

What is “test anxiety”?

It is real! It occurs when one excessively worries about their performance in a situation where performance really counts. Some people experience “butterflies”, while others get an upset stomach, a headache, feel shaky, sweaty or feel like their heart is beating too quickly. With test anxiety typically students focus on the negative, which creates a vicious circle: *What if I forget everything I know? What if the test is too hard? What if I fail?* Too many of these negative thoughts leave no mental space for thinking about the actual test questions. This makes the individual feel worse which increases the stress and negativity, which increases the anxiety.

Reducing/Preventing Test Taking Anxiety

- ✓ Being well prepared is the best way to reduce anxiety. Don't wait until the night before to cram.
- ✓ Study groups work wonders for most. Take advantage of your strengths and rely on others for your weaknesses.
- ✓ What works for you? Memorize – flashcards – review notes – association {“George Eaton's Old Gray Rat Ate Penny's Hat Yesterday”}
- ✓ Space out your studying over several days or weeks; continually reviewing your classwork and study sheets helps tremendously.
- ✓ Remain positive – “self chat” is great! “I can do this”; “My teacher said I'm prepared”; “I got this”.
- ✓ Rest – a good night's sleep does wonder; several good nights sleep is optimum. Eat breakfast – even if you aren't a morning person!
- ✓ Be on time – running late for anything creates stress and the feeling of being unorganized does not get one off to a good start.
- ✓ Chew gum if allowed --- or drink cool water slowly
- ✓ Regulate your breathing....visualize a “happy place”...exercise
- ✓ Reward yourself – make a contract with yourself to complete a set amount of study time to earn a reward (30 minutes of TV, or phone, or video games).
- ✓ Teachers and parents can provide “positive chatter” as well. “Yay, on your way to promotion” is much easier to hear than “if you fail you'll be retained next year”.

Reducing Text Anxiety During a Test

- ✓ Read the directions slowly and completely – do not think you know what they are going to say! Read, read, read, and, listen, listen, listen.
- ✓ Do the simple questions first to build your confidence; don't get stuck in the mud – if you don't know one, move on and come back to that one at the end.
- ✓ Focus on the question at hand – try not to let your mind wonder (how much longer do I have? I'm hungry? Hope it's nice outside after I get out of here.) Again, filling your mind with “stuff” leaves less room for question/answers.
- ✓ For multiple choice questions, think of your answer BEFORE you look at the choices; sometimes when you read the choices you get confused or question yourself; go with your first instinct, it's usually your best response.
- ✓ For essay questions, underline key words in the reading prompt or question—clearly think through words like *compare*, *contrast*, *summarize*. Organize your thoughts (scrap paper or edge of test) then write with clarity – and neatly!
- ✓ Breathing is essential! Sit straight in your chair with good posture, breathe in through your nose, hold for a few seconds, then release through your mouth slowly – wait a few seconds and repeat;
- ✓ Relaxing is key! Sit straight with feet flat on floor in front to you; using your hands, grab underneath your chair; push down with your feet while pulling up with your hands at the same time and hold for about 5 seconds – repeat; this relaxes all the muscles except the ones you actually need!
- ✓ After the test do something to get your mind off the test! Do not dwell on any mistakes you might have made....and reward yourself, after all you did complete the test!
- ✓ Debrief! It's always a good idea to ask yourself what worked and what didn't. I use “Continue – Stop – Start”, never too soon to learn to evaluate your processes and refine them for future successes!

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