

# Managing Test Anxiety

Common Causes of Test Anxiety	Examples
Expectations of Self	"I can't let my parents down."
Past test experience	"I've flunked many other tests."
Fear of failing	"If I don't do well, I won't graduate"
Academic problems (underdeveloped skills)	"I am terrible at multiple choice tests"
External Locus of Control	"I am going to fail because the questions are going to be too difficult."
Low Self Efficacy	"I don't believe I can handle this task"

It is important to understand that it is not the test situations themselves that create anxiety. It is how you interpret what tests mean that create your anxiety. Students often interpret test situations in extreme or negative ways, which increases their anxiety and results in poor test performance.

## Stress Management Techniques for Reducing Test Anxiety

### ➤ Challenge self-defeating thoughts

If you think about tests negatively or in a fearful way, you will likely have considerable test anxiety. To challenge your self-defeating thoughts, identify what you say to yourself about tests. These thoughts may be "catastrophic" in nature. Once you identify your negative thoughts, develop realistic coping statements that you will use instead.

Sample negative statements: "I could never study enough for this test." "I have a lousy memory."

Sample Coping statements:

"I have much material to learn, but if I adhere to my schedule, I can do it."

"I'm going to talk with my professor to find out how to study for this test. There are also tests on reserve I can use to prep."

### ➤ Thought Stopping

When you start to feel test anxiety, listen to what you are telling yourself and then interrupt anxiety-producing thoughts by yelling "**STOP**" to yourself. Take a deep breath, and make sure you then use a coping statement. Do this before and during tests.

### ➤ Recognize your control in the outcome of a test

It is self-defeating to tell yourself that your test performance is not in your control. These thoughts create anxiety and prevent you from studying effectively. Focus on what you can do to improve your test performance.

### ➤ Imagery and visualization

Use this technique *before* a test to calm yourself and improve your concentration. In your mind, create a scene that is peaceful and soothing, such as laying on the beach in the summer sun, or floating down a calm stream on a raft. Use your image/visualization until you feel relaxed, focused, and without worry thoughts.

➤ **Technique #5: Avoid stress triggers**

- ✓ Avoid people or situations that trigger anxiety.
- ✓ Avoid discussing course material immediately before the test if this stresses you.
- ✓ Last minute cramming generally causes more anxiety and concern.
- ✓ Pay attention to the time allotted for the test, but avoid excessive clock-watching.
- ✓ Avoid getting to the test "just in time;" Plan to arrive early to settle in and relax.
- ✓ Minimize food/drinks that are stimulants and increase "jitters."
- ✓ Avoid believing rumors you hear about the test. Check it out with the person who knows –your instructor.
- ✓ Avoid checking the progress of other students during the test. It doesn't take long for someone to complete a test when he/she hasn't studied.

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