

Don't let Test Anxiety get the Best of You

Many, if not all, students experience some amount of nervousness or tension before tests or other important events. A little bit of this type of anxiety can actually be helpful when facing a challenge like a test. But too much nervousness can be a problem that may interfere with your ability to study for and do well on tests.

In order to know what you can do to help yourself you must first determine what kind of anxiety you are experiencing.

If your nervousness is due to lack of preparation or study time, then that is a normal rational reaction that you can address by preparing more adequately the next time.

- Avoid cramming for a test. Trying to learn or memorize all the material a day before a test is a poor way to learn and can easily produce anxiety.
- When studying for a test, ask yourself what questions may come up on the test from the textbook, lectures and labs and try to answer them in your own words.
- Combine all the material you have been presented during the quarter and work on mastering the main concepts of the course well before the exam time.
- Make a study plan to learn, review and memorize material by using the course syllabus to plan for what you need to know by test time.

If you are prepared, but still panic, “blank out” or overreact, then this type of anxiety is not rational, though it can still be a very normal reaction for many people.

If you are preparing adequately for your tests/exams, and are still very anxious then some of these techniques may prove helpful:

- Change your perspective on test taking. Don't give catastrophic meaning to the test grade--- it is not a reflection of your self-worth, nor does it predict your future life success. It is only one of many tests you will encounter in your student life.
- Avoid thinking of yourself in all-or-nothing terms.
- While preparing for tests, especially final exams, don't neglect your normal basic biological needs. Remember to continue with good nutrition, exercise, and sleep. Schedule in some time for recreation and relaxation, or socialization during these times.
- Once you feel that you are prepared for the text, relax and get plenty of sleep the night before the test or exam.
- After the test, do something you enjoy to relax.

The Day of the Test or Exam

- Begin your day with a good breakfast, don't overeat or load up on caffeine—overeating may make you feel sick or tired and too much caffeine may give you “caffeine jitters”.
- Wear a watch so you can keep track of testing time and can pace yourself during the test.
- Try to do something relaxing the hour before the exam—last minute cramming could be confusing and cloud your mastery of the overall concepts.
- Get to the test area early so you are not rushed and can find a good seat away from distractions. While waiting, get your testing materials ready and if you are too early distract yourself by reading a newspaper or magazine.
- Avoid; don't talk with classmates who may add to your nervousness or anxiety.

During the Exam or Test

- Before you begin answering the test questions, review the entire test. Read the directions.
- Organize your testing time efficiently.
- Work on the easiest portions first.
- For essay questions construct a short outline for yourself, and then begin your answer with a summary sentence.
- For multiple choice questions, read all the answer options first, then eliminate the ones you are certain are not correct. Look for qualifying words like “always”, “only”, “most”. Rely on your first choice.
- If you feel anxious:
 - Tell yourself “ I can be anxious later, now is the time to focus on the test”
 - Replace negative thoughts with more positive thoughts “I don't have to be perfect.” “I will be able to show what I know on this exam.”
 - Tense and relax your muscles throughout your body.
 - Take a couple of slow deep breaths.
 - If allowed, go out of the room get a drink of water.
 - If allowed, eat something.
 - If allowed, break you pencil lead and then go sharpen it.
 - Think about your post test relaxing activity.

After the Test or Exam

- Make sure you do the post test relaxing, enjoyable activity that you planned.
- Try not to dwell on all the mistakes you might have made.
- Do not immediately start to study for the next test.

Resources and References

General Resources:

- www.how-to-study.com
- www.studygs.net
- www.tutorvista.com

Testing Resources:

- www.testprepreview.com
- www.atitesting.com

Test Anxiety Resources:

- [Taking the Anxiety out of Testing](#) by Susan Johnson
- [Test Anxiety Prevention](#) by Howard Rosenthal
- [No More Test Anxiety: Effective Steps for Taking Tests and Achieving Better Grades](#) by Ed Newman

References:

- [The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook](#) by Edmund J. Bourne
- [The Feeling Good Handbook](#) by David Burns
- [Taking the Anxiety out of Testing](#) by Susan Johnson