

TEST ANXIETY

So let's say you have a test coming up. Are you nervous? Do you feel a little worried about how you will perform on your exam? A little tension or stress before and/or during a test is normal. Sometimes, that nervousness can work in your favor by motivating you. However, in larger amounts, tension can interfere or even impair our ability to think clearly, plan, and perform on tests. The following information will help you to cope and overcome test anxiety.

How well prepared are you for your test? Did you study? Tension can be caused by a lack of preparation for a test. However, this type of tension is easy to understand and can be eliminated appropriate studying. (Hints on how to improve your study skills are presented in the Study Skills screen of this program).

If you have studied appropriately for your test and you are still overreacting or panicking, you are suffering from test anxiety. In this screen, we will review the steps that will help you to overcome its effects. These steps are:

1. Before the test
 2. Thinking straight about your test
 3. Taking care of your basic needs
 4. Getting ready
 5. Facing the test
 6. During the test
 7. After the test
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BEFORE THE TEST

- **BE PREPARED.** Preparation is the key element in reducing test anxiety. The better prepared you are for your exam, the lower your level of anxiety. Being well prepared for a test can also increase your self confidence. So, study, study, study!!!
- **NO CRAMMING.** What is cramming? Imagine stuffing all of your textbooks into your backpack at one time. Would they all fit? Probably not. Now imagine that backpack is your brain. Just like your backpack your brain will handle a little information at a time a lot better than a lot of information at one time. Cramming

is an ineffective way of studying. If you cram the night before, you might be able to pass some parts of your test, but you will not remember anything afterwards (and in most cases the information will be included in your final.) It is not a good idea to try to cram weeks of information into your head the night before the test. Usually, this is a time when you are feeling anxious, pressured and probably guilty for studying at the last minute. All of these feelings will make it difficult for you to concentrate. Some students say that they do worse on a test when they study weeks ahead of time. Years of research on how to study do not agree with this statement. If this happens to you it is because you are either, studying in advance without learning or you have developed a bad habit of learning under pressure. Both are ineffective ways of learning and both can easily create anxiety.

- **REVIEW ALL THE INFORMATION.** Study from your book, notebook, and any other materials used class. Combine their information. Work on mastering the main idea, as well as specific ideas or concepts your teacher may have presented in your class.
- **ASK YOURSELF QUESTIONS.** This method is well explained in the Study Skills screen of the Counseling Center program. When studying, try to turn the headings into questions, and answer them using the different sources of information used in class such as your books, notes and/or study guides. Ask yourself what kind of questions your teacher may ask you. Try to answer them too. Moreover, ask your teacher for samples of previous tests, and practice with them as well.
- **USE FLASH CARDS.** Flash cards are excellent tools for studying. After you put together your questions and you formulate the answers, put the question on one side of an index card and the answer on the other side. This kind of help will allow you to allocate your time in an effective way. You will be able to study quickly, carry your flash cards everywhere with you and determine what you already know. Try to use your time to study what you do not know and merely review what you know.



THINKING STRAIGHT ABOUT YOUR TEST

CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK ABOUT STUDYING. Changing the way you think about studying can improve your performance. Grades and studying are important, but you should not let them determine your self worth or self esteem. . This kind of thinking can lead you to see studying as an impossible task. These kinds of beliefs can create anxiety and stress and reduce your capacity to concentrate, and learn. This type of thinking can start a vicious cycle. (The Study Skills website can put you on the straight and narrow!)

- **PUT YOUR TEST IN PERSPECTIVE.** A test is only a test. Keep in mind that there will be others. This will help you remove part of the emotional charge we put on our tests, reducing your stress, and allowing you to study better.
- **ELIMINATE NEGATIVE SELF-TALK.** Avoid thinking of yourself in a negative way. (i.e., I can't do this. This is too much. I will never learn all of this information.) Avoid getting weighed down by negative thoughts and feelings related to studying. Focus on what needs to be done and **DO IT**. You will be surprised how much time you can waste doing everything else but studying. Negative thoughts waste time and cause you to feel more anxious and frustrated.
- **INVEST TIME IN PLANNING.** Take some time to review your current study habits and compare it to the success you are having on tests. Continue to do what is working and start thinking of ways to change what is not working. This way you can improve your study habits and improve your performance on tests.
- **PUT YOUR GRADE IN PERSPECTIVE.** Your grade is not necessarily a reflection of your preparation. You might think that the test anxiety reduction program is not working because your grades are not immediately improving. The reality is that your grades will not improve right away. It will take time and more than one test to see that kind of results. You can consider yourself successful if you made a plan and followed through with it. If you had a good plan, and you stick to it, that is what really counts; even if the grade was not as high as you would have liked it to be. Give yourself a pat on the back for putting together an effective study plan. The test may have been more difficult than expected. Take a little time to re-do your plan and try again. The reverse is also possible, you may have failed your plan and still managed to get a good grade (E.G., the test included those questions you knew all about.) Again, you should use more than your actual grade to evaluate your performance.
- **DEVELOP REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS.** Take your tests one at a time. Set reachable goals. Make sure you use all of the information you know. Hope for a result that matches the stage of program you have reached at this point. If you set goals that are hard to reach it will only lead to frustration, which, in turn, will become a good excuse to give up.



TAKING CARE OF YOUR BASIC NEEDS

- **KEEP IN MIND THAT YOU ARE MORE THAN A TEST TAKER.** Students concerned about tests usually neglect other aspects of themselves. Do not forget that taking a test is only one of the important things in your life. You should also care for your biological, emotional, psychological, and social needs.
- **"MENS SANA IN CORPORE SANA."** "Healthy mind in healthy body." Exercise. Stay in good shape. Eat consciously. Keep up with your recreational and social

activities. All of these things contribute to your well-being and capacity to avoid test anxiety.

- **REMEMBER THAT "FOOD FOR THOUGHT" IS ONLY A LITERARY EXPRESSION.** You probably see some of your friends pigging out on junk food and drinking lots of unhealthy drinks. (e.g., too many sodas or energy drinks). Some people feel that these things will help them study better and/or longer. In fact, the result is often the opposite. A stomach ache will prevent you from concentrating. Caffeine may give you the jitters, make you feel light-headed or even give you a headache.
- **SMALL DOSES PLEASE.** Study for short periods of time (see the Study Skills screen for more information.) Take in a little information at a time and take breaks. It is important to give yourself enough time to study before the test. The object of studying is to learn as much information as possible, so give yourself plenty of time.
- **REST THE NIGHT BEFORE THE TEST.** Keep yourself busy by doing other activities. Play a game of basketball, relax, and talk to your friends. Rest. Get plenty of sleep. A refreshed mind will allow you to do your best. A tired mind will not function at its best. **(This is the reason why studying overnight usually does not pay off).**



GETTING READY

- **FACE THE DAY OF THE TEST WITH PRIDE.** Take responsibility for your actions. If you studied enough, be proud of yourself. What really matters at this point is not the potential grade, but the fact that you did what you were supposed to do. This is an accomplishment in itself!
- **EAT A SENSIBLE BREAKFAST.** Do not overeat or eat junk food before the test. Some students use food as a way to reduce anxiety. Overeating on the day of the test may backfire on you making it difficult for you to do your best. You may become physically uncomfortable (such as a stomach ache) or sick during the test. So eat a healthy breakfast and don't worry you will do great!
- **RELAX DURING THE HOUR BEFORE THE TEST.** Do something relaxing the hour before the test. It is too late to try to learn what you did not learn before. Last minute cramming will cloud what you have learned before. It will also chip away at your confidence.
- **AVOID "STRESS-CARRIERS."** Politely avoid classmates who produce anxiety and affect your mood to the test. Do not let them scare, stress, or upset you.
- **BRING A "STRESS-SAVER" WITH YOU.** Bring your favorite magazine, book or newspaper to read. Reading can help relieve stress and take your mind off of the test.

- **USE PHYSICAL RELAXATION.** Learn and use tensing and relaxing techniques to fight off the tension and anxiety.



FACING THE TEST

- **HOW DO YOU FEEL?** How are you? How is your anxiety level? If it is high or moderately high, take some time to relax. You may think that relaxing will take away from your test time, however relaxing increases your chances to do a more efficient job. This will save you time instead.
- **COACH YOURSELF.** Sometimes students get anxious after finding out that they do not know the answer to the first or second question.

Follow your plan:

- *Answer the questions you know.*
- *Answer the questions you are not really sure about, and finally*
- *Answer the questions you do not know*

This process will help you to keep moving. Stick to the plan!!

- **REVIEW YOUR TEST.** Before you begin answering the questions, review the entire test. Read the instructions carefully; twice if necessary. Stick to your plan, begin working on the easiest questions first.



DURING THE TEST

- **OUTLINE ANSWERS ON ESSAY QUESTIONS.** Develop a short outline of your answers for essay questions. This will help you to organize your answer, avoid irritating repetitions, and skip circular arguments.
- **GIVE SHORT ANSWERS FOR SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS.** Answer short and to the point. Use specific terms and ideas. If you cannot remember a technical term, describe it in your own words.
- **READ OPTIONS CAREFULLY.** Read all the options of multiple choice questions. Eliminate the most obvious. Use qualifying words such as "always," or "only," to eliminate others. If unsure, rely on your first hunch, then mark the question with an asterisk or a star and move on. If you have time at the end, go back and review your marked questions.

- **WEAR YOUR WATCH.** Do not rush through the test. Keep track of the time. Pace yourself. If you are running out of time, concentrate on those questions which you can answer. Make sure you match the number of the question with the number of your answer on the Scantron.
- **DO NOT GET STUCK.** Do not get stuck on one question. Skip it and solve the next one. Go back to the question after you finish answering those you can. Remember that you do not get points for trying. * **RELAX YOUR TENSION.** If your tension is hampering your capacity to do your best, tense and relax your body as needed during the test. This exercise releases your tension. Breathing deeply, in and out, also helps to release anxiety. For more information on relaxation, see the Relaxation, Breathing Techniques, and Biofeedback screens in this program.
- **ASK QUESTIONS.** Ask for more information if you are not sure about a question in your test. Asking your instructor a question can also help to distract you and reduce your anxiety. * **TALK TO YOURSELF.** If your anxiety continues, tell yourself phrases like "I can be anxious later, now I am going to continue my test." Use any type of internal dialogue (nobody else need to hear you) that can help you do better in your test.
- **IF WORSE COME TO WORSE, USE ANY OTHER LEGAL TRICK TO DISTRACT YOURSELF.** If anxiety continues, use any acceptable way to distract yourself from it. Request permission to go to the bathroom or get a drink, etc. If nothing else works, go sharpen your pencil!



AFTER THE TEST

- **REWARD YOURSELF.** Whether you did well or not, reward yourself for taking, and surviving your test! You deserve it.
LATER ON. Evaluate your study plan. Here are some questions to ask yourself:
 - *Were you prepared for it?*
 - *Were you able to control your anxiety and relax?*
 - *What did you do right? (You should repeat this while studying for the next test.)*
 - *What did you do that needs work? (Try to work on it, but do not dwell on your mistakes!!).*
- Finally, use your mistakes as a guide. Mistakes make it easier to figure out what needs to be improved.
- **THEN...** Develop an improved plan and begin studying for your next test!



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