

Counselling &
Learning Support
North Vancouver Campus

MANAGING TEST ANXIETY

TESTS GOT YOU



STRESSED?



Capilano University

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Managing Test Anxiety

Experiencing some level of nervousness or anxiety before a test is normal. The fact is a little anxiety can even motivate you to perform better. However, when things seem beyond *one's control* that is generally where the **test anxiety** problems start.

Test taking is a three part process that involves:

1. *Knowledge of Subject Matter.*
2. *Knowledge of Self.*
3. *Interaction of subject matter, self, environment and test format.*

Taking time to address test anxiety will show you that you **do** have control in these areas. The only thing you don't have control over is what your teacher is teaching you and how they are teaching you. Everything else is in your control.

To begin gaining control, it is first important to find out exactly what the problem is. You need to get specific. For example, "I get anxious ...

- *taking essay tests*
- *because there is no time to study.*
- *because I'll fail and disappoint my family.*

The problem is usually more specific than just *test anxiety*. By addressing the specific concern you can fix the problem and reduce the anxiety.

Gaining Control over Studying

These are some things you can do to get the most out of your study time:

1. *Warm-up.* Spend the first 15 minutes going over material you know well. This will help you to focus and build your confidence.
2. *Schedule time with no distractions.*
3. *Plan ahead and study throughout the term. Avoid cramming because it creates more stress.*

REMEMBER: We can only recall about one third of what is in our brain at any one time. You may not remember everything you know at once. As you move through the material in your notes or on a test, you will begin to recall things as your memory is triggered. It is normal **NOT** to recall everything immediately.

Gaining Control of Yourself

Change your thoughts

Often it is our **EMOTIONS** and **THOUGHTS** that create anxiety.

- **Our thoughts may spiral out of control:** e.g. *"If I flunk this test, I'll flunk the class, I'll flunk out of school and I'll never get a job."*
- **Negative, self defeating, frightening thoughts:** e.g. *"I could never study enough for this test,"* or *"I'm stupid, I'll never pass this class."*

These types of thoughts will only add to your anxiety. You need to get in the habit of changing negative thoughts to positive **thoughts**. E.g. *"If I stick to my schedule and concentrate, I can do it"* or *"I can pass this test"*. What you **THINK** really does make a difference on how you act, how you feel, and how you perform on a test.

Use Positive Imagery

Another way to stay positive and gain confidence is to use imagery. Learn to imagine yourself calm and in control. Imagine yourself passing the test. Imagine yourself feeling confident - being a winner.

Use Effective Stress Management Strategies

Stress Management is also a part of dealing with test anxiety. The following strategies will help you to cope with stress on a general level and therefore reduce the anxiety you feel about exams.

- **Relaxation:** To be effective, relaxation techniques must be practised every day. By practising at different time such as: whenever you start to feel tense, before you go to sleep, during imagery exercises and when you need to refresh yourself during study sessions, you will get practice getting yourself into a relaxed state and it can become second nature to you. Getting enough sleep is also essential.
- **Exercise:** Some type of regular exercise will help you reduce stress and help you stay focused.
- **Nutrition:** Maintain a healthy balanced diet. Excess sugar, fat and caffeine or skipping meals can result in you feeling more anxious.

The goal is to keep your eating, sleeping and exercise patterns as normal as possible, especially the night before a test.

Gaining Control over the Environment

Certain types of tests or subjects may cause more anxiety than others. If a certain subject is making you anxious, spending extra time studying, getting a tutor, and/or extra help from the teacher may be necessary. If a particular type of exam (e.g. multiple choice, short answer or essay) causes anxiety it is helpful to learning test taking strategies aimed at specific types of tests.

Remember that everyone has their own style of taking tests. Someone finishing earlier or later than you is not an indication that they did better on the test. Sit in a place in the room that is comfortable for you. Wear clothes that make you feel good. Do whatever you need to do to feel confident in that environment.

The Importance of Deep Breathing

When all else fails - **BREATHE**. When you breathe you can't be anxious, you get your focus and control back. Learn to breathe - concentrate on it. Take a slow deep breath, feel it filling your lungs - feel the tension leave your body as you exhale. With the next breath imagine yourself calm, confident and refreshed.

Practise this whenever you start to feel yourself getting anxious. Practice when you study and frequently throughout the day - everyday. On test days when you start to get anxious you trigger yourself to breathe and regain control.

Remember, You Do Have Control

There is a lot you can do to help you study and learn the material more effectively. However, unless you remember "you" are an important component in testing, it is easy to ignore yourself and your body's attempt to help you.

Anxiety is just energy with no place to go. A negative label of anxiety distracts from the process of test taking. Changing your beliefs about tests and what they mean can alter that energy and bring desired results.

Need Help or More Information?

Counselling & Learning Support offers workshops and individual counselling for students who need help coping with exam anxiety. For more information, contact us in Birch 267 or phone 604.984.1744.