

Taming Your Test Anxiety: Learning to Do Your Best Under Pressure



Before the Test

- 1. Commit to physical health and self-care.** Your brain is a part of your body, and it's the hardware you rely on to get through the test. (That and your pencil—bring an extra.) You need to be well-rested, well-nourished, and it's best to avoid or minimize caffeine intake.)
- 2. Be realistic about how you need to PREPARE.** Plan ahead and look for ways to optimize your time management and study habits. It will pay off with better performance and less anxiety. Check out the Tutoring Center webpage for study tips.
- 3. STOP REHEARSING YOUR TEST ANXIETY** by worrying about it, especially when you are studying. Every time you worry, you are training yourself to be nervous during the test.
- 4. Practice a relaxation technique.** Use it to visualize a positive test-taking experience.
- 5. Use the “DUMP” technique**—just before the test, give yourself ten minutes to write down all your thoughts and feelings about the test. After ten minutes, put it away and just focus on the test.

During the Test

- 1. BREATHE deeply** as you wait for the test to get handed out, and pause to take a few relaxed breaths periodically.
- 2. Expect life to be unpredictable.** Plan on not knowing some questions. Expect to see material that doesn't look familiar. Start with something that looks easier.
- 3. ACCEPT your anxiety.** Fighting it adds to the adrenaline. As you get distracted by panicky feelings, think, “It is just adrenaline. I can work through this” and re-focus on the test.
- 4. STOP** giving your primitive brain **DANGER THOUGHTS.**
- 5. START** rehearsing **SELF-SUPPORTING THOUGHTS.** Your primitive brain needs **SAFETY MESSAGES** to calm down and turn off the “fight or flight” response
- 6. List your five worst DANGER thoughts:**
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
- 7. Avoid distractions.** Ignore students who are leaving. Try not to watch the clock. Use your visual, tactile or auditory senses to stay focused.
- 8. Write five self-supporting or “safety” thoughts:**
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

After the Test

Learn from your experience. Rate your anxiety from 0-10 on the next exam after this workshop. Did it decrease? What do you think helped? After the test, review your answers and your study strategies. Where were your strengths and your weaknesses? What did you learn about how this professor designs tests? Do you need to focus more on concepts and general patterns, on details and specifics, on problem-recognition, or on organizing essay responses?

Learn to do your best in developing test-taking skills but **keep it in perspective**—ultimately, no one takes tests for a living and many other ways of demonstrating knowledge and ability will be critical. The general skills you develop in college—self-care, stress management, creativity, problem-solving, emotional awareness, intellectual curiosity, and your confidence in taking on challenges WILL transfer to many new experiences and future successes.