Test anxiety

Most college students experience test anxiety at one time or another.

The reasons for test anxiety can vary from performance anxiety (the need to get the best grade in the class) to being underprepared for the exam itself. In between these factors lie other reasons. Perhaps the course has been a difficult one for you, you missed some classes due to illness or you have several exams on the same day. There are methods you can use to combat test anxiety. Look at the signs that indicate you are anxious about a test. Once recognized, they will be easier to overcome.

**Signs of test anxiety**

(taken from Orientation to College Learning by Dianna L. Von Blerklom, p. 181)

* nausea
* lightheadedness
* sweaty palms
* butterflies
* heart pounding
* fainting
* going blank
* worrying about failing
* trouble concentrating
* diarrhea
* throwing up
* shaking
* headaches
* feeling tense
* crying

**Some causes of text anxiety**

* past test experience
* frustration
* missed classes
* did not attend study session
* material is difficult
* fear of failure
* type of test
* notes are missing
* have been ill
* lack of sleep
* embarrassment
* being under prepared
* don't like the class
* did not read the text

**How to combat test anxiety when studying for the test**

Your best defense is a good offense. Be well prepared for the test.

* Join a study group and visit the tutor if one is available.
* Compare and share notes.
* Find out what the test will be like. Ask the professor to explain how the test will be structured, how many true/false, multiple choice, matching and essay questions will be on the exam.

**Practice controlling your anxiety**

* Exhale, take deep breaths.
* Take a "mental time out" to think of something unrelated for a minute or two. Return to the study topic refreshed.
* Visualize completing the test successfully.

**Revise your lecture notes.**

* Take notes from the textbook.
* Write out possible test questions and try to answer them.

**How to combat test anxiety when taking an exam**

* Sit at the front of the room to avoid distractions from others taking the test.
* Avoid negative thoughts. Keep focused on doing as well as you can.
* Avoid talking to others who are also anxious about the test.
* Read over the test carefully before beginning to answer. Include directions for each section and plan your time accordingly.
* If allowed to write on the test, underline key words in the questions.
* Answer the easiest questions first.
* Use your time wisely to answer questions with higher point value.
* If your mind goes blank, don't waste time - move on to another question. Return to unanswered questions if time permits at the end of the test.
* Use relaxation strategies such as deep breathing and mental "time out" techniques as needed.

**When in doubt, guess**

* Guessing can be used when you think one of the answers sounds familiar. When a choice sounds familiar it might trigger some form of recall that involves material you covered. That choice might be the right answer due to information deep in your long-term memory. Select that choice over an unknown answer.
* Never leave a question blank. Always select a choice or write in some information for short answer or essay questions. You might get partial credit for the answer rather than no points for leaving it blank.

**End of exam strategies**

* Use all the exam time allowed. If you finish early, go over as many of your answers as possible. Start with the most difficult questions. For short answer and essay questions, review everything you wrote to see if your answers sound clear and concise when read a second time. Did rereading trigger information that you left out? If so, add that new information. If you have no room on that page, indicate to the professor that additional information can be found on the back of another page of the exam.
* Use caution when changing answers. Use this strategy if other information in the test changes your answer. Usually your first choice is the correct one. Your choice came from somewhere in your memory bank even if it was an "educated guess."

**How to reduce anxiety for the next exam**

* After the first exam, review how you prepared for the exam. Learn helpful strategies for taking future exams by answering these questions.
* Did the test reflect how you had studied?
* Did you find that the professor relied more on lecture than on the text?
* Did you find that outside readings were included on the test?
* Did you find that information from student presentations were included on the test?
* Do your notes reflect the same information that was on the test?
* Did the test information also include textbook readings?
* Did you keep up with the readings?
* Did you use the text to prepare for the test?
* Did you compare notes with a classmate to see if they had additional information you had missed?
* Did you attend the professor's review session?
* Did you attend tutoring sessions if they were available?

**Plan to**

* Stay up-to-date with all written and reading assignments.
* Review and revise your notes weekly.
* Learn some relaxation techniques to use before and during the next exam.
* Create a study plan that will give you enough time to cover all the material for all your classes.
* Make out a study schedule covering at least the two weeks before your finals begin. This will give you adequate preparation time to cover all material for all your tests.
* If you have a job, ask for a shortened schedule or time off for these two weeks.
* If you have a family, tell them ahead of time that these two weeks are going to be very difficult.
* Set your priorities. If you have a very difficult class, plan to schedule more time for that material.
* Don't forget to schedule breaks in your study plan for relaxation.
* Get enough sleep.
* Reward yourself when your finals are done.