

# Test Taking Strategies and Test Anxiety

## **What Is Anxiety?**

Anxiety is the feeling of agitation and distress you experience when you are faced with a challenge such as performing on stage, competing in an athletic event or **taking an exam**

## **What is Test Anxiety?**

Test anxiety is the feeling of nervousness and distress you experience before or during an exam. Students who suffer from test anxiety report difficulties with concentration, mental blocks, and distractibility.

## **There Are Two Types Of Anxiety:**

- ✚ **Anticipatory:** feeling of distress occurring while studying for or thinking about the exam.
- ✚ **Situational:** feeling of distress occurring while taking the exam.
- ✚ *It is important to be aware of when anxiety attacks you so that you may use strategies in and out of the exam situation to manage the anxiety.*

**Test anxiety occurs in a wave so it will increase from when you first recognize it, come to a peak, and then subside**

## **What causes test anxiety?**

- Lack of preparation!
- Past experiences of blanking out or performing badly on exams.
- Focusing too much on the outcome.
- Focusing too much on how other classmates and friends are doing.
- Issues outside of school distracting you from studying for or concentrating on exam.

## **How does test anxiety affect you?**

Test anxiety affects you in three ways:

Physiologically

Behaviorally

Psychologically

Physiological reactions may include:

- increased heartbeat
- tensed muscles
- perspiration
- dry mouth

Behavioral reactions may include:

- Inability to make decisions, act, or express yourself.
- Difficulty reading and understanding questions on an exam.
- Difficulty organizing your thoughts.
- Difficulty recalling or retrieving terms and concepts.

Psychological reactions may include:

- Feeling apprehensive or uneasy.
- Feeling upset.
- Having self-doubt or negative self-talk.

### **What are some ways to deal with test anxiety before the exam?**

Prepare well and in advance

Check your attitude

Relax

How can you prepare well and in advance?

- Gather information about the exam.
- Set up a study schedule.
- Review material often throughout the semester.
- Test yourself.

### **Relax**

Learn stress releasing strategies that you can use in and out of the exam situation.

Practice the techniques so they become easy to use.

EXERCISE,

LISTEN TO MUSIC THAT SOOTHES OR MOTIVATES YOU

STRETCH

PRACTICE STRESS RELEASING EXERCISES

### **Following are Quick Relaxation Techniques**

#### **you can use in or out of the classroom:**

#### **TENSE AND RELAX**

*If sitting in a chair in class, you can use your chair to help you with this exercise.*

- Place your feet flat on the floor in front of you.
- With both hands, grab the underside of your chair.
- Push your feet into the ground and pull on your chair upward. Tense your muscles, holding for 5 seconds.

- Release your pull and relax your feet, letting your body go limp.
- Repeat as necessary.

### **BREATHE**

#### *3 Deep Breaths*

- Inhale through your nose, taking in air as if filling your abdomen.
- Hold for 1 second.
- Exhale through your mouth or nose, slowly (make sure you exhale completely – push out every last bit of air).
- Repeat two more times.

### **Body Scan**

- Start at one end of your body and focus on a specific muscle or muscle group.
- Concentrate on how that muscle feels. Is it tense?
- Consciously release the tension in the muscle.
- Continue throughout your entire body.

### **Guided Imagery**

- Imagine that you are going away from where you are right now and traveling to a place where you want to be. This place may be a warm beach, a tropical forest, a cozy room, a pool of water...you decide.
- What does this place feel like?
  - Is it warm or cool? Are there soothing breezes or comforting sun rays?
  - Is there a refreshing mist or shower of rain?
  - Is it bright or dim? What kind of light is there? – Daylight? Candlelight?

#### Moonlight?

- What aromas does this place have? – Spring flowers? Pine trees? Citrus fruits? Salty seaside air? Fresh cut grass? Coffee? Mint?
- How does this place make you feel? – Peaceful? Tranquil? Refreshed? Beautiful? Strong? Confident? Whatever the feeling, embrace it; hold on to it.
- Now as you journey back to here, hold on to that feeling and bring it back with you.

### **What strategies can you use to relieve anxiety during the exam?**

#### **Here are some student suggestions:**

- **Take a break. Stop for a minute, role your shoulders or close your eyes.**
- **Get a drink of water. See if you can leave the room for a drink of water so you can briefly leave the exam environment.**
- **Ask a question. Break the uncomfortable silence by asking the instructor a question.**
- **Move on to an easier question. If being stuck on a question is frustrating you, move on and come back to the challenging one later.**

- Use positive self-talk. Talk to yourself and guide yourself out of the anxiety.
- Use your quick relaxation exercises. Allow yourself a time out – take a few breaths, tense and relax, or do a quick stretch.

### Three Stages Of Test Taking:

- ✦ Before the exam
- ✦ During the exam
- ✦ After the exam

## STRATEGIES FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF EXAMS

### Multiple Choice Exams

- Read directions carefully. Most items ask for single answers but some may give you the option of marking several choices.
- Read each question thoroughly, then look at the choices.
- Underline key words and phrases. If the question is complicated, break it down into small or simple sections that are easier to understand.
- Pay attention to qualifiers. Words such as “only” or “except” or negative words such as “not” can confuse your understanding of what is being asked.
- Eliminate answers you know are incorrect. Check relevancy and accuracy of each answer.
- Look for patterns that may lead you to the answer. Sometimes choices that are more general or are of a middle value in a range may indicate a right answer.
- Read every word of each choice. Instructors may include answers that are right except for a single word.
- When a test includes a long reading passage, read questions first. This might help you focus on the information you need to answer the questions.

### Matching Exams

- Read directions carefully. Sometimes an instructor may want you to consider an answer only once; other times an instructor may want you to consider an applicable answer more than once.
- Start with the column that has the longest statements and match those with shorter statements or terms.
- Do easy matches first to eliminate possible answers and make it easy to spot the more difficult matches.

### Short Answers Exams

- **Look for clues.** *The sentence structure or number of blanks may give you clues to the answer.*
- **Don't look hard for hidden meaning.** *Short answer questions are meant to test your ability to recall information..*
- **Over-answer.** *If you are stuck with two answers, write down both – you might get partial credit.*

### True/False Exam

- **Check for qualifiers.**
  - *Words such as all, always, only and never tend to indicate an absolute. This may indicate a false answer.*
  - *Words such as generally, usually, often, and sometimes may indicate true answers.*
- **Look for two-part statements.** *If one part of the statement is incorrect, the whole statement is false.*
- **Don't look hard for hidden meaning.**

### Essay Questions

- **Survey exam.** *Read all questions and decide how much time you will spend on each.*
- **Analyze each question carefully.** *Understand what the question is asking. For example, is the question asking you to compare ideas or describe a situation? Underline key terms and phrases. Look for phrases that limit the topic such as "Between 1815-1830..." or "In the western part of ..."*
- **Plan before you begin writing.** *Write down main ideas and examples and create an outline.*
- **Write your answer** *using your outline and fill in details.*
- **Review.** *Do a final check. Did you answers all parts of the question? Check for spelling and punctuation errors.*

### During the exam:

- **Do an information dump!** *Before you begin answering, jot down hard to remember formulas and terms on the margins or back of exam.*
- **Survey exam.** *Before you begin answering, take a quick look at the whole exam. This may help you decide where to begin and how much time to spend on each question.*
- **Read directions carefully and underline key terms and phrases.**
- **Do easy questions first.** *They may give you clues for the more challenging questions.*

- **Relax!** Use your strategies to calm yourself.

After the exam:

- Reward yourself! Keep practicing positive self-talk.
- Analyze your exam.
  - What went well and what didn't?
  - What type of questions did you find most challenge? Why?
- Make and implement a plan to do better next time.

Set Goals For Change=

List test taking or study strategy ideas you think might help you perform better on exams. Then decide how and when you will implement them.

*In order to improve my test taking skills I will work on:*

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*List two test taking or study skills you will incorporate this week:*

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_ *How?* \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_ *How?* \_\_\_\_\_

*List two test taking or study skills you will incorporate this semester:*

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_ *How?* \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_ *How?* \_\_\_\_\_

MCQ METHOD=

### **Strategies for Taking Standardized Tests**

#### **Night Before Testing**

- **Go to bed on time.**
- **Put a few number 2 pencils with erasers in your backpack.**
- **Solve family/friend problems before the testing date.**
- **Talk to your parents about any concerns that you might have about the test.**

#### **The Morning of Testing**

- **Start your day as you always do.**
- **Eat a good breakfast.**
- **Think of what you will do to relax after you get home from school.**
- **Think Positive!**

### Multiple Choice Questions

- If you do not understand the directions, ask for help.
- Read the question and *all* answer choices before marking anything

### Pace Yourself

- Don't spend too much time on any one question. Do your best and then move on.
- Answer the easiest questions first, but be sure to go back to those questions you skipped.

### Multiple Choice Questions

- Do not change your answers unless you are very uncertain about your first answer choice.
- Try to answer every question. Make the most intelligent guess you can.

### The Process of Elimination

- After you have been through all of the questions once, go back and find questions you have some knowledge about and eliminate choices that you know are incorrect.
- If you can eliminate two wrong answers, your chance of choosing the right answer is greater

### Answering Questions

Don't guess blindly, but if you have time to think about the best answer choice, make it!

### Skip, Return, Check

If you finish early, check to make sure you have answered all questions.

### Key Words

- Find key words or phrases in the question that will help you choose the correct answer.

### Are we communicating?

- Make sure you understand what the question is asking.
- Be sure you are responding to the question that is being asked.

### Reading Passages

- If the test requires you to read passages and then answer questions about what you read, read the questions first.
- By doing this, you will know what you are looking for as you read. This also helps you go faster on the test.

### Math Computation

- **When using scratch paper on a math test, double check to make sure that you have copied the problem correctly from the test booklet!**
- **Line up place value correctly on your scratch paper (thousands, hundreds, tens, ones) or the answer will be incorrect.**
- **If your answer does not match one of the choices, reread the problem, recopy the numbers, and try solving it again.**

#### **A Matter of Time**

- **If any time remains, spend it on those questions about which you know nothing or almost nothing.**
- **As you go back through, do not change all answers.**
- ***Remember: Your first guess is usually right.***

#### **It's About Time**

- **Don't spend too much time rewriting or obsessing about neatness.**
- **Don't worry if you run out of time.**

#### **Final Tips**

- **Fill in bubbles fully, write neatly, and erase stray marks.**
- **Double-check the test number in your test booklet against the answer sheet every few questions to be sure you haven't gotten on the wrong number.**
- **Remember it's okay not to know everything — unlike class tests, these tests will have some questions designed to challenge the limits of your knowledge at a grade level *above* your current grade.**