

TAKING TESTS WITH LESS STRESS

How to cope with test anxieties.....



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Using test time wisely: the five steps

As you work through the test, following these five steps for answering questions:

- Step 1** Read the whole paper through and highlight and underline important words.
- Step 2** Check how many questions must be answered in each section and read each question again, putting a mark beside all that you might attempt. Now select those that you will answer.
- Step 3** Allocate time for each question and start with the question that you are most comfortable with.
- Step 4** Plan out each answer clearly before you begin.
- Step 5** At the end always check over your answers and proof read for mistakes.

What if you don't know the answer to a question

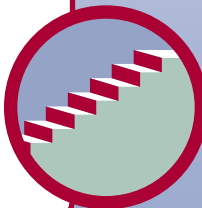
- Tip 1** Use a delayed response for those answers that you don't know right away. In other words, read the question a few times and try to recall the information by linking or associating key words in the question to clusters of information that you have in your memory. Or try to visualise the notes that you made or heard when the lecturer was discussing the topic. If you are not sure of the answer, delay the response. Skip the question for now and return to it later after answering as many questions as you can.
- Tip 2** Use educated guessing when you have exhausted other options but avoid waffling.

Analysing after a class test or assessment

Tests are valuable learning tools. As soon as you can, after the test or assessment, make a list of the questions that confused you. Write down topics that you did not study thoroughly. When class tests/assessments are returned, ask yourself the following questions in your next study session:

- 1. What kind of question did you miss the most? Did you see a pattern?
- 2. Did you make any careless mistakes? Which ones and how?
- 3. What was the source of information you missed?
- 4. Which parts of the test had the best scores? Why?
- 5. What strategies worked to help you remember questions?
What strategies did not seem so effective?

Remember changing your approach to tests can take a little time. Making positive changes is a bit like climbing stairs, you have to take it one step at a time, but before long you'll reach the top.



Many students experience strong emotional, physical and behavioural reactions or anxieties when they are faced with taking tests or examinations. So if you are experiencing any adverse reactions or anxieties then you are not alone but the question you must ask yourself is what can I do about it?

What are the signs?

- Panicky or anxious feelings
- Short temper or tendency to blame others
- Increased desire to put things off
- Negative self talk (see below)
- Physical complaints e.g. headaches

Do you recognise any of the following negative self statements?

- They are all smarter, more intelligent than me.
- I should never have taken this course, I know I'll fail.
- What's the point anyway.
- Why can't I do better, my whole life is failure, I'm not capable of being good at anything.
- I will leave it too late to study just like the last time.



Strategies to reduce test anxiety

There are strategies that you can use to prepare emotionally, physically and mentally for tests. However before you read about the right way to cope, it is important that you are aware of the wrong way to cope: Some students respond to feelings of anxiety by cramming. Cramming may put some information into memory but will not lead to thorough understanding of the material. Cramming can also give rise to the "blank mind" during examinations. So cramming as a survival technique in college is about as useful as an ashtray on a motor bike! What is worse is that it causes more anxiety as students become aware of how much they don't know.

The following strategies can help to prepare you for tests:

Emotional preparation

- Use positive self talk and visualisations. Talk to yourself in a positive manner.
“I can succeed if I really put my mind to it.”
“I am learning to use effective study strategies.”
“I'm learning how to cope with pressure.”
- Practice visualisation techniques. Picture yourself being successful handling the test without excessive stress, or if you are feeling very uptight, try visualising an image or picture of a peaceful or tranquil place, such as a deserted sandy beach in summer, or the top of a high mountain, away from everyone. Picture yourself relaxing in this scene, and carry out the relaxation exercise outlined below.
- Relaxation techniques: One relaxation method is the "breathing by threes". Inhale slowly through your nose as you count to three. Exhale slowly through your nose as you count to three. Repeat this several times.



Mental preparation

Some preliminary steps that you might take would include:

- Seek help from your lecturer and/or counsellor about study techniques
- Get organised. Tidy up and organise your notes and other material.
- Make a special set of notes that contain summaries of information that requires more of your attention.
- Use study methods that give ample feedback. To help identify areas that need more review, have a friend or family member quiz you.
- Anticipate test questions. Use information from your notes, lectures to predict test questions. Allocate some time each day to practice answering some of the questions.
- Find out as much as you can about the upcoming test.

What questions do you need to ask about the test?

1. How many questions will be asked.
2. How much time is allocated.
3. What chapters or part of the course does each test cover?
4. Can I use a dictionary, spell checker, calculator?
5. Are points taken off for spelling and grammatical errors?
6. Are there any sample tests to review?

Physical preparation

- Get a good night's sleep.
- Allow time for a healthy breakfast. Avoid sugary foods, they may give you an "energy boost" but the effects will wear off quickly and will leave your energy level lower than before you ate.
- Check that you have all the necessary supplies
- Allow extra time to get to college the day before the test.

