

Overcoming test anxiety

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

General preparation/building confidence:

Review your personal situation and skills

Academic counselors can help you in these areas or refer to the study skills zone.

- Developing good study habits and strategies
- Managing time (dealing with procrastination, distractions, laziness)
- Organizing material to be studied and learned
Take a step by step approach to build a strategy and not get overwhelmed
- Outside pressures success/failure consequences (grades, graduation), peer pressure, competitiveness, etc.
- Reviewing your past performance on tests to improve and learn from experience

Test preparation to reduce anxiety:

- **Approach the exam with confidence:**
Use whatever strategies you can to personalize success: visualization, logic, talking to yourself, practice, team work, journaling, etc.
View the exam as an opportunity to show how much you've studied and to receive a reward for the studying you've done.
- **Be prepared!**
Learn your material thoroughly and organize what materials you will need for the test. Use a checklist.
- **Choose a comfortable location for taking the test** with good lighting and minimal distractions
- **Allow yourself plenty of time**, especially to do things you need to do before the test and still get there a little early
- **Avoid thinking you need to cram just before the test!**
- **Strive for a relaxed state of concentration**
Avoid speaking with any fellow students who have not prepared, who express negativity, who will distract your preparation
- **A program of exercise** is said to sharpen the mind
- **Get a good night's sleep** the night before the exam
- **Don't go to the exam with an empty stomach.** Fresh fruits and vegetables are often recommended to reduce stress. Stressful foods can include processed foods, artificial sweeteners, carbonated soft drinks, chocolate, eggs, fried foods, junk foods, pork, red meat, sugar, white flour products, chips and similar snack foods, foods containing preservatives or heavy spices
- **Take a small snack, or some other nourishment**
to help take your mind off of your anxiety.
Avoid high sugar content (candy) which may aggravate your condition

During the test:

- Read the directions carefully
- Budget your test taking time
- Change positions to help you relax
- If you go blank, skip the question and go on
- If you're taking an essay test and you go blank on the whole test, pick a question and start writing. It may trigger the answer in your mind
- Don't panic when students start handing in their papers. There's no reward for finishing first

Use relaxation techniques

If you find yourself tensing and getting anxious during the test:

Relax; you are in control.

Take slow, deep breaths

Don't think about the fear

Pause: think about the next step and keep on task, step by step

Use positive reinforcement for yourself:

Acknowledge that you have done, and are doing, your best

Expect *some* anxiety

It's a reminder that you want to do your best and can provide energy

Just keep it manageable

Realize that anxiety can be a "habit" and that it takes practice to use it as a tool to succeed

After the test, review how you did

- List what worked, and hold onto these strategies
It does not matter how small the items are: they are building blocks to success
- List what did not work for improvement
- Celebrate that you are on the road to overcoming this obstacle