

TIPS for GETTING THROUGH MATRIC

After supporting each of my daughters, and having worked with several students, who were completing Matric over the years, I have some experience and knowledge of the stress involved. The South African statistics and news articles focus on the stories of students who couldn't cope, in the hopes of informing parents and students of 'things they should watch out for,' or be aware of, and mostly bring to our attention how much pressure this final year of school places on many students.

I have put together a few tips that I believe can make your Matric year a little easier and more manageable.

In a nutshell:

- ✓ **MANAGE YOUR TIME/TASKS**
 - Use a diary/calendar
 - Plan your time/tasks
 - What works for YOU?
 - Divide tasks into smaller chunks
 - Work consistently
 - Reward yourself
- ✓ **MANAGE YOUR ENERGY LEVELS**
 - HeartMath®
 - Pace yourself
- ✓ **Keep in mind: THE BIGGER PICTURE**
- ✓ **Have a PLAN A, B & C**
- ✓ **Plan some FUN**
- ✓ **MANAGE YOUR EMOTIONS & STATE**
 - Heart Focused Breathing™
 - Cook's Hook Ups
 - Other suggestions to shift
- ✓ **ASK FOR HELP**
- ✓ **GET ENOUGH SLEEP**

The key to getting through Matric is **MANAGING** both your **ENERGY LEVELS**, and your **TIME**. It is the one year when planning and using your diary or a wall calendar, or your phone calendar, can help you keep tabs on deadlines, projects and exam dates. Having a sense of what needs to be completed in basically 6 months of class-time and 4 months spent writing exams, can help some students, whereas others may feel overwhelmed by seeing **ALL** there is to get through.

So it is important to *understand yourself* – how do you function best? What makes you feel overwhelmed and what feels more manageable for you? Do you need to have a sense of the whole year and plan your time, or is it easier to manage one month, or even one week at a time, to keep on top of your scheduled tasks?

One of the simplest ways to MANAGE your TIME AND TASKS is to look at the next due date and work backwards, breaking the task into smaller chunks and scheduling those chunks into your available time. I understand that Matric is a bit of a juggling act, because there are many due dates and many tasks to be completed, but Matric is completed *one day at a time*, so WORK CONSISTENTLY to get through.

You can also REWARD YOURSELF for completed tasks – are you the kind of student who loves to tick items off a To Do list, or do you prefer to sit down and finish a whole project in one go; do you need external pressure or encouragement; or an actual physical reward? How can you set these rewards up to ensure you get them?

In terms of managing your ENERGY LEVELS, HeartMath® can definitely help you regulate your emotions, prepare for your exams and stay calm when you are writing exams or delivering those all-important speeches. If you also take at least 3 – 5 minutes a day to practice *Heart Focused Breathing™* (instructions below), you can also increase your resilience, so that you are better able to cope with all that is involved in your Matric year.

Another key aspect is to try and consider or visualise the BIGGER PICTURE. When you sit down to study or work on a project – remember WHY you are doing this. Where are you going and what doors do you hope to open in your future, by completing your Matric year? The effort you put into each day or project and exam may determine which of the possible future doors you can walk through. Matric gives you the keys to unlock the doors of possibility.

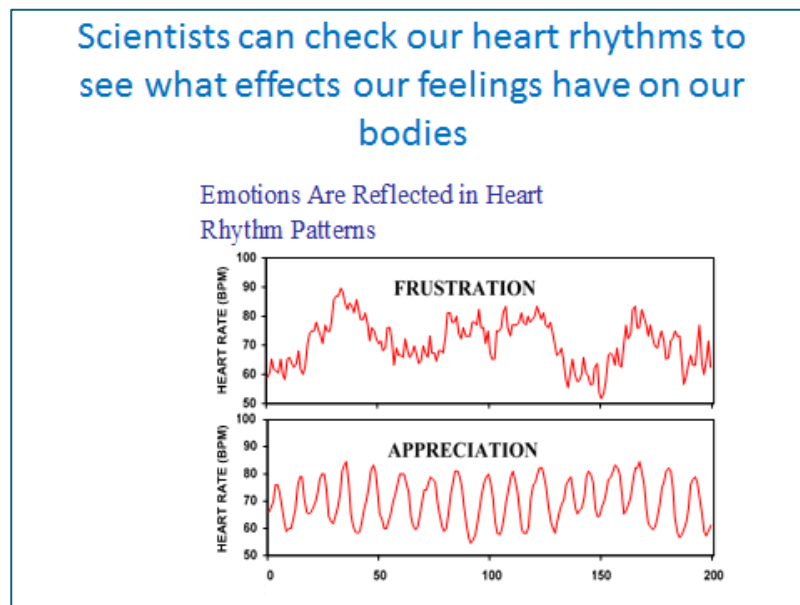
After all – you really *only* want to do this amount of work, and get through this level of stress and commitment, just once! So if you have to complete Matric, **what if you could do it to the best of your ability?** It is getting through 6 months of hard work and commitment and then the due date pressure eases off, and your extra-murals are usually completed for the year, and you can spend a lot of time focusing on your exams, studying and memorising what you need to. And just to help you, you write several sets of exams, so you get to study the same material repeatedly. This is when you need to PACE YOURSELF and **keep your energy levels up** to get you through to that *last exam paper*! Just imagine how you will feel when you put the *last* full-stop at the end of the *last* sentence in your *last* Matric exam!

I encourage Matric students to have a PLAN A, PLAN B and maybe even a PLAN C - so you have options lined up. I've found that this can **ease some of the pressure**, because students don't only limit themselves to one choice. I've also worked with a lot of University students and I've come to understand [through my own life experiences and career path - which has definitely not been linear] that if you are willing to be open and explore possibilities and options, you will find a way forward [even if you don't start where you think you should]. So, if you are hoping to go to University after Matric, I would suggest that you apply to as many as you can, so that you have many opportunities and choices lined up.

Plan some FUN time too – it is after all your last year of school, and you should be able to enjoy some of it. Also, try to schedule in some time for sport or other physical activity (like gym), so that you keep your body and mind strong.

Our emotions have a strong impact on our physical and neurological state (how you feel and your ability to focus and think). Studies have shown that our “heart activity affects how we feel” **and** “our ability to think.”¹ Depleting emotions (like frustration, anger, anxiety or worry) create disordered heart rhythm patterns and renewing emotions (like appreciation, care and compassion) create ordered heart rhythms.

The following 3 images are slides adapted from *The Inside Story*²:



Emotions like:

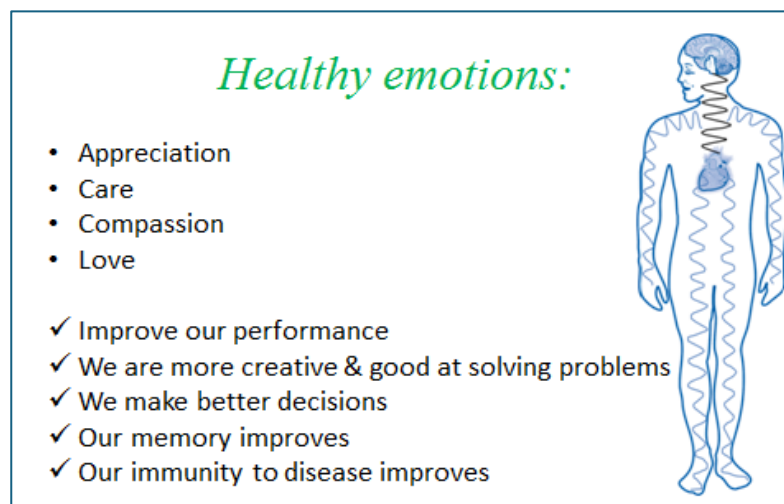
- Frustration
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Worry

- Deplete our energy and
- We can't think clearly or make decisions
- We don't communicate clearly
- Not good for our health

A diagram of a human body outline. A jagged, irregular line runs vertically through the center of the body, starting from the head and ending at the feet, representing a disordered heart rhythm. The heart is highlighted in the chest area.

¹ Institute of HeartMath, 2012. *The Inside Story: Understanding the Power of Feelings: The Heart-Brain Connection*, 5th edition. HeartMath LLC: California, p 23-24.

² Institute of HeartMath, *The Inside Story: Understanding the Power of Feelings: The Heart-Brain Connection* PowerPoint slides.



Here are a couple of ways you can SHIFT YOUR EMOTIONS into a more positive, renewing and calm state:

- **Heart Focused Breathing™:**

Focus your attention in the area of the heart. Imagine your breath is flowing in and out of your heart or chest area. Breathe a little slower and deeper than usual. (Suggestion: you can try breathing in to the count of 5 and out to the count of 5). Do this for 30 seconds or more.

- **Cook's Hook-ups (Brain Gym)³:**

Sit in your chair and cross your ankles. Stretch out your arms in front of you, with the backs of your hands together and your thumbs facing downward. Cross your wrists and place your palms together, and interlace your fingers. Point your joined hands down towards the floor and then slide them up your belly until they are resting on your chest. Relax your shoulders and press your tongue up against the roof of your mouth. Breathe deeply and slowly and stay in this position for a few breaths. Release your hands and uncross your feet, touch your fingertips together and hold for a few seconds while breathing deeply.

Here are a few other ways you can *shift into a state* that enables you to sit down and start working or studying⁴:

- Do a few jumping jacks
- Listen to music [that makes you feel good]
- Go for a walk

³ Adapted from: de Jager, M. 2002. *Mind Dynamics: Brain Gym In Your Briefcase*. Human & Rosseau: Cape Town, p60

⁴ Kuypers, L. 2011. *The Zones of Regulation: A Curriculum Designed to Foster Self-Regulation and Emotional Control*. Social Thinking Publishing: Santa Barbara, California, p140-141.

- Get a hug
- Bounce on a ball or a trampoline

Please also remember, it is OKAY to ASK FOR HELP. In the bigger picture of *your whole life*, Matric is just one piece of the puzzle, or one stretch of the road in your journey. I know that many of you face a lot of pressure, perhaps from teachers, parents and sometimes, the most pressure is from yourself.

If things feel like they are too much, or you are overwhelmed, speak to someone you trust. You can also try reminding yourself, “*This too shall pass*”⁵. This phrase has gotten me through many times where I’ve felt overwhelmed or overscheduled, with too much on my “To Do” list and not enough hours in a day ...

Oh and this is one of the most important tips – GET ENOUGH SLEEP! Everything seems more do-able in the morning, after a good night’s rest. There is a lot of research that indicates the importance of sleep and its impact on learning.^{6 7}

⁵ Definitive author unknown, but read up more about this phrase at: <https://simplicable.com/en/this-too-shall-pass>

⁶ Bonadie, N. 2025. Article: Sleep Hygiene for Studying – How Tossing and Turning Impacts Learning. Available at: <https://www.sacap.edu.za/blog/applied-psychology/sleep-hygiene-for-studying/>

⁷ Salari, M, Rajizadeh, M A & Sheibani, V. 2026. Sleep deprivation and learning & memory impairments: The modulating effects of exercise and complementary medicine, Behavioural Brain Research, Volume 505, 2026. Available: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0166432826001075>