

Take Control of Test Anxiety

YOU ARE NOT ALONE! Most students experience test anxiety at some point in time. Being a little nervous is natural and actually increases your adrenaline output to jump start you. However, knowing a few tricks to keep the anxiety at a minimum will make test-taking a more enjoyable experience.

What does test anxiety feel like?

- Some students experience mainly physical symptoms, such as headaches, nausea, faintness, feeling too hot or too cold, etc.
- Others experience more emotional symptoms, such as crying easily, feeling irritable, or getting frustrated quickly.
- A major problem of test anxiety can be its effect on thinking ability; it can cause a person to blank out or have racing thoughts that are difficult to control.

What can you do to control test anxiety?

BEFORE THE TEST

1. Put things in perspective. Remind yourself that your entire future doesn't depend on this exam - there will be other exams and other courses. One test doesn't determine your talents and abilities as a successful student.
2. Be well prepared for the test to increase your confidence. Ask your teacher for practice tests or additional homework problems. Participate in tutoring sessions. Do an error analysis of your typical mistakes on your homework and practice tests. Work out lots of difficult questions dealing with tough topics in a random order. FYI - cramming is a culprit of test anxiety.
3. Remind yourself of past successes. Think of a challenging course in which you struggled, but eventually succeeded. Tell yourself that if you did well in the past, then you can do well now.
4. Don't overlook physical preparation. The night before the exam, organize everything you will need. Get a good night's sleep two nights prior to the exam. Watch caffeine, alcohol, and sugar intake. Take walks around the block as study breaks. Eat protein and drink water.
5. Visualize completing the test successfully. Play the entire "tape" in your mind -- from the moment you wake up on the day of the exam to the moment you finish the exam. Self-fulfilling prophecy does exist!
6. Arrive prepared and positive. Don't come too early or too late. Avoid talking to other students. Refrain from flipping through your notes or books – relax instead. Pick a seat that has few distractions. Bring a snack and some water. Enter class with a smile. Remind yourself that you studied hard and will do your best - "This test is going to be ok today!"

DURING THE TEST

1. Put into practice [helpful test taking strategies](#). Read the directions slowly, circle significant words, jot down notes in the margins or do an “information dump” on the back of a test page, and start with the simplest questions. Doodle if you need to on your exam as long as your answers are clear.
2. Engage in “thought stopping” techniques if you find that you are worrying, comparing yourself to your peers, or thinking about your ultimate test score. Start with calming activities.
3. Practice calming techniques throughout the exam. If you get overwhelmed, turn your paper over and breathe deeply. Stretch your arms and legs in your seat or get up. Tense and relax muscles. Use positive “self-talk”. Daydream and then refocus. Take a drink of water or a bite of your snack. If your instructor permits, leave the room for a moment or clarify a question.
4. Approach your studying seriously, but think of the test as a game. Your goal is to collect as many points as you can in the time available. You are in control of the test and the test is not in control of you. It is YOU vs. the TEST and you will win the battle!
5. Expect a few “curve balls” on the exam. When faced with unexpected questions, just relax! Don’t dwell on a question too long - simply skip it for now and return to it later to make an attempt. Remember that you can miss questions and still get a great grade.
6. Take one step at a time. Break your test taking into small, manageable parts. When you finish a portion, give yourself a pat on the back and move to the next portion. Focus on the questions you find the easiest to answer – bounce around – that’s ok!

AFTER THE TEST

1. Reward yourself! Take a night off with a good movie or dinner out with friends, regardless of how well you think you did. At this point, you can’t change your test performance so you need to move forward, not punish yourself, and engage in positive activities.
2. Communicate with your teacher. Let him/her know that you experience test anxiety – perhaps you will get more suggestions. Bring up ideas of taking your test in a different room (ex. academic testing center). Conversations with your teacher also allow him/her to know your desire and intent to do well in the course.
3. Decide if you need additional academic skills. Think about whether or not you need additional study strategies, memory techniques, time management tips, or learning styles self assessment. Your test anxiety could stem from lack of information in these preparatory areas.
4. Select and try one or two new techniques for each test. Keep track of what helps lower your anxiety and implement into habits for future tests. Throw out what doesn’t work for you.

NOTE

If you are experiencing test anxiety that can not be calmed through enhanced test preparation, test taking strategies, and relaxation tips, then you may need to seek assistance from a professional to help you overcome your anxiety. **Take a deep breath – You can do it!**

Adapted from [University of Illinois](#)