

Coping with Test Anxiety



1. Learn relaxation skills

Use progressive muscle relaxation

First, get comfortable. Then, tighten the muscles in your toes and hold this for a count of 10 seconds. Then, relax your toes for 10 seconds. Next, flex the muscles in your feet. Hold for a count of 10 seconds. Relax for 10 seconds. Move slowly up your body (e.g., legs, stomach, back, arms, hands, neck, face), contracting and relaxing muscles as you go. Breathe deeply and slowly throughout exercise.

You can also learn how to relax when you find yourself becoming nervous during an examination. These are the steps to relaxation during an examination:

Close your eyes.

Take a long, deep breath.

Let it out slowly.

Concentrate on your breathing for 20 seconds.

Repeat entire sequence once, then return to the test.



2. Deep breathing can also be used alone.

Take deep (abdominal) breaths when you are feeling anxious. Concentrate on deep, slow breathing for 10-20 seconds.

3. Think positively!

Learn to replace emotional, frightening thoughts with calming responses. For example, replace, “I will not graduate if I do badly on the test” with “There are many points in this class and many classes I will take before graduation.” This technique is called cognitive restructuring; it needs to be practiced to be effective.

4. Use pleasant imagery.

You may be able to relax more quickly when you imagine yourself in a positive scene (e.g., one that you have experienced or one that you would like to experience). Scenes that work well include calm, relaxing scenes related to nature (e.g., laying on a blanket at the beach, sitting next to a creek, walking in the woods on a fall day).

5. Consider studying in the place you will take the test.

Memory for the information on the test can be enhanced by matching the study conditions to the testing conditions. It may not always be possible to study in the room in which you will be tested, but if this can be arranged, you may feel more confident when taking the test.