

TEST ANXIETY

Strategies to Overcome Test Anxiety

1. It is essential to be prepared!

There is no substitute for knowing the material. Study thoroughly with whatever techniques work best for you in accordance with your learning style.

2. Start a mental offensive!

- a. Practice "thought stopping", *tell yourself to*, "STOP!!!" if you have negative thoughts/feelings about the test.
- b. Think through *what your performance on this test really means*. Abandon the "victim mentality" that blames a poor performance on having a bad day, having a poor professor, an unfair test, or "test anxiety." Think positively and do your best.
- c. *Praise yourself*. Encourage yourself by saying, "I am very relaxed. I am doing a great job on this test."
- d. *Visualize success*. Mentally rehearse what it will be like to succeed on a test. Be specific. Set a goal, such as "I will do 8 points better than on the last test. Imagine yourself as calm, confident, using strategies and working steadily on the test.

3. Learn to relax!

- a. Spend some time each day—just ten to twenty minutes are enough—learning to relax your body. This will help you to remain calm throughout the exam.
- b. Breathing short, shallow breaths increases anxiety. Instead, focus on taking deep, long breaths. Try this as the test is distributed.
- c. Scan your body—notice what areas of your body are tense. Tell your muscles in your shoulders, for example, to relax. Continue throughout your body.

4. Practice self-testing!

As you study throughout the term, write your own test questions. Divide the chapters amongst classmates. Write questions and exchange to make up a "mock test."

- a. Objective terms are good for drill, especially in a study group.
- b. For essays, make an outline for the answer; then begin writing.
- c. For math and some sciences, use old homework problems.
- d. Take a "mock test" in the room where you will actually take the test. When you go to take the real test, you should find yourself more relaxed and confident.

5. Have an emergency plan!

You are well prepared and have done everything suggested above. But wait! You "freeze" in the test anyway. Use this formula: **R.S.V.P.**

R- is for respond. Recognize that your nerves are still getting the upper hand. Identify the feeling.

S- is for seize control. Realize that you are not helpless; you do not need to be a victim. Take three deep breaths and do a small version of the relaxation exercises you have been practicing.

V- is for visualization. Visualize successfully completing the test.

P- is for put. *Put* down what you can—start with anything: facts, formulas, a rephrasing of a question, anything. This may break the wall built up between you and the information you're trying to recall.

6. When the exam is over, treat yourself!

Sources:

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Paulk, Walter. How to Study in College. Houghton Mifflin Co: New York, 2001.

University of Portland, University Health Center, Learning Assistance Program

University of Western Ontario, London, Canada, www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning/mcanx.html

Academic Resources Center, Stetson University

101 CUB, 386.822.7127, academicresources@stetson.edu