

Are You "Test Anxious"?

- Are you aware of being really nervous on a test, maybe so nervous that you don't do your best and you lose points, even though you know you've studied well and are prepared?
- Does your stomach ever get tight or upset before or during a test? Hands cold and sweaty? Headaches? Do you have trouble sleeping the night before a test?
- Do you ever find your mind racing, or dull or "muddy," so that you can't think clearly, while taking a test?
- Do you ever forget, during a test, material you studied and learned, maybe only to remember it again later after the test is over?
- Do you "overanalyze" questions, see too many possibilities, choose the complex answer and overlook -- and miss -- the simpler correct one?
- Do you make many careless errors on a test?
- Have you had some bad experiences with tests...made poor grades when you didn't expect them?
- Do you spend a lot of time and energy studying and preparing for tests, yet fail to make grades that represent what you know? Do you lack confidence in yourself as a student because of this?
- Are tests and finals a particularly miserable time for you?

"Yes" answers to a number of these questions suggest that you may be "test anxious."

Of course, everyone is anxious about tests; if you weren't, you wouldn't try. A certain amount of tension is good; it acts as a motivator. But it has been estimated that as many as 20% of college students may suffer from nervousness which is so severe that two things happen: their grades drop -- anxiety interferes with their mental processes and keeps them from doing their best -- and the quality of their life lessens -- they're miserable.

Most test-takers may benefit from suggestions for ways to keep calm and maintain a productive level of tension while preparing for and taking tests; see the other side of this page.

If you think you may be "test anxious," try some of the strategies listed below, or talk to your TRIO Student Support Services Counselor who will help you with techniques for test anxiety reduction.

How To Keep Calm During Tests

1. **PREPARE WELL IN ADVANCE.** Keep up day to day, if you can; but don't judge yourself harshly if you don't. Avoid last-minute cramming. Don't go without sleep the night before (though 4 or 5 hours may be enough). Stop studying an hour or so before the test and relax and compose yourself.
2. **KNOW TIME AND PLACE** of the test and what you need to bring. Be on time, neither too early nor too late, with blue books or supplies. Don't rush.
3. **DON'T TALK ABOUT THE TEST** with classmates immediately beforehand, if you know it raises your anxiety level. To do so may nourish group paranoia.
4. Read over the test and **PLAN YOUR APPROACH.** Ascertain point values per part, time limits for each section, which question you'll start with, etc.
5. Don't hesitate to **ASK FOR CLARIFICATION** from the professor, teaching assistant, or proctor if you have questions about directions, procedure, etc., rather than letting anxiety build up because you aren't sure about what you are expected to do.
6. **DEVELOP AN AGGRESSIVE, YET REALISTIC ATTITUDE.** Approach the test vigorously determined that you will do your best; but also accept the limits of what you know at the moment. Use everything you know to do well; but don't blame yourself for what you don't know.
7. **ACTIVITY REDUCES ANXIETY.** If you go blank and can't think of anything to write, go on to another question or another part of the test. On an essay, jot down anything you can recall on scratch paper to stimulate your memory and get your mind working.
8. **RELAX YOURSELF PHYSICALLY** during the test, if you notice that you are not thinking well or are tight. Pause, lay your test aside, and take several slow, deep breaths. Concentrate on your breathing. Do this if you notice that you are worrying excessively about one problem, not reading carefully, forgetting information you know.
9. **PAY ATTENTION TO THE TEST**, not to yourself or others. Don't waste time worrying, doubting yourself, wondering how other people are doing, blaming yourself, etc. Don't worry about what you should have done; pay attention to what you can do now.

Information from UT Austin Learning Center.