

WORDS OF ADVICE FROM

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Have you had the experience of sitting in class with some obscure fact scrawled on the whiteboard, the teacher waving her arms ecstatically explaining the joy of electron valences, or existential crises, or exponential equations, and you suddenly understand – with the force of all epiphanies – that you are absolutely sure you will never use any of this again? Seniors, if that experience sounds familiar, I am going to let you in on a secret. Now that it is all over anyway, and we've convinced you that someday you will use calculus to measure your own carpets, I can admit to you: baloney. I had not seen the phrase "electron valence" since high school until I used it just now in that sentence. I had to research how to spell it.

We, your proud teachers, subjected you to all of this, knowing full well that you could find any answer to any question in three second by simply looking on your phone. We didn't make you learn an entire high school curriculum because we thought you needed to know it, but because we know that you need to know how to know.

If that seems like too many "knows" in one sentence, you are right – but read it again anyway. You need to know how to know. Your brain doesn't have to remember everything it learned; it just has to become very good at learning. Unfortunately, the only way a brain can become good at learn-

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ing is through exercise. I hate to tell you: it doesn't happen by just looking up answers on a phone. It happens, your brain improves, by doing the heavy lifting: working out all the electron valences by hand; reading about Hamlet's existential crises, or Holden's, and then thinking it through; and finally, by working all those exponential equations on paper, showing your work, over and over, until the brain, like any muscle, sweats and swells and finally is allowed to show off its nice six pack at the beach.

It is also nice to not be ignorant. So knowing something about electrons, and knowing that there is an equation out there to help you measure your carpet, and that a character named Hamlet exists in some play and people talk about his feelings from time to time, well, that's a bonus. You will also be pretty good a trivial pursuit.

So remember, as you begin college or your jobs. You are educated. If we did this correctly, you are educated not because of what you remember, but because of how well you can think, reason, and express yourself. If you want to become even better at those things, and develop an even sexier brain (maybe one with a six pack and good thighs), there are institutions out there that will throw even more difficult material at you, require even harder books, thornier problems, and longer papers. After you finish there, you can reread this letter. You will probably find that you don't actually remember much of that stuff either, but you will have a brain that can handle anything. And a brain that can handle anything, that is the ultimate prize. Go for it. Not very many people make it, but you can – if you want it. By going to Wakefield, you've had a very good start.

Mr. Chumley encourages the students of Wakefield High school by informing ^{them} that even if they don't use the ^{exact} complex equations or extensive vocabulary that they had to memorize, they will still use the brain that was exercised and grown throughout their entire life to solve problems