What I Wish I Knew podcast transcript

Title: What I Wish I Knew
Episode 5: About getting an embarrassingly good ATAR without living in the library
Creator: Swinburne Marketing
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[*Intro music up*]

00:00:05:16 - 00:00:24:13
SAM
Hi everyone, and welcome back to What I Wish I Knew, Swinburne's VTAC podcast for Year 12s. Today we'll be covering Year 12 study tips that you might not know – but wish you did – to help you during your final year of high school. I'm your host, Sam Eddy, and I'll be joined by Aiden, a current Swinburne student who recently went through VCE.

00:00:24:15 - 00:00:47:10
SAM
We're here to put your mind at ease and set you on the right track, because let's be honest, between keeping up with assignments, getting through exams, navigating Year 12 can feel daunting. So let's get into it. Aiden, welcome to the podcast lounge, I guess we can call it. Please introduce yourself. Tell me a little bit about who you are and what you're studying and your journey to Swinburne.

00:00:47:10 - 00:01:03:17
AIDEN
Yeah. Okay. I am, my name is Aiden. I am a third-year student in computer science at Swinburne University here at Hawthorn campus. So, what? Third year. I'm majoring AI. I'd already done an elective minor in applied maths. And I signed up for the professional program as well.

00:01:03:20 - 00:01:06:11
SAM
So you're not afraid of study?

00:01:06:13 - 00:01:13:15
AIDEN
Afraid to study. I don't know. I think everyone's a little bit afraid to study.

00:01:13:16 - 00:01:28:18
SAM
No, that's great. And hopefully today we'll be able to get some tips from you on how to do it best. Now, it's been a few years since you left high school and came across to university life. Thinking back on it, was there one thing you wish you had have known? Back in Year 12?

00:01:28:20 - 00:01:47:23
AIDEN
I don't know. I guess one of my life mottos is, ‘it's not that deep’. So, I think that's probably the first thing that comes to mind. I think the stress is kind of unavoidable, even. Because I definitely had that attitude to some degree in Year 12. I was like, I know, like, it's just like, I know it's just a number, but it's just the pressure that gets heaped on you is insane.

00:01:48:00 - 00:02:04:24
AIDEN
So I think being able to put your mental health first is probably something that I've learned since, since I started studying at uni. And yeah, just making time to sort of step back and just, you know, take some time to yourself, go for a walk, whatever. Just to get away from the madness, you know?

00:02:05:01 - 00:02:10:17
SAM
Is there any, I guess, tricks you've discovered on how to stay focused while you're studying?

00:02:10:19 - 00:02:27:03
AIDEN
It's a lifelong quest, I think. What about make fun out of what you're doing? I think that's the first thing that I would say. If there's any fun to be found in the subject, if you can find the fun, if you can stuff around a bit, if you can let yourself play a bit loose.

00:02:27:05 - 00:02:37:05
AIDEN
I think that is probably the key. Because, you know, once you're associating it with something positive in your head, it makes you want to do it. And the more you do it, the more you know about it, the more confident you feel, more you want to do it, right?

00:02:37:08 - 00:02:53:18
SAM
In terms of good study habits, is there anything you've come across that's been like, oh, I'm going to use this because it helps me remember things, or it's easy to recall information that is new to me? Like, what little tips or hacks have come your way?

00:02:53:20 - 00:02:55:12
AIDEN
I'm really, really bad at studying.

00:02:55:13 - 00:03:04:22
SAM
I think we'd all say we're really bad at studying, though. Like, there's got to be something that, you know, something you're skilled at. Then how did you get through Year 12?

00:03:04:24 - 00:03:23:05
AIDEN
How did I survive? I think I what I largely did was I tried to make... I made a point of showing up to every lesson – if not on time, then I showed up at least. And did my best in every lesson. I did, I made the most of my class time, I guess is what I'm saying. Like, home study is not something that I've ever really been very good at doing.

00:03:23:07 - 00:03:42:17
AIDEN
But I found at the very least, if I can come to class and pay attention and ask questions and do all the things that teacher wants in class, that's great as well. And also, even maybe a little bit of lunchtime study. Right? Yeah. Because when you're sitting at least in a school environment, I always found that home didn't really work as a study environment for me.

00:03:42:17 - 00:03:48:09
AIDEN
So yeah, just being in that school environment, especially if you have other people who are working.

00:03:48:09 - 00:04:00:11
SAM
Yeah. And make use of the spaces, I guess, that are around you to support study. In terms of Year 12, did you ever get to a point where you felt burnt out or like you just couldn't give anymore?

00:04:00:17 - 00:04:19:08
AIDEN
Oh my goodness. Yeah. Well, I mean, in Year 12 the pressure is high, but there's holiday homework every single holidays. And the break, you know, just as you're starting to kind of relax a little bit, you're back to school. So I think yeah, I definitely hit a point where I was burnt out. There was a point where I was in the – because I did a lot of music in high school.

00:04:19:08 - 00:04:41:16
AIDEN
Band was like, one of my favourite places to be, one of my favourite things to do apart from anything else. Just because it took me away from everything, and I could just have fun. I could play some music. Right? But my commitment, I suppose, to the music program hadn't gone unnoticed. And so in regards to my slipping academic results, my year level coordinator actually pulled me out of the music program as a temporary thing, and he was like, 'you've got to focus on your work, dude'.

00:04:41:17 - 00:04:54:08
AIDEN
And that, I did it for a little while. But I couldn't maintain it for very long. I think that was the point at which I actually burned out, because it was one of my support structures. Right. And so I did actually go and have a chat to him, and was like, 'this isn't working'. And he was like, 'yeah, that's okay'.

00:04:54:09 - 00:05:06:24
AIDEN
'We can make this work'. So yeah, I think the only point where I actually did hit the ground, I guess, was when I lost, I suppose, the support structures that I was using to cope.

00:05:07:01 - 00:05:07:17
SAM
To get through it.

00:05:07:17 - 00:05:09:00
AIDEN
Yeah. To get through.

00:05:09:02 - 00:05:15:13
SAM
What would you, in terms of advice, what would you say to current Year 12s in managing that potential for burnout?

00:05:15:18 - 00:05:19:03
AIDEN
Potential burnout? I can't say walks, can I?

00:05:19:05 - 00:05:24:00
SAM
I mean, if it's something that you think helps for sure. There's got to be little things.

00:05:24:00 - 00:05:47:20
AIDEN
I think if you let yourself go in terms of time, if you keep yourself to a schedule – look, schedules are great, right? I have never found a schedule helpful. Right? I think at the end of the day, it's the rhythm and it's the actual application of the schedule that means a lot more than the written down schedule itself, right? But if you can forget about a schedule – particularly if you're locked into something like that – if you can forget about a schedule, if you can go for a walk.

00:05:47:20 - 00:05:53:08
AIDEN
And not say, 'I have to be home in half an hour'. If you can just let yourself go and say, 'whatever, I'll be back'.

00:05:53:10 - 00:05:53:23
SAM
When I feel ready.

00:05:53:23 - 00:06:07:08
AIDEN
Yeah, exactly. If you just, even for one afternoon, that can be enormously therapeutic. To just sort of go, 'this is an off day'. And I know, it's like no one ever wants to do that, right? Because they know you've got this huge task list, you've got all these things you know you need to do.

00:06:07:08 - 00:06:23:09
AIDEN
You've got teachers on your back, you've got SACs, you've got whatever. Right? But yeah, if you can find it within yourself to let go and not put a limit on it and not say, 'I'll come back if', 'I'll come back when'. Just say, 'I'll come back when I'm feeling a bit better'. You know, I think that would be therapeutic.

00:06:23:09 - 00:06:25:14
AIDEN
I think that's something I've learned at uni compared to high school.

00:06:25:14 - 00:06:41:23
SAM
I think that's such really, you know, great advice. I think that's so wise to just not put like, 'I'm going to take a 10-minute break', but I'm going to take a break, and I'll return when I'm ready to keep going. I think that's really good advice. So you mentioned earlier the idea of looking after your mental health.

00:06:42:00 - 00:06:57:09
SAM
I guess my question is around if you're in Year 12 and you have a lot of stress and pressure to, you know, cram all this content by the end of the year, how do you look after your mental health and still make sure that you're reaching those academic goals?

00:06:57:09 - 00:07:00:21
AIDEN
So making sure you get the 99.95 without going insane?

00:07:00:24 - 00:07:05:07
SAM
Yeah, exactly. Don't say I don't know. You must know.

00:07:05:10 - 00:07:29:03
AIDEN
I must, right? I must. I actually ended up with an embarrassingly good ATAR for how like, little study I did. I definitely did not deserve my ATAR. I think that actually stemmed from a lot of hard work that I put in when I was feeling a bit better, I guess, in Year 10 and Year 11. Early VCE subjects when I was able to devote my attention fully to that and, you know, really go the hard yards.

00:07:29:05 - 00:07:46:06
AIDEN
I entered VCE with an already very good score, like, sort of down pat. And then I was able to go through VCE and that score definitely helped me when I finished up. So early start and sort of balancing the one, two subjects that you do in, say, Year 10, and then 3 or 4 in Year 11.

00:07:46:08 - 00:07:50:12
AIDEN
Just sort of – if you can spread it out, spreading it out is probably the best thing you can do.

00:07:50:12 - 00:08:13:02
SAM
So, I guess, like if you want to approach exams and not feel that level of stress, but you're also not strong at a good study routine or study habits. Is there anything you picked up on that helped you approach that period of what would be high, intense stress? To, I guess stay somewhat focused and calm.

00:08:13:04 - 00:08:42:15
AIDEN
I definitely didn't know this in Year 12, but I will still say, I think something that gets lost on a lot of people is: anything is better than nothing. So you can go day after day doomscrolling, playing games,

whatever, right? But if you even set aside one hour, right? If you can do one hour per day and you can maintain that the whole way through, like, that will put you in so much better standing than nothing at all and just stressing and worrying, ‘oh my goodness, there's so much to do’.

00:08:42:17 - 00:09:04:12
AIDEN
I think, yeah, that's something that I definitely should have remembered, honestly, in Year 12. If you can set aside any time at all, that's going to be better than no time. So one hour, two hours, you know, as long as you have that block set aside, that will be enormously helpful to you if you're the sort of person who just sort of spirals in stressful periods and stressful situations.

00:09:04:14 - 00:09:09:12
AIDEN
Then I think, yeah, as long as you can do something a bit, then yeah, it's going to put you in better standing.

00:09:09:12 - 00:09:27:19
SAM
Yeah, 100%. And like you said, even though you weren't good at home study, you consistently attended your classes. Gave everything to your classes that you needed to. When you opened those exam papers, were there questions that you had absolutely no idea how to answer?

00:09:27:21 - 00:09:44:09
AIDEN
Like you would not believe. They taught us this thing in physics. It's not physics related, it’s study related, sorry. It’s called the, you know the traffic light system? You know, you have your 20 or 30 multi-choice questions at the start of the exam. You can go through in reading time and just sort of mentally mark them, right?

00:09:44:11 - 00:10:04:17
AIDEN
Red light, I've got no idea at all. Yellow light is like, I kind of know, I reckon if I put some effort into this, I could probably figure it out. And green light is like, this is easy. And so when you go, when the exam actually starts, you go through the multi-choice, you do all the green ones in about five minutes, and then you do the yellow ones in another, maybe 15, and then you do the rest of the paper.

00:10:04:17 - 00:10:23:08
AIDEN
If you’ve got time at the end, then you kind of come back and you try to – if you’ve got time – you work through the red ones. Otherwise, you guess them. So I think there were definitely, there were, there were a handful of red questions on my exam papers. I think no matter what you study, there are going to be questions that you don't know about, that you're not sure about.

00:10:23:10 - 00:10:31:17
AIDEN
I guess what is good is that everyone is sitting the same paper. So even if there are some things that you're unsure about, that's why we have – you know, every student in the state sits the same paper, right?

00:10:31:17 - 00:10:53:11
SAM
I think that the takeaway from this is, don't follow a system that you're expected to follow. Just do whatever works for you. And I think something like traffic lights is such a good system, because I know myself, if I go into an exam and I don't know a question, I hyper-focus on that question. And I'll spend 20 minutes staring at it, trying to figure out the answer.

00:10:53:15 - 00:11:15:07
SAM
And then I've lost so much important time. So I think that's a really good strategy to lean into for sure. In terms of your approach to high school, study at university, is there something – if you look back at yourself three years ago, the little version of you – what advice would you give him?

00:11:15:09 - 00:11:32:00
AIDEN
Just to sort of survive Year 12, right? How to get through? I think if I put a bit more time into my friends, I think that would have been good. I think that was one of the ways that I got through Year 12 was through the people around me and sort of the support network, I guess, that I had.

00:11:32:02 - 00:11:49:09
AIDEN
I would say that it's worth investing in them because, well, I mean at the end of the day, they still going to be friends. Even after high school, right? So, yeah, I think invest time into friends and don't be afraid to do that. Because they are, you know, it's not all about

00:11:49:09 - 00:12:03:08
AIDEN
I'm going to keep saying it. It's not all about study. But yeah, I think the people around you and the social things that you do and the clubs, for example, I watched all of the people sort of fall out of the music program as we sort of went through school. Right? And they were like, ‘oh, maybe not’.

00:12:03:08 - 00:12:16:17
AIDEN
‘Oh, hit Year 10, Year 11. Maybe not, I don't have time’. Yeah. But I did commit some time. I think, I’d encourage myself. Yeah. Committing that time is important to things that you enjoy doing at high school so it's not all just a slog.

00:12:16:22 - 00:12:26:17
SAM
Yeah, 100%. That's great advice. We're going to end with some rapid-fire questions. All I want you to do is answer the first thing that comes to mind. High school or uni?

00:12:26:19 - 00:12:28:20
AIDEN
Which one is better? Uni.

00:12:28:23 - 00:12:31:22
SAM
Okay. Great. Exams or assignments?

00:12:31:24 - 00:12:32:23
AIDEN
Exams.

00:12:33:00 - 00:12:38:22
SAM
Okay. And one unexpected thing that made a big difference?

00:12:38:24 - 00:12:54:08
AIDEN
I think I'm just going to say again, how hard I worked in, especially in Year 10, at my Applied Computing 1 and 2. That was my early VCE subject. The amount of time that I put into that, like reading the textbook, doing all the questions, and really getting to know the subject well.

00:12:54:08 - 00:13:09:08
AIDEN
That really helped me when I did the 3/4 in Year 11. And then that score, I think I was ranked fairly high in my class. And the score that I got for that ended up really, really helping my ATAR as well.

00:13:09:10 - 00:13:23:09
SAM
So any Year 10 or 11s listening, jump in and do a 3/4 now. It's defintely worth it. I want to come back to one of the rapid fires, because I just realised what you said. It's almost like I didn't listen to your answer as you said it. You said exams over assignments?

00:13:23:09 - 00:13:24:10
AIDEN
100%.

00:13:24:12 - 00:13:31:11
SAM
That goes against, like, everything that makes sense in my brain. Like, it's stressful. It's under time pressure. Why?

00:13:31:16 - 00:13:51:21
AIDEN
I think if you look at it – this is just me thing, it's just me – but as a chronic pathological procrastinator, when you've got time pressure, it works, right? If you look at it, like, teachers will go, 'a week will do to complete this assignment'. You don't actually need like a week. It'll take like maybe six, 10 hours maybe?

00:13:51:21 - 00:14:11:23
AIDEN
But I think when it comes to an exam, everything in there, it's two hours. You know that it's going to take two hours. They designed it to be done in two hours. And so I can just enter a state of hyper-focus, right? And sort of, reading time, you know, 'mark out this, I'm going to do this then and this here and I'm going to skip this one because it sounds dumb and I don't understand it'.

00:14:12:00 - 00:14:22:15
AIDEN
I'd much prefer exams for that reason. It's because it's easier to perform well in that one, you know, two, three-hour period than to sort of actually do work over the course of time.

00:14:22:17 - 00:14:38:00
SAM
100%. I really want to thank you for being so open and candid about your experience. It's not easy to be critical of oneself. And I think the fact that you've come in here and just been like, 'hey, I was not good at study, but I made it work for me'.

00:14:38:00 - 00:14:56:07
SAM
And I think you've given us some really good tips. I want to reiterate that idea of making time for people is super important. The traffic light system really made you make use of exam time. And I just think, you know, it's invaluable advice that I think will resonate with a lot of our listeners. I think that just about covers everything.

00:14:56:07 - 00:15:14:17
SAM
Thank you so much, Aiden, and thank you to our listeners for tuning in. If you have any questions or would like personalised advice on everything and anything VTAC, simply reach out to our team of Future Student Advisors. You'll find the link in the podcast description. Good luck with Year 12 and we will hopefully see you all here on campus at Swinburne next year.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]