

# MICHELLE CASTRO

## *My Story*



It has now been a year since I have completed the HSC. Believe it or not, Year 12 was one of my favourite years in high school because it was the year I was truly able to practise how to deal with stress, learn how to manage my time effectively, and consolidate my learning methods.

Are there any Hornsby girls here? Well, I attended Hornsby Girls' and completed 12 units. I took Advanced English and Extension, Modern History, Economics, Music 2 and Extension, and 2U Maths, which gave me an ATAR of 98. Every time I told people that I actually really enjoyed all my subjects, they seemed shocked. This should not be a shock. Make sure you enjoy the subjects you've chosen because it makes studying *so* much easier and *so* much more interesting – I can't stress this enough.

Starting Year 12 may seem like a bit of a jump and a shock because everything counts towards your final HSC mark all of a sudden. However, with diligence, focus, determination and perseverance, you will achieve your goals. *You* must take responsibility for your own learning, be self-motivated and proactive. Easier said than done. But, the fact that you are all here today shows me that you want to do well and are committed to doing so. *That* is the first step to doing well in the HSC. Remember, the HSC is a game. Know the game and know the tactics.

Throughout Year 12, I paid close attention in class and listened very carefully, ensuring that I understood everything that the teacher was explaining. Whenever something was unclear, I didn't hesitate to ask the teacher to explain it to me again. This is particularly important in subjects like Maths and Economics. I didn't want to be struggling to understand a concept right before an exam. Like I said before, it is crucial to take responsibility for your own learning. Never assume that your teacher doesn't have time to answer your question and don't ever think that a question you're asking is dumb. I remember seeing a poster on the walls of our maths room that said the only dumb thing to do was to *not* ask questions.

I was also quite consistent and aimed to get at least some study in every single day, whether it was completing an assignment, doing the set homework and more, revising the day's content, reading ahead or revising for an exam. Another thing, it is quite tempting to slack off during the holidays, but you should be doing at least a little bit of revision then just to refresh your memory and to get ahead. If you're not getting ahead, then essentially, you're behind because others are getting ahead.

The amount of hours I spent studying gradually increased, the closer it got to Trials and the HSC. Now, this might seem like the logical thing to do, but there are actually many students who burn out by Trials and don't do as well as they could have done if they had paced themselves more.

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In Year 12, I was a Prefect, still singing in a choir and playing piano (which didn't feel like it was just for HSC). The HSC is not about studying 24/7 because if you do that, you *will* burn out. I kept myself quite occupied throughout the year and tried not to give myself any time or an opportunity to procrastinate. It is more difficult to procrastinate if you're doing extra-curricular activities and you *need* to fit everything into your schedule. Also, I made sure I still had a social life and made the most of recess and lunch to talk to friends about things other than the HSC. Clearing your head will help you to concentrate better when you actually do study.

Another tactic of mine was to use all the resources that I could get. This included school teachers, accessing HSC past papers and textbooks, school trial past papers and practice essays from friends who did well in the subject. One thing that really helped me was the TSFX lectures, which I attended for Economics, because the presenters are actually HSC markers who know and tell you exactly what the markers are looking for in the HSC responses. They inform you of strategies and expose you to a variety of questions to help you do the best you can in Trials and the HSC so I would suggest attending these lectures. Also, instead of spending hours and hours on writing notes, TSFX provides you with a concise but thorough set of notes. I found that this saved a lot of my time and I used that extra time to do past papers.

Some advice...

Know how you personally study. Everyone does this differently, so knowing how you learn and study most efficiently, will already put you ahead of the crowd.

Get enough sleep before exams. It is scientifically proven that it actually helps you to consolidate the things that you have learnt. You should not be trying to understand or learn the content the night before an exam anyway.

Do not spend heaps and heaps of time on notes – do past papers as soon as you can. After doing past papers, mark it yourself and go through your mistakes. There is no point doing past papers if you do not see what you get right and wrong. If there are any errors that you don't understand, ask your teacher. Also, if it's an essay, get feedback on it.

Explaining concepts to friends or helping them with answering some questions is also useful. It's great revision for yourself.

Reread English texts (and just any humanities subject) as many times as you can so that everything in it becomes 'common knowledge' and you know it back to front.

Prioritise – you should be spending more of your time on your weaker subjects or on topics you are not as confident with. Remember, it's not just about drilling. You need to study smart and strategically.

Don't get discouraged by marks you're not happy with. Consider it a small price that you pay for a lesson you learn. The earlier on you make the mistake, the better. Take the criticism on board and improve next time.

Obviously this is a given but...don't procrastinate. If you're bored of doing one subject, do another subject. That way, you're still being productive.

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A few things I would've done if I repeated my HSC would've probably been to get more sleep in general, exercise more so that I'd feel more energised and be able to focus better on a constant basis, and cut off distractions whilst studying.

All the best for the upcoming year and remember to enjoy Year 12! It's all in your hands. At the end of the day, it's not just about a number. Edmund Hillary, the first man to climb Mount Everest once said, "I think that all mountaineers do get a great deal of satisfaction out of overcoming some challenge which they think is very difficult for them..." Don't view the HSC as a burden but rather, as an opportunity to learn, challenge yourself, and showcase what you're capable of. Reach that peak of the mountain.

Michelle