

Managing Test Anxiety

When taking an exam, you may experience physical symptoms, have trouble recalling information or difficulty thinking clearly. If test anxiety is interfering with your performance or your quality of life, try some of the suggestions below!

Before the Exam

- 1. Put things in perspective:** While your exam is important, the weight of your future does not depend on the results of this single exam.
- 2. Remind yourself of past successes:** It's easy to compare yourself to your peers. Remember that the admissions department selected you for a reason and believe you are capable and an excellent student.
- 3. Don't give a test the power to define you:** One exam won't be a defining moment for your academic career. Your performance depends more on how well you studied for the exam, rest-taking strategies, and other educational factors.
- 4. Visualize completing the test successfully:** Imagine your entire day from the moment you wake up to when you've completed the exam.
- 5. Remind yourself that a certain level of anxiety may be helpful in performing your best:** Utilize anxiety control strategies to manage your anxiety if it becomes excessive.
- 6. Use practice tests to simulate an exam:** By taking a practice test, you can also practice controlling your anxiety levels when taking the exam. If you are nervous about completing the exam on time, time yourself while practicing questions.
- 7. Get a good night's sleep for several days before the exam:** This will allow your body and mind to catch on any needed sleep leading up to your exam. This will also help you think more clearly and manage anxiety better during the exam.
- 8. Reduce caffeine intake:** Caffeine is a stimulant that will increase your anxiety so limiting your intake prior to the exam will help in lowering anxiety levels.

During the Exam

- 1. Get in the right mindset:** Try and arrive a little early for your exam, but avoid chatting with other students as their anxieties may increase your own. Instead, take a walk around the building to shake off nervous energy and silently talk to yourself, meditate, breathe, and/or pray.
- 2. Limit distractions:** If possible, select a seat with fewer distractions or closer to the front. If noises tend to bother you, consider bringing earplugs to limit background noises.
- 3. Dismiss perfectionism:** Remind yourself that you don't know all the material that could possibly appear on the test and nobody else does either. You have prepared as much as you can!
- 4. Expect a few curve balls on the exam:** Your expectations of the test will not match the exam perfectly, so don't let unexpected questions stump you. Stay focused, make an intelligent guess, and note to review the question later.
- 5. Stop negative thoughts:** Remind yourself of your past successes and say STOP to your negative thoughts. Focus on completing the test to the best of your ability rather than trying to calculate your grade based on potential missed questions.
- 6. Don't get stuck on difficult questions:** If you're unsure of an answer, make an educated guess and move forward. You can still miss a few questions and do well on the exam.
- 7. Check time periodically:** Focusing too much on the time may increase anxiety or distract you from the exam. It can be a better strategy to sacrifice a few points by not quite finishing the test than to rush through the last several questions and thus miss many points.

Use the Anxiety Control Procedure: If you continue to feel overly anxious, use this exercise to reduce your tension. Although it's simple, many students have found that it really helps lower their anxiety to a level that is helpful rather than harmful. Plus, it will only take a minute!

- Close your eyes.
- Breathe in slowly to the count of seven and exhale to the count of seven.
- Continue this slow breathing until you actually feel your body begin to relax. (About 2 to 4 sequences.)
- Open your eyes and give yourself a positive, very specific self-talk (i.e., "You're doing great. You're prepared. You're doing your best.")