 3 deep breaths.
- be determined, be serious and be committed - then you can succeed.
- think of finishing and feeling satisfied - and then go for your best.

Handling the questions

- begin with questions you know best - this boosts your confidence.
- set answers out clearly - write legibly.
- for multiple choice, don't spend too long on one question - eliminate obviously wrong choices first.
- be careful to spell names, places and special terms accurately.
- allow time to read over your answers to check for fluency and completeness.

BE CONFIDENT – PLAN FOR SUCCESS IN EXAMS ... AND THEN IT WILL HAPPEN!

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