



Test Anxiety: Tips and Strategies

Test Anxiety

- Many if not all students experience some level of test anxiety in their school career
- Some test anxiety is healthy- it heightens arousal, can enhance performance, and can motivate. A lack of anxiety can lead to poor results and not taking an exam seriously

When test anxiety becomes a problem

- Test anxiety is problematic when significant feelings of fear and distress impede study habits and test writing
- Common symptoms: rapid heart rate, sweating, shortness of breath, fear of failure, feeling overwhelmed, self doubt, irritability, weak concentration, drawing a blank, scattered thinking, inability to comprehend questions
- When interference from test anxiety is significant there will be a marked discrepancy between test results and class performance (and what you actually know)

Strategies for coping with exam anxiety

- **Be prepared:** the number one strategy to try first when confronting exam anxiety is to be prepared for your exam. Being prepared can increase academic confidence. In preparation:
 - Study thoroughly using good study skills and a study plan. If you have put in a good effort studying for the exam, you may feel more positive and confident for the exam
 - Don't cram- have your studying done ahead of time so that the morning of the exam you are not concerned about studying
 - Get a good night sleep before the test, maintain your diet (healthy food is optimal)
 - Exercise the day before or in the morning to release tension
 - Arrive on time so you're not feeling rushed. Find a seat that you are comfortable in
 - When you feel prepared, you can start the exam with a much calmer disposition
 - If you are not prepared, you will likely be anxious
- **Practice relaxation techniques:** physiologically, you can't be anxious if you are relaxed. By regulating your anxiety through relaxation techniques, you can potentially think more clearly, recall more, and reason better
 - Relaxation techniques can help you set the stage for an exam so that you can begin feeling calm. Try to get in the habit of doing a technique before all your exams so you feel grounded
 - Be comfortable and alert
 - Some relaxation techniques include:
 - Deep breathing: close eyes, concentrate on your breath, breath slowly
 - Guided imagery: image a peaceful relaxing scene that puts you in a happy place. Try being detailed in your imagery
 - Tense and relax different muscle groups (tense for a few seconds then release)

- **Manage anxiety during the test:** even when you've prepared for a test, it's normal to experience some anxiety as you write your test. The key is to keep anxiety in check. Strategies to help reduce your anxiety during tests are:
 - When you feel anxiety increasing, take a break- relax, breath, think of calming imagery.
 - Mark down the question that you are not sure of, and move on. Come back to those questions later. You might be triggered from other questions on the test or recall something later that will help you answer the question
 - Don't think about your classmates- they are not important right now. Work at your own pace and concentrate on your own exam and well being
 - If a question is giving you anxiety and feels overwhelming, try to break down what the question is asking. Read it over carefully. Break large questions into manageable parts. Take a moment to sketch out an outline on how you will answer the question
 - Take your focus away from your anxiety- chew gum, momentarily doodle, think of something pleasant, then get back to the exam
 - Budget your time and do your best to get as much as you can completed

- **Thinking affects anxiety:** Negative self-talk during an exam can lead to increased anxiety. Using realistic thinking and positive self talk can help you regulate your anxiety during an exam:
 - Some common anxiety inducing thoughts are: "I know I'll mess up", "I am going to fail", "I should have studied more", "I'm stupid", "I have to get a perfect mark", etc.
 - Be mindful of such thinking during an exam and try to stop it or counter it
 - Try to replace such thoughts with *realistic thinking*, such as "It's only a test. I will get some questions wrong but I can answer several of them. I can make educated guesses on the questions I don't know. If I do this, I'll do much better on my test than if I beat myself up over the questions I don't know", etc.
 - *Positive self-talk* is also very helpful and counteracts negative thoughts, such as "I know about this subject, I can do this. I will do my best! I'm awesome! "

Resources

- Talk to your instructor/ TA about what to study for your exam
- Utilize the Academic Success Centre (ASC). They offer study skills training, tutoring, workshops, handouts, and much more. Website: <http://www.unbc.ca/asc/>
- UNBC Counselling Services. Provides individual and confidential counselling for UNBC students
- Online resources:
 - www.Anxietybc.com
 - <http://www.testanxietytips.com/>
 - <http://www.studygs.net/tstprp8.htm>

Sources:

www.Anxietybc.com

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