

Time management, study plans, and exams

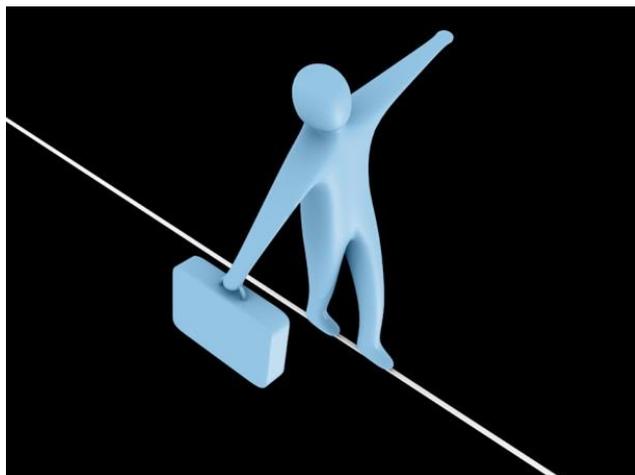
The best strategy for **avoiding stress and anxiety about homework, assignments and exams** is an **effective and consistent study plan teamed with good time management**.

Both begin at the start of the year, not two weeks from the exams.

Planning time

Begin by brainstorming, mind-mapping or just **make a list of everything you do**, including:

- chores (contributing to the house you live in)
- sport or other exercise
- music or other hobbies, pastimes or passions
- socialising, family and friends (parties, outings, dates; online and screen time)
- work, i.e. part-time job
- school and travel to and from school
- tutoring
- homework and study.



The evidence is in: good health and **good mental health can increase academic performance by up to 11 per cent**.

Balance is the key; work-life balance, not walking-the-VCE-tightrope balance.

In the above list tutoring and part-time work are optional, but every other dot point is an essential element of a healthy work-life balance.

Do some simple arithmetic. From the 168 hours that make up a week, start by subtracting those spent sleeping. The research suggests **adolescents need eight to ten hours sleep a night**, but few VCE students sleep that much. Six hours should be is an absolute minimum. *[See Wellbeing Notes 6—Sleep]*

NOSSAL WELLBEING NOTES

Now **add in a regular homework and study time**. Make allowances for sports practice or a favourite TV program. (Balance, remember.) Facebook time? Factor it in, but set limits.

A study timetable has to be achievable: it's about relieving, not creating, stress. Now the important thing is to stick to it!

Planning study

A timetable that includes sleep, meals, work, exercise, friends, family and study is a base grid. The job now is to fit a study plan into the study part of the timetable.

Both the timetable and study plan should be regular but not rigid and balance school and study with living a 'normal' life.

A successful study plan needs to get its priorities right. Ask these questions.

- Which subjects need more or most of my time?
- Do I concentrate on a couple of subjects per night, every subject every night, or something in between?
- How much revision time do I include daily or weekly?
- Will I include study time with a partner?

Be creative about study

Study doesn't have to be boring.

- **Some people work well with a study partner**—someone to bounce ideas and questions off, make mind maps, do old exams, quiz each other, keep each other on track.
- **Build variety into study:** combine it with a picnic on a nice day; do it at the local library one day a week; coach a weaker friend in your best subject.
- **Build revision time into the study plan from week one.** Even ten minutes on a topic worked on weeks ago can be refreshing and builds confidence.
- **Homework and study don't need long uninterrupted slabs of time.** Use ten, 15 and 30 minute opportunities to study while on the train, waiting in the car, even during the TV ads. Large assignments can be done in 30-minute chunks.
- While regularity is encouraged, **be flexible and forgiving about study.** Unexpected events happen, things (and you) stuff up. Don't stress: return to your plan next day.
- **Check out the section on Procrastination** to see if any strategies there make sense and might work for you. Use them.



Ask for help from your teachers if you are unsure of anything about your study.

Online studying and learning resources

These university websites have good resources on learning skills, studying and writing exams. We're not going to repeat a million study tips here. Go online.

http://services.unimelb.edu.au/academicskills_old/study

www.monash.edu.au/lis/lionline/study/index.xml

www.lc.unsw.edu.au/olib.html#2

www.counselling.cam.ac.uk/selfhelp/leaflets/exams

The Cambridge University site is particularly good, especially on preparing for exams.

Exam stress

The whole business of study, revision and exams is sometimes all just a bit much. It's important to **have a friend you can blow off steam and debrief with**, a safety valve.

You also need a trusted person, probably an adult, who can let you know if you seem overly anxious in general or about a particular problem.

It goes without saying that **good health, nutrition and exercise, and quality sleep increase your ability to cope** with stress. Practising effective relaxation gives you a head start in stress prevention, concentration and mental capability.

Exam week

Having been diligent in class, done the homework, assignments and revision, you feel only mildly apprehensive about exams. Calm down.

- Check with your teacher what the exam will cover
- Practice on past exams and exam material
- Use flash cards with key points written on them
- Clear your personal timetable of everything non-crucial for exam progress
- If you work part-time, schedule time off to study in the week before; give the management heaps of notice
- Put social activities on hold for a couple of weeks: knock yourself out after the exams
- Explain to people at home that you're serious about your revision and place a sign on your study room door advising them that you are studying



Exam days

- Don't stay up too late trying to cram everything in
- Pack your bag before going to bed and add some spare pens
- Allow an hour's wind-down time after studying before going to bed
- Use the tips in the Sleep section
- Get a good night's sleep and wake up at the normal time
- Have a good breakfast; don't skip it because you're not hungry or feel nervous
- Try some of the 'brain food' ideas in the Nutrition section
- Get to school with plenty of time to spare, but not too early
- If nervous, don't hang with a crowd of people who might increase your anxiety
- Do breathing exercises to stay calm

The exam

- Enter the exam room with energy (don't slouch), determined to give it your best
- Visualise things going well: you've worked hard, you know you're capable
- Regard the exam not as a test, but an opportunity to show what you know
- Organise your equipment on the desk, water bottle full, no label
- Sit quietly and breath deep and slow
- Listen to all instructions carefully, read through the whole of the exam
- Make sure you understand the questions
- If allowed, highlight or underline key points or words in the questions: *compare and contrast*, *discuss*, *demonstrate*, etc; you don't want to do a brilliant essay only to discover that you *discussed* the topic instead of *analysing* it
- Work out how much time to spend on each section, how many marks each is worth
- Decide which questions/sections to do first (as a rule, do the easy ones first)
- Keep an eye on the time
- Jot down key points, facts and ideas as they come to mind
- If writing an essay, remember that it doesn't need to be as polished as one written at home in a week
- If you have a memory block, don't panic; breathe deep, engage the brain on the next task, and come back later
- If you run out of time to finish, put the information in point form, show the examiner you know the material



NOSSAL WELLBEING NOTES

After the exam

- Don't leave the exam early
- Go over your answers and add any point you missed; it might just get you an extra mark (and who knows what one extra mark might mean?)
- Don't stress if everyone seems to be finishing and you're not
- Check that you answered every question and didn't miss one
- Don't do an 'after-exam post-mortem' by yourself or with others; it causes confusion, convinces you you got something wrong, stresses you for the next exam
- Treat yourself (something small till after all exams are done)

"The difference between try and triumph is a little 'umph'."

Marvin Phillips

The final word on exams

