

OVERCOMING TEST ANXIETY

The most common academic anxiety is test anxiety. How many times have you lost points on a test when you knew the material? How many times have you raced through a test and turned it in without checking your answers just because you wanted to get it over with and escape? How many times have you worried more about a test than studied for it? A little anxiety can help motivate us and focus us on the task, but too much anxiety simply destroys performance.

TEST ANXIETY SURVEY

Test anxiety is a frequent experience for college students. Look at the following checklist. How many of these characteristics describe you?

- _____ You feel that tests are more of a threat than a challenge.
- _____ You have a lot of worrisome or negative thoughts about what might happen if you do poorly.
- _____ You have physical reactions (such as butterflies in the stomach, sweaty palms, altered heart or breathing rate) when you are about to take a test.
- _____ You have trouble keeping your mind on the test items or remembering ideas you learned recently.
- _____ You worry about other people scoring higher than you do on the test.
- _____ Your worries about tests have not decreased as you have matured (Divine & Kylene, 1982, pp. 60-61).

If you suffer from test anxiety, is your response generalized to all tests or is it specific to one course or subject? Your answer to that question is important. If you have been severely anxious in all testing situations for more than two years, we strongly recommend that you work with a counselor on more powerful techniques such as progressive relaxation, cognitive desensitization, and thought stopping. If you have specific anxiety about one course, then these strategies can help you manage stress and increase performance.

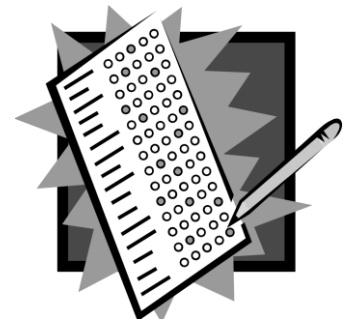


BEFORE THE TEST

- Finish appropriate, timely, comprehensive content preparation, including all homework. In simple terms, read, study, and then work with a study group. Go to any review sessions, and be sure to go to class the week before the test.
- Use rational and helpful self-talk such as *I am well-prepared to take this test*, or *I will read and answer each question carefully*.
- Practice or rehearse your performance by creating and/or answering potential test questions.
- Get enough sleep, exercise, and good nutrition. Even if you study late the night before, get at least two to three hours of sleep.

THE DAY OF THE TEST

- Grab the psychological edge by going to class on time with *all* the required materials.
- Be sure to take a watch to set specific time goals so that you will have enough time at the end of the test to check your answers.
- Do not participate in the fearful pretest conversations that the other students are having.
- Sit away from friends and toward the sides or back of the room to minimize distractions when people finish early if you have a choice of where you sit during the test.



DURING THE TEST

- Make careful and deliberate use of your time. Look over the test and allocate how much time you intend to spend on each section.
- Close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and refocus on the question by saying, *What is this question asking?*, if you feel yourself becoming tense or distracted.
- Use rational and helpful self-talk throughout. It is tempting to use *catastrophizing* statements such as *I am no good at this and will never succeed*, or *I have failed before and I will fail again*. Instead, deliberately use rational and calming statements like *I need to stay focused on one question at a time*, or *Just because I failed before does not mean I will fail this time*.