

BIOLOGY

EMMA TOVEY CRUTCHFIELD RECEIVED A PERFECT VCE BIOLOGY SCORE IN 2013.

My name is...

Emma Tovey Crutchfield

I went to...

Melbourne Girls Grammar School

In VCE Biology I received a score of:

50

The thing I liked best about doing this subject was...

unlike many VCE subjects, Biology can be immediately applied outside the classroom. I found it gave me such an understanding and therefore appreciation of how the world works. I love cellular biology and knowing why I get sick, how I get better, what provides my body with the energy and why plants are green! It has inspired me to hopefully study medicine and undertake scientific research in the future.

The best advice I can give VCE students about this exam is...

the biology exam is quite time restricted and some of the application style 3 mark questions can be very time consuming. To conquer this: never rewrite the stem of the question; instead, just write down the key terms, definitions and explanations that will get you the marks. I always had to remind myself that in the end expression doesn't matter – the examiners are just looking for the key stuff so just get it down!

I also completed Further Mathematics in 2014. In both exams something that I was not prepared for was an initial shock that, even after all the practice exams I did in preparation, the one that counted, sitting in front of me, seemed different. I'm not sure why, but in the exam, the questions seem oddly worded and more difficult than, the previous year's paper or the practice exams. Just remember that in reality all exams are set to the same standard. Once you get started this feeling goes away – but just be aware of it (I wish someone had told me this!).

If you reach a question that you can't understand, don't get frustrated; just leave it and come back at the end. If you decide to answer it immediately,

you're more likely to go off on a tangent: an examiner, who is pushed for time, will start to read your answer and immediately get the sense that you've got no idea! If you leave it and come back to it, this not only lets you finish the paper and earn all the marks you deserve but gives you a fresh perspective on the 'hard question'. When reading it again, do a few things: (as well as the obvious: identify how many marks it is worth, look at the other related questions, space to answer, etc.) 1) Underline the key words in the question and link them to hard areas of that specific topic: if you're not getting it, it is probably one of those difficult areas that they examine again and again such as the auto-immune response. 2) What haven't the examiners assessed in this paper? i.e. think of the large topics: genetics, evolution, immunity, cellular functioning, etc. This may hint what they are on about.

The best advice I got from my teacher about this exam was...

never memorise anything you don't understand. Biology is all about understanding and applying what you know to new situations – if you truly understand the hardest parts of the subject, the exam becomes easy.

In the month before this VCE exam, I...

completed practice exams, but more importantly, after each exam, I wrote an extensive critique on all of my mistakes and why I hadn't received full marks in a particular question. Every night I would take these sheets and reread them in bed – putting to memory new theory and identifying patterns in my mistakes. These pages are so important – doing a practice exam is worth very little if you don't learn from the mistakes you've made (simply putting a big red cross and writing 'stupid' next to your answer does not amount to learning from your mistakes). I had a friend who was also studying biology, and we marked each other's papers. By doing this, we knew that the marking wasn't biased. It is very easy to chuck extra marks on here and there saying 'oh, I would have gotten that!': but the truth is you didn't... so you wouldn't have! Objective marking of your practice exams is critical.



In the week before this VCE exam I...

stopped doing practice exams about 4 days before and focused purely on those mistake sheets I spoke of above, and concentrated on writing out definitions. I think this is a good idea as you can remind yourself of your common mistakes as well as avoiding the stress of doing poorly on a practice exam just days before the exam.

On exam day, I prepared myself by...

getting up quite early and going on a walk around the block with my sister, talking about things other than the exam. I then ate my usual breakfast and left quite early to account for any delays. It's important to understand that stressing at this point will only be detrimental. Accept and be proud of the work you've done and sit the exam with confidence.

After the exam, I...

personally chose not to discuss my results with anyone. I just went home, went for a short run and showered to help clear my head. Of course I was still anxious and tense but I just sat myself down in the sun with a tea and resumed study for the Further exam, which was the next day.

The best exam advice I received from my parents, siblings or friends was...

if you find the question difficult, so does everyone else in the exam room: take comfort from this.

I didn't work a part-time job during year 12 because...

I wanted to focus on my study. However, some people work better with less time so I think this part is just personal preference.