TEST ANXIETY

This handout is not designed for those "weaklings" who can walk into a classroom, calmly sit down, and ace a test. It is designed for those people who experience great trauma when they hear the word "test"! It's designed for those who are willing to take the steps they need to take to overcome the fear of tests. Some of the suggestions may seem bizarre; but if it works, it may be worth it. If you want to succeed, it is important that you do what you must to get the grade you desire.

Also, this booklet gives information on ways to overcome anxiety. It does not take the place of test preparation. The first step you must take in test preparation is to study and know your material well. How to prepare for a test is covered in other booklets and seminars. If you need help about how to study for a test, please call The Learning Center, 583-5195 ext.2364, or talk with your instructor.

Are you ready to overcome anxiety?

Let's get started. There are several steps you can take to help you with that ugly stress that accompanies test taking. These steps include positive thinking, controlled breathing, dealing with the fear response, muscle relaxing and rehearsing the test. After we've covered these areas, we will discuss some other practical suggestions that may be helpful.

The tips listed in the next section are intended to be used for all test-taking situations. You should practice these steps routinely. Don't wait until the day before the test to begin trying to overcome your anxiety. Begin practicing NOW!

Positive Thinking

A test only measures your performance on a given day. It tells you how much you know about the questions you were asked. IT IS NOT a measure of your worth as a student. It is important that you see the test in this manner and not let your score become a reflection of you. Once you have established this fact, begin following these steps:
1. Verbalize your worries and write them down.

2. Quickly, contradict these statements. You need to feel like you are in control and you can achieve this by self-talk. Practice the following by writing a positive response to the listed quote:

   When you think:

   "I'll probably fail because this teacher makes such hard tests," contradict the statement by saying

   "I always get test anxiety and become paralyzed during a test." Your contradiction should be

   "If I'm lucky, I'll pass the test." You should respond:

   Continue to rephrase your worries in a positive manner. Every time you have a negative thought, write it down and then contradict it. As you practice this technique, you will begin to become a positive thinker.

3. Place index cards around your home, your car, your study area. On these cards, write:

   I can                              I will                              I want

   Use these as constant reminders to think positively.

4. Make an inventory of the things you can do, the things you want to achieve and the feelings you want to feel that contribute to a positive mental attitude.

   Things I Can Do

   I can pull information from a question to help me write an essay.

   I can eliminate two choices from a multiple choice question.

   On the following lines, write other positive statements about the things you can do.
Things I Want to Achieve

I want to be able to avoid time pressure.

Feelings I Want That Contribute to a Positive Attitude

I want to feel confident about my knowledge.

I want to feel that I’m not afraid of the test.

Controlled Breathing

When a person exhales, tense muscles tend to relax. Don’t breath too fast or forcefully because this may cause hypertension.

1. Close your eyes
2. Inhale and exhale ten times.
3. Breathe through your nose and fill your lungs.
4. Hold your breath and slowly count to 5.
5. Breathe out slowly and easily through your mouth.
6. Concentrate on breathing and think of nothing else.

Dealing with the Fear Response

It’s normal to connect a feeling of fear with an event. To deal with your fear, sometimes it helps to practice being in the testing situation.

1. Practice your relaxed breathing.
2. Make a list of three events that cause fear when you are taking a test and then rank these events from what causes the most fear down to what causes the least fear.
3. Practice relaxed breathing.
4. Imagine event #3. If you feel fearful, turn off the picture and go back to breathing.
5. Once you’ve successfully pictured event #3 without panic, move on to the next item.

By repeatedly putting yourself in the testing position and experiencing a comfortable feeling, you are desensitizing yourself to those bad feelings.

**Muscle Relaxing**

This anxiety release requires some practice. You should be seated in a comfortable position before you begin. Between exercises, you can practice your controlled breathing. The idea is to focus as much on the technique as possible and, therefore, block out the harmful anxiety. Basically, you will tense each muscle group, inhale, count, release the tension, and then exhale.

1. Bend your head and try to rest your right ear as close as you can to your right shoulder. Take a deep breath and count to five. Assume normal position, relax and exhale.

2. Repeat the same procedure but bend your head to the left shoulder.

3. Repeat again but this time try to touch your chest with your chin.

4. Next, make a fist and tense your left forearm. Take a deep breath and count to ten. Release your fingers and relax and exhale.

5. Now, do the same with your right arm.

Continue moving from the head to the arms, your trunk and then your legs. You will begin feeling yourself relax and because you have been focusing on this exercise, you will forget about your anxiety.

**Rehearsing the Test**

1. Imagine yourself at the exam beginning to develop anxiety.

2. Immediately visualize yourself taking deep breaths and giving yourself positive instruction.

   "Focus on the exam, nothing else."

   "Relax."

3. After rehearsing, use the cue words during the exam.

**Other Practical Suggestions**

1. Know about the test. Ask your instructor what kind of questions to prepare for: multiple choice, true/false, essay? You’ll feel more in charge if you know what to expect.

2. Manage your daily routine the day before the test.

3. Get a sufficient amount of sleep the night before the test.

4. Avoid caffeine; it can lessen attention span and reduce concentration. Eat a meal low in
fat and high in proteins—yogurt, chicken or eggs.

5. Dress in the clothes that make you feel confident.

6. Avoid cramming. Never “group cram” immediately prior to the test.

7. Arrive early for the test. The more important the test, the more time you should schedule for arriving.

8. Have supplies you need for the test.

9. Just before the test, take an intentional walk or go up and down the stairs two or three times.

10. During the test, pay close attention to the instructor. Resist the urge to ignore what the instructor is saying because you want to get started on the test.

11. Get totally involved in answering the items.

12. Keep a positive outlook.

13. Have reasonable expectations.

14. When anxiety surfaces, make a tight fist. Take a deep breath and relax. Do this five times. Then think, “Everybody is probably having trouble with this exam and I can do as well as anyone else.”

Overcoming test anxiety isn’t easy. It takes work and concentration, practice and more practice. But if you are determined to succeed and you are willing to take the steps necessary, you will be able to sit down in a test situation and feel confident that you know what you are doing.