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# YOU'RE ALLOWED TO BE STRESSED

## Last minute HSC preparation

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The most stressful period of my life by far has been the time I sat for my HSC. It was the worst of times, and no, in no way was it the best of times. I sort of scraped through it in 2017, and having had two years to reflect upon (read: recover from) this crazy ordeal, there are a couple of things I'd like to share.

Academically, now's not the time to listen to someone else's advice. All the candidates will have had some sort of plan in place since the beginning of the year. The execution of these plans, however, will vary from person to person in terms of how successful they've been. Whether or not the plans were good ones to begin with is another question altogether, but that would have been a discussion for January. Less than a week away from the beginning of HSC, the one thing everyone has in common is stress. Stress levels should be soaring right about now, and as a candidate, you might feel like you're flying off the handle. And the only way to acknowledge this stress is to admit that well, *it's normal*.

Board exams matter way more than they should in our public education system and HSC, being the final hurdle as well as the first step towards university admission, has extra connotations. It's only natural that candidates feel stressed out, anxious, and for many of them, a certain fear starts to set in. Although I think all of these emotions are natural at this stage, it's impor-

tant to make sure you don't let them overwhelm you. The way to do that is to continue on with the routine that has helped you these past months. Put in the hours behind your studies at the last moment, not only will that keep you distracted, it'll make your preparation more rounded.

This is pretty standard advice, to be honest. I've probably read this somewhere myself, in late March 2017. What I experienced back then and I've heard many friends experience this as well, is that the last moment anxiety makes it very difficult to get any meaningful preparation in. You constantly feel like you've forgotten something, or that there's no way what you're reading right now will stick around in your brain long enough. But here's the thing, in times of troubles such as HSC, we tend to give our brain less credit than it deserves. Getting anxious about anxiety won't help, the best you can do is dedicate these last couple of days towards a better preparation and hope you retain most of the information. Odds are, you will.

Another issue that worries a lot of candidates is what to study at this point when everything has been covered multiple times (hopefully). With only a few days left, the good thing to do now would be to focus on the first exam: Bangla, first paper. I always found it to be particularly tricky, and being the first exam, it's rather important that this one goes well. Something that helped me in my time is to go through a mental checklist every now and then of each subject and what the diagno-

sis is on all of them. If there's a certain chapter in Physics that needs extra attention, get it done. If you feel like you forgot a chemical formula, go through your notes and refresh your memory. These last moment measures will increase the odds of you being able to answer whatever they throw at you in the exam, and the more effort you put in, the more confident you get.

In the buildup to the exams, a lot of students discover that they're only able to study at the dead of night, when everyone is asleep and your Facebook notifications finally shut up. That's all fine and dandy, but going to sleep at 4 in the morning and waking up at 1 in the afternoon isn't going to be a sustainable habit if your exams are scheduled for 10 AM. Getting your sleep cycle in order is of utmost importance in the days leading up to the exams, but the way to do it might not be forcing yourself to sleep at 10 like our parents often suggest. Bring your bedtime back by one hour at a time, if you're used to going to bed at 4, try doing it at 3 one week out from the exam. You can bring the time back an hour every night, and if you're going to bed anytime between 12 and 1 once the exams begin, waking up by 7 AM, you'll have enough sleep under your belt to catch the exam and actually think about the integral problem in Math First Paper before answering it. It's amazing how much of a difference a good night's sleep can make to your vital analytical skills for an exam. It's also very important that you start early

enough to catch your exams because for people living in Dhaka, the traffic can be very unpredictable.

Something that personally bothers me a lot even now is when people come out of an exam centre and compare answers. It's especially worse for an exam like HSC because it matters so much in the long run. Wallowing in despair for an entire afternoon over a handful of incorrect MCQ answers is an afternoon wasted in my opinion, because that's an afternoon you could have spent preparing for the next exam. A good way to avoid that is to let the last exam slide out of your mind as soon as possible. It does reinforce your confidence if you can make sure you've answered everything correctly, but *what if you haven't?* The risk here is too great and I'd suggest the donning of earphones as soon as you get out of the centre to clear your mind and make yourself ready for the next exam. HSC is a marathon and it's no use stumbling at any stage because you thought you needed to see what was going on behind you.

At the end of the day, HSC isn't just another board exam. It's THE board exam and there's no point running away from that reality. But that doesn't mean it's different from your other exams in terms of preparation and execution. If you've prepared well enough, the questions should be much easier than your average model test, and if your head is in the right place come April 1, this should be a piece of cake.