



Reducing Test Anxiety

Do any of these sound like you?

“When I am about to take a test, I suddenly remember all the things I forgot to study and worry that I am not well prepared.”

“I use good study skills to prepare for my tests and know that I am thoroughly prepared. But when I get into the test classroom, I start to sweat, forget everything I learned, and all I can think about is, ‘What if I fail?’”

“I think I study well and I’m not worried that I will fail, but when I take a test my grades don’t reflect the effort I put into studying.”

If so, you may suffer from TEST ANXIETY.

What is Test Anxiety?

Most students feel some degree of unease in testing situations; this is a normal response. Lower levels of anxiety can even be beneficial in keeping you alert during the test. It is also common, however, for students to be slowed down by anxiety, especially when they are more focused on the physical responses (heart beating, sweaty palms, upset stomach, etc.) or on the fear of failing than on recalling information for the test.

How Do I Combat Test Anxiety?

Prepare for Different Types of Questions

Often, a first step in lowering test anxiety can be achieved through preparing for those kinds of test questions that make you the most nervous. Think about what kind of test questions you least enjoy—for example, multiple choice or essay questions. Jot down specific reasons why you do not like this kind of question (Does it make you feel more nervous than another type of question? Do you feel you tend to do less well on this kind of question?). After becoming aware of the reasons for not liking a particular question format, review some test tips:

- **Essay Questions**
 - Read through all questions and begin with the one that you feel most comfortable with first.
 - Make a quick outline of key points—This will help you organize your thoughts and better ensure that you include relevant information.
 - Write a quick summary of your points in the first paragraph; waiting too long to get to the point might lead the reader to believe that you do not understand the topic.

- True-False Questions
 - Watch for qualifiers, such as “all,” “never,” “most,” or “sometimes”—these are almost always key words.
 - It is common for these tests to use negatives—for example, “the sky is not blue.” This might trip up a test-taker who isn’t paying attention.
 - If a statement must be added to make a question true, then the question is false.
- Multiple-Choice Questions
 - Often, the answer choices will be similar. Expect this and read through all options carefully before answering.
 - If you are unsure about an item, cross out the choices you are confident are incorrect.

For all tests, if you come to a question that seems difficult, circle it and move on to an easier question. At the end of the test, return to all your circled questions. You’ll be amazed at how much easier some of those “hard” questions are once your memory has been triggered by some of the easier questions.

Practice Relaxation Techniques

Sometimes you’ll find that you just need a moment or two to collect yourself and get focused on the test. There are a number of strategies to reduce your stress and allow you to relax. For example:

- Just before the test begins, close your eyes and focus on breathing deeply and calmly. Inhale for a count of three, hold your breath for one, and then exhale for a count of three. Repeat.
- Plan to give yourself a reward after your test. When you feel yourself getting anxious, take a deep breath and remind yourself of that reward.
- Close your eyes for a moment and visualize yourself doing well.
- Raise your shoulders to your ears and hold as tightly as you can for five counts. Then release, exhaling as the tension eases from your neck.
- Don’t think about how others are doing—turn your focus inward and think about your strengths.

For more ideas of relaxation strategies, refer to the exercise in the SRI Student Guide tool shop “*Managing My Stress and Finding Ways to Relax*” or visit your college’s Learning Center or Academic Achievement Office. Lastly, check with your professor. Using your professor as a resource lets him or her know you’re interested in succeeding in the class, and he or she may have helpful hints for how to defeat test anxiety.