

# Test Anxiety Strategies

## 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!

- Practice "thought stopping", tell yourself to, "STOP!!!" if you have negative thoughts/feelings about the test.
- 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.
- Praise yourself. Encourage yourself by saying, "I am very relaxed. I am doing a great job on this test."
- 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!

- 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.
- Breathing short, shallow breaths increases anxiety. Instead, focus on taking deep, long breaths. Try this as the test is distributed.
- 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."

- Objective terms are good for drill, especially in a study group.
- For essays, make an outline for the answer; then begin writing.
- For math and some sciences, use old homework problems.
- 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:

1. Ellis, Dave. *Becoming a Master Student: 9th edition*. Houghton Mifflin Co: New York, 2000.
2. Paulk, Walter. *How to Study in College*. Houghton Mifflin Co: New York, 2001.
3. University of Portland, University Health Center, Learning Assistance Program
4. University of Western Ontario, London, Canada, <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning/mcanx.html>.