

[See this page in the course material.](#)

## Learning Objectives

- Identify strategies for preventing and controlling test anxiety

There are few words more familiar in academia than the word *test*. From early childhood until perhaps our advanced years, we engage with tests in countless ways—formally and informally, with anticipation and nerves. In this section we take a look at tests and exams more closely and try to demystify them.

Tests or “examinations” are assessments designed to gauge your knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors, and aptitudes. Below is a short list of some of the many tests you have likely taken:

Spelling tests	Reading tests	Math tests	Language tests	Laboratory tests
Typing tests	Physical fitness tests	Driving tests	Intelligence tests	Personality tests
“Self” tests	Standardized tests	Placement tests	Achievement tests	College entrance tests!

Just imagine how many tests have you taken in your lifetime:

- In total, you may have taken an average of 113 standardized tests between pre-K and twelfth grade, according to the Council of the Great City Schools, which studied students in large urban districts.
- In the 2014–15 school year, 401 unique tests were administered across subjects in the 66 large urban school systems that the council studied.

You may feel as though you’ve already taken enough tests for a lifetime! But, for better or for worse, testing seems to be a fact of life, and it’s certainly a recurring feature of the college experience. So you’ll be in the best position for success if you can learn to take tests in stride and develop good test-taking skills.

As you’ll discover, a big part of doing well on tests is knowing what to expect and gearing up psychologically—that is, learning how to deal with test anxiety.

## What Is Test Anxiety?

My fears are like thundering elephants. Then when I get them out and really look at them, I see that they are actually mice with megaphones.

—Bruce Rahtje, author and Biblical scholar

For many test takers, preparing for a test and taking a test can easily cause worry and anxiety. In fact, most students report that they are more stressed by tests and schoolwork than by anything else in their lives, according to the American Test Anxiety Association.<sup>[1]</sup>

- Roughly 16–20 percent of students have high test anxiety.
- Another 18 percent have moderately high test anxiety.
- Test anxiety is the most common academic impairment in grade school, high school, and college.

Test anxiety is “the set of phenomenological, physiological, and behavioral responses that accompany concern about possible negative consequences or failure on an exam or similar evaluative situation.” (Zeidner, 1998) Put another way, test anxiety is a combination of over-arousal, tension, worry, dread, fear of failure, and “catastrophizing” before or during test situations.

Below are some effects of moderate anxiety:<sup>[2]</sup>

Being distracted during a test	Crying	Acting out
Having trouble organizing or recalling relevant information	Illness	Toileting accidents
Having difficulty comprehending relatively simple instructions	Eating disturbance	Sleep disturbance
Negative attitudes towards self, school, subjects	High blood pressure	Cheating

Below are some effects of extreme test anxiety:<sup>[3]</sup>

- Overanxious disorder
- Social phobia

Poor test performance is also a significant outcome of test anxiety. Test-anxious students tend to have lower study skills and lower test-taking skills, but research also suggests that high levels of emotional distress correlate with reduced academic performance overall. Highly test-anxious students score about 12 percentile points below their low-anxiety peers. Students with test anxiety also have higher overall dropout rates. And test anxiety can negatively affect a student’s social, emotional, and behavioral development, as well feelings about themselves and school.

Why does test anxiety occur? Inferior performance arises not because of intellectual problems or poor academic preparation. It occurs because testing situations create a sense of threat for those who experience test anxiety. The sense of threat then disrupts the learner's attention and memory.

Other factors can influence test anxiety, too. Students with disabilities and students in gifted education classes tend to experience high rates of test anxiety.

If you experience test anxiety, have hope! Experiencing test anxiety doesn't mean that there's something wrong with you or that you aren't capable of performing well in college. In fact, some stress—a manageable amount of stress—can actually be motivating. The trick is to keep stress and anxiety at a level where it can help you do your best rather than get in your way.

## Strategies for Preventing and Controlling Test Anxiety

The following video, from the University of British Columbia, provides strategies for coping with any stress and anxiety you may have about an upcoming test or exam. It also provides strategies, such as the following, for acing an exam:

1. Ask about the exam (materials covered, format, points, level of detail, etc.)
2. Take inventory of your notes
3. Set a study schedule
4. Keep your diet consistent
5. Don't stop exercising
6. Get regular sleep
7. Make a five-day study plan for each exam



[See this interactive in the course material.](#)

You can view the [transcript for “Exam Strategies – Study Skills” here \(opens in new window\).](#)

Health and wellness cannot be overstated as factors in test anxiety. Studying and preparing for exams can be easier when you take care of your mental and physical health. The following are a few tips for better health, better focus, and better grades:

1. Try a mini-meditation to reduce stress and improve focus. Breathe in deeply, count to five, and exhale slowly. Watch your lower abdomen expand and deflate. Repeat five times. Learn more about how to [proactively manage stress](#).
2. Know when to stop. Although some students may stay up until 4 a.m. studying, it's not a healthy habit. Your mind is more efficient when you get enough quality sleep, so make sure to schedule enough time for rest.
3. Don't try to be perfect. You'll alleviate a lot of anxiety by learning that just "doing your best" is something to be proud of—it doesn't have to be perfect.
4. Reach out for help. If you feel you need assistance with your mental or physical health, talk to a counselor or visit a doctor.

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1. "Text Anxiety." *American Test Anxieties Association*. Web. 25 Apr. 2016. [\\_\\_](#)
  2. "Test Anxiety." *Test Anxiety*. Web. 25 Apr. 2016. [\\_\\_](#)
  3. "Test Anxiety." *Test Anxiety*. Web. 25 Apr. 2016. [\\_\\_](#)

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