

BEING YOUR BEST

Edition II

By Zan Fairweather

OP1 School Dux

For tutoring in the Brisbane area, contact northbnetutors@gmail.com



The comprehensive guide for
Queensland senior students —
achieve your **best** OP!

Being Your Best – Edition II

Zan Fairweather

Published by Zan Fairweather

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Using This Handbook

Part	Chapter	Best Time to Read	Done
<u>1 – Preparation</u>	<u>1 – Subject Selection</u>	Before the year starts	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>1 – Preparation</u>	<u>2 – Goal Setting and Motivation</u>	Before the year starts	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>1 – Preparation</u>	<u>3 – Health</u>	Before the year starts	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>1 – Preparation</u>	<u>4 – Timetabling</u>	Before the year starts	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>1 – Preparation</u>	<u>5 – Knowing Your Environment</u>	Before the year starts	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>1 – Preparation</u>	<u>6 – Friends & Family</u>	Before the year starts	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>2 – Study</u>	<u>7 – Note-Taking</u>	Early term	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>2 – Study</u>	<u>8 – Class</u>	Early term	<input type="checkbox"/>

<u>2 – Study</u>	<u>9 – Study Environment</u>	Early term	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>2 – Study</u>	<u>10 – Exam Preparation Methods</u>	Late term	<input type="checkbox"/>
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<u>3 - Assignments</u>	<u>12 – Understanding Criteria</u>	Mid term	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>3 - Assignments</u>	<u>13 – Planning & Drafting</u>	Mid term	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>3 - Assignments</u>	<u>14 – Research & Referencing</u>	Mid term	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>3 - Assignments</u>	<u>15 – Oral Presentations</u>	Mid term	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>4 - Getting Ready for University</u>	<u>16 – QTAC Applications</u>	Before the year starts	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>4 - Getting Ready for University</u>	<u>17 – Interstate & Overseas Universities</u>	Before the year starts	<input type="checkbox"/>

<u>4 - Getting Ready for University</u>	<u>18 – Scholarships and Co-Curriculars</u>	Before the year starts	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>4 - Getting Ready for University</u>	<u>19 – Job Applications</u>	Whenever applicable	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part 1 - Preparation

Chapter 1 - Subject Selection

There are **three criteria** that are helpful to use when choosing subjects for Year 11 and 12.

The first is **university prerequisites**. If a university course has a strict requirement for a subject and you are set on that course, then that subject is a strong candidate for selection.

The second is **likeability**. The importance of this depends on who you are. If you can do any subject and enjoy it, then it's irrelevant. If you get most of your motivation from doing enjoyable subjects, likeability is important. The more you love a subject, the more you will enjoy the Year 12 experience of study, and the better OP you will get.

The final criteria is **weight**. As an example, a B+ in Drama will usually carry less of a weight on your Overall Position (OP) than a B+ in Physics, due to the QCS scaling for that subject. In a basic sense, if you know you can get the same marks in Physics and Drama, university prerequisites and likeability aside, it would make sense to choose Physics.

Another part of the weight criteria are bonus points for certain subjects. As of the time of writing, Mathematics C and languages both offer bonus ranks/OP points upon applying to some Queensland universities.

Chapter 2 – Goal Setting and Motivation

I advocate forming goals from passions. **Passions** are things you enjoy, things that make you happy, and things that make you want to be better.

Goals are how you will envelop your life in your passions.

If you love writing as a passion, your goal might be to publish a novel.

Beyond a university degree and aside from all of the scores, numbers and grades, what do you really want from all the hard work you are putting in for Year 12? Is it to cure a disease? To own your own company? To eradicate poverty? To represent Australia at the United Nations?

These goals aren't ridiculous at all. Just ask a Nobel laureate in medicine, a CEO, a humanitarian, or a diplomat. Don't be afraid to dream big. Honestly accepting your wildest dreams and having a burning desire for them will give you huge amounts of motivation.

For most people, the OP, the university degree; these are just stepping stones. They're smaller goals that get you to your ultimate goal. Keep your long term goals in full frame. When you find yourself asking 'why am I working this hard, and sacrificing this much?' you'll have a perfectly clear answer each time.

However, having the right goals only forms part of your motivation for study. Motivation is a very personal thing. There's not one quote, picture or idea that I'd guarantee would work. That's up to you. For me, it was sticking up my goals on my roof so that I read them every night I went to sleep and every morning when I woke up. For you, it



could be visualising, watching videos, reading about where you want to be, being around like-minded people. Take finding motivation seriously, it will get you to your best OP.

Chapter 3 – Health

Year 12 is hard on you. It can drain you. This is the reality.

That is why your health; both physical and mental, is so essential to getting through the year.

Mind and body are interlinked. Treat your body well – exercise, eat good food, and you will have more energy and motivation to study.

In terms of the mind, I found meditation really useful. There are some great apps you can get for a phone that help you do it for 10 minutes before bed. If you're not feeling as new-age as that, make sure you're doing enough with hobbies, family and friends that you're happy and fresh mentally. Never be afraid to talk to someone if it's getting too much. It's a tough year. There's nothing heroic or impressive about suffering alone.

Of all the recommendations, sleep is one of the most important. You need at least 8 hours a night (like old people always say). Whenever you're thinking to yourself, 'if I stay up for two more hours each night I'll get a better OP', in my opinion it's not true. Your quality of work goes downhill, and you would be much better off sleeping and getting it done with a fresh brain the next day. I achieved success without ever going past 10PM or skipping out on sleep. It's definitely possible.

That being said, I knew a few people who could get by with far less sleep and still do well. That might be you. Either way, seriously consider your health in Year 12, and beyond.

Chapter 4 – Timetabling

Timetables are helpful for putting time aside for specific subjects, and making sure that you spread your time evenly. You can use a timetable to balance school and life outside school. Maintaining a balance between the two will be essential to your success.

Timetables aren't for everyone, and that's okay, but if you enjoy regimentation like me, then they are a life saver.

Some of my favourite things to put in my school timetables were:

Morning/evening routines: Things that you do each morning or night that get your mind off study. For me, it was reading and meditation. For you, it could be calling a friend, music, whatever. If you do it each day at the same time, waking up and going to sleep will become a breeze and you will find the consistency helping your study.

Study before school: If you manage your sleep really well, you can find yourself with half an hour or more before school to fill with study. This can be some of your best quality study of the day, and doing it each day over the year adds up to what can be an OP point or more higher.

Regular breaks: Education and psychology research points to the idea that breaks improve productivity significantly. Timetabling in breaks every half hour or hour will pick up your game and keep you interested.

Chapter 5 – Knowing Your Environment

There are a number of things about your environment which you need to be aware of to be your best.

Teachers are an integral part of the senior school environment. Most of the time it might seem like teachers are conspiring to make you fail and crumble under pressure. Realise, though, that most teachers are there because they love to educate others. It is an exceptionally underappreciated service to our community. You can respect this service by giving your all in the classroom, and respecting what they do. Treat them with respect, and they'll propel you to your best. Show them this through actions and words. Tell them you're going to work hard this year and get your best OP. Show them your hard work with continuous effort and attention. Ask them how to be better, then become better.

At the time of writing this edition, Queensland seniors compete against one another (in a drawn out way) for their OPs. The OP is a loose comparison to other students, rather than a pure reflection of your own performance. The system is there and you have to accept it. Also keep in mind that working against the system, such as by not helping anyone, will do you more harm than good. **Don't be afraid** to help out a friend with their work simply because you're scared it'll bring down your OP. Yes, it might; if at all by an absolute smidgen. But you'll also ostracise a friend, foster a culture of negativity that could spread throughout the grade, and cut yourself off from your friend helping you in the future. Is it worth it?

It's so important to help everyone in your grade where possible, as building a team-player attitude in your year level can drastically improve your grade's QCS attitude.

Chapter 6 – Friends & Family

Friends and family are the crux of your support network. Your friends and family are the ones who know you the best. They know how to cheer you up and how to support you. Never underestimate the power of their support, because it is likely there will be times you will need it during the year. The challenges that you face will build your character, and with a strong support network behind you, these challenges are surmountable.

The key to building a support network is communication. I saw a lot of students working towards top grades who felt like their family and friends did not support them. Nearly every time, this was not the case. They simply hadn't communicated their dreams, their goals and their aspirations to the people around them. If the people around you don't understand what that goal is and why you want it, you can't expect them to know how to support you properly.

Sit down with family and friends and explain to them the whys and the hows of your intended studies. Tell them what you want to achieve. Tell them what kind of commitments you will be putting in. Then, when they see you playing that out, they are more likely to get behind you and support you, and you will gain motivation from it. They will share in your triumphs, and lift you out of your disappointments. It's one of the most moving parts of the journey towards high school success.

Part 2 – Study

Chapter 7 – Note-Taking

Note-taking in class and during homework forms the basis of your revision material for exams.

Paraphrasing what your teacher or the textbook says is one of my favourite ways to learn. It forces you to understand, rearrange and write rather than mindlessly regurgitating. Say your teacher says:

"The evolutionary pathways of Hominids is riddled with contradictions and inaccuracies, and it is currently impossible to fully confirm one specific evolutionary theory pertaining to one geographical location, logistical movement or interspecies culmination of genes."

Your notes might be:

"Research behind Hominids is inconclusive. We cannot know for sure where they moved, how they moved or the types of interactions between species."

If you're looking for a better note-taking method, Google '**Cornell Notes**'. This method is fantastic, and I still use it well into university. The most important aspect is that the method forces you to leave a summary section on the bottom of the page, which is a great place to revise when you're studying for an exam.

Chapter 8 – Class

Making the most of class time will put you a long, long way ahead. Even getting 10 minutes of more productive time each class adds up to a mountain of extra preparation for assessment over the course of a year or two.

The first step is going on time. This ties in with telling your teacher that you're going to work hard. Don't give conflicting messages. Respect their time by giving them yours.

Mastering concentration is the next step. It's hard to stay concentrated for an entire lesson. Believe me, I know. It's easy to daydream or talk. But think of all the time it adds up to. You don't have to be perfect with it, but you can always improve, and small improvements get you a long way. You're going to be there anyway, it makes sense to work hard. Daydreaming doesn't get you closer to the OP you want. Again, your teacher will notice, and this feeds in with not proving you're serious about hard work. If you're having trouble, remove distractions. Don't bring your phone to school/class, sit close to the teacher, ask questions, bring a water bottle, constantly take notes, and stay alert.

In terms of organisation, try to use a diary and a subjects folder. Most schools provide diaries. List all your tasks for homework and when they are due. For the subjects folder, use a plastic sleeve folder and have tabs for each class. Put all of your handouts and task sheets in their own tabs for each subject and never lose them again.

Chapter 9 – Study Environment

A study area should be a sanctuary. It should be quiet, accessible and clean. You should have water and small healthy snacks with you, especially for the longer sessions. You should remove as much distraction as possible, especially your phone. It can also help to play unfamiliar music or music associated with promoting good study, such as classical or instrumental music. Familiar music will distract you and reduce your productivity, even though it seems like you're enjoying study more. For classical music, ABC has a great classical radio station (FM106.1 at the time of writing), and there are also great Spotify playlists for classical and instrumental music.

If you're at the extreme end of the prone-to-distraction spectrum like me, then sometimes it helps to 'force' focus. My favourite way of doing this was by studying in **libraries**. The cultural norms and rules of it being unacceptable to listen to loud music, talk, or spend time surfing on useless sites was great at stopping me from getting distracted.

There are fantastic libraries in South East Queensland that you can and should use on top of your school library. The State Library of Queensland is a gem, as well as the University of Queensland and Queensland University of Technology libraries (the rules keep changing on whether these are open to public, check for yourself). On top of this, there are fantastic physical resources you can use when writing assignments that simply aren't on the web.

Chapter 10 – Exam Preparation Methods

I've compiled a list of all the exam preparation methods I came across during high school and university. Try them out and stick to the ones that suit you best.

Method	Tools	Description
Flow-Chart of Topics/Mindmaps	Paper, pens/computer	Writing a flow-chart between all the topics you have learnt during the term to identify their links and a logical progress through study
System Card Practice	System cards (small rectangular pieces of card you can get from news agents), pens	Use system cards for flashcard practice. Write the name of a term, definition or concept on one side, and the explanation on the other. Compile this for a topic or whole subject at a time, then run through them reading the definition side first and trying to answer it. If you can't remember the answer, turn it over, write out the definition again, and put it at the bottom of the pile. If you could remember the definition, put the card aside. Once all your cards are put aside, you should know the deck pretty well, but you can keep going through them to fully solidify your memory.

<p>Electronic Flashcard Practice</p>	<p>Anki (downloadable program)</p>	<p>This method is similar to the system card practice, but uses intelligent computer programs which can identify which cards need to come up more often for you to learn them. Anki is the program I used, and can be downloaded for free, but there are others.</p>
<p>Writing Out Notes</p>	<p>Textbook, notes, pen, notebook</p>	<p>Write out any information you think is important in your notebook, preferably under the Cornell Notes format I discussed in Chapter 7. You can get this information from your textbook, any notes you took during the semester, handouts, electronic resources, PowerPoints, etc.</p>
<p>Highlighting Notes</p>	<p>Highlighters, notes</p>	<p>Self-explanatory, and I wouldn't rely on it. A useful supplement with other study methods though.</p>

<p>Summarising PowerPoints</p>	<p>PowerPoint slides (printed or electronic), notebook, pens</p>	<p>It depends on your teacher, but some will have the bulk of examinable content on their PowerPoints. If you're printing them out, print in the handout format (under print settings) so that there are three slides to a page and a space to write notes. Then summarise the information on each slide using the adjacent ruled lines.</p>
<p>Highlighting PowerPoints</p>	<p>PowerPoint slides (printed), highlighters</p>	<p>Can be done hand-in-hand with the above method.</p>
<p>Revision Sheets</p>	<p>Revision sheets</p>	<p>Revision sheets are lists of every topic that is examinable. If you're teachers don't give these out for you, you can make your own by asking the teacher or gauging what content you have gone through. Use it as a checklist to ensure you've covered everything. They can be a good start for the mind-map discussed above.</p>

<p>Whiteboarding Concepts</p>	<p>Whiteboard, whiteboard pens, content</p>	<p>Sometimes it's great to get concepts up in big, bright colours, especially for visual subjects like mathematics and the sciences. Writing out an equation or graph in exaggerated form, or maybe a chemical process, boosts the understanding. It's also a fun way to break up study.</p>
<p>Practice Questions</p>	<p>Practice questions, pen, paper</p>	<p>Teachers might give you practice questions in the format of the exam, which are great further down the track once you've studied and learnt the concepts first. Answer these as fully as you can, just as you would in an exam.</p>
<p>Practice Exams</p>	<p>Practice exam, pen, paper, timer</p>	<p>Put yourself in the real exam situation where possible. Quiet room, no distraction, timed. Emulate the real exam. Answer questions with 100% effort.</p>
<p>Teaching Others</p>	<p>Others</p>	<p>Teaching others, especially those who aren't experts, forces you to synthesise, condense and summarise material, which is fantastic for understanding. Teaching your parents, friends or siblings about a concept will aid your understanding.</p>

Chapter 11 – Exam Preparation Mindset

Attention and Motivation

The quality and quantity of your study will depend very much on your **attention and motivation**

Attention is you being able to shut out distraction and focus directly on the task at hand. A huge part of this is choosing the right study environment, which is discussed in Chapter 9. Also, minimise the amount of times you get up and do something else. Have set breaks rather than letting something mildly interested stop your study every 5 minutes.

Motivation comes from the question of why you are studying so much in the first place. Always come back to your goals and remind yourself. If your goals are shaky, so is your motivation. Tell yourself why you're doing it, and be real about it. An example could be: "I'm doing an extra hour of Chemistry tonight to get a higher exam mark which will boost my Subject Achievement Indicator (SAI), in turn boosting my OP and giving me a better chance of getting into my dream university course, where I can learn how to create medicines that will save people's lives".

Prioritising Subjects

Another part of the mindset is knowing **which subjects to do when**. In the thick of it, you won't always have enough time to study every subject as much as you want to. The best you can do for yourself is prioritise them. Using the following criteria can help:

Urgency – the closer an exam is, the more urgent it is to focus on that subject.

Exam length – the longer an exam, the more you'll usually need to know, and hence the more study you'll need.

Wingability – some subjects have essential knowledge that you simply cannot walk in and know (such as formulas for a maths exam), while other subjects have answers you can partially figure out in the exam without much preparation (an English exam). You should never be in this circumstance in the first place, but if it comes down to it, learn the subject that has essential knowledge first.

Difficulty – the harder you find a subject, the more you'll need to prioritise it.

Importance – the proportion of your final mark that a particular exam will make up. The third of three Physics exams in one term is probably less important than the only Mathematics B exam of the term.

Quantity and Quality

Quantity and quality study is a vital concept for getting those top marks. Quantity study is studying a large range of topics on a basic level. Quality study is studying one topic in depth. Quantity study gets you a decent mark, but the best exam results come from combining both. Study quantity at the start of the term, learning all the content you need to know. Then, when exam preparation comes around, pick apart each topic in depth with quality study.

Timing

Timing is all about **learning thoroughly and well, reviewing efficiently** and **avoiding cramming**. The learning part of the term begins in Week 1 and finishes when you stop learning new content in class. This is where you should focus on learning new material

(quantity study). Once you finish the term's content, you automatically switch to the review part of the term (quantity and quality study). It's a huge mistake to leave a time gap between the two, because you may have to learn things a second time before studying them. Get reviewing early.

Finally, try not to study the night before or day of an exam. It simply is not good. Accept the position you're at the day before an exam, and know that any further cramming will only move you backwards. Exams are just as much about being in the right mindset to recall quality knowledge as how much content you know. Stay in that right frame of mind by avoiding the cram.

Part 3 – Assignments

Chapter 12 – Understanding Criteria

Criteria and conditions define your assignment results. Conditions are something that have to be fulfilled, like a certain style, or signing a plagiarism declaration. Criteria are more ambiguous. They're a set of guidelines given by the state studies board that your teachers interpret and relate to the assignment at hand.

Understanding how to write to criteria is the most important key to success with assignments. As you've probably heard time and time again, you can have a brilliant assignment, but if it doesn't answer the criteria, you won't get a brilliant mark.

Unfortunately, most assignments are not so much about writing what you think on a topic, but writing to a set of criteria. You can't control which way a teacher interprets the criteria, but what you can do is give them less to question, and less to wonder about. Make that A+ the easiest they've ever awarded.

Criteria are good in many ways because it's impossible to miss out an important part of the assignment. It's all there on the criteria sheet as a checklist for you. When you get to the criteria sheet, look straight at the **A-range criteria**. No matter what level you're at, everyone should aim for the A-range. Shoot for the stars, land in the clouds.

First seek clarity with the criteria, then brainstorm them. Don't be afraid to ask your teacher what they mean and what they're looking for. Ask for examples of how you can satisfy those criteria. Even if you showed me the task sheet, I still couldn't tell you exactly what to do, because each teacher is looking for something slightly different.

Once you've understood the criteria, start to brainstorm tangible ways for how you will satisfy each criteria. In a past English monologue of mine, for the criteria '*discerning use of a wide range of apt vocabulary for the chosen character*', I wrote that I would '*read over monologues of my character and pick out commonly occurring words*'. Doing this for each criteria is a great start to the planning process, which I will touch on further in Chapter 13.

Conditions, on the other hand, are simple. Just do what they say. You run the risk of getting a straight up fail for not satisfying one simple condition when you've worked incredibly hard on the whole assignment. Don't run the risk.

One contentious condition I will touch on is **word limits**. The ways that different schools and even different teachers in the same subject enforce word limits are incredibly unpredictable. So the best way to deal with this is to hear it straight from the horse's mouth. Find out the following things from your teacher: what word limit they will be enforcing, what the penalties are for going over or under, what parts of the assignment are counted in the word limit, and what content you should cut first. If in doubt, follow the pack. It's much better to have a similar number of words to everyone else than being on either extreme of the spectrum.

Chapter 13 – Planning & Drafting

Once you have begun your planning from expanding on the criteria sheet, you can create sub-headings and expand upon each point. **Always keep in mind that every single point you make must answer the assignment's question.**

After some quality brainstorming, order these points into an assignment structure that you can write in order. Start with introduction, body, conclusion, and then expand on that.

The actual writing of the assignment should come after in-depth research, which will be discussed in Chapter 14. Each person writes differently, but I recommend writing each section with the relevant research nearby, so that you can write and reference simultaneously.

A fantastic way to structure paragraphs as you write them is with the **PEEL** formula. This works well particularly in humanities and the sciences. Point, explain, evidence, and link. Teachers love this formula. Make your point in the first sentence and be clear and concise. Explain that point in the next sentence or two. Use evidence, and reference profusely, to back that point up. Then link the final sentence to the next paragraph. This method will remind you to make sure every paragraph has a distinct purpose in answering the question. An example of a peel paragraph is below:

(Point) *Plants offer a unique benefits over mammals in the production of biopharmaceuticals. (Explain) Mammalian molecules have the potential to interfere with biopharmaceutical proteins, while plants do not possess these molecules. (Evidence) For example, vitamin-binding recombinant human intrinsic factor rhIF is*

*being produced in transgenic plants. Vitamin B12 plays an important role in regulation and function of the brain and nervous system, as well as assisting in forming blood cells, and cannot be produced or used by plants naturally (Truswell, 2007). Seeing as plants do not use vitamin B12, they can produce rhIF free from vitamin B12 binding interferences (Rehbinder et al., 2009). **(Link)** These benefits are part of the reason for an increase in capital investment in the plant biopharmaceutical industry."*

Try to make a draft as high-quality as it can be, so that if you're allowed to check a draft with a teacher, you get the best possible feedback. Try to pick up on any hints that teachers give you, as their job is not to correct every assignment to an A+ level. If they've flagged a sentence expression error early on in the assignment, check that there are not more throughout. If they don't think your first paragraph links well with your second, there may be similar issues with the other paragraphs too. Try to see the patterns and work with what you have.

Once you've finished the drafting stage, the final editing is a relatively simple process. Proof-read, proof-read, and proof-read some more. Read it out loud. Get someone else to read it. Make the formatting look presentable.

The final copy should make you proud. You've worked hard, and the assignment should reflect your study habits and dedication. It's a wonderful feeling to know you're truly handing in your best assignment possible.

Chapter 14 – Researching & Referencing

High quality research and referencing will drastically improve your assignment marks, and prepare you well for university study.

Research should fulfil a number of criteria before you can consider using it for an assignment:

- Must have an author/authors, unless it is a trusted institution, such as the CSIRO or a university department
- Preferably will be less than 5-10 years old, particularly in the sciences
- Must be independent and without bias
- Must be relevant in terms of the information itself, and also who the information is aimed at (PhD works are usually inappropriate as are primary school textbooks)
- Preferably will be peer-reviewed (most textbooks, journal articles and reports are)
- Strike a balance between online and offline sources

There are a number of great places to get high-quality research:

- State Library of Queensland
- Council Library
- School Library

- School Library/State Library's journal database
- Google (take PDF reports and journal articles over websites where possible)
- Textbooks
- Class materials
- Your teacher

I **highly** recommend using databases. Most schools have a subscription to one, ask your librarian. The most common one is EBSCO Host. They have hundreds of thousands of fantastic journal articles and online textbooks that will take your assignment to the next level.

Once you start getting your research together, I recommend putting it into a document to keep track of it all. Try using a table, such as below:

Source	Notes	Section
(Borowitzka & Moheimani, 2013)	The demand for biofuels is extremely large and rising, therefore production of algae for biofuels requires large-scale cultures, orders of great magnitude larger than current production.	Body Paragraph 3 - biofuels

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The **source** heading contains a citation, which is how you reference a source in the body of an assignment. The **notes** heading is where you extract the useful information from the source. The **section** heading is what part of your assignment you plan to use the information in.

Learning how to do citations and write a bibliography is critical to doing well in Year 12. Most assignments have a specific criteria for references and/or research. You can use online bibliography tools, but the best tool of all is Microsoft Word's inbuilt referencing tool. You can access it through **references>insert citation>add new source**. Fill in all the details for a source, and insert it. Doing this will also automatically compile a bibliography entry for you as you go, which can be inserted once you've finished your assignment through **references>bibliography>bibliography/works cited**.

When writing an assignment, try to use as much of your relevant research as possible and reference it often. Take the basic ideas from the work and put it into your own words, then cite it. Teachers don't expect you to come up with the theory of electromagnetism by yourself, they expect you to research it, understand it and explain it in your own words. Don't be afraid to reference every sentence or two.

Some conventions of referencing:

- The first time you reference a source with more than one author, include all the authors in the citation, unless there are more than three, then cite the first author's surname, then et al., then the date [such as **(Anderson et al., 2008)**]
- The second time you reference a source with more than one author, always use just the first author's surname, then et al., then the date
- If you are referencing a quote inside a text, reference the author of the quote 'in' the author of the book, then the date [such as **(Jacobs in Markson, 2009)**]
- If you say the author's name at the start of a sentence instead of citing them at the end, only have a bracket around the year [such as '**Phillips (1999) suggests that daily reading increases brain function by 6%**']
- If you are quoting a particular part of the book, include a page number after the date [such as **(Brown, 1988:55)**]

Chapter 15 – Oral Presentations

It won't be surprising to you that a lot of people struggle with public speaking. It's certainly not easy. But there are ways to make it easy on yourself, and play to your strengths.

In preparing your speech:

- **Ensure high quality content.** Yes, there are some who can make average content sound amazing with confidence and finesse. But usually, a minimum of half the performance is marked on content anyway, so it's a great place to start.
- **Have memorable phrases in your speech.** This can include anecdotes, puns or a play on words.
- **Simplify your language.** Complex, intelligent sentences sound better on paper than out loud, and can bore your audience or confuse them. Remember, you're performing, not reading an assignment out loud.
- **Practice, practice, practice.** Especially if you get anxious or nervous. What will make you most nervous is having a speech you don't know well, so get to know it. Start by reading through your speech. Then read it out loud and start to use movement and gesture. Then try to remember one paragraph at a time, slowly increasing what you can recite by memory. If you're struggling with this, write a paragraph from memory until you can do that, then try and perform it by memory. Even if you're allowed to look at notes when you're speaking, the best

speeches never do. Always aim for an off-by-heart speech. If you can't get there, you'll still know it so much better by trying.

On the day of the presentation:

- **Drink plenty of water.**
- **Consider using a non-medicated throat lollie.** Such as a Butter Menthol. Smooths up the throat and makes your speech sound like warm milk on a rainy day.
- **Practice deep breathing.** Imagine you have a beautiful bunch of roses that you are smelling. Fill your lungs to the brim with that smell. This will get you deep breathing.
- **Get into the right mindset.** Remind yourself: yes, speeches are scary. But you're going to have to do it. Accept that it's hard and that you'll do the best you can, knowing you've prepared exceptionally well, and there's nothing more you can do.

Part 4 – Getting Ready for University

Chapter 16 – QTAC Applications

Dates are usually similar year-to-year, but check QTAC website to confirm.

IMPORTANT DATES	
Deadline	Process
Mid June	Course information for university courses released
Early August	QTAC applications open
Late September	Due date for on-time applications
Early December	Final date to change preferences for first offer round
Mid December	OPs released
Mid January (following year)	First round offers released

Choosing your university preferences is an exciting and scary decision. For you, it might be the most motivating part of your high school journey – landing the dream university course. Only **you** know which course is best for you. Others can offer great advice, but at the end of the day, you're the one that lives with the choice, not anybody else.

There are a few bits of advice that could help you with your choice:

- **Research and enquire.** Pick up information booklets for all universities you're interested in at the Tertiary Studies Expo, or from your career counsellor. Go to information nights for the courses and universities you're seriously considering. Go to open days and ask good questions.
- **Course first, then university.** You might disagree with this advice, but in the long run, you'll probably be happier in your perfect course vs. a great university with a course you don't enjoy. If you're lucky, you will find both in the same place, but a nice campus wears off fairly quickly when you hate what you study.
- **Good people do good things anywhere.** It's true that you might get a few more opportunities or better lecturers at a higher ranked university, but it's not the end of the world if you don't get into one. If you're good, and you want success enough, you'll find a way to make it no matter where you go. Course satisfaction is more important than university reputation.
- **Aim stupidly high with your first preference.** You have heaps of preferences to put on QTAC. If your dream course is higher than your predicted OP, put it in anyway. You might have a freakishly good QCS cohort, or your final term marks might get you over the line. You'll hate yourself for having to wait a year to transfer to your dream course if you could have done it straight away. The other preferences are

for the more likely courses, and then your foot-in-the-door courses as last preferences if something goes seriously wrong.

- **There's always a way.** QTAC isn't the end of the line. There's always another way to your dream career if you miss out on what you want. It might take you a year longer than people who get in straight away, but there's no rush to get into your working life.
- **If you can't decide between two courses, consider a dual degree.** They take a little bit longer, but they make you more employable, and your study is more balanced. If you are leaning to one course over the other but can't decide, consider doing a dual degree, and take most of your subjects under the degree you'll think you'll stick with in your first year of university. Then, if you don't like the other one, you can change into a single degree and you won't have added any extra time onto your degree.
- **If you are interested in an industry but don't know what part, consider a generalist degree.** You might be interested in humanities but you have no idea what course you'd like. Then you might choose a Bachelor of Arts, take heaps of different subjects, and then major in what you find you end up liking, or transfer to a degree in that field. The same can be said for science and commerce.
- **Thinking about campus culture.** If life on campus is really important to you, then the advice above about choosing course over campus is not as relevant. Universities with great cultures can really enhance your degree, but it depends on what is important to you. If campus culture is, the sandstone universities will usually offer a 'better' culture. They are about more than just coming into class and going home.

University can be a social hub and a cultural hub. You should always try and find out for yourself by visiting them on Open Days and talking to current students.

- **Consider choosing courses based on passion.** The way subjects are taught in high school can sometimes be very different to what they are like at university and in a career. It can sometimes be deceiving to think you will enjoy a university course based on liking the subject in high school. Also, some fields of study in university aren't even offered in most high schools in Queensland, like architecture or psychology. So consider thinking instead about what you are passionate about, and let that inform your choices. You may never have studied psychology before but you might be the person all your friends go to with their problems, and you might love offering them advice. Think about what really makes you happy, and find a course that can help you make a career out of it.

Chapter 17 – Interstate and Overseas Universities

Going interstate or overseas for university is one of the biggest decisions you will make if you follow it through. It's not only a choice of university, but it's moving your whole life, and likely moving out of home.

Interstate

The reasons for going interstate for university are numerous: a clean slate, setting up your own life in a new city, being forced to make new friends, being able to attend a unique course or higher-ranked university, unique scholarships, new cultural and social life and different opportunities after graduation.

The reasons against going interstate are also numerous: it's expensive, emotionally taxing, hard on yourself and your family, leaving friends behind, having to start new and instability.

If you've never considered it before, do. But only go through with it if you're 100% certain, because it's a huge choice.

Great Australian universities (in more traditional tertiary fields such as law, science, medicine, arts, engineering, politics and commerce) that are worth looking into include:

- University of Sydney
- University of New South Wales
- Australian National University

- Monash University
- University of Melbourne
- University of Adelaide
- University of Western Australia

There are also a number of smaller colleges and universities that offer courses not offered in Queensland, particularly in the field of music, drama, visual art, production and design.

All applications go through an applications centre unique to the state, **not through QTAC**, so you will have to find the admission process unique to the institution you are applying to. Always keep an ear out for all the scholarships they offer. Find university-specific and faculty specific ones on the universities website, as well as additional scholarships at <http://www.hobsonscoursefinder.com.au/scholarship/search>.

Overseas

Overseas universities are one step up from interstate universities, both in terms of benefits and costs. Most of the best universities in the world are overseas. You're giving yourself access to a hugely varied number of courses and institutions, and the opportunities are endless. At the same token, there is not much government support in terms of loans for going overseas, and some course fees can add up to over \$60,000 a year for overseas students. Plus, you may well be in a different country to your family for long periods at a time.

Overseas universities usually take more holistic applications than Australian universities, and factor in your personal qualities, extra-curricular achievements and recommendations. If you are considering going to university overseas:

- **Start early.** Preparing applications, financial plans, visas and taking standardized tests takes a lot of time. It will impact on your Year 12 performance, so it has to be worth it.
- **Have a backup plan.** Dream big, but always have a Plan B. Apply for Australian universities as well.
- **Earn your recommendations.** If you ask for recommendations but you haven't made an impact on someone, your application is worth nothing. Recommendations that are faked to sound good are still awful. Treat the people you get to know well.
- **Reflect on why you want it.** Doing this for the wrong reasons will cause you a lot of problems. Honestly ask yourself why you want it. When you've found that reason, communicate it passionately in your application.
- **Consider sports scholarships.** Sometimes this is the only way many Australian students make it to undergraduate courses overseas, particularly in the United States. If you're at state or national level for a sport, it could help you pay for a world class education. Find an international university sports scholarship agent to guide you through the process.

Chapter 18 – Scholarships & Co-Curriculars

I highly encourage you to get involved in as much as you can in high school. Getting involved has a number of benefits:

- De-stressing and relaxing from study
- Getting involved in something that you could enjoy for a lifetime
- Feeling like a bigger part of your school and cohort
- Developing you as a well-rounded person
- Setting you up well for scholarships and jobs

I will dwell on that last point.

Most scholarships you go for, before and during university, require you to show how well-rounded you are. Co-curriculars are the main part of this.

Having strong co-curriculars demonstrates your time-management, depth of personality, dedication and motivation. People displaying such qualities are those who donors want to put through university. They are the people who become future leaders.

If you're considering scholarships; and everyone should, then consider picking up more co-curriculars.

A great place to start is with **co-curriculars within your school**. These are things like taking on leadership role in houses or for your school, playing sport, joining a debating team or playing music.

For someone who has already become involved within school, I highly recommend **co-curriculars outside of school**. You get to meet other high school students from around the state, and excel your academics, leadership skills and social responsibility. I've collated a list of outside of school activities that will strengthen any scholarship (or job) application beyond belief.

Academic External Co-Curriculars

- Australian Informatics Olympiad
- Australian Mathematics Competition
- Australian or International Space Design/Settlement Design Competitions
- Bond University High Schools Mooting Competition
- National / International Biology, Chemistry or Physics Olympiads or Tournaments
- National Geographic Channel Australian Geography Competition
- PWC Australian Economics and Business Studies Competition
- QAMT or Macquarie Bank Future Problem Solving Competition
- RACI Australian National Chemistry Quiz or Chemical Analysis Competition
- Rio Tinto Big Science Competition
- UNSW ICAS English, Maths or Science Competitions
- UQ School of Economics QETA Student Economics Competition

Leadership External Co-Curriculars

- Defence Force Cadet
- Emu Gully Leadership Program
- ADF Long Tan Leadership Teamwork Award
- TIP Leader
- Australian Student Leadership Conference

Community Service External Co-Curriculars

- Surf Life Saving club
- Sony Foundation Children's Holiday camp
- Rosies Friends on the Street Outreach program
- Camp Quality
- The Smith Family student2student reading program
- Kokoda Challenge
- Scouts Australia
- Girl Guides Australia

Award External Co-Curriculars

- Lions Youth Of The Year Award
- Duke of Edinburgh Award

- Order of Australia Association Student Citizenship Award
- Pierre De Coubertin Award
- Quest Newspapers Young Star Awards
- Caltex All-Rounder Award

Chapter 19 – Job Applications

Finding the Right Job

During university, having a part-time or casual job can contribute a lot to balance in your life. It may also be a necessity if you are focusing on financial independence.

Early on in university, it will probably be difficult to find a job that relates to what you're studying. Hospitality or retail may be your only option, and that's okay. You can learn a lot of valuable things in these industries.

The first place to start is always with connections. If you've heard that a family member or friend is hiring, or know someone who is hiring, find out more. It's always the easiest way to get a job, and your family member or friend can vouch for your character.

If that fails, look around your local area for jobs posted in shop windows. Local is always best. Failing that, Gumtree and similar online spaces are always a great place to look as well. Another ideal place for university student work is with universities themselves, student unions, student sport organisations or on-campus businesses. They are convenient, flexible and you often get to work with like-minded students.

Once you get further into your degree, internship, work experience and research positions will open up that will allow you to earn money while extending your knowledge. Universities and student societies have great advice on how to land these gigs.

Writing a Resume and Cover Letter

Writing a resume is simple if you keep it simple. Hiring managers usually spend about 15 minutes on a resume, on average, so never go over 1 page; maybe 2 if you're an exceptionally accomplished young human being. But never fill space for the sake of it. My resume formatting that has worked exceptionally well over the years:

FULL NAME

email@address.com

+Phone Number

SUMMARY

Talk about your passions, career objectives and most valuable skills.

EDUCATION

University

Degree average *2014-2017*

- GPA (if you think it's good enough)
- Clubs/societies/volunteer involvement

High School

Queensland Certificate of Education *2009-2013*

- OP (if you think it's good enough)
- Achievements/co-curricular involvement/leadership positions

EXPERIENCE

Company X

Job Position X *Dates - Dates*

- What you did in past tense if it's a past job, what you are doing in present tense if it is a current job. Mention hard skills rather than soft skills. Include what you learned and how you added value to the business. Use numbers rather than ambiguous statements if possible (I raised X dollars, I served X clients, I recruited X members)

Company Y

Job Position Y *Dates - Dates*

- What you did in past tense if it's a past job, what you are doing in present tense if it is a current job. Mention hard skills rather than soft skills. Include what you learned and how you added value to the business. Use numbers rather than ambiguous statements if possible (I raised Y dollars, I served Y clients, I recruited Y members)

You usually won't need to include referees unless it is a very entry level job. If an employer wants them, they'll ask for them. Save your resumes as PDFs and the name of the file as your full name (**Your Name – Resume**).

Most jobs will indicate whether you need cover letters. The entry level jobs usually don't require them, but as you climb up the ladder, you will start to need them. Also save them as PDFs with your full name (**Your Name – Cover Letter**). The basic format goes:

- Your contact details
- Hiring manager's contact details
- 'Dear Mr/Ms hiring manager's Surname'
- Sentence explaining that you would like to apply for X job as advertised on X date
- The body is split up into paragraphs that directly address how you meet the selection criteria. Use the STAR principle to answer these – a **situation** you were in when you have dealt with similar, the **task** at hand, the **action** you took, and the **result** of this action
- A final sentence explaining that you look forward to meeting them and that they should find your resume attached
- Yours sincerely/faithfully, then your full name below

You can find great examples of cover letter formatting online.

Epilogue

Once you've put the effort in and given senior school your all, the OP you come out with is something to be really proud of, whatever it is.

But it's important to keep in mind that it doesn't reflect you as a person very well at all, and you should not let a bad OP define you. It doesn't measure your natural intelligence, it measures how well you fit into a certain educational mould developed for Queensland. It doesn't measure how far you will go in life either. It really is just a number.

As I've mentioned earlier, good people do good anywhere. The fact that you're reading this book is in many ways even more important than getting an OP1. It indicates that you're willing to go above and beyond what's expected of you. Long after your OP pales into insignificance, that trait will set you apart from everyone else, not just in your career, but in your personal life as well.

So, whether you are ecstatic or disappointed with your OP, be proud that you were willing to give it a crack. There's always another way to get where you want to go in life; what matters is that you aimed to be your best.

Being Your Best – Edition II

The free guide for Queensland senior students – achieve your **best** OP!