

10 Ways to Manage Test Anxiety

Has this ever happened to you? You've been studying hard for your midterm, but when you walk into your exam, your mind goes blank. As you sit down to start your test, you notice your heavy breathing, pumping heart, sweaty palms and/or a pit in your stomach.

If these classic signs of test anxiety sound familiar, your grades and test scores may not reflect your true abilities. It really helps to learn ways to manage test anxiety before and during a stressful test.

Text anxiety

What is "test anxiety"? Racing thoughts, inability to concentrate, or feelings of dread can combine with physical symptoms like a fast heartbeat, headache, or nausea. While it's completely normal to feel a bit nervous before a test, some students find the anxiety they feel just before or during the test is debilitating.

Test anxiety tips

Our brains are instinctively wired to protect us from danger. The "danger" our brain may be reacting to in a test situation is the danger or fear of failure and all the potential ramifications of failure. In addition to physiological reactions, test anxiety can be experienced as unwanted racing thoughts. Test anxiety can arise from a static unwarranted belief. For example thinking; "I'm not smart enough", or it can manifest itself as random negative thoughts or intrusive memories perhaps of a bad experience when taking a test in the past. Here's what you can do to manage your anxiety in the days leading up to and during your test.

1. STUDY the material you believe will be on the exam.

Yes, this seems obvious, but it bears repeating. If you feel confident that you've prepped thoroughly, you'll feel more confident walking into the test ...and feel less anxious. The best preparation begins with getting the information into your memory. It's best to preview the lectures, attend the lectures and to review your notes, your textbook and other printed materials. Use Echo360 to help you with recall for information you might have missed at the lecture. In addition to studying alone it may help to study with a partner or study group.

2. Get a good night's sleep.

Cramming is never the answer, and pulling an all-nighter throws off your circadian rhythm. Having adequate rest (about 8 hours per night) is more beneficial than rereading a text until dawn. Research shows that young adults that get the least amount of sleep get lower grades in college than those that get more sleep. This is because tired individuals can't remember what they just learned. Sleep loss decreases the body's ability to extract glucose from the blood stream. Without this stream of basic energy, the region of the brain that is responsible for important higher level functions suffers. These functions include the ability to pay attention, memory, moral reasoning, impulse control, judgment and motivation. For some helpful advice on how to get better sleep go to: www.sleepfoundation.org.

3. Fuel up.

Hunger compromises executive functioning. Eat a nutritious breakfast before the test. Since you are not allowed to bring in a snack or drink get the right things in your system so that you don't become hungry during the extended period you are in the Test Center. If you're not allergic to eggs consider eating a couple of those and other proteins. Pair some proteins with some complex carbohydrates such as a banana or an apple. Both of these will give a boost to your system for an extended period of time. Avoid foods or drinks laden with sugar as they will quickly spike blood sugar and insulin levels, leading to increased energy. However, this rise in energy levels is undesirable because a spike in blood sugar may be followed by an energy crash before the exam time allotment is over.

4. Get to the testing site early.

Feeling rushed will only amp up the anxiety. Pack everything you need for the exam the night before and set the alarm, so you can get out the door on time.

5. Have a positive mental attitude.

Form a mental picture of your happy or calming place and pair it with a morale-boosting mantra like "I can do this" or "I worked hard and deserve this." Visually think of your happy place and recite your mantra, right before the test begins.

6. Read carefully.

Read the directions thoroughly and read all answers before making a choice. Slowing down can help you stay focused. Consider the following syllogism ...but before you respond make sure that you are not tired or hungry (two things that compromise optimal executive thinking):

- All roses are flowers.
- Some flowers fade quickly.
- Therefore some roses fade quickly.

A study reported by Daniel Kahneman showed that most students endorse the syllogism as valid. But "the argument is flawed, because it is possible there are no roses among the flowers that fade quickly." While "a plausible answer comes to mind immediately; overriding" the intuitive answer requires extra thinking. The intent here is not to reduce your confidence in selecting a correct answer, rather it is to show that you may be one of "many" who rely on intuition in selecting the first answer that comes to mind when taking a test. Those voices in your past, that have told you not to second guess on an exam, may have given you bad advice. When we take our time, and *read carefully* we are more prone to put in the extra effort necessary to consider other less obviously appearing answers.

7. Just start.

After you've read the directions, dive right in by making an outline for an essay answer. Or, find some multiple choice questions you can ace to build up your confidence and momentum. Flag questions you're not sure about and return to them later.

8. Don't pay attention to what other students are doing.

Everyone else is scribbling or tapping away? What do they know that you don't? It doesn't matter. Pay attention to your own test and pace, and forget about the other students in the room. If you tend to be distracted by the sound of mouse clicks or the taps on your classmate's keyboard wear ear plugs or try to sit where the bothersome noise is less distracting. And just because someone else seems finished way before you doesn't mean they are smarter than you or that they'll get a better score than you.

9. Be aware of the time.

Stay on pace by scoping out the whole test before getting started. Mentally allocate how much time you'll spend on each section. If there's time to recheck, even better.

10. Focus on calm breathing and positive thoughts.

Deep breathing can slow down a beating heart or a racing mind, so practice these techniques at home. The very act of concentrating on breathing and thinking can biometrically alter those anxious feelings. You can try to recreate body reactions similar to the sensations you feel when in a panic-like state. For example running up several flights of stairs or some other high intensity training type exercise. Once you are in that heightened physical state just practice calming yourself down by breathing deeply, etc. and paying attention to how your body is calming itself down both through your efforts and how it naturally calms down. We expect to have physiological reactions at the top of the staircase, so we're not bothered by those sensations. However, when these sensations occur without any apparent precipitant it's understandable a person would feel debilitated by this. It may help to think of those expected physical sensations everyone has after a high intensity exercise as being similar to your panic-like sensations. Embrace them as your brain's reaction to the "danger" of failure. Remember that it's just a little extra adrenaline, cortisol and norepinephrine pumping through your system by a brain that is trying to protect you from what is really unwarranted "danger".

The list originated from: <https://www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/test-anxiety>

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