

Test Anxiety

University of New England
Biddeford and Portland, Maine
207-602-2443
Www.bit.ly/UNESASC

Student
Academic
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Center

Understanding Test Anxiety

Many students experience some level of anxiety during an exam. However, when anxiety begins to affect exam performance it becomes a problem. Worrying competes for invaluable computing power in the brain's 'working' or short-term memory.

Causes of Test Anxiety

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• lack of preparation• cramming the night before• ineffective time management• worrying how friends and other students are doing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• failure to organize textbook and lecture information• ineffective or "old" study habits• worrying about past performance on exams• misunderstanding how the test is designed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• thinking about negative consequences of failure• realizing you studied the wrong information, or read the wrong chapter• confusion about content
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Symptoms of Test Anxiety

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• perspiration• sweaty palms• headache• upset stomach• rapid heart beat• tense muscles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• difficulty reading and understanding the questions on the exam paper• difficulty organizing your thoughts• difficulty retrieving key words and concepts when answering essay questions• scoring poorly on an exam even though you believed you knew the material• "going blank" or "freezing up" on questions (especially when you thought you knew the material!)• remembering the correct answers as soon as the exam is over
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Effects of Test Anxiety

Reducing and Managing Test Anxiety (continued on page two)

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Reducing and Managing Test Anxiety

Study critically and understand the material well enough so that you can recall it even if you are under stress:

- Learn and practice good time management
- Avoid laziness and procrastination
- Build confidence by reviewing material all-semester-long and not one-time-spurts
- Learn to concentrate on the material you are studying and avoid day dreaming
- Generate questions you want to find the answers to from your textbooks and lecture notes
- Focus on key words, concepts and examples in your textbooks and lecture notes
- Make 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
- Write about your anxiety – research studies at the University of Chicago suggest writing and reflecting about our anxieties ten minutes prior to exam time actually reduces anxiety and increases performance.

The environment in which you study can have a significant effect on how you perform. Check your place of study for the following conditions:

- Room temperature - better cool than warm
- Noise - minimize distracting noise. Some people need some sound and some like silence. Find what works for you.
- Interruptions - culprits are family and friends. Consider a "do not disturb sign" and talk openly about your priorities.
- Lighting - 75 watt bulbs are best, but not too close – your light should shine from the opposite side of your dominant hand.
- Comfort - 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. Don't get too comfortable--a bed is a place to sleep, not study.
- Neatness - have everything (book, pencils, paper, beverage, dictionary, typewriter, calculator, tape recorder, etc.) close at hand. Stay organized. Have the right equipment. Would you play goalie without wearing a mask?

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Preparing for, or anticipating, test anxiety:

- What is it you have to do? Focus on dealing with it
- Take one step at a time and one test at a time
- Think about what you CAN do, not what you can't
- Avoid negative or panicky self-statements
- Think through things rationally

Coping with Anxiety

- Learn relaxation techniques; you're in control.
- Learn to breathe slowly and deeply
- Learn meditative and mindful breathing techniques
- Accept that some anxiety is normal; it's a reminder to replace panic with calm and to relax and cope steadily with the situation
- Some tenseness can be an ally, a friend; it's a cue to cope
- When the fear comes, just pause
- Keep the focus on the present; what is it you have to do?
- Don't try to eliminate fear totally; just keep it manageable
- Do something that will prevent you from thinking about fear
- Describe your surroundings – do you need to make a change?
- Reinforce self-statements and affirmations such as 'it worked', 'I did it', and 'it wasn't so bad'
- Be pleased with your progress

Counseling Services at the University of New England provides a variety of services that address the psychological and emotional health of the graduate and undergraduate student population. Please contact their office at 207-602-2549 for additional information or to schedule an appointment.