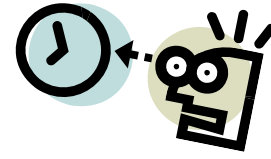


## Managing Test Anxiety



Most students experience some level of anxiety during an exam. However, when anxiety affects your performance on an exam, it has become a problem.

There are steps you can take to keep anxiety from interfering with your performance. This doesn't mean that you'll eliminate all anxiety; it's a normal reaction to stressful situations and can even be beneficial. You can, however, implement some strategies that will help you reduce your anxiety to a manageable level. Remember, anxiety is a learned physiological response and you can take control.

### Before the Test

- **Be well prepared.** Of course you'll be anxious if you haven't learned the material. Start studying at the beginning of each unit and keep it up every day; don't wait until the night before the test to study. Take good notes and review them right after each class session and periodically throughout the unit. Find and use the study techniques that work best for your learning style: flashcards, outlines, summary sheets, study groups, working with tutors in the LRC, SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review).
- **Sleep.** Harvard Medical School studies indicate that getting 6 to 8 hours of sleep can significantly improve your performance on exams. By and large, all-nighters just don't work very well.
- **Avoid caffeine.** Contrary to conventional wisdom, the "edge" you get from caffeine won't help you focus. It's actually more likely to increase your anxiety!
- **Steer clear of nervous friends.** Anxiety can be contagious. If classmates are worried about the exam, they can increase your own anxiety. You may find it helpful to simply avoid talking with other students right before an exam.
- **Eat.** A light meal of low fat proteins (chicken, turkey, most fish, low-fat yogurt or cottage cheese) an hour or two before a test will give you the energy your brain needs and keep hunger pangs from distracting you.
- **Exercise.** Try moderate exercise 3 to 4 hours before the test to help you relax.

### During the Test

- **Come on time and be ready.** Have needed testing tools—pens, pencils, paper, eraser, and any teacher-authorized helps.
- **Avoid distractions.** Find a seat, probably near the front of the room or away from other students, where you will be less likely to be sidetracked by noises or movement.
- **Take time to get organized.** Look over the entire test. Read the directions carefully. Plan your approach and budget your time accordingly.
- **Answer the easy questions first.** Knowing you can be successful will increase your confidence and focus your thoughts on the topic so you'll be ready for more challenging questions.
- **Don't get stuck.** If you should draw a blank, skip the question, go on, and come back later.
- **Take your time.** There's no prize for finishing first, so plan to use the entire testing time; use extra time to verify your answers. Don't worry about how quickly other students complete the exam. If there is a time limit, check the clock periodically, but not too frequently. It's better to miss a point or two by not finishing the test than to panic and lose your concentration and end up missing many points.

- **Use stress reducing techniques.** If you start to feel anxious, help yourself relax.
  - Close your eyes. Put down the pencil or take your hands away from the keyboard. Breathe in slowly to the count of 7, and then slowly exhale to the count of 7.
  - Pull your shoulders back, tilt your head down toward each shoulder, or shake your hands out at the wrist to relieve muscle tension.
  - Make fists, hold them for three counts, and then slowly relax them for three counts.
  - Employ positive imagery. Picture yourself succeeding. Use positive self-talk. Remind yourself that you really do know the material.
- **Keep things in perspective.** Remember, this is a test. This is only a test. Your entire future does not ride on this one exam.

## After the Test

- **Relax.** You gave it your best. Remember also that no matter how the test went, you still have the opportunity to learn from the returned exam.
- **Prepare for the next exam.** Identify techniques you used that were effective in helping you manage your anxiety. Write them down and use them on future exams.

