

# DEALING WITH TEST ANXIETY

## CAUSES OF TEST ANXIETY:

- ***Concerns about your preparation***

Many students are concerned about how prepared they are for an exam. They should be! If you are waiting until the last minute to read the text, do the homework, and study the lecture notes, you most likely are NOT adequately prepared for the exam.

Even if you are not fully prepared, there are things you can do to get as much out of a cramming session as possible. First, review all of the notes and handouts the teacher has given you. At the very least, read them over and highlight what you perceive as the main information. Secondly, do select problems from EACH section that will be covered on the exam. Either do problems from the homework or answer questions from the text review. Third, consolidate the information into 4-5 pages of summaries. Next time, start earlier to be sure you can thoroughly review all of the information. For assistance on how to take and study effective lecture notes, actively read a text, and review for quizzes and exams, check out the *Learning Power On-line* web site [www.rit.edu/lponline](http://www.rit.edu/lponline) or attend the *ASC Lunch 'n' Learning Series* (Posted on-line at [www.rit.edu/SA/ASC](http://www.rit.edu/SA/ASC) -- click on the "Quarterly Schedule" tab on the home page).

- ***Concerns about your own capabilities***

Often times, students are not confident about their own abilities. Past experiences may have led them to believe that they cannot do well in a specific content or on tests in general. The best way to combat such beliefs is by preparing thoroughly, talking positively to yourself about your effort, using as many resources as possible, and seeking assistance and support from others. Talk to your professor, use the ASC Math and Writing Labs, attend review sessions, and use other discipline-specific learning centers on campus.

- ***Concerns about how others will perceive your capabilities***

Many times students feel undue pressure to perform well on exams due to competition with peers or siblings or because parents have very high expectations for them. It is best to compete only with yourself and focus on improvement from one exam to the next. Try not to let grades determine your worth or success. They are just one measure of achievement. Focus on all the things that you do well and maintain a balanced view.

- ***Concerns about your future success***

It is highly unlikely that one exam will determine your future or your eventual success. Successful people have usually overcome many obstacles and have become successful despite adversity and challenges. They have used feedback (even negative feedback) as a means for further growth and development. If you were supposed to know everything when you came to college, you wouldn't need to be here. Remember that college is all about LEARNING and GROWING. Use feedback on your exams to improve your next performance. Your future will only be determined by a series of events, not just one examination.

## SIGNS OF TEST ANXIETY:

- Perspiration
- Sweaty Palms
- Headache
- Upset Stomach
- Rapid Heart Beat
- Tense Muscles
- Nervousness
- Mental Blocks
- Difficulty Organizing Your Thoughts
- Difficulty Concentrating on Questions
- Remembering Answers After The Test is Over

## **HOW TO REDUCE TEST ANXIETY:**

### • **COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING**

Deal with negative self-talk by recognizing the types of cognitive distortions you may be having. These might include:

- All-or-nothing Thinking (“If I don’t get an A, I might as well fail.”)
- Catastrophic Thinking (“If I fail this test, I’ll never graduate.”)
- Comparison Thinking (“If they’ve already finished, I must be doing something wrong.”)
- Disqualifying the Positive (“Just because I did well on the quiz doesn’t mean I know it.”)
- Negative Filter (“I can’t solve this problem. Oh, no! Now what am I going to do!”)
- Should or Ought Thinking (“I should know this. How stupid can I be.”)

Substitute more rational, objective, productive, affirming thoughts...

“I’m trying as hard as I can.”

“I prepared as much as I could for this test.”

“I can only do my best.”

“If I calm down, I will probably remember.”

### • **SYSTEMATIC DESENSITIZATION**

Combine muscle relaxation, deep breathing, positive imagery, and isometrics to calm your body and your mind. Try these techniques:

- ✓ Tense and relax each major muscle group in progression.
- ✓ Take three calming breaths in through your nose and out your mouth.
- ✓ Stretch your neck or arms to release tension.
- ✓ Practice visualizing yourself preparing for the test, taking the test, and getting the test back with positive results.

### • **LEARNING SKILL DEVELOPMENT**

Attend Academic Success Workshops or check out effective study strategies through the Academic Support Center ([www.rit.edu/SA/ASC](http://www.rit.edu/SA/ASC)).

**Remember to simulate the examination conditions when you prepare. Use these three strategies to test your ability to remember and perform under testing conditions:**

1. Try to do problems RANDOMLY – Not in any specific order.
2. Try to recall information UNAIDED – Don’t rely on books, notes, etc. for your final review.
3. Try to do problems and recall information under TIMED conditions – make sure you can remember quickly.

## **RESOURCES FOR OVERCOMING TEST ANXIETY:**

RIT Academic Support Center  
University of Buffalo

[www.rit.edu/ponline/testtaking](http://www.rit.edu/ponline/testtaking)  
<http://ub-counseling.buffalo.edu/stresstestanxiety.shtml>

**R·I·T**

Academic Support Center • 2080 Monroe Hall • (585) 475 - 6682

[www.rit.edu/asc](http://www.rit.edu/asc)

8/31/2010

Academic Support Center  
**asc**  
Navigate Your Way