

HOW TO KEEP CALM DURING TESTS

Prepare well in advance

Try to keep up from day to day. Avoid last-minute cramming. Don't go without sleep the night before. Stop studying an hour or so before the test, relax and compose yourself.

Know the time and place

Don't spend your last moments before the test trying to find out where to go and what to bring. Be on time, neither too early nor too late, with blue books and supplies. Don't rush.

Don't discuss the test

Don't talk about the exam with classmates immediately before the test if you know it will raise your anxiety level. To do so may nourish group paranoia.

Plan your approach

Read over the test and prepare a strategy. Ascertain point values per part, time limits for each section, which question you'll start with, etc.

Do the easy questions first

This increases confidence and reduces anxiety so your memory functions at its best.

Seek clarification

Don't let anxiety build because you aren't sure what to do. Ask for clarification from the professor, teaching assistant, or proctor if you have questions about directions, procedure, etc.

Be aggressive and realistic

Develop an aggressive yet realistic attitude. Approach the test vigorously, determined to do your best, but accept the limits of what you know, and don't blame yourself for what you don't know.

Keep working & Intend to remember

Activity reduces anxiety. If you go blank, go on to another question or part of the test. Tell yourself, "I can't think of the answer right now, so I will move on. I'll be able to answer it when I come back to it later." Intend to remember. On an essay, jot down anything you can recall on scratch paper to stimulate your memory.

Relax – Breath - Stretch

Relax physically during the test if you notice you are not thinking well or are tense. Pause, lay your test aside, and take several slow, deep breaths. Concentrate on your breathing. Stretching also helps you relax during tests.

Focus

Pay attention to the test, not to yourself or others. Don't waste time worrying, doubting yourself, wondering how other people are doing, blaming yourself, etc. Don't worry about what you should have done; pay attention to what you can do now.

Imagine you are somewhere else

Place yourself at home or at the library doing your homework. This will help you create a more relaxed atmosphere for yourself, thus allowing that part of your brain needed for complex thinking to function.

Replace negative self-talk with positive self-talk

Criticizing yourself and worrying only increase anxiety. Prepare some positive statements ahead of time to use during the test. See handout, "What do you tell yourself while taking exams".

Replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts

Instead of foreseeing failure, think positively and visualize success.

Instead of reliving the past, anticipate a good experience.

Instead of fearing failure, strive for success.

Instead of being unsure, take control of those things you can control.

Yell "STOP"

If you start to panic, mentally yell, "STOP!" This will stop your mind from racing. Breathe deeply, and see your body releasing all this sand through your pores (this will make your body relax also). Visualize yourself in a calm peaceful place like a summer meadow or a forest or by a stream. Keep on breathing deeply. Take a few minutes to do this with your eyes closed. Then tell yourself you know the material you will be successful. Then go back to the test.

Put things in perspective

If you start to panic, go with the fear and imagine the worst. Go through the whole scenario of not passing the test, failing the course, dropping out of school, not getting a job, and ending up pushing a shopping cart down Skid Row. That will help you get your fears in perspective. Laugh at yourself. Practice deep breathing and visualize the opposite, i.e., getting an "A" on the test, passing the course, getting your degree, etc.

Reward yourself after the test

After the exam relax and reward yourself for your efforts. Learn from your mistakes, but make sure you do not beat yourself up over them. Mistakes are feedback and part of learning.

Adapted from: RASSL/Learning Services. UT- Austin and University of Milwaukee
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