

A GUIDE TO TEST ANXIETY



ACADEMIC SUPPORT CENTER

BREMER HALL ROOM 116

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TEST ANXIETY

Most of us experience some level of fear before tests.

Common reactions include:

1. Physical Symptoms:

- Heart beats faster
- Diarrhea
- Trembling
- Trouble swallowing
- Twitching
- Sweating
- Nausea

2. Mental and Emotional Symptoms

- Mind goes blank
- Intense panic
- Feeling of defeat or failure

You probably see yourself in one or more of these reactions. Moderate levels of anxiety before and during tests are probably helpful. Some anxiety can keep you on edge enough to perform at your peak.

Although test anxiety is a common experience, high levels of it interfere with test performance. If any of the symptoms diagrammed above are taken to the limit, they become disabling. Your intense reaction to stress may cause you to perform less effectively than if your reaction were under control or limited. Sometimes, intense forms of anxiety prevent students from being able to respond at all.

Most intense test anxiety is caused by lack of preparedness. Systematic preparation for a test is the best way to avoid fear during the test. If you are ready and you know it, your sense of confidence will overshadow feelings of doubt and inadequacy.

Preventative Measures

1. Develop practice and review tests and treat them as real tests.
2. Take as many tests as possible to break through the wall of fear you have built.
3. Practice working within time limits so that the ticking of the clock is not quite as frightening.
4. Familiarize yourself with the building and room in which you will be tested. Visit the room, sit in it, and visualize yourself taking a test there.
5. Rehearse your behavior. Practice sitting calmly at a desk or table, answering questions about what you have been studying. Make yourself a test similar to what you predict the instructor will use to measure your knowledge.
6. Eat the right foods before the exam. High protein, low fat foods are best. Avoid junk food, sugar, excessive amounts of caffeine and, of course, alcohol and other drugs.
7. Compose yourself. Eating something bland is a start. Walking, breathing to release tension, visualizing yourself succeeding in the testing situation, and giving yourself positive messages about your ability are all good practices toward eliminating excessive fear during the actual testing situation.

Coping During The Test

There are also several techniques you can try during the test if you feel yourself getting overwhelmed by fear.

1. Channel your thinking. If you allow self-doubt and images of failure to intrude, they can easily absorb your attention and prevent you from focusing on the test and communicating what you know about the material. Keep your purpose for being where you are clear at all times. This is not an opportunity to question your ability but to represent what you know about the content.
2. Relax. Breathing deeply and regularly can help. Concentrate on your breathing and a feeling of expelling stress. Relaxing your muscles can also promote relief. Be aware of your physical tension points and concentrate on unwinding them.
3. Visualize success. See yourself receiving a good grade on this test. See yourself applying the test information in life.
4. Visualize calm. Breathe, relax your muscles, and imagine a peaceful scene. Natural scenes are often calming. Some people visualize supportive loved ones. If you can take a few moments to relax in this way, bringing your anxiety level down, your performance on the test should improve.

5. Do not look at your classmates. Competition will only increase feelings of anxiety. It does not matter if other students look confident or if they finish sooner. Remember that anxiety may cause your perceptions to be “off”. In addition, the first test handed in does not necessarily mean the best work has been done. Often the student who takes the longest period of time on the test does the most thorough job.
6. Think positively. Do not silently call yourself names. Instead, when you talk to yourself, build morale. Thoughts like, “I really know this material” and “This experience is going well”, are far more productive than “This sucks” and “I know the answer, but I can’t remember it”.

Choose to try some of the suggestions offered in this packet. With experience, you will gain confidence in testing situations. With increased confidence, disabling fear in testing situations will be eliminated. You will probably continue to have some degree of testing anxiety. We all do. But, hopefully, you will overcome the disabling form of anxiety that may be preventing you from performing well in classroom testing situations today.

Activity

Test Anxiety Inventory

1. List your symptoms of test anxiety.
2. Beside each symptom, indicate whether you feel you experience it within the normal range or if it is intense for you.
3. For each intense symptom, indicate what you can do to alleviate its effects.