

## TAKING THE TEST

- **Read over the whole exam before beginning to write anything.**
- **Choose the problem or question that seems easiest to you and do it first.** Continue to do the problems in order of increasing difficulty.
- **STAY IN MOTION!!!** Work on a problem until you get stuck. Think about it for a minute or two, and if nothing comes to you then drop it and go on to another problem. *Don't spend 30 minutes sweating out an additional five points on a problem and run out of time, leaving a 40-point problem untouched.* You may later have time to return to the first one and you're much more likely to think of how to do it then.
- **Don't panic.** If you feel yourself sweating or hyperventilating, put down your pencil, close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and consciously relax any muscles that you're clenching (jaw, neck, stomach). When you're calmer, go back to work.
- **If you have time at the end, check your solutions.** Did you answer each part of every question? Did you answer the question(s) asked? Do your answers look reasonable? Do your calculations check out? (Save this one for last.)
- **Be comfortable but alert** Choose a good spot and make sure you have enough room to work, maintain comfortable posture but don't "slouch"
- **Stay relaxed and confident** Remind yourself that you are well-prepared and are going to do well. If you find yourself anxious, take several slow, deep breaths to relax. Don't talk about the test to other students just before it; anxiety is contagious
- **Read the directions carefully** This may be obvious, but it will help you avoid careless errors  
**If there is time, quickly look through the test for an overview** Note key terms, jot down brief notes
- **Answer questions in a strategic order: First easy questions** to build confidence, score points, and mentally orient yourself to vocabulary, concepts, and your studies (it may help you make associations with more difficult questions)
- ✓ **Review:** Resist the urge to leave as soon as you have completed all the items. Review your test to make sure that you have answered all questions, not mis-marked the answer sheet, or made some other simple mistake Proofread your writing for spelling, grammar, punctuation, decimal points, etc.
- ✓ **Change answers to questions if you originally misread them** or if you have encountered information elsewhere in the test that indicates that your first choice is incorrect

**Remember that you are looking for the best answer**, not only a correct one, and not one which must be true all of the time, in all cases, and without exception.

- **Always guess when there is no penalty** for guessing or you can eliminate options
- **Don't guess if you are penalized for guessing** and if you have no basis for your choice
- **Use hints from questions you know** to answer questions you do not.

### Strategies to answer difficult questions:

- **Eliminate options you know to be incorrect** If allowed, mark words or alternatives in questions that eliminate the option
- **Give each option of a question the "true-false test:"** This may reduce your selection to the best answer
- **Question options that grammatically don't fit with the stem**
- **Question options that are totally unfamiliar to you**
- **Question options that contain negative or absolute words.** Try substituting a qualified term for the absolute one, like *frequently* for *always*; or *typical* for *every* to see if you can eliminate it
- **"All of the above:"** If you know two of three options seem correct, "all of the above" is a strong possibility
- **Number answers:** toss out the high and low and consider the middle range numbers
- **"Look alike options"** probably one is correct; choose the best but eliminate choices that mean basically the same thing, and thus cancel each other out

**The following test-taking tips can be generalized for all standardized tests.**

1. You do not have to answer all the questions correctly to pass. It is not expected that students answer every question correctly.
2. Attempt to answer ALL of the questions and DO NOT leave any blanks. There is no penalty for guessing, and students can get partial credit on the open-ended (constructed response) questions.
3. Use time wisely. If you get stuck on a question, make the best guess or place a mark in the test booklet by that item and go back to it after finishing that section of the test.
4. Get a solid good night's sleep before the test. Being well rested will sharpen the mind and aid your memory. Eat good breakfast the morning of the test.
5. Try to make the morning of the test a pleasant one. Avoid stress.
6. Get to school on time the day of the test.
7. Listen carefully to the instructions from the teacher, and read the directions to each question carefully (especially the constructed response and written questions). Be sure you understand exactly what you have to do for each part of the test.
8. Look for key words in test directions and questions such as: choose, describe, explain, compare, identify, similar, except, not, and but.
9. Read each question carefully and think before you answer. Be sure that you understand the question before you start to compare answer choices. Look at ALL answer choices and choose the best and most complete answer. If you're not sure which answer is correct, eliminate choices that you know are incorrect. Then focus on the remaining choices.
10. A word of caution about changing answers - usually your first choice is correct. If you have to change an answer be sure to erase completely.
11. Stay focused on the test, even if other students finish early. Don't get distracted.
12. It is OK to mark in the test booklet as a help in taking the test - i.e., underlining important words, etc. - but mark ALL answers on the answer sheet.
13. For constructed response and written questions - be sure to write neatly and legibly - IF THE READER CAN NOT READ YOUR ANSWER YOU LOOSE! Many students loose points because they do not read the directions carefully for these kinds of questions. Watch out for questions that have three or more parts!

**Tips on answering multiple choice questions**

- ✓ Read the question before you look at the answer.
- ✓ Come up with the answer in your head before looking at the possible answers, this way the choices given on the test won't throw you off or trick you.
- ✓ Eliminate answers you know aren't right. ✓ Read all the choices before choosing your answer.
- ✓ If there is no guessing penalty, always take an educated guess and select an answer.
- ✓ Don't keep on changing your answer, usually your first choice is the right one, unless you miss-read the question.
- ✓ In "All of the above" and "None of the above" choices, if you are certain one of the statements is true don't choose "None of the above" or one of the statements are false don't choose "All of the above".
- ✓ In a question with an "All of the above" choice, if you see that at least two correct statements, then "All of the above" is probably the answer.
- ✓ A positive choice is more likely to be true than a negative one.
- ✓ If there is an "All of the above" option and you know that at least two of the choices are correct select the "All of the above" choice
- ✓ Usually the correct answer is the choice with the most information.

## Dealing with Test Anxiety

### Most students experience some level of anxiety during an exam

However, when anxiety affects exam performance it has become a problem.

**General preparation/building confidence:** Review your personal situation and skills

- Developing good study habits and strategies
- Managing time (dealing with procrastination, distractions, laziness)
- Take a step by step approach to build a strategy and not get overwhelmed Outside pressures success/failure consequences (grades, graduation), peer pressure, competitiveness, etc.
- Reviewing your past performance on tests to improve and learn from experience

### Test preparation to reduce anxiety:

- Approach the exam with confidence: Use whatever strategies you can to personalize success: vizualization, logic, talking to your self, practice, team work, journaling, etc.  
View the exam as an opportunity to show how much you've studied and to receive a reward for the studying you've done
- Be prepared! Learn your material thoroughly and organize what materials you will need for the test. Use a checklist
- Choose a comfortable location for taking the test with good lighting and minimal distractions
- Allow yourself plenty of time, especially to do things you need to do before the test and still get there a little early
- Avoid thinking you need to cram just before
- Strive for a relaxed state of concentration Avoid speaking with any fellow students who have not prepared, who express negativity, who will distract your preparation
- A program of exercise is said to sharpen the mind
- Get a good night's sleep the night before the exam
- Don't go to the exam with an empty stomach Fresh fruits and vegetables are often recommended to reduce stress. Stressful foods can include processed foods, artificial sweeteners, carbonated soft drinks, chocolate, eggs, fried foods, junk foods, pork, red meat, sugar, white flour products, chips and similar snack foods, foods containing preservatives
- Take a small snack, or some other nourishment to help take your mind off of your anxiety. Avoid high sugar content (candy) which may aggravate your condition< relaxation>

### During the test:

- Read the directions carefully. Budget your test taking time. Change positions to help you relax
- If you go blank, skip the question and go on
- If you're taking an essay test and you go blank on the whole test, pick a question and start writing. It may trigger the answer in your mind
- Don't panic when students start handing in their papers. There's no reward for being the first done

### If you find yourself tensing and getting anxious during the test < relaxation>

- < relaxation>Relax; you are in control. Take slow, deep breaths
- Don't think about the fear Pause: think about the next step and keep on task, step by step
- < relaxation>Use positive reinforcement for yourself: Acknowledge that you have done, and are doing, your best
- Expect *some* anxiety It's a reminder that you want to do your best and can provide energy Just keep it manageable
- Realize that anxiety can be a "habit" and that it takes practice to use it as a tool to succeed

### After the test, < relaxation> review how you did

- List what worked, hold onto these strategies It does not matter how small the items are: they are building blocks to success
- List what did not work for improvement and celebrate that you are on the road to overcoming this obstacle

### If you are aware that you have a problem with test anxiety,

be sure your teacher or instructor knows before any testing begins (and not the hour before!). There may be other options to evaluate your knowledge or performance within the subject matter.

<http://www.studygs.net/tstprp8.htm>

**A hundred cartloads of anxiety will not pay an ounce of debt** Italian proverb

## What does test anxiety feel like?

- Some students experience mainly physical symptoms, such as headaches, nausea, faintness, feeling too hot or too cold, etc.
- Others experience more emotional symptoms, such as crying easily, feeling irritable, or getting frustrated quickly.
- A major problem of test anxiety can be its effect on thinking ability; it can cause a person to blank out or have racing thoughts that are difficult to control.
- **Western students are strongly encouraged to seek assistance at [Student Development Services](#) if you experience interfering levels of anxiety prior to and/or during tests and exams;** if you are not a Western student, speak with a counsellor or physician about support services.

## What can you do to control test anxiety?

- Be **well prepared** for the test.
- Include as much **self-testing** in your review as possible.
- Maintain a **healthy lifestyle**: get enough sleep, good nutrition, exercise, some personal "down" time, and a reasonable amount of social interaction.
- As you anticipate the exam, **think positively**, e.g., "I can do OK on this exam. I've studied and I know my stuff."
- Engage in **"thought stopping"** if you find that you are worrying a lot, comparing yourself to your peers, or thinking about what others may say about your performance on this exam.
- Before you go to bed on the night before the exam, **organize anything that you will need** for the exam -- pen, pencil, ruler, eraser, calculator, etc. Double check the time of the exam and the location.
- Set the alarm clock and then get a **good night's sleep** before the exam.
- Get to the **exam on time** - not too late but not too early.
- **Be cautious about talking to other students** about the exam material just before going into the exam, especially if this will make you more anxious.
- Sit in a **location** in the exam room where you will be distracted as little as possible.
- As the papers are distributed, **calm yourself** by taking some slow deep breaths.
- Make sure to **carefully read any instructions** on the exam.
- As you work on the exam, **focus only on the exam**, not on what other students are doing or on thinking about past exams
- If you feel very anxious in the exam, take a few minutes to **calm yourself**. Stretch your arms and legs and then relax them again. Do this a couple of times. Take a few slow deep breaths. Do some positive internal self-talk; say to yourself, "I will be OK, I can do this." Then direct your focus on the test; associate questions to their corresponding lecture and/or chapter.
- If the exam is more difficult than you anticipated, try to **focus and just do your best**. It might be enough to get you through with a reasonable grade!
- When the exam is over, **treat yourself**. If you don't have any other commitments, maybe you can take the night off. If you have to study for other exams you may have to postpone a larger break, but a brief break may be the "pick up" that you need.

<http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning/mcanx.html>

Test anxiety is almost universal. In fact, it is unusual to find a student who doesn't approach a big test without a high level of anxiety. Test anxiety can cause a host of problems in students, such as upset stomach, headache, loss of focus, fear, irritability, anger and even depression. New research is helping to better define how emotional stress and anxiety affect learning and academic performance.

Stressful emotions can inhibit a student's ability to absorb, retain and recall information. Anxiety creates a kind of "noise" or "mental static" in the brain that blocks our ability to retrieve what's stored in memory and also greatly impairs our ability to comprehend and reason. The key to understanding how anxiety inhibits cognitive and physical performance lies in understanding how emotions affect the rhythmic activity in the nervous system.

Feelings such as frustration, fear, anger and anxiety cause the neural activity in the two branches of the autonomic nervous system to get out of sync. This, in turn, affects the synchronized activity in the brain, disrupting our ability to think clearly. On the other hand, uplifting feelings such as appreciation lead to increased harmony and synchronization in the brain and nervous system, which facilitates our ability to think more clearly.

Research has shown that providing students with tools and strategies that build both emotional skills and healthy physical habits when preparing for a test can help them overcome test anxiety and the associated symptoms, while improving their ability to prepare for and perform on critical testing. It's important to help students identify what they are feeling and give them tools that will help them learn to manage emotions such as anxiety, self-doubt, anger or frustration. The proper physical habits enable students to have enough energy

and stamina for their brain to do its job of thinking and analyzing for a sustained period of time.

Here are a few tips from the Institute of HeartMath based on its TestEdge™ programs. Share these with your children ahead of time to better prepare them emotionally and physically for test taking.

### **Tips for Students**

**Practice the neutral tool:** When you have uncomfortable feelings about whether you will do well on the test, practice the neutral tool. It's important to catch negative mind loops that reinforce self-doubt or uncomfortable feelings. Every time you catch a negative thought repeating itself, stop the loop and practice going to neutral. Start by focusing on the area around your heart. This helps to take the focus off the mind loop. Then breathe deeply. Breathe as if your breath is flowing in and out through the center of your chest. Breathe quietly and naturally, four-five seconds on the in-breath, and four-five seconds on the out-breath. While you're breathing, try and find an attitude of calmness about the situation. Do this in the days leading up to the test, right before and during the test.

**Address the what-if questions:** A lot of times before we have to do something like take a test, much of the anxiety we feel is a build-up from negative "what-if" thoughts. What if I fail, what if I can't remember anything, or what if I run out of time. Try writing a what-if question that is positive and can help you take the big deal out of the situation and begin to see things in a different way. Examples of these kinds of questions are, "What if I can remember more than I think I can?" "What if I can feel calmer than I think I can?"

**Think good thoughts:** Science is showing that good feelings like appreciation can actually help your brain work better. When you feel nervous or anxious, try this. You can do it as many times as you need to or want to. Remember something that makes you feel good. Maybe it is your pet or how you felt when you got a big hug from your mom, or how you felt after a super fun day at the amusement park with your friends. After you remember how you felt, hold that feeling. Pretend you are holding it in your heart. Let yourself feel that feeling for 10-20 seconds or more. It's important to let yourself really feel that good feeling all over again. Practice this tool right before the big test.

**Get enough sleep:** Big tests require a lot of energy and stamina to be able to focus for several hours. Make sure you get at least eight-10 hours of sleep the night before the test. Have fun: Do something fun the night before to take your mind off the test, like see a movie, play a board game with your family or participate in a sports activity. That way your mind and emotions are more relaxed in the time leading up to the test.

**Eat a hearty breakfast:** The brain needs a lot of energy to maintain focus on a big test for several hours. Eat a hearty and healthy breakfast, including complex carbohydrates and protein to make your energy last as long as possible. Foods such as eggs, cereal and whole-wheat toast help energize your brain to think more clearly and much longer compared with the fast-disappearing bolt of energy from drinking a soda pop or eating a cookie for breakfast. For a snack food, bring simple foods such as peanut butter and crackers, cheese and crackers or a burrito to sustain energy until lunch.

Practicing these tools in advance of and during a test can help students limit test anxiety and perform even better on their school work.

<http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=283>