



# THE OAK LEAF

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# How to Actually Achieve Your New Year's Resolutions

Written by Olivia Vu and Genevieve Yuen

The creation of New Year's resolutions has been a tradition for over thousands of years. These goals allow one to focus on becoming a better person and develop healthy habits over the course of the year.

However, not many people are actually able to achieve their long-term goals, resulting in a lack of growth and an unhealthy cycle of poor habits that inevitably contribute to an unhealthy lifestyle.

According to "New Year's Resolutions at Work, Can Work" by Jessie Wood, "46% of people do keep resolutions for at least six months, and 8% keep them for the entire year." While many Americans claim that they will follow their resolutions, many factors can prevent them from doing so.

To avoid these roadblocks, here are three reasons why New Year's goals don't work and how to actually achieve your new year's goals this year.

## **Thinking Too Big/Being Too Vague:**

When people think of a suitable New Year's resolution, many exaggerate their goals, such as "learning a new language" or "exercising more." These unrealistic and over-generalized expectations that one creates for themselves can be overwhelming and almost impossible without the right conditions.

## **Solution:**

One way to create a more effective New Year's goal is to simplify your large goals into smaller, more accomplishable ones.

For example, instead of claiming to exercise more, arrange a workout plan where you aim to exercise during a certain time frame for a specific number of days a week.

Remember, while you shouldn't be too hard on yourself, maintaining self-discipline is

essential instead of using words and not following through. This will not only allow you to see the steady progress you are making towards your goals but also make achieving them a much easier task to meet.

It's more manageable to ease into your New Year's resolutions through small checkpoints rather than jumping towards the big goal.

Being aware of your limits and setting the right goals are the keys to success and will get you closer to achievement in the long run.

## **Not Having Enough Motivation:**

Motivation is the second issue many people have when aspiring to achieve their goals. You will be nowhere near improvement without the desire or need to fulfill your dreams.

Besides hard work and careful planning, having motivation can give you that extra boost you need to make those dreams come true.

### **Solution:**

Using motivation can help create healthy habits for yourself and make boring routines much more fun. For example, if one's New Year's resolution is to get more into gardening as a hobby, it might be challenging to follow through without motivation.

Instead, one should imagine the flourishing garden and fresh produce they would have if they started gardening now. In addition, setting monthly or weekly awards can help one have more motivation if they see a reason to work hard.

Thinking of the big goal and *why* you want to change can evoke motivation and help you get one step closer to success.

### **Procrastination:**

While setting small goals and having motivation is necessary, procrastination is the most critical obstacle

to avoid. Having an adequate plan and the desire to fulfill that plan is not enough if you don't actually start contributing toward the goal. Excuses are very common; before you know it, six months can go by without any improvement.

### **Solution:**

Set reminders every day to make sure you stay on track. It can be easy to put off a task for another more rewarding, dopamine-fulfilling occupation than the one at hand.

Having alarms that remind you of the work can be extremely helpful in drawing your attention and focus back to what you need to accomplish. Another critical piece of advice is to start now. Ignore all excuses

for putting aside the task and start working on it. The hardest part is getting out of the procrastination trance and into reality.

Once you begin your task, you'll find it much easier and more natural to continue your workflow than you imagined. For

instance, creating an account on Duolingo is the best first step if one wants to learn a new language.

Then, doing a lesson per day and sharing your progress with loved ones can enhance motivation and decrease the chances of procrastinating.

### **Recap:**

By setting smaller, more achievable goals, gaining motivation, and avoiding procrastination, you can be more successful in fulfilling your New Year's resolutions.

In addition, it's helpful to write down the steps towards completing your resolutions and creating a weekly plan that you can refer to to enhance your chances of success.

Additional healthy habits include listening to motivational music, imagining your new, improved self after achievement, or creating a mood board.

Remember, you don't have to worry so much about the future or the past but rather about what you can do in the present.

# Winner of AHS Environmental Photography Contest Shares Her Experience

Written by Rowan Diener

This January, AHS' Environmental Club hosted a photography contest open to all students—the theme was “something in nature,” in line with the club’s values of preserving the Earth’s natural beauty and advocating for a healthier environment.

The winner was junior Amy Nguyen, whose photo depicts flowers atop the mountains of Da Lat, Vietnam. In the background stretches the verdant Central Highlands for which the region is known.

“I wouldn't say I really had an inspiration,” Nguyen explained during her interview with The Oak Leaf, “but I knew I would never see that view of Vietnam and of the beauty there ever again. Standing atop the mountains really made me slow down, take a breath, and take in the views and people around me, and also realize the privilege I had to be able to

return to my home country.”

The occasion of the photograph was a particularly happy one—Nguyen was visiting her family in Vietnam for the first time in four years. “Last time we didn’t explore much,” Nguyen said, “so I begged my mom

for us to see the other parts of Vietnam, rural and city.” Photography, while not necessarily a hobby, is a valued means by which Nguyen reflects upon her experiences and the things she has seen. Posting her photos online has compelled her to “see the beauty more”

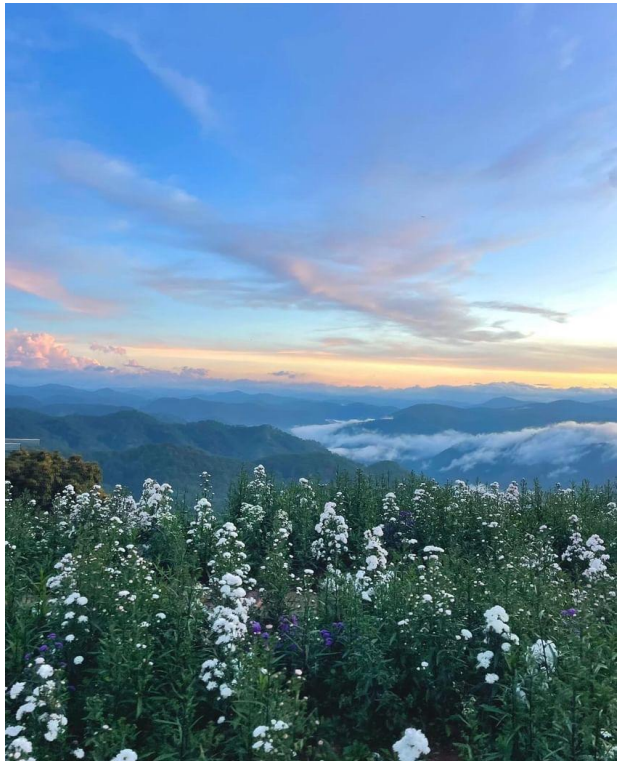


Photo credit: Amy Nguyen

when out in nature, whether on hikes or trips.

Nguyen has been involved in more direct forms of environmental advocacy as well—she is especially passionate about access to electricity and solar power.

“I used to work for a solar camp and we focused a lot on how solar can benefit a community’s water, lighting, and energy,” Nguyen said. “We also were able to send solar suitcases to schools in Rwanda and Uganda to help with lighting and charging/battery access for devices.”

She explains that doing that sort of humanitarian work left a lasting impression of the importance of solar power, which she feels deeply connected to.

If you’d like to see more from Amy Nguyen (or perhaps share her love for skiing and frozen yogurt), you can find her on Instagram under the handle [@amytramn](#).

# Book Review: The Westing Game

Written by Piper Dooley

If you're looking for a light read, the Westing Game by Ellen Raskin is a 1978 mystery full of twists and eccentric characters.

On the shores of Lake Michigan a group of 16 seemingly unrelated people are given letters inviting them to tour apartments in a new building, Sunset Towers. They become the building's tenants, only to quickly be wrapped up in a competition to win the inheritance of a neighboring paper tycoon Mr. Westing.

The story's protagonist, young Turtle Wexler, as well as other formidable characters, question and investigate all of their surroundings.

Through revelations about the tenants' pasts and connection with the late Westing, complex puzzles, and vague clues, the truth of the mystery is revealed.

The Westing Game is enjoyable with endearing characters whose relationships grow and evolve while they face danger and death to win the game. The short novel encourages its readers to question everything and everyone.

It is, for a murder mystery, surprisingly gentle and forgiving with many character arcs focusing on redemption and acceptance. Many clues feel interactive and are enjoyable to solve vicariously. The book deals heavily with the accumulation of wealth in America, through both labor, ardor and inheritance.

In the character's comical and exaggerated personalities and evident greed a satirical look at American capitalism is quietly broached. Raskin mocks patriotism, excessive accumulation of wealth and the real life dynamics of industries and politics. Raskin took inspiration from a real life man and an important chapter of Michigan's history.

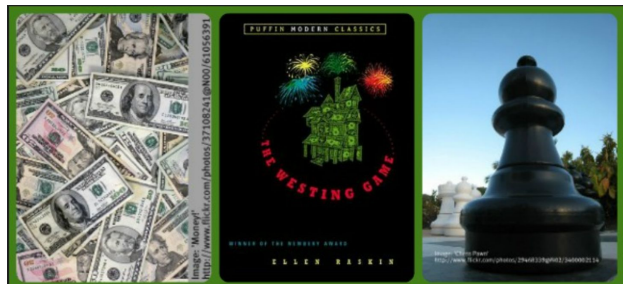


Photo Credit: Free use image from Flickr



# Opinion

## Stress Management

Written by Tonia Chen

Stress is an emotion that every student must inevitably deal with. Whether that stress is present for one semester or the entirety of your lifetime, it has the potential of becoming more than a helpful motivator and take over an unhealthy portion of our lives.

In fact, over 60% of students report that they grapple with stress on a daily basis, according to a recent survey conducted by the American Psychological Association.

It is common for high schoolers to feel the overwhelming pressure to organize their entire future in the span of merely 4 years. Although stress is inevitable, there are many ways to cope with it to prevent it from taking over.

### Writing your Thoughts into a Journal

Sometimes, it's hard for your brain to keep up with your emotions.

Your thoughts are not always organized into a perfectly straight line, it can be a tangled zig zag as well. In order to combat this issue, it may be a good idea to transfer your thoughts onto paper.

It is always good to talk to a friend about your emotions, but sometimes it is simply not easy. One in four people report that they don't feel they have someone to confide in.

As a result, those people end up keeping their emotions to themselves, which can lead to anxiety and increased stress levels. By writing these feelings down, people can achieve improved mental health, positive moods and reduced anxiety.

### Set Achievable, Specific Goals

While it is good to have goals in our lives, it is important that we make sure these goals are achievable. If we set goals that are far too vague and unrealistic, it can make it seem harder to achieve, this leads to procrastination, lack of motivation, confusion, and ultimately, stress.

It is important to narrow down your list of goals to build determination and productivity.

For example, instead of having your goal be "I will get into a good college," you can tune it to "I will set aside 2 hours everyday for my schoolwork, and begin volunteer work." By making goals more specific, we can better comprehend them, and therefore achieve them.



## **Write down your Daily Schedule**

Since students have numerous responsibilities, it is common for people to forget about their daily tasks.

It is easy for some responsibilities to be forgotten, which can lead to even more stress. By writing down your schedule, you can save yourself the effort of trying to remember everything.

By including checkboxes we can also feel a sense of accomplishment when we finish a task. It can help you figure out how to schedule your day, organize your priorities, and stay on top of your work. By setting strict schedules, students can reduce procrastination, which can lead to many stress invoking consequences, such as late work, messy work, or a lack of sleep.

# Opinion

## Movie Review: *Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One*

Written by Luc Trinh

The past weekend I watched “Mission Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One.” As part of the popular “Mission Impossible” movie series, it differed from its predecessors in several ways.

In the movie, Tom Cruise stars as the fictional highly skilled field agent Ethan Hunt who, along with the Impossible Mission Force, have to track down a powerful AI weapon called the “Entity” that threatens all of humanity before it falls into the wrong hands.

Taking control is easier said than done as the team has to race against rival U.S. intelligence agents, local authorities, and even a terrorist named Gabriel who works with the AI.

The protagonists continue the same story like the previous movies with acquiring a high-stakes

mission, performing high-action stunts, using sci-fi technology, and taking twists and turns throughout.

However the movie had significant differences compared to its predecessors. For example this is half of the whole story (the second half, an untitled sequel, is supposed to be released in 2025).

Comparably, the previous movies were standalone stories. The story also differs with now technology changing from being an aide to becoming an obstacle due to the AI takeover, forcing the protagonists to improvise on existing tactics.

Another key difference is that in the race to obtain control of the AI, almost no one can be trusted.

This results in the Impossible Mission Force

having to compete against others in the race to acquire the key that can control the AI; the team is now disavowed by the U.S. government and having to rely on themselves for the first time since *Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol*.

Most importantly the story has a Terminator-esque storyline where the protagonists have to battle AI.

The movie does have similarities to its predecessors, though.

The main characters revisit places from previous movies like Rome (*Mission: Impossible III*), the United Arab Emirates (*Ghost Protocol*), and the CIA Headquarters in Langley, U.S. (*Mission: Impossible*).

The movie also repeats certain scenes from previous movies like how Ethan Hunt engages the villain on a moving train just like in *Mission: Impossible* and how he had a flirtatious relationship just like in *Mission: Impossible* 2. It even combines the characteristics of previous villains, like Jim Phelps/Job (Mission: Impossible); Sean Ambrose (Mission: Impossible 2); Owen Davian's (Mission: Impossible III); Kurt Hendricks/Cobalt (Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol); Solomon Lane (Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation); and August Walker/John Lark (Mission: Impossible – Fallout), into the main antagonist Gabriel, who desires to use the Entity to take over the world.

They also did a great job breaking the consistent storyline and made AI the main focus. It does really reflect how AI is a growing issue in the 21st century and how we must know how to manage it before it goes rogue.

Overall *Mission Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One* differs from its predecessors yet recycled many of the scenes and storyline plots from them. We will have to wait for the sequel to come out to see how it will compare.

In my personal opinion, I really liked how they recycled the scenes, storyline and villains. The directors really did a refresh instead of doing just the same old thing.

# The Poetry Corner

## Poetry submitted by AHS Students

Every American knows less and less  
The state of the world we can only  
guess  
Pressure building on the press  
Two and a half newspapers shut down  
each week  
It appears the media has sprung a leak  
What is false and what is true?  
We, as Americans, have no clue

- Julian Chea, Junior

How come boundaries are so hard to set  
Sitting out here  
In the pouring rain  
Under an umbrella covered in The Kiss  
Not yours as I don't believe your love  
for me could stand the many centuries  
As this one does  
I mean  
I love you  
Of course I do  
I remind you with every chance I get  
But I never see you pray  
In the cathedral of my heart  
For no matter what extravagance I paint  
on it's walls  
You can't seem to look for long enough  
To see the hard work and dedication  
And you will never see  
The failed attempts painted over  
For I closed myself off until it was as  
close to perfect as one could be  
I try to pull you in with more than just  
paintings

But I see you falling asleep when I  
speak for too long  
Not understanding the lyrics and gospel  
we sing in an off key harmony  
Sometimes we aren't even on the same  
lyric or page  
So I try to find your cathedral  
Every one I enter is more or less the  
same  
But also quite different  
Of course the paintings and sculptures  
vary  
They're different places after all  
But the dedication and devotion, I mean  
Sometimes their visitors become  
entranced  
Sometimes with fear and tears  
But also sometimes with adoration  
Care and comfort  
Respected and repaired  
Is that too much to ask for?  
To be loved by a singular with such  
might?  
For I do desire it so  
As when I do pay my respects to such  
structures  
I'm worried I may see you  
Caring so much about someone who  
isn't me  
And for you to not give the same  
treatment the next time my heart is  
visited  
Or for you to never return at all.

- "La Cathédrale de mon Cœur,"  
Juniper Vintson, Senior

# Advice: Ask Buzzy

Written by Buzzy

Happy New Year, Hornets!

Buzzy here to wish you all an amazing new year and great progress through the second semester. I see it in students that the second semester can be tough, but I know that you all are strong, and can persevere no matter what's in your way!

On a personal note, spring is one of the best times of year for a Hornet, with everything coming to life and the weather finally warming up again. So, as a bit of advice from a Hornet, if you're feeling down because of some rainy day blues, remember that spring is just around the corner, and soon enough, it'll be blue skies and warm, sunny days.

## Question 1: Any advice to prepare for AP tests?

I'm glad to see students actively prepare for AP tests! February is a good time to start ramping up your preparation for the AP tests, as you should have a foundation for knowledge and skills building throughout the year at this point.

At the same time, it would give you ample time to address your weak areas and hone your test-taking skills to set you up for success.

First, map out your study plan to keep you on track! Set aside specific times each day to review material, even 20 minutes per day would add up when you keep it consistent.

Break down your study goals into manageable chunks and celebrate your progress along the way. Tackle practice questions and dive into class materials for review. Remember to focus on understanding the core basic concepts and key terms.



The materials might seem overwhelming, but with a good grasp of the basics, you can tackle challenging areas much easier. Some recommendations I have are to create a mind map for visualization or to explain the concepts to another friend. Don't be afraid to ask for help from others, working through it with them would clarify the concepts.

Remember that AP Exams are standardized tests, and like any standardized test, you can do better by learning how to take the test. So get your hands on past exams and official practice tests and perfect your test-taking techniques. I will touch more on the topic in April.

In the end, the most important thing is to take care of yourself amidst the grind. Get enough sleep, eat well, make time for your hobbies, and spend time with others. Your long-term wellbeing is ultimately more important than the tests. With determination and a solid plan in place, you've got this!

**Question 2: I've fallen behind in class and I'm feeling overwhelmed. Any tips on how to catch up and stay motivated? Thanks!**

I totally get where you're coming from. Falling behind in class can feel super overwhelming, coupled with your grade looming over you. It is important to keep a to-do list to keep track of all your assignments as well as stay up to date on tests and deadlines so you can prepare for them. Once again,

I recommend establishing a study schedule that works for you and stick to it. Set aside specific times each day to focus on catching up, and be consistent with your study routine. Even just a bit each day would add up quick. Identify your areas of weakness and what you need to catch up on (homeworks, test preparations,...). Then, start studying by breaking down the material into smaller, manageable chunks. Tackle one topic or assignment at a time to avoid feeling overwhelmed. To catch up

on work, focus on the most important tasks first. Look at your syllabus or talk to your teacher to figure out which concepts or assignments are the highest priority.

Don't be afraid to reach out to your teacher or classmates for help. They're there to support you and can provide guidance or clarification on anything you're struggling with. It's easy to get discouraged when you're playing catch-up, but try to stay positive. You can stay motivated by celebrate your progress, no matter how small. Remind yourself why you're doing this: whether to get good grades for colleges or to prove to yourself you can do it. Taking care of your well-being is crucial to maintain motivation, so take breaks and surround yourself with people who uplifts and support you.

I wish the best of luck to you! Just take it one step at a time, stick to your

study schedule, and you'll be back on track before you know it.

### **Question 3: How do I face college rejections?**

During March, many seniors face the prospect of rejection as college decisions are coming out. Try to not take it personally. Rejection from a college isn't a reflection of your worth. Yet it is also perfectly normal to feel disappointed or unmotivated from the rejection.

After all, I understand you have all put in a lot of work and just lost a potential future you have wished for (especially if this is your dream school). Let yourself feel, and when you are ready, take a step back to reflect on your experience. Why you wanted to go to that particular college in the first place and explore other options that would offer similar experiences. And celebrate your other acceptances!

Remind yourself of your personal growth, how far

you have come and achieve in this moment, or the relationships you built with others during the process. All the struggles you felt were not for nothing. You have grown. Embrace the colleges that have accepted you.

Try not to take it personally: Rejection from a college isn't a reflection of your worth. Allow yourself to feel your emotions, but remember that it's a natural part of the process. When you're ready, focus on moving forward.

Find ways to cope: Remind yourself of your personal growth and connect with others who have faced similar situations. Consider reading about successful individuals who overcame college rejection. Get some perspective: Reflect on why you wanted that particular college and explore other options that offer similar qualities. Evaluate your qualifications and consider schools where you're a strong candidate. Turn to colleges saying yes:

Embrace the colleges that have accepted you and explore them further. If you didn't get accepted anywhere, consider alternative paths such as community college or taking a gap year. If you're struggling to let go: Consider asking for reconsideration if significant information was missing from your application. Think about reapplying after a gap year to enhance your application. Explore transferring to your dream school after completing a year elsewhere, ensuring you excel in your current academic environment.





# Valentines Word Search

Written by Ella Randecker

p	n	d	w	b	s	e	h	m	d	p	i
o	r	c	y	g	r	a	v	i	o	a	e
e	s	a	h	e	y	l	p	w	l	g	v
m	o	s	p	o	w	u	h	b	t	y	o
l	p	w	i	d	c	f	p	o	e	m	l
a	d	e	o	s	v	o	t	s	e	e	h
r	h	e	a	b	v	m	l	e	b	r	m
i	v	t	e	t	p	h	c	a	r	d	o
m	f	y	s	c	a	g	p	u	t	v	w
e	v	p	o	u	i	d	v	o	p	e	f
h	e	a	r	t	s	e	w	y	b	m	a

*-Card*

*-Sweet*

*-Chocolate*

*-Rose*

*-Hearts*

*-Love*

*-Cupid*

*-Poem*

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