

It quickly becomes apparent that VCE is not so much a competition with the rest of the state as it is a competition with yourself: a challenge to push yourself to your limits and to realise your potential. In the end, that number up there – that ranking – doesn't tell me anything important. What does is the satisfaction I experienced after each exam, knowing that I had done the best that I could. That's what I will take away from VCE: not an indication of how I rank in the cohort, but a testament to the fruits you reap from the efforts you put in.

Good afternoon Father, staff, students, past students, guests, distinguished guests... hopefully that's everyone. I am humbled to stand before you all on behalf of this fine group of gentlemen, any of whom would be just as deserving to stand here. Today, I hope to profess my gratitude for my time at Mazenod and impart some advice to those of you approaching and those of you already suffering in VCE.

About myself, there isn't much to tell. I come from an Italian background, and so naturally the most important things in my life are family, faith and pasta. I've never been exceedingly bright: I struggle to grasp new concepts quickly, I've failed more than a few tests throughout school – granted, most of those were spec. maths but nevertheless – and I still can't count in my head. Honestly, you would have seen me in my Year 12 VCE maths exams counting on my fingers to solve $7 + 8$. So why am I standing here? I don't know if that can be pinned down to any single reason. I could tell you I worked hard, which is absolutely true, but so did every other person sitting here. Is it fair to say I worked harder than everyone else? I don't think it is. Rather, I think I am here because of an almost... I'm hesitant to use this word because I don't want it to undermine the enormous effort it takes, but an almost lucky set of circumstances. Lucky because I had an end goal to motivate me; lucky because I had, unknowingly, developed early habits that would give me a slight edge; and lucky because I have a family that never once pressured me.

Now it goes without saying that your dreams can only be realised with hard work; there's no other way around it. The key is finding a reason to put in that effort. And that is something that I was fortunate enough to have discovered early. What started as a childhood fascination with Ancient Egypt in Grade 1 ignited a dream to do archaeology; and, admittedly, Indiana Jones may have played a part. This is something I've always aspired to do and it's what gave me purpose at school; a reason to put in the effort I did. So strong was this passion that, even now when I've been told that with a 99 ATAR I should be looking at entering a more "prestigious" profession like law, I've refused to budge; this is what I love and I won't let some number dictate my aspirations.

It's also important to remember that your time here is an experience. Whilst it may seem dominated by your studies, you should still seek to maintain a balance. You don't have to give up your social life, or deactivate Facebook, or unplug the PS4 or stop watching "I'm a celebrity... get me out of here". On the contrary, you should keep all those things because they will provide the respite you need from VCE. And believe me, you'll need it. So don't feel pressured to give up the things you love: just remember to keep the emphasis on your studies. Personally, I chose to remain involved in school debating and a mentorship program of a gifted student at St John Vianney's. Outside of school, on weekends, I'd go swimming, attend 9:30 Mass, and visit my Nonna. And I'd always reserve time for my favourite shows of course, like Game of Thrones and Wentworth. Though I shouldn't really recommend Game of Thrones: too often would I walk into an exam crying over the death of my favourite character in the previous night's episode.

Whilst not to undermine the importance of hard work – which is most important of all – it is also true that VCE does require a degree of talent. Now, I can assure you, I've never been naturally smart. However, I do believe there is one habit that may have given me that slight edge. For as long as I can remember, I have been an avid reader. From Roald Dahl to JK Rowling to Tolkien to Dickens to Hugo. Even throughout Year 12 and to this very day, I read for at least 20 minutes before bed. Now, admittedly, my vocabulary or spelling still can't compare to many of the other gentlemen sitting here today. But as Ms Phillips taught me, it's not about using the biggest word; it's about using the most appropriate word and that is something you can only pick up from years of reading. So to all year levels, I cannot stress enough the

value of reading. It will enhance the clarity of your writing and the sophistication of your ideas immeasurably, and also clear your mind before bed. Which becomes increasingly desirable in Year 12: it does not make for good sleep going to bed dreaming about your revision notes.

If I can impart one final piece of advice with you, it's this... All of the knowledge you accumulate over the course of one year will be tested in a couple of hours in a single exam and that can be daunting. So to enter that exam with a clear head, here's my advice for you: on the night before each of your VCE exams, despite what some teachers may say, I am absolutely convinced you should do no study. All you guys in years 7-10 are probably thinking "but I thought study starts the night before" but remember, good study habits start early. So instead, I dare you to watch a Harry Potter film the night before your exam. No other series is better to completely distance yourself from the stress of VCE and to help you relax. It's what I did and I was able to enter each of my exams totally calm and prepared.

Now of course, no DUX is able to attain that position without the support and encouragement from those around them. My biggest thanks goes to my family. One of the biggest struggles people face in VCE is the pressure and expectations put on them by others. No doubt, I experienced that from most of my peers and teachers at school. But I was able to deal with it quite easily because I never received that kind of pressure at home. My parents never once tried to tell me what score I should be aiming for; rather, they constantly assured me that they would be proud of me regardless of the result because they knew I was trying my best. So I didn't need that number to prove anything to them; though that didn't stop mum bragging to everyone we know that I was DUX. Without that constant assurance mum and dad, I would surely have crumbled under pressure so thank you.

To the 41 other men seated here today, this is an achievement we share together, just as we shared the tough road here. I'm sure you would all agree when I say that none of us could have reached the heights we did without the support of one another; whether that support was contributing ideas in class or just being open for a chat amidst the stress of it all. Now I have to give special mention to Phillip Mai, Andrew Tudehope and Sebastian Bailouni regarding our free period discussions on the best study tips and advice for upcoming SACs, I want you guys to know how invaluable they were to me. And I think it shows because we are all here today! To Renn opt Hoog, you are and always were my inspiration; you are the smartest person I know and certainly the most hardworking. Thank you for setting an example to all of us in commitment and dedication that I will continually strive for in my life.

To my teachers, I wish I could name all of you but I know the students here are all keen for class, so you'll have to forgive me. My academic achievements are a reflection of the collective knowledge and wisdom I have accumulated from each of you throughout my six years at Mazenod and so I owe this to you. One of the unique things about the teachers here at Mazenod is that they often go beyond the role of an educator; they can inspire you and influence the person you become. To Mr Fyfield: more than getting me a 50 in RE, you deepened my religious faith and inspired me to live out its tenets. Words can't describe how thankful I am for that. To Mr Moore: thank you for sharing your love of history with us and for pushing each of us to reach our potential. On behalf of those of us in your 2014 Revs class, I'm sorry for the copious amounts of practice graphics and documents and short answers and essays we drowned you in. To Ms O'Farrell: Your passion for literature when you first taught me in Year 9 really resonated with me. I've come to appreciate storytelling as an art form and something much more profound than mere entertainment. I can honestly say that I enjoyed every moment of lit class and it was an absolute pleasure to invest my time and effort into a subject that you made more than just a subject: it was a passion. To Mr MacNeill: thank you for taking this mathematically challenged buffoon and helping him to get a respectable score in both spec. and methods that he is proud of, which would otherwise have been impossible! To Ms Giacco: you were far more than just a teacher to me. You are the inspiration for the person that I want to be in life: a selfless, compassionate, committed and altruistic Catholic. Thank you for your example. And finally, to Ms Caird: you've seen me grow up from the shy, little boy auditioning for debating in Year 7 to where I am now... and I'm not sure if much has changed. You have been the

nurturing, motherly figure for me at Mazenod, who gave me confidence; not just to speak but also in my own abilities. From you, I learnt the most. Yes, you taught me history; and as my debating coach, you taught me about politics, and the environment, and economics and everything from fat taxes to voluntourism. But you also taught me about life. From the very interesting life that you have led, you seemed to have a story for everything. And perhaps it's these life lessons that you gave me that I will prize most. So thank you.

I guess I will take this chance to say my final farewell to Mazenod. Everything I am and everything I hope to be originates from the views and values that this school has taught me. Many of my fondest memories are grounded here and I won't soon forget any of it. I'm honestly thankful for all of it. Your time at Mazenod is not just an education, it's an experience: remember that. Make the most of every opportunity you are presented with. Yes, you're going to leave this school with a number, but I tell you what, that's the last thing I'll remember when I think back on this place.

Thank you.