

Test Anxiety

Test Anxiety is a psychological condition in which a person experiences distress before, during, or after an exam or other assessment to such an extent that this anxiety causes poor performance or interferes with normal learning.

Symptoms

Physical — headaches, nausea or diarrhea, extreme body temperature changes, excessive sweating, shortness of breath, light-headedness or fainting, rapid heart beat, and/or dry mouth.

Emotional — excessive feelings of fear, disappointment, anger, depression, uncontrollable crying or laughing, feelings of helplessness

Behavioral — fidgeting, pacing, substance abuse, avoidance

Cognitive — racing thoughts, 'going blank', difficulty concentrating, negative self-talk, feelings of dread, comparing yourself to others, difficulty organizing your thoughts.

Causes

Test anxiety can develop for a number of reasons. There may be some prior negative experience with test taking that serves as the activating event. Students who have experienced, or have a fear of, blanking out on tests or the inability to perform in testing situations can develop anticipatory anxiety. Worrying about how anxiety will effect you can be as debilitating as the anxiety itself. This kind of anxiety can build as the testing situation approaches, and can interfere with the student's ability to prepare adequately. Lack of preparation is another factor that can contribute to test anxiety. Poor time management, poor study habits, and lack of organization can lead to a student feeling overwhelmed. Student's who are forced to cram at the last minute will feel less confident about the material covered than those who have been able to follow a structured plan for studying. Being able to anticipate what the exam will cover, and knowing all the information has been covered during the study sessions, can help students to enter the testing situation with a more positive attitude. Text anxiety can also develop genetically.

Lack of confidence, fear of failure, and other negative thought processes may also contribute to test anxiety. The pressure to perform well on exams is a great motivator unless it is so extreme that it becomes irrational.

Perfectionism and feelings of unworthiness provide unreasonable goals to achieve through testing situations. When a student's self-esteem is too closely tied to the outcome of any one academic task, the results can be devastating. In these situations, students may spend more time focusing on the negative consequences of failure, than preparing to succeed.

Accommodations

Test anxiety prevents students from demonstrating their knowledge on examinations. To be covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act, test anxiety must pass two legal tests. First, it must be a "mental impairment." As a form of Social Phobia, a mental disorder included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, it meets this first test. Second, it must "substantially limit one or more of the major life activities." Individuals for whom test anxiety is one manifestation of Social Phobia-Generalized are substantially limited in the major life activities of interacting with others and working. Individuals for whom test anxiety is the only manifestation of their Social Phobia are substantially limited in the major life activities of thinking and working, the latter because they are excluded from any career requiring a test for application, credentialing, licensure, or training. Accommodations may include taking the test in a separate room or taking an untimed examination. Documentation supporting a diagnosis of test anxiety should include evidence of significant impairment in test performance.

Most students experience some level of anxiety during an exam

However, when anxiety affects exam performance it has become a problem.

General preparation/building confidence:

Review your personal situation and skills

Developing good study habits and strategies

- **Managing time**
(dealing with procrastination, distractions, laziness)
- Organizing material to be studied and learned
Take a step by step approach to build a strategy and not get overwhelmed

- Outside pressures
success/failure consequences (grades, graduation), peer pressure, competitiveness, etc.
- Reviewing your past performance on tests
to improve and learn from experience

Test preparation to reduce anxiety:

- Approach the exam with confidence:
Use whatever strategies you can to personalize success: visualization, logic, talking to your self, practice, team work, journaling, etc.
View the exam as an opportunity to show how much you've studied and to receive a reward for the studying you've done
- Be prepared!
Learn your material thoroughly and organize what materials you will need for the test. Use a checklist
- Choose a comfortable location for taking the test
with good lighting and minimal distractions
- Allow yourself plenty of time,
especially to do things you need to do before the test and still get there a little early
- Avoid thinking you need to cram just before
- Strive for a relaxed state of concentration
Avoid speaking with any fellow students who have not prepared, who express negativity, who will distract your preparation
- A program of exercise
is said to sharpen the mind
- Get a good night's sleep
the night before the exam
- Don't go to the exam with an empty stomach
Fresh fruits and vegetables are often recommended to reduce stress.
Stressful foods can include processed foods, artificial sweeteners, carbonated soft drinks, chocolate, eggs, fried foods, junk foods, pork, red meat, sugar, white flour products, chips and similar snack foods, foods containing preservatives or heavy spices
- Take a small snack, or some other nourishment
to help take your mind off of your anxiety.
Avoid high sugar content (candy) which may aggravate your condition<
relaxation>

During the test:

- Read the directions carefully
- Budget your test taking time
- Change positions to help you relax
- If you go blank, skip the question and go on

- If you're taking an essay test and you go blank on the whole test, pick a question and start writing. It may trigger the answer in your mind
- Don't panic when students start handing in their papers. There's no reward for being the first done

If you find yourself tensing and getting anxious during the test

< relaxation>

- < relaxation>Relax; you are in control.
Take slow, deep breaths
- Don't think about the fear
Pause: think about the next step and keep on task, step by step
- < relaxation>Use positive reinforcement for yourself:
Acknowledge that you have done, and are doing, your best
- Expect *some* anxiety
It's a reminder that you want to do your best and can provide energy
Just keep it manageable
- Realize that anxiety can be a "habit"
and that it takes practice to use it as a tool to succeed

After the test, review how you did

- List what worked, and hold onto these strategies
It does not matter how small the items are: they are building blocks to success
- List what did not work for improvement
- Celebrate that you are on the road to overcoming this obstacle

Check out local centers and resources in your school for assistance!

If you are aware that you have a problem with test anxiety,

be sure your teacher or instructor knows before any testing begins (and not the hour before!).

There may be other options to evaluate your knowledge or performance within the subject matter.

5. **Do not guess until all absolute matches have been made because you will likely eliminate an answer that could be used for a later choice.**

[Click here for a practice test on matching questions.](#)

Guidelines for Answering Sentence Completion or Fill-in-the-blank Questions

1. **Concentrate on the number of blanks in the sentence and the length of the space.** The test maker is giving you clues to the answer by adding spaces and making them longer.
2. **Provide a descriptive answer when you can not think of the exact word or words.** The instructor will often reward your effort with partial credit

[Click here for a practice test on fill in the blank questions.](#)

Guidelines for Essay Questions

1. **Organize your thoughts before you begin to write.**
 - * A short outline on a separate piece of paper will improve your answer.
 - * Write the topics and the key introductory words.
2. **Paraphrase the original question to form your introductory statement.**
 - * This process helps you get the question straight in your mind.
 - * Restating the question allows the teacher to see how you understood the question. Perhaps you understood it to mean something other than the teacher intended.
3. **Use the principles of English composition**
 - * Form a clear thesis statement (statement of purpose) and place it as near to the beginning as possible.
 - * Provide clear explanations to back up the main concept.
 - * Remember, a complete answer usually has a main idea , supporting details and illustrative examples.
4. **Write clearly! Teachers need to be able to read it.**
 - * Making teachers work hard to read lowers your grade.
 - * Write or print clearly, using a dark-colored erasable ball point pen.
 - * Avoid crossing out words or sentences, and don't smudge your paper.
 - * Remember to save some space for a brief but adequate summary.
5. **Use lists or bullets wherever possible.**
 - * Numbers or bullets allow the teachers to easily see your points.
 - * Never bury your lists or key points in the middle of a paragraph.
 - * If you must use a long paragraph, underline your key points.

Direction verbs that ask you to review an idea or concept in your own words

summarize, survey, discuss, explain

Direction verbs that ask for a *set of items or ideas* that were presented in lecture or reading. These action words generally require more precise wording of items by giving numbers or steps:

trace, outline, list, diagram, solve

Direction verbs that ask you to speak in *favor* of a concept or give the reasons why it should be accepted as valid:

defend, argue, debate, contend, justify

Direction *verbs* that ask for a *specific meaning* or picture of a concept:

define, clarify, describe, depict, illustrate

Direction *verbs* that ask you to show *differences* in several ideas or situations:

contrast, compare, distinguish, differentiate

Direction *adjectives* that ask for specific information the instructor considers important:

significant, critical, key, important, major, principal, essential, vital

6. **Identify the verbs or words in the question that give you direction.**
 - * Key words in each question describe the task you are expected to complete.
 - * Circle the direction words in the question to make sure that you are focusing on the desired task.
 - * Sample direction verbs or adjectives, and their generally intended action or task, are listed below.

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