Test Taking and Test Anxiety

University of St. Thomas
Counseling and Disability Services
Tutorial Services Center
Test Anxiety Checklist

- I worry about failing tests.
- I do not sleep well the night before a test.
- I sometimes try to figure out how I can avoid taking a test.
- Before or during a test I often perspire excessively, have an upset stomach, feel my heart beating rapidly, or experience shortness of breath.
- I have difficulty concentrating when I take tests.
- While taking tests I am often unable to recall information that I learned.
- I make foolish mistakes when I answer test questions.
- I become very nervous if time runs out before I am able to answer all the questions on a test.
- While taking tests, I worry that other students will finish before me or do better than me.

What is Test Anxiety?

The uneasiness or apprehension students experience because they must take a test.

Some anxiety is normal.

Adapted from College Study Skills, 5th Ed. By James Shepherd (1994).
Anxiety in and of itself is not bad or destructive. It is helpful at moderate levels since it signals a need for action.

Avoid OVERREACTION. This causes high levels of anxiety which can inhibit performance.
Symptoms of Test Anxiety

BEFORE THE TEST

- Insomnia
- Loss (or increase) of appetite
- Stomachache
- Boredom
- Restlessness
- Inability to concentrate
- Avoidance
Symptoms of Test Anxiety

DURING THE TEST
- Confusion
- Panic
- Mental blocks
- Fainting
- Nausea
- Yawning
Symptoms of Test Anxiety

AFTER THE TEST

- Indifference
- Guilt
- Blame
- Depression
- Anger
Do you know it, but blow it?

- Accept that you may not know all the answers.
- Don’t expect perfection.
Reducing Test Anxiety

• Keep a positive attitude
• Focus and read directions carefully
• Take one question at a time
• Avoid comparing yourself to others
• Take deep breaths, drink water or have a mint
• Stop cramming at least 30 minutes before the exam
Reducing Test Anxiety

- Yell “Stop!” to negative thoughts
- Momentarily visualize a calming place
- Remind yourself that you will get through this
- Ask questions for clarification
- Relax and reward yourself
Why test???
Reasons for tests

• Help decide student grades
• Motivate students to study and learn material
• Provide teachers feedback about teaching effectiveness
• Provide students feedback about course progress
• Assess critical thinking skills and application of knowledge
EXAMS!!!

What's the worst that could happen??
Test Taking Exploration

- Brainstorm all the reasons, rationalizations, justifications, and excuses you have used to avoid studying.

Test Taking Exploration

• As exam time gets close one thing I notice I do is ...
• When it comes to taking tests, I have trouble ...
• The night before a test I usually ...
• The morning of the test I usually ...
• During a test I usually feel ...
• After the test I usually ...
Preparation

• Conduct frequent reviews in advance

• While organizing your notes, review all major concepts and course vocabulary. Be able to explain them.

• If given a review, do it first!!

• Survey 3RQ System
  - Survey it
  - Read it
  - Recite it
  - Review it
  - Question it
Preparation

• Use your syllabus, study guide, notes, and text to identify information for an exam.
• Start early!
• Studying too much without sleep can hurt recall.
Preparation

• Engage your senses. Study actively.
• Work with a classmate and test each other over the material.
• Work alone if you find yourself distracted.
• Know the test format.
Diagrams as Study Aids
Talk don’t cook rice.

-Chinese Fortune Cookie
At the test...

• Visualize your success

• Scan the entire test
  ▫ Evaluate the test
  ▫ Budget your time
  ▫ Note points for each question
  ▫ Pace yourself and track your time

• Jot down important points you remember on the test
At the test...

- Stay in the mindset of the test; focus on the test and not the outcome. Avoid “what if…”

- Mark questions you need to go back to after you have answered the questions you know for sure.

- Try to answer every question.

- Outline essay questions.

- If there are bonus questions, go for it.
Objective Exams

- Read directions and mark key words.
- Decide your answer before looking at the choices.
- Read all choices before choosing one.
- Eliminate obviously wrong answers; then reduce the possible answers to two.
- If unsure about an answer, guess. Leave no blanks.
Objective Exams

• Read questions looking for multiple concepts. This can be subtle. Use grammatical clues.

• If you change your mind based on new information, you may change your answer. If vacillating between 2 options, go with your 1st choice.

• Use all of the test period.

• Check your work. Rushing can cause careless mistakes.
Short Answer Exams

• Know the answer style that your professor expects: short phrases, lists, outlines, full sentences.

• Use visuals – draw diagrams if appropriate.
Essay Exams

• Read directions carefully; ask questions if you don't understand the directions.

• Do exactly what the directions say.

• Scan the test and review the content.

• Sequence for essay exams:
  1. Read the question.
  2. Think about what to include in the answer.
  3. Briefly outline what you plan to write.
  4. Complete the outline with pertinent details.
Take-Home Exams

• Create an environment conducive to test taking.
• Plan a strategy according to test instructions.
• Be prepared to use research if requested.
• Approach the exam as if you would a paper. Draft, write and rewrite.
Open-Book Exams

- Mark important pages in your textbooks and notes for easy reference.
- Jot down important information in textbook margins.
- If classroom notes are allowed, mark those too.
Quantitative Exams

- Analyze before you compute.
- If a question is not in mathematical notation, translate it to solve the problem.
- Show your work; teachers often give partial credit for knowing the math concept and application.
- Check your work systematically.
Just Breathe!
High Stakes Testing

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amkmxbRn5tkSlide31
Want more information?

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