

CONGRATULATIONS! You made it!



Your final year of high school has begun.

At the other end, your world awaits.

But what will happen in between?

Everyone tells you that it is an important year, that it will be a stressful time and that you should make the most of your opportunities in this last year.

They say you should work hard, stay focussed and yet keep balance in your life.

And the clock has already started ticking!

There is no doubt that Year 12 requires hard work, but that is not the same as stress. You can work hard and still have some balance in your life.

Working harder should involve working smarter.

So how do you have a successful, productive and balanced year, with minimal stress?

Five words - [Planning](#), [Structure](#), [Balance](#), [Positivity](#), [Support](#)

If you want to know more, read on. You will learn about tips that I have been sharing, successfully, with senior students for many years.

PLANNING

When ordering your stationary, get an extra clear plastic sleeve folder that you will use as a **planning folder**. Into this you will put a copy of all current assignments, your **scaffolded action plan** for each task and your **weekly work plan**. You will keep this with you at all times!

When you receive a new assignment or revision task, spend 10 minutes **scaffolding** that task. This means breaking it down into small, achievable steps and working out a logical order for completing them.

Once you have decided on the order, work backwards from the due date, and set your own **mini-deadlines** for each step. This will be your **action plan**. Keep it in your **planning folder**.

Some tips when setting **mini deadlines**:

- Be realistic about the time required
- Remember to include drafting in your time line
- Aim to finish a week earlier to allow space for unforeseen problems
- Start as soon as you get the assessment task!!

At the start of each week, make your weekly **work plan**. Look through your **action plans** and make a list of the smaller tasks that you need to complete that week. Prioritise them and then allocate a time in your **schedule** for each one.

For example: History research question - Monday evening

Psychology test preparation - Tuesday in study

Read Chapter 4 of the English novel - Tuesday evening

Draw next two sketches for Art and Design - Wednesday in the lesson



STRUCTURE

Develop a **study schedule** and stick to it. Know your body clock and how you work best. Know your commitments and your distractions. Be honest with yourself.

- Which part of the day are you most efficient?
- Do you work better in big chunks or do you need to build in rest breaks?
- What are your other commitments during the week?
- When is the most useful time to chill out?

Start with allocating two hours per day and five hours over the weekend. If you have time to spare by Sunday, then put your feet up. If you find that you need more time, it is much easier to add it to an existing structure.

However, you will be surprised by how quickly you complete your work, if you are working smarter.

Develop **routines** - for the start of the day, the start of lesson, at the end of a lesson, at the end of the school day, to start homework and when packing up for the night. It only takes a minute.

- Have a checklist
- Check it before you move on
- Store things in the same place each time
- Use 'post-it' notes as reminders, bookmarks, or for recording ideas or questions

Create a **productive work environment** and keep it tidy. The key to working smarter is to be able to put your hands on something quickly when you need it.

Clear the desk (and your school locker and your bedroom). Allocate **designated spaces** for filing and storing materials and put things back in their right space!

Most importantly, dedicate a space where you leave the things you need for the next day. That includes school notices, sports uniform and finished assignments. Check that space before you leave the house each day!



BALANCE



All of us need to maintain life balance if we are to be happy, healthy and achieve our goals. Year 12 students are no different, so consider incorporating some of the following into your week.

Build **regular exercise** into your day - allocate at least 20 minutes each day into your **study schedule**. Ideally you should be aiming to do 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week.

Make time each day for simple **relaxation**, to give your brain and your body a rest and recovery time. Allocate 30 minutes per day for just chilling out, preferably just before going to sleep. This is time out alone (not chatting to friends!) and can include activities such as:

- meditation ▪ listening to music ▪ having a long soak in the bath ▪ light reading ▪ journaling ▪ doodling ▪ yoga

Everyone has their own thing - find yours.

It is always important to spend **time with friends**. But build that into your **schedule** in sensible and practical amounts and ask your friends to respect your study commitments.

When scheduling your social life, avoid extreme late-night activity. One of the most important things for maintaining balance is to get enough **sleep**! You need at least 7 - 8 hours sleep each night to function effectively. Having all-nighters or very late nights are not healthy. Otherwise you will develop 'sleep debt', which is not made up by simply sleeping 14 hours another day.

Finally, you also need a **balanced diet**. Eat healthy food, regularly, in sufficient amounts. What is healthy food?

- If you buy it fresh, as it came from the farmer, then it is definitely healthy. But you don't have to go all Paleo!
- Avoid excess fat and sugar, seek out wholegrain foods, eat a range of fruit, nuts and vegetables and include plenty of good protein.
- If it is fast food, then it is not usually very healthy.
- Treat yourself occasionally. Life isn't supposed to be boring!

IMPORTANT: This is not a good year to start an extreme diet. (Actually, extreme diets are not a good idea anytime!)

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

The key to working smarter is to have a positive and realistic attitude. Staying positive means that we are not distracted, discouraged and derailed by negativity.

When working towards our goals, everyone makes mistakes, struggles to understand at times and takes a while to master new skills. It is unrealistic to believe otherwise, as these are the processes of learning.

Focussing on the negatives of your experiences saps your confidence, makes you hesitant, narrows your creativity and problem-solving ability and can become addictive.

Listen to what conversations you have with yourself in your head. Catch the negative thoughts and *reframe* them.



Turn “This is hopeless. I can’t do this” into “I have made a start, but I have not yet nailed it”

Change “I only got a C” into “I know what I need to do to pass, now I can work on improving those skills”

Remind yourself of what you have already achieved. You made it to Year 12, didn’t you?

By *scaffolding* your tasks, you can focus on what you have accomplished already, rather than feel negative about what still needs to be completed.

Learn from your mistakes. Don’t keep doing the same thing over and over. Try a different approach, think creatively or ask someone from your *support* network for help.

Don’t spend too much time just staring at a problem or a blank page. Take a *mini-break* and do something from your *relaxation* list. Or spend a little time working on something that you feel more confident about, to restore your energy and momentum. Before you return to the original task, ask for ideas or direction from one of your *support* team.

Actively avoid all of those “*Year 12 is too hard/ it’s not fair*” conversations that gain momentum in the common room or online. A little debriefing and complaining with your peer group is normal, but not usually productive. Those conversations can very quickly normalise negative thinking. Going for a walk, recounting the comedy you watched last night or planning your weekend, are much healthier options.

SUPPORT

Anyone who has ever accomplished a big personal goal, will tell you that it is not possible without an effective **support** team. So, who should you enlist to be on your team?

Start with your **teachers**:

- Ask your teacher to repeat instructions if you are not clear. Never leave the classroom if you are not sure about something.
- Ask them for ideas or direction when you are stuck. Sometimes a brief email will get you back on task.
- Also ask them to check whether you are on the right track before proceeding too far, especially with major investigations. Don't wait until final drafting time to get reassurance.
- Always provide a draft copy when your teacher requests it. We all make mistakes - that is what drafting is for!

Include your **parents**:

- Keep your parents informed. Show them your **schedule** and your assignment **action plans**. (Trust me, they will be impressed.) Ask them to gently remind you when you should be working and to encourage you to relax when that is scheduled too.
- Ask them to read drafts if they feel confident.
- Brainstorm ideas with them. Even if they have little to contribute, talking out loud will enhance your creativity.

Find a **working buddy**:



- Make sure you have one for each subject.
- This is not necessarily your best mate, but someone you can productively discuss ideas with and problem solve together
- Mutual support is a great confidence builder.
- However, select someone who will challenge you and not just do it for you. That is not learning.

Select a **confidante**

- Find someone you can debrief with honestly, to share your concerns and to challenge any negative thinking.
- Again, this is not necessarily your best friend. It could be a parent, an older sibling or cousin, a coach, an aunt or uncle, your favourite teacher, a neighbour or the school counsellor.
- This person is there for your mental well-being, not for help with homework. Share your feelings with them, not your algebra problem!

So now it is up to you.

Make a checklist of those things you need to bring into your Year 12 experience. Start with all the words in bold.

Next step - start making the changes!

I cannot guarantee that you will get a perfect score if you take up these strategies.

However, I can promise that you will finish the year feeling more positive, with a greater sense of achievement and will look back on the year as a good one.

You will have also developed a set of skills that will carry you productively into your future.

I hope it is a great future.

Good luck with this next step.



© The Learning Circle 2018

This booklet is for student use only and cannot be reproduced without permission from the author.