

Managing Test Anxiety

The following excerpt is taken from the Student Development Centre's Learning Skills Services web site from the University of Western Ontario.

What does test anxiety feel like?

- Some students feel mainly physical distress symptoms, such as headaches, nausea, faintness, feeling too hot or too cold, etc.
- Others express more emotion, wanting to cry or laugh too much, or feeling angry or helpless.
- The major problem of test anxiety is usually its effect on thinking ability; it can cause you to blank out or have racing thoughts that are difficult to control.
- Although many, if not the vast majority, of students feel some level of anxiety when writing exams, most can cope with that anxiety and bring it down to a manageable level.

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 -- tough to do when you have to study for exams: get enough sleep, good nutrition, exercise, some personal "down" time, and a reasonable amount of social interaction.
- As you anticipate the exam, think positively, i.e., "I can do OK on this exam." "I have studied and I do know my stuff."
- Do some serious "thought stopping" if you find that you are mentally comparing yourself to your peers or thinking about what your parents, partner, children, or other significant others may say about your performance on this exam.
- Before you go to bed on the night before the exam, make sure to collect together 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 in plenty of time.
- Don't talk to friends about the exam material just before going into the exam.
- Sit in a location in the exam room where you will be distracted as little as possible.
- As the papers are distributed, calm yourself down by closing your eyes and taking some slow deep breaths.
- Make sure to read carefully any instructions on the top page of the exam.
- As you work on the exam, focus only on the exam, not on what other students are doing.
- If you feel very anxious or even panicky in the test, take a few minutes time out and calm yourself down. 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 take your time and get back into the questions.
- If the exam is more difficult than you anticipated, try to focus and just do your best at that point. It might be enough to get you through, even with a reasonable grade!
- When the exam is over, treat yourself. If you do not have any other commitments, maybe you can go to see a movie with a friend. If you have other exams to study for, you may have to postpone a larger treat, but maybe a half hour for a coffee with a friend or a quick swim in the pool will be the pick up that you need.

Should you like to read more about test taking skills from this site, click on the following links:

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

Writing Tests and Examinations

Study Hints and Tips

The following excerpt on *Study Hints and Tips* is taken from the web site, *The Urban Explorer*.

Essay Questions

Essay questions usually allow you to demonstrate your knowledge of a given topic within a less restrictive framework. Points to keep in mind when answering essay questions include:

- ◆ read each question carefully and underline all of the key words – the verb used in the question is usually a guide to the approach that you should take in your answer
- ◆ make notes -- jot down key ideas and information related to the topic so that you will not forget the ideas you wish to convey
- ◆ make a rough outline of your answer to organise the flow of your discussion
- ◆ keep in mind the important elements of an essay -- introduction, body and conclusion
- ◆ begin with a clearly statement of what it is that you will be addressing in your answer (your interpretation of the question) and how you will address the question
- ◆ be direct and to the point in the body of your essay -- get to the points quickly and illustrate them frequently
- ◆ do not worry about composing beautiful prose -- strive for clarity
- ◆ include a conclusion where you bring all of the elements of your paper together in a final summary statement -- punch up the key points of your answer
- ◆ write as legibly as you can -- if the marker has to struggle to decipher your ideas, you may get poorer results than you deserve
- ◆ write on alternate lines -- especially if your hand writing is difficult to read -- writing on every other line will also leave space for changes and additions

Click here for more details: <http://www.yorku.ca/lcode/focus/school/hints2.html>.

The “Tips for the Essay-Type Examination” excerpt is from the St. John’s Academic Advising Center Web Site

5. TAKE TIME TO WRITE AN INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

The introduction will consist of the main point to be made; the summary is simply a paraphrasing of the introduction. A neat bundle with a beginning and ending is very satisfying to the reader. Be sure that your answer is direct and really answers the question.

6. TAKE TIME AT THE END TO REREAD THE PAPER.

When writing in haste we tend to:

- Misspell words
- Omit words or parts
- Omit parts of questions
- Misstate dates and figures (1353 written as 1953; \$.60 as \$60)

7. QUALIFY ANSWERS WHEN IN DOUBT.

It is better to say "Toward the end of the 19th century" than to say "in 1894" when you can't remember whether it's 1884 or 1894, though approximate, may be incorrect, and will usually be marked accordingly. When possible, avoid very definite statements. A qualified statement connotes a philosophic attitude, the mark of an educated man.

Click here for more information: <http://www.csbsju.edu/academicadvising/help/essayexm.html>

Useful Web Sites

On

Managing Test Anxiety and Developing Test-Taking Skills

For more information on test anxiety, please visit the following sites:

1. “Reducing Exam Anxiety and Improving Concentration” from the Counselling and Behavioral Centre, Toronto <http://www.yorku.ca/cdc/lsp/ep/exam6.htm>
2. “Symptoms of Test Anxiety,” study tips “Before the Test,” coping skills “During the Test” from Center for Personal and Professional Development, Rolla, Mo.: <http://www.umar.edu/~counsel/test.html>.
3. “STRESS I Know the Material, But When I Take the Test I Go Blank!” from the University Counseling Services at Kansas State University: <http://www.ksu.edu/counseling/strestst.html>.
4. “Dealing with Test Anxiety” from ISS/Learning Center, University of St. Thomas: <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning/mcanx.html>

For more information on test-taking strategies, please visit the following sites:

1. “Study Hints and Tips Writing Exams Tests and Examinations” from The Urban Explorer: <http://www.yorku.ca/lcode/focus/school/hints2.html>.
2. “A Guide for Writing Essay Examinations” from <http://english.ttu.edu/uwc/eexamsb.html>
3. “Tips on Writing the Essay-Type Examination” <http://www.csbsju.edu/academicadvising/help/essayexm.html>
4. “How to Prepare for an Essay Exam” from <http://www.uwec.edu/Academic/Geography/Ivogeler/essay.htm>
5. “A KEY STRATEGY...” for studying <http://www.ksu.edu/counseling/strestst.html>
6. “The Essay Exam Organization and Neatness Have Merit” <http://www.iss.stthomas.edu/studyguides/tsttak4.htm>