Test Anxiety

What is test anxiety? It is worry or fear caused by having to take tests.

Signs include:

Mental distraction: being unable to concentrate, being easily distracted.
Physical symptoms: increased heart and breathing rates, sweaty palms, nausea, fidgeting, or headache.
Mental blocks: ineffective thinking.

Who is affected? All students are affected, but to varying degrees.

The slightly anxious student sees the exam as an opportunity to show what they know.
The student who has failed tests before views them as a threat of another potential failure.
The test anxious student does poorly even though the material has been learned because their anxiety is not being managed.

What causes test anxiety?

Pressure from yourself or others.
Poor past experiences.
Fear of failure.
Poor study skills.

What can I do to stop test anxiety?

Learn effective study habits and some basic self-discipline techniques:

Create a study atmosphere.

Study where you can concentrate without interruption from phone, TV, or friends.

Sit at a well-lit desk or table.
Study when you feel alert and rested.

Make the most of your notes.

Take notes effectively.
Read your notes for a few minutes after class to fill in gaps.
Review your notes weekly.

Manage your time with a schedule.

Mark deadlines and exam dates on a calendar.
Schedule several short review sessions, 40 to 50 minutes long, rather than a few long ones.
Be realistic about the amount of material you can cover in one session.

Schedule some free time too.

Create learning aids:

Make flash cards for terms, foreign language vocabulary, etc.
Make timelines and charts.
Create an outline to break the information into smaller categories.

Prepare yourself:

Attend all classes.
Listen actively by asking questions, picking out key phrases and information.
Get help at the Center for Academic Success, the Writing Center, or with Peer Tutors.

Be kind to yourself.

Eat and sleep well before an exam.
Avoid cramming.
Avoid caffeine and other drugs for pep.

Learn good test taking skills. Follow these tips:

For Short Answer Exams

Budget time.
Do the easiest questions first.
Answer each question even if you don't know the complete answer.
Use the full time allowed to review answers, make corrections, and add information.

For Essay Exams

Read all the questions first.
Use short, simple sentences that are logical and clear.
Start with the easiest question first.
Answer more difficult questions last.
Budget time.

For Objective Exams

Solve in order given.
Circle and skip difficult questions and return if time permits.
Beware of qualifying words such as: most, all, sometimes. Or always.
Think as you read, to be sure you thoroughly understand the question.
Finish the exam. Then go back to the questions you skipped. Use all the time allowed.

For Standardized Exams

Get a study aid guide and work through it carefully and consistently.
Circle questions that you are unable to answer and return to them later if time permits.
Make an educated guess by eliminating choices you know are wrong, then look for clues in the remaining choices and pick and answer.

How can I control my anxiety?

Don't let emotions interfere with logic.

Think about why you become anxious and afraid.
Turn negative self-defeating thoughts into positive, supportive thoughts.

Use your imagination positively.

Disastrous scenarios create anxiety.
Imagine yourself as calm and in control, as a winner not a loser.

Learn to relax.

Learn a relaxation technique.
Learn how to unblock your mind during an exam.
(Techniques taught at the Center for Academic Success)

How can I deal with pressure before it has a chance to build up?

Use the resources available to you, such as:

The Center for Academic Success
Student Success Coach
Instructors
Peers
Your parents, spouse, or someone else that you trust.

Take steps to beat test anxiety! You can succeed!