

### What Is Test Anxiety?

(adapted from *About Test Anxiety*, Channing Libete Co., Inc., 1987)

Test anxiety is “worry or fear caused by having to take tests.” Students may describe symptoms of test anxiety in several ways. For example, some students describe test anxiety as “mental distraction” in which they are unable to concentrate, because they are distracted by a variety of external factors. Some students experience test anxiety as physical symptoms, such as “butterflies” in the stomach, a quickened heart rate, rapid or shallow breathing, nausea, sweaty palms, headache, etc. Students also have characterized test anxiety as a “mental block” during which they are unable to focus on the assignments (exams, oral quizzes, etc.) that they are confronting.

#### Who is affected?

Many students face anxiety when approaching an exam. However, for certain students, this anxiety may become severe enough that it affects how they function during the exam. Some students become quite anxious because they have failed exams in the past and they fear that they will experience this failure again. Students experiencing “test anxiety” may remark that they have studied and believe they have mastered and comprehended the material; yet, because of the anxiety, they may not perform adequately on the exam.

#### What causes test anxiety? What can I do?

Test anxiety may result from “pressure, past experience, and fear of failure” (p. 4). Suggestions for managing test anxiety include the following:

1. Give yourself permission to believe that one test will not influence *all* future educational and career endeavors.
2. Learn about stress and develop relaxation techniques. Practice the techniques daily and use them when you’re experiencing anxiety.
3. Believe that active study procedures yield positive results.
4. Remember that the important people in your life (parents, friends, significant other, etc.) will still care about you despite your test score.
5. Develop appropriate study strategies to curb or eliminate test anxiety.
6. Remember that studying is an individual process. Each student establishes study strategies that are effective for him/her. A study approach that works for your best friend may not be the one that is most beneficial to you.
7. Acquiring relaxation techniques might help in testing situations in which anxiety is so high that test answers are forgotten during the exam but recalled minutes after handing in the test.

#### Some Effective Study Techniques

1. Select an appropriate place to study that is free from distractions. Attempt to study in the same location on a daily basis. Be alert and rested when you are studying.
2. Look over class notes as soon as possible after each class. Incorporate review time each 2-3 days to re-review your class notes.
3. Schedule your time so that you are aware of test dates, review periods, and social/recreational time. Consider studying in shorter blocks of time (such as 30 minute sessions) rather than one 4-hour period.
4. Determine study strategies that are effective for you. For example, some students learn well with note cards. Others find that notes in the margins of their class notes or brief outlines enable them the most effective learning.
5. Acquire good eating and sleeping patterns so that your mind and body are functioning well. Make a concerted effort to practice study strategies so that “cramming” is eliminated.

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(continued)

### Some Test-Taking Skills

1. Plan your time. Check to see how many points each question is worth. Spend more time on the questions that are worth more points.
2. Determine which questions are the easiest and do those first.
3. Budget time to review your answers before handing the test in.
4. Try not to panic when confronting a difficult question. Place a mark beside the questions and continue. Go back later, and try to answer the hard questions.
5. Be alert to words such as “always,” “never,” “after,” etc.
6. Take time to assure yourself that you understand what the questions is asking in a multiple-choice exam.
7. If there is no penalty for guessing, take time to go back and answer any questions that were skipped earlier in the test.

### Some Ways to Help Control Anxiety

1. Attempt to replace negative thoughts with positive or more realistic statements. For example, assume that a lower exam score might be O.K. rather than assume that you are a failure.
2. Try to imagine yourself as calm and in control. Strive to eradicate dismal thoughts and feelings that contribute to anxiety. Develop positive thinking skills.
3. Invest some time in acquiring relaxation techniques to manage anxiety.

If tension and anxiety increase during an exam, try the following exercise:

1. Close your eyes
2. Take a long, deep breath (from your belly, not shallow breathing from your chest)
3. Let it out slowly
4. Concentrate on your breathing—actually feel or hear yourself breathe. Don't allow yourself to worry about the time or tension.
5. Repeat once, then return to the test (p. 13).

### Prevention Strategies

1. Seek assistance from an academic support counselor or other qualified professional on the University campus. Tips on how to combat test anxiety and other study strategies are usually available.
2. Talk to your friends and classmates. Perhaps they have experienced similar concerns and can provide some ideas that may help you.
3. Visit the class instructor if you are encountering difficulty with course material or with comprehending lectures.
4. Discuss your feelings with the important persons in your life (parents, spouse, girl/boy friend, etc.) Receiving their support and concern may help in calming your fears.

There is no magic cure for “test anxiety.” However, students who develop an understanding of what test anxiety is and who acquire and practice techniques to allay the potential debilitating aspects of test anxiety are better able to prepare themselves for a successful educational experience.