

Reducing Test Anxiety

Recognizing Test Anxiety

Test anxiety can strike in 2 places: your head and your body. Here are some signs that might indicate you have it:

...in your head

- Mental blank out (“drawing a blank” on questions)
- Racing thoughts
- Difficulty concentrating / more easily distracted than normal
- Negative thoughts about past performance, the consequences of failure, how everyone else is doing on the test
- Knowing the answers after the test, but not while taking it

in your body...

- Sick to your stomach
- Cramps
- Faintness
- Sweating
- Headache
- Dry mouth
- Increased breathing rate
- Fast heartbeat
- Tense muscles

A tiny amount of anxiety isn't bad – it's actually helpful when preparing for and taking tests – but, if you are showing 4 or more of these symptoms, your stress level might be too high. Another good indicator is when you notice that you often score lower on tests than on the unit work.

How Can You Cope With Test Anxiety?

You can ease test anxiety leading up to and during the test by dealing with the causes of it.

Before the Test:

Cause	Cure	Explanation				
You don't know what to expect on the test	Learn about the test	A lot of people who have anxiety deal with it by avoidance. They hope that if they avoid confronting the thing that is worrying them, it will go away – which, of course, it doesn't! Finding out the basics of what will be on the test - like how long it will be, the types of questions you can expect, the concepts covered - will help to reduce anxiety.				
You feel you haven't mastered the material	Make an organized study schedule and stick to it!	<u>Think of a test as your chance to show what you've learned rather than a time when you have to be perfect!</u> Remember to review before the test and stay organized by creating a study plan that outlines what you're going to work on when. When you have finished each study task, cross it off the list so you can feel a sense of accomplishment!				
You have negative thoughts	Counter them with positive thoughts and actions	The time to deal with negative thoughts is before the test day. Take out a piece of paper and write your negative thoughts in a column. Then, for each one, write a positive and true thought that argues against it. (Keep this list and add to it as you need) For example: <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Negative Thought</th> <th>Positive & True Thought</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>I always do poorly on tests.</td> <td>I've got a better study plan for this test than I've ever had before!</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Negative Thought	Positive & True Thought	I always do poorly on tests.	I've got a better study plan for this test than I've ever had before!
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I always do poorly on tests.	I've got a better study plan for this test than I've ever had before!					
Your body shows signs of anxiety	Take care of your body and your mind will benefit.	Although it might go against your natural inclination, remember to: Eat well and exercise, get lots of sleep (especially the night before the test), and continue to socialize and take study breaks because your emotional health is important too! On the day of the test, arrive early so that you can get settled and comfortable before you start.				

During the Test:

Cause	Cure	Explanation
Tension is building up	Practice tension release exercises	Break the cycle of anxiety by teaching your body how to release tension before the test. When you start to feel anxious, take a few deep breaths and exhale slowly. Imagine a peaceful place while you do this. Another way to release tension is to focus on the muscles in your shoulders by contracting them for 10 seconds and then letting them relax. Concentrate on the difference in the feelings and repeat the exercise trying to get the muscles to relax more each time.
You allow the test environment to annoy or irritate you	Tune out distractions	Not all aspects of the test environment can be controlled. Remember to dress in comfortable clothing layers so that the temperature of the room doesn't bother you. If you have a choice, try to choose a chair away from doors and other high traffic areas. Also, before the test, choose a phrase like "remain calm" that you can mentally repeat to calm and focus your mind.
Your mind goes blank or it wanders	Stay focused	Many people get so nervous when they first open their test booklets that their minds go blank or start to race with unrelated thoughts. To avoid this, arrive at the test with a plan. Will you read and answer each question one-by-one, or read them all before you begin? What will you do when you come across a question that you don't have an answer for? If you go blank on a writing question, remember that <i>action fights anxiety</i> . Start jotting down anything on a scrap piece of paper and soon ideas will start to take shape in your head. Then you can start to organize your actual answer. Try to answer every question, even if it's just a guess.

What do you need to succeed?

Test anxiety feeds on the unknown! The more you know about the test, and the more you know about your own anxieties and how to overcome them, the less that test anxiety can control you!

You have to know the material to do well on a test. You have to control test anxiety to show what you know. Practice, organization and preparation are really the keys to success!

If you feel like these strategies are not helpful, please consider making an appointment with someone in the Student Services office. We will do our best to help you find success!