

Beat Test Anxiety

"A little anxiety never hurt anyone." – Your mother

Mother's right. It doesn't hurt to have a little anxiety. You don't want to become complacent and lose that "edge". This is especially true in test taking. A little stress will motivate you to prepare better.

Roosevelt was right, too. While the right amount of anxiety gives you an edge, too much anxiety can set you over the edge and actually cause you to do what you fear most about test taking---fail!

Why? You realize that within the next 60 or 90 minutes a large part of your grade will be determined by what you write down on that piece of paper, by which circle you darken with your No. 2 pencil, by how well you have skimmed a passage or memorized a list.

Anxiety is one of the biggest stumbling blocks for students in the test taking process. Let's examine some of the situations that produce test anxiety- and ways to avoid them:

1. Fear of success. "Gee, if I do really well, then my parents or teachers or friends will expect me to be smart all the time.

Get a clue. You'll always have pressure, so you might as well have good pressure ("Hey, genius, keep up the good work!") rather than bad pressure ("I can't understand how anyone with a brain like yours gets such bad grades!").

2. Fear of competition. You know the material, you're able to discuss it in class, but during the test, you are intensely aware of what your classmates are doing. Look at them! Writing down one answer after another - and you just know they're

all correct! Who cares about them? Compete with yourself. Try to beat your previous test scores: exceed your last grade. That's positive competition.

3. Inability to concentrate. Your love life's a mess. Your roommate's driving you crazy. Your parents want to know when you're coming home for a visit.

Life is complicated. But you've go to learn how to unravel the threads of life when situations, such as test preparation, require concentration and focus. Mental exercises can help. (The "Micheal-Jones-put-your-worries-in-a-shoebox-and-don't-bring-them-to-your-chemistry-final" solution is one of my favorites.) In other words, decide to put other worries to the side until after the test.

4. "Everyone else is panicking, so I guess I should, too." We all know at least one Anxiety Professional who seems to thrive on the crisis atmosphere of pre-test panic. "I'll never learn all of this stuff." "I just found out we have to know everything in Chapter 12!" "This professor fails half of the class on the final!"

Don't fall into that trap. Avoid these people. Don't answer the phone when they call. Study where they don't. Keep on a positive course; let them wring their hands to the bottom of the grading sheet.

5. Lack of preparation. You're scared to death of the test because you're not prepared for it. Maybe you never opened a book, read the material, done the assignments or attended class all semester – or it could mean that you're studying ineffectively. ("It's on Chapter Seven?? I thought it was on Chapter Eight!")

To avoid test anxiety, prepare: Answer these questions far in advance of the test date:

- What material will be covered?
- How many total points are possible?
- What percentage of my grade is based on this exam?
- How much time will we have to take it?
- Where will the exam be held?
- How is the test fashioned (multiple choice, essay, true or false, etc.)?
- Can we bring notes; is it open book?
- Will we need anything (calculator, pencil, pen, blue book, scantron, etc.)?

Beating test anxiety is all about preparation and time management. If you plan ahead and anticipate your need for time and materials – you'll succeed!

Recommended Reading

"Ace" Any Test, the latest addition, to Ron Fry's best selling *How To Study* program, is one of seven books that college students can turn to for study preparation. Published by Career Press, these books offer easy-to-implement steps to better grades. Also included in the series: *How To Study, Improve Your Reading, Write Papers, Take Notes, Manage Your Time, and Improve Your Memory*. All are available in your college bookstore or by calling 1-800-CAREER-1.