

# Test Anxiety: Getting Control

From  
Mental Health  
Services Department

"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."  
Thomas A. Edison

**PREPARING FOR SUCCESS**

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## Physical Signs of Test Anxiety

- Perspiration
- Sweaty palms
- Headache
- Upset stomach
- Rapid heart beat
- Tense muscles



## What is Test Anxiety?



Most students experience some level of anxiety during an exam. However, when anxiety begins to affect exam performance it has become a problem.

### What Causes Test Anxiety

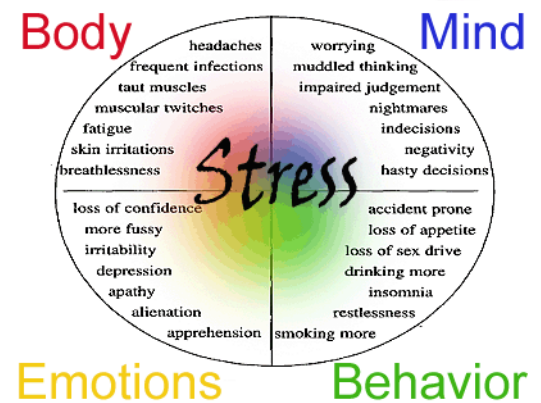
- Lack of preparation as indicated by:
- cramming the night before the exam.
- poor time management.
- failure to organize text information.
- poor study habits.

### Worrying about the following:

- past performance on exams.
- how friends and other students are doing.
- the negative consequences of failure.



## It's a Mind Body Thing



## Other Effects Of Test Anxiety

### Nervousness:

- Having difficulty reading and understanding the questions on the exam paper.
- Having difficulty organizing your thoughts.
- Having difficulty retrieving key words and concepts when answering essay questions.
- Doing poorly on an exam even though you know the material.

### Mental Blocking:

- Going blank on questions.
- Having the feeling that the answer just went out the window.
- Remembering the correct answers as soon as the exam is over.

I will never give up, I will never give up, I will never give up.



Reduce Test Anxiety  
...with these techniques!

## Reducing Your Test Anxiety

- ◆ Study and know the material well enough so that you can recall it even if you are under stress.
- ◆ Learn and practice good time management and avoid:
  - ⇒ laziness
  - ⇒ procrastination
  - ⇒ day dreaming
- ◆ Build confidence by studying throughout the semester and avoid cramming the night before the exam.
- ◆ Learn to concentrate on the material you are studying by:
  - ⇒ generating questions from your text books and lecture notes.
  - ⇒ focusing on key words, concepts and examples in your textbooks and lecture notes.
  - ⇒ making charts and outlines which

organize the information in your notes and textbooks.

- ◆ Use relaxation techniques, for example, taking long deep breaths to relax the body and reduce stress.

### Preparing for or Anticipating Test Anxiety

- ◆ What is it you have to do? Focus on dealing with it.
- ◆ Just take one step at a time.
- ◆ Think about what you can do about it. That's better than getting anxious.
- ◆ No negative or panicky self-statements; just think rationally.

**Don't worry; worrying won't help**



*Success is a Product of Preparation!*

### Reinforcing Self-Statements

It worked! I did it!

It wasn't as bad as I expected!

I made more out of the fear than it was worth!

## Change Your Environment

The environment in which you study can have a big effect on how efficient your study time is. Check your place of study for the following conditions:

- Noise
- Interruptions
- Lighting
- Temperature
- Neatness
- Comfort

### • Equipment

Minimize distracting noise. Some people need some sound and some like silence. Find what works for you. Culprits are family and friends. Consider a "do not disturb sign" and turning on your answering machine. You can catch up with folks later. 75 watt bulbs are best, but not too close and placed opposite the dominant hand. Better cool than warm. Have plenty of room to work; don't be cramped. Your study time will go better if you take a few minutes at the start to straighten things up. A desk and straight-backed chair is usually best.

## Confronting and Handling Test Anxiety

- Don't think about fear; just think about what you have to do.
- Stay relevant.
- Relax; you're in control. Take a slow, deep breath.
- You should expect some anxiety; it's a reminder not to panic and to relax and cope steadily with the situation.
- Tenseness can be an ally, a friend; it's a cue to cope.

Check out the Academic Studio - Student Success Center

Building 106, Second Floor

## Don't Make Yourself Sick with Worry



*To do well on tests you must first learn the material.*



***Multi-tasking might sound like a good thing, but the fact is you end up doing a lot but very little of it is as good as would be if you truly focused and concentrated on one thing at a time.***

## General test preparation

These are techniques to better understand your material:

### Learning & Reviewing

- Take good notes in your class lectures and textbooks
- Review your notes soon after class/lecture
- Review notes briefly before the next class
- Schedule some time at the end of the week for a longer review
- Organize your notes, texts, and assignments according to what will be on the test
- Estimate the hours you'll need to review materials
- Draw up a schedule that blocks units of time and material
- Test yourself on the material
- Finish your studying the day before the exam

**For detail information on preparing for specific types of test visit <http://www.studygs.net/shared/testing.htm>**

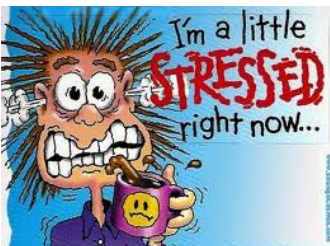
## Reducing Stress: Get a Plan

Many stresses can be changed, eliminated, or minimized. Here are some things you can do to reduce your level of stress:

- Become aware of your own reactions to stress.
- Reinforce positive self-statements.
- Focus on your good qualities and accomplishments.
- Avoid unnecessary competition.
- Develop assertive behaviors.
- Recognize and accept your limits. Remember that everyone is unique and different.
- Get a hobby or two. Relax and have fun.
- Exercise regularly.
- Eat a balanced diet daily.
- Talk with friends or someone you can trust about your worries/

problems.

- Learn to use your time wisely:
- Evaluate how you are budgeting your time.
- Plan ahead and avoid procrastination.
- Make a weekly schedule and try to follow it.
- Set realistic goals.
- Set priorities.
- When studying for an exam, study in short blocks and gradually lengthen the time you spend studying.
- Take frequent short breaks.
- Practice relaxation techniques. For example, whenever you feel tense, slowly breathe in and out for several minutes.



## Managing Stress

### Introduction

Stress is a part of day to day living. As college students you may experience stress meeting academic demands, adjusting to a new living environment, or developing friendships. The stress you experience is not necessarily harmful. Mild forms of stress can act as a motivator and energizer. However, if your stress level is too high, medical and social problems can result.

# How Time Management Can Reduce Your Stress

There's no such thing as time management! So why should you read the rest of this handout? Because there is such a thing as self management and that's the key to making time your ally rather than your enemy.

There are only 24 hours in your day, just the same as everybody else's. So how do you end up frustrated, angry, behind in your work, and dead on your feet? Maybe because you don't know how to use those 24 hours to your advantage.

## Step #1

If using your time wisely is a problem for you, you probably don't have a very good idea of where it all goes. It just seems to go! A good place to start, then, is to keep track of how you use your time. Get a Weekly schedule and faithfully keep track of how you use your waking hours for one week. The results will probably surprise you.



## Step #2

The next step is to pick up several more of these Weekly Schedules and do some planning. You'll discover, among other things, that if you get seven hours sleep a night, you have 119 hours per week to do everything you need to do. That, of course, includes going to class, eating, athletic events, social activities, personal hygiene, time-in-transit, studying, student organizations, telephone and TV time, etc. Be sure to schedule time for all these in your 119 hours. Then try sticking to your schedule for a week. This should give you a good idea of where your real priorities are!



As a general rule of thumb you should anticipate spending twice as much time reading and studying for your classes as you spend in the

class. For example if you spend 3 hours a week in class you can anticipate that you will need to spend between 4-6 hours a week outside of class working on that course.

## Schedule / Plan Ahead



Use a monthly calendar to help you allocate your study time on the Weekly Schedule. At the beginning of each semester spend an hour with your calendar to enter all important dates. As you receive course syllabi, enter the dates for quizzes, papers, etc., on your calendar. Then estimate the time needed to prepare for each of these. If a paper is due the eighth week of class and it usually takes you four weeks to do a paper, start work on the paper the second week, allowing yourself an extra week for typing and an extra week for disaster.

If you stick to this schedule, you'll amaze yourself by having the paper finished in the seventh week. The rule-of-thumb is "Plan ahead by working backwards." By counting backwards like this, you'll be surprised how well you're using your time and how much better your grade will be when you're not under pressure. And, by being really honest with yourself and taking account of all your priorities, you'll be able to go to the football game and not feel guilty.

At the start of each week, transfer important items from your calendar to your Weekly Schedule. This helps you to avoid things that might otherwise sneak up on you.

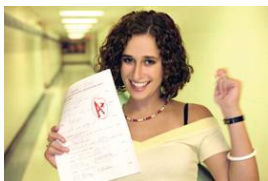
An alternative to a paper calendar is to use an electronic calendar. You could use the one on your desktop computer (e.g., Microsoft Outlook), or better yet, on a PDA (e.g., Palm Pilot). Set alarms to remind you when to do things.

## Preventing Perfectionism

Living your life as a perfectionist will set you up for continuous rejection and self-putdowns, and deny you peace of mind because demanding perfection usually results in failure. Even if you achieve an exceptional result, chances are that you'll still be unhappy, as you'll find additional reasons for not being good enough. That's the destructive nature of perfectionism and that's why it destroys self-esteem. Nothing is ever good enough.

Remember, being a perfectionist may paralyze your future chances of success because you'll eventually fear taking any new actions that might produce an imperfect result. Preventing perfectionism begins by saying no to unreasonably high demands that produce only failure and self-contempt. The new way of thinking requires you to choose goals that are easier to achieve and are within the realm of your possibilities. Moderate your expectations--and stop focusing on faults and flaws--and then watch your performance and self-esteem soar.

**Power of Failure** Failure is a teacher and can be the source of much personal growth. Experiencing failure--and learning to judge your own capabilities--demonstrates that you have the strength to accept life's challenges. Never condemn yourself for not succeeding. See failure for what it really is: an opportunity to discover that future success lies in another



## Overcoming Procrastination

William Knaus, a psychologist, estimated that 90% of college students procrastinate. Of these students, 25% are chronic procrastinators and they are usually the ones who end up dropping out of college.

**What is Procrastination?** Procrastination is the avoidance of doing a task which needs to be accomplished. This can lead to feelings of guilt, inadequacy, depression and self-doubt among students. Procrastination has a high potential for painful consequences. It interferes with the academic and personal success of students.

**Why do Students Procrastinate?** Poor time management, difficulty concentrating, environment is distracting and noisy, fear and anxiety, being overwhelmed, negative self-talk "I can't do this, I'll never get this paper done", personal problems, demands of family and jobs, unrealistic expectations and perfectionism, and fear of failure.

**How to Overcome Procrastination** Recognize self-defeating problems such as; fear and anxiety, difficulty concentrating, poor time management, indecisiveness and perfectionism. Discipline yourself to use time wisely: Set priorities. Study in small blocks instead of long time periods. Motivate yourself to study: Dwell on success, not on failure. Try to study in small groups. Break large assignments into small tasks. Keep a reminder schedule and checklist. Set realistic goals. Modify your environment: Eliminate or minimize noise/ distraction. Ensure adequate lighting. Have necessary equipment at hand. Don't waste time going back and forth to get things. Don't get too comfortable when studying. A desk and straight-backed chair is usually best (a bed is no place to study). Be neat! Take a few minutes to straighten your desk. This can help to reduce day-dreaming.

*"Life is either a daring adventure or nothing." Helen Keller*