

Anxiety isn't uncommon in stressful situations, and a frequently stressful or anxiety-provoking situation can be test-taking. Many students feel some form of anxiety when taking exams (while reviewing, just before the test, during the test, after the test, and any combination of these). These feelings can range from nervousness and sweating to forgetfulness and blanking out to becoming physically ill.

Most people feel a navigable amount of nervousness. And actually, a few nerves might improve your test performance. But when these nerves begin to negatively impact exam performance, the experienced anxiety has become a problem.

Whether you're dealing with nerves, forgetfulness, illness, or anything else, consider reflecting on and working in the following three areas to reduce test anxiety and lessen its interference with test performance:

1. **MENTAL PREPARATION**

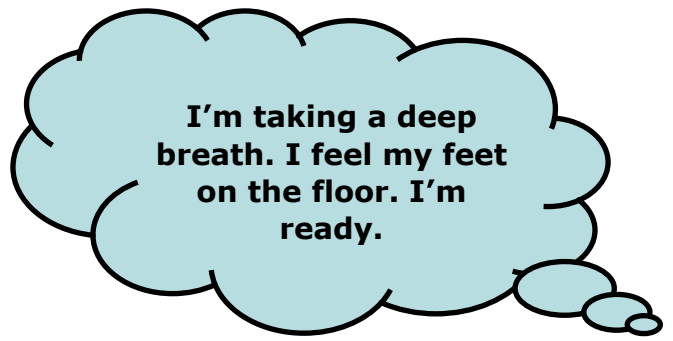
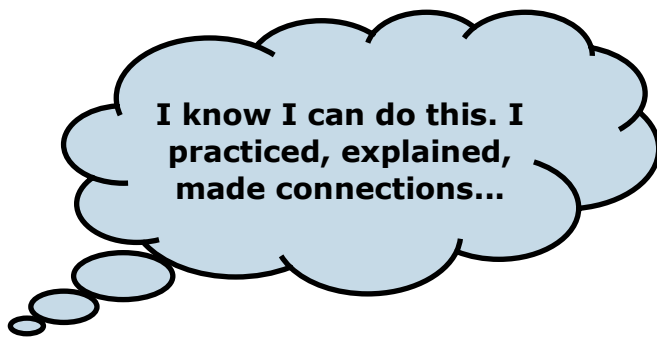
Before the exam:

- ❑ **Be thoroughly prepared.** A confident knowledge of course materials is the first step in reducing test anxiety.
- ❑ **Review the material.** Begin your review process early; trying to cover two months of material in two hours is not an effective way to prepare for an exam. But engaging in consistent practice with the content you've learned can help to reduce anxiety because you're learning it to know it. If it doesn't feel stressful to do this near the exam time, it could be calming to get into the material.
- ❑ **Arrive at the exam location early.** Know where you'll be and get there in time to find a spot that feels good to you. Relax and try not to talk about the test/worries with people around you. Also, try to make space between you and anyone who seems nervous; nervousness and anxiety can spread quickly.

In the exam, have a plan:

- ❑ **Review directions and test questions/sections.** Some initial tension is normal, so try to pause first, take some deep breaths, and then get into the framework/expectations. Want to be sure you don't forget something? Do a quick brain-dump of formulas/concepts/ideas you don't want to lose track of.
- ❑ **Make a schedule for yourself.** Use what you know about how many points questions are worth, how many sections you have, how long you have to complete the exam, etc. Allow more time for a higher point question. Pace yourself and check the time. Knowing how well you're progressing will help to reduce anxiety over whether or not you'll finish the exam.
- ❑ **Don't speed too much time on any question.** If you can't come up with the answer, move on. You can always come back if you have time. Higher scores will usually result from trying all items.
- ❑ **If you get stumped on a question or a series of questions, move onto questions you can answer.** This will get your mental process and concentration going and can ready you for more difficult questions.





2. *PHYSICAL PREPARATION*

- **Work to develop good study habits and techniques.** Make sure that you're incorporating consistent practice and self-testing into your study, and schedule your work throughout the week, rather than engaging in long, single sessions. You don't want to cram. Your brain won't be convinced that the content matters, and won't work to keep it. Revisit the material often and regularly, aloud and written out, in various ways and various places, and learn it until you can't get it wrong.
- **Take care of yourself.** Be sure you're eating healthy, regular meals, and getting good rest. These are so important for your learning and performance! Tiredness can quickly lead to frustration and can fuel anxiety.

3. *RELAXATION*

In connection with mental and physical preparation, relaxation before and during the exam can aid in retention and improve test performance. When a person is anxious, their body becomes physically tense. Relaxation removes tension and thus reduces anxiety — the deeper the relaxation the greater the reduction in anxiety. Here are several things you can do to achieve a state of relaxation before and during an exam.

- **Go for a walk.** Allow adequate time prior to the exam to go for walk. Tune into the space you're in, clear your mind, and enjoy the sense of relaxation.
- **Avoid discussing the test.** We mentioned this on the previous page, too. Talking about the test can fuel anxiety—if not for you, for someone else. You'll need to figure this out about yourself, and then take and offer space where the test isn't a conversation topic.
- **Take a series of 10 deep breaths.** Hold each breath for 10 seconds. Slowly release your breath, and take the next one.
- **While sitting or lying down, tense all the muscles in your body.** Hold the tension a few seconds, then release and let your muscles relax completely. Repeat as needed until you feel less anxious and have a deeper sense of relaxation.
- **Stretch.** Stretching your muscles invigorates the body and is a great pick me up, especially if you're groggy.

