

# Test Anxiety and Stress

*"Having an inner critic is normal...believing it is negotiable."*

The World Health Organization states that anxiety and depression are the 4<sup>th</sup> leading cause of suffering and disability in the world and will be the number two cause by 2020. With that in mind, it is imperative that individuals are able to not only recognize the anxiety in their lives but also having coping mechanisms in dealing with the anxiety that is an inevitable part of our lives.

As stated above, test anxiety usually conjures up negative connotations. Anxiety is seen as something that should be avoided at all costs. That is not usually possible. A little anxiety/arousal can have the potential of being helpful in a test taking situation. However, too much anxiety or arousal can be debilitating. The Yerkes-Dodson Law (1908) suggests that anxiety that is either too high or too low hinders performance. For example, when you are doing something that does not excite you, your performance tends to be lower. However, when you are too keyed up or anxious, that anxiety also hinders your performance

Passing or failing a test is not an indication on who you are as a person. Think positively, prepare, and do your best. Not everyone can be good at all things. You have your own set of strengths and weaknesses. It is important to realize that you will not get a perfect score on every test that you take. By having this awareness and not expecting perfection, you will save yourself a lot of heartache and stress. While you cannot control how a particular instructor prepares a test, you do have control on how much you prepare. Below are tips that can help reduce test anxiety before and during a test, along with reducing anxiety when taking specific types of tests.

## General Anxiety Tips

- **Build Expectancy**  
Think of self in changeable terms. Just because you had one negative experience on a test or quiz does not mean that is an indicator for future failure. Build an emotional wall to separate the past, present, and future.
- **What If?**  
Ask yourself what would be the worst thing that could happen in the situation that is causing anxiety and what you can do about it.
- **Teach mind cleaning/mind focusing techniques** such as deep breathing, visualization, and deep muscle relaxation.
- **Assess Controllability-**

What's controllable, what's not. Don't upset yourself more by focusing on what you cannot control.

- Focus on strengths
- Thinking Strategically
  1. What is the goal?
  2. What resources do you need?
  3. How do you acquire the needed resources?
  4. What steps do you need to take in order to accomplish the goal?

### Before the Test:

- Predict: Talk with your instructor about the format of the test, length, time limit, and any special instructions.
- Schedule time with no distractions to study
- Get tutoring if needed
- Sleep: All nighters are a bad idea. Being fatigued can effect brain function and not allow you to perform at your best.
- Eat a good breakfast before you go. Foods that are low in fat and high in protein are helpful.
- Know your Learning Style: Use that as an asset with studying. If you know you are a visual learner, make flashcards. For example, if you learn by writing things down, then do it!
- Approach the test with a positive attitude, prepare yourself emotionally, and eliminate any negative thoughts.
- Remind yourself that you studied and know the material.
- Arrive early for the test and bring all supplies.
- Listen to the instructor's directions.

### During the Test:

- Relax

The bottom line is that when you are nervous, you don't perform as well. If you encounter a tough question, you might start to panic. Panicking creates distraction and distraction creates poor performance, and poor performance creates even more panic. Before you begin a test, take a few deep breaths in through your nose to the count of 4 and out through your mouth to the count of 4.
- Preview the Entire Test

Before you begin, scan the test and assess which parts of the test are easier for you than others. Do the easy parts first. This will encourage

you and give you more confidence. Save the difficult portions till the end so you don't get discouraged early on in the test. This will also help you pace the test and get an estimation of how long it will take to complete the test.

- Jot down any mnemonic devices that will help you on the test
- Keep an eye on the clock so you can pace yourself
- Check your answers, but usually your first response is correct

### Typical Responses to Test Questions:

- Quick Time Response: This is the response you have when you read a test question and immediately answer it.
- Lag-Time Response: This is when you read a question and the answer does not come to you immediately. You may have to re-read the question and think for a moment before the answer comes to you.
- No Response: This is the least desirable. As you may have guessed, this is when you read the question and you have no idea what the answer is. Here are some tips:
  1. Leave the question till the end.
  2. Make an intelligent guess.
  3. Eliminate all unreasonable answers.
  4. Watch for modifiers (all, most, least, etc.).
  5. See if one question answers the other.
  6. Look for hints throughout the test.
  7. Don't panic, move on.

### Multiple Choice Tests

- Read the entire question. You may think you know what it is saying, but you may miss something.
- Try to answer the question before looking at the answer choices. Sometimes the answer choices can be confusing.
- Examine all answer choices
- Make sure you take your time and not go too fast
- Recognize that answers containing extreme modifiers such as always, every, and never are usually wrong
- Cross off answers that you know are incorrect
- Recognize that when the answers are all numbers that usually the highest and lowest are incorrect
- If you cannot answer a question, move on to the next one. Another question may trigger the answer you missed

### Matching Questions

- Read each column before you answer to determine if there are an equal number of items in each column.
- Match what you know first
- Cross off what you have already used
- Use process of elimination and logical clues

### True/False Questions

- Watch for key words such as many, some, few, and often, never, and all
- Watch for double negatives such as "not untruthful"
- Remember that if any part of the statement is false, the entire statement is false

### Essay Questions

- More is not always better. Try to be as concise as possible
- Pay attention to the action word used in the question when you respond (discuss, analyze, justify, prove, etc.)
- Write a thesis statement for each answer
- Outline your thoughts before you begin writing
- Use details (time, dates, places, and proper names) when appropriate
- Make sure to answer all parts of the question
- Summarize your main ideas at the end of your answer
- Proofread your answer

### References

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