

Hello everyone!

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that we are gathering on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation today. I have an astronomy professor who shares a fun fact about Kulin seasons before every lecture and I love it, so I thought I'd share one with you today. From tomorrow 'til the end of June, we're going to be in the Waring season, which is named after the word for wombat. During this time, wombats emerge to bask and graze in the sunshine.

Now that we all have that mental image, I should mention that I'm supposed to be talking about my VCE experience at Koonung – but I wanted to start with something a lot cuter than that. You see, I wasn't sure how to go about writing this, because I feel like inviting the dux of the school back to give a speech carries an expectation that I can reveal some sort of secret about “doing well” in school. Unfortunately for me and my speech writing, that's not possible...

Literally none of what you need to do for academic success is kept a secret. I can testify that your teachers here and the surrounding community do a good job of telling you. Deep down, if you think about it, you probably already know the expectations and what it is you *should* do, it is just a question of not ignoring the nagging voice in your head. Trust me. You will have a much better time if you respect that voice instead of wasting so much time and effort suppressing it.

So there, I can reveal no secrets and no miracle overnight tricks. As most of you in year 11 and 12 already would know, wombats will always be infinitely cuter than a VCE experience. VCE is hard. Some of it sucks. There's no way around it, but there are always things that can help...

If we abandon the idea that the nagging voice is our enemy, that we happen to be missing out on some magical secret that would give us perfect marks- If we stop thinking that all our time spent here is nothing but burdens and harsh numbers, it doesn't seem so bad at all.

For me, it was important to let go of the idea that everything we do here is structured and obligatory. Instead, I found something that I wanted to do for the sake of *doing* (for me this was literature), and everything only got better from there.

There will, of course, be times when you more or less have to play the game. Even this, though, doesn't have to be horrible. For example, I disliked maths a lot of the time. But, I knew that I wanted to keep my options open and that eventually maths methods was something I would have liked to have on my ATAR. So I committed (perhaps out of spite) early on, I studied what I had to, and ended up accelerating methods and doing a whole year less of it than if I had surrendered to my contempt. A lot of the time what got me through my science subjects was the fact that I could make my notes as colourful, beautiful, and creative as I wanted. I learnt French through the framework of my biggest passion – reading.

By reminding myself that I was privileged enough to be learning, and by shaping things I didn't particularly want to do through something I loved, I can honestly say that I made the most of the infamous 'VCE experience'. I hope you can, too.

Thank you for listening to me 😊