

OVERCOMING MATH AND WRITING ANXIETY

Our abilities to solve math problems and to write college papers are procedural knowledge skills. Usually students who have math or writing anxiety have developed these responses over many years. An important initial step is to determine your level of competence in procedural knowledge skills. In other words, what is your competence when you are *not* anxious? Most campus learning centers have diagnostic tests to help you discern your skill level. If you are deficient in these skills, pursuing the appropriate remediation is imperative. You may need to learn these skills at the high school level before attempting a college-level class. Remedial courses or labs, computer tutorials, and individual tutoring are available through most colleges or local libraries. As you master each level, you will discover that your anxiety is lessening. Many college students, however, have good procedural knowledge skills but freeze on the math test or in-class writing assignment. If that is your circumstance, review the following strategies:



BEFORE THE CLASS

- Complete appropriate, timely, and comprehensive content preparation, including all homework. Work with a tutor to clarify areas you find confusing and then attend study group sessions and test reviews.
- Use rational and helpful self-talk such as *I've practiced and gone to the test review*, or *My tutor gave me some shortcuts that should really help*.
- Practice or rehearse your performance. For math, rework your homework problems and any additional problems available. Practice explaining to yourself how to do the problems. To prepare for in-class writing assignments, write possible questions and outline your answers. Write thesis statements for each possible question.
- Get enough sleep, exercise, and good nutrition.

DURING THE CLASS

- Make careful and deliberate use of your time. For math, immediately write the formulas down. Then plan how you will allocate your time on the various parts of the test. For in-class essays, quickly write down any key names, dates, etc. to organize into an outline later.
- Refocus on the task using appropriate self-talk, and breathe deeply if you feel yourself becoming tense. Say to yourself, *Okay, what is this question asking, and what do I know about it?*
- Skip to an easier question when you get stuck. Many times the answer to a problem will come to you in the process of taking the test. The important thing is to remain calm and keep your thoughts flowing.
- Use rational and helpful self-talk throughout such as *These first few questions look just like the ones covered during the test review last night. I'm going to be fine.*

