

# Reducing Test Anxiety

Following is a series of suggestions for reducing or eliminating test anxiety. Choose the ones that appeal to you and give them a try.

**Test anxiety symptoms**

**Be well prepared for the test**

**Have a back-up plan**

**Use positive visualization**

**Work with your thoughts:**

**Pick up the free test anxiety guided imagery CD**

**Write before the exam**

**Breathe slowly and deeply**

**Try progressive relaxation exercises**

**When the test is handed out**

**Visit the Counseling and Advising Center**

## **Test anxiety symptoms:**

- Physical: headaches, nausea, faintness, feeling too hot or cold, sweaty palms, etc.
- Emotional: getting frustrated quickly, feeling irritable, crying easily, etc.
- Cognitive: blanking out or having racing thoughts that are difficult to control

## **Be well prepared for the test**

- Studying is not a one-time thing. Spend at least some time with the material daily.
- Pause after each paragraph, section, or 10-15 minutes, cover what you've read and ask yourself "What did I just read? What were the main ideas of the section?"
- Watch for lists, such as causes, methods, stages or steps and learn them
- Look for points emphasized in class or the text. Instructors will often give clues.
- When reviewing, first try to recall the main points of each section without checking notes.
- Turn your review into questions that you ask yourself (or a partner).
- Eat normally and get a good night's sleep. Go to bed after studying without other activity.

## **Have a back-up plan**

Make back-up plans to insure that you will reach your goal no matter what happens with the test. Ask yourself what will happen if you fail this test? If you fail the class? Will you simply have to repeat the class? Will this mean that you will no longer be able to reach your career goal? If you create a back-up plan, or a "worse case scenario," you know that you have constructed a mechanism that will insure achieving your goal no matter the outcome of a particular test.

## **Use positive visualization**

On the night before your exam, find a quiet place to relax. Close your eyes and take three slow, deep breaths. Visualize yourself in the classroom taking the test. See yourself calmly, confidently taking the exam. You are organized and alert. You are enjoying yourself because you want to demonstrate how much you know about the material. Create this movie in your head. You are in command and in control. Repeat the positive visualization in the morning, before you get out of bed. Refer to this personal movie anytime during the test. This positive visualization will help you realize what you are capable of achieving.

## **Work with your thoughts**

As the test approaches, notice what thoughts you are having. If you have thoughts such as: I should have studied more.....I'll never get through....I just want to finish and get out of here... I'm getting really tense again....My mind's a blank... I must be really stupid....I know everyone's doing better than I am....If I fail this test, I'll flunk the course.... Simply notice the thoughts, let them go and replace them with a positive thought that you know is true. Example: I studied well, I know the material and I'm going to do my best. If the thoughts continue, continue to let them go and focus on positive thoughts.

## **Pick up the free test anxiety guided imagery CD**

The Counseling & Advising Center has put together a 23-minute guided imagery CD designed to train your brain to remain relaxed as you prepare for and take tests. Free copies of this CD, as well as a guided relaxation and meditation CD, are available to Grays Harbor College students upon request at the Counseling & Advising Center.

## **Write before the exam**

In a study conducted at the University of Chicago, researchers found that students who were prone to test anxiety improved their test grades if they were given 10 minutes to write about their feelings before being tested. The researchers believe that worrying competes for computing power in the brain's working, or short-term memory." Writing helped reduce the anxiety and freed up the students' brains to work on the tasks on the exam.

## **Breathe slowly and deeply before the exam**

- As you approach the scene of the test, begin taking slow, deep breaths into your belly. Continue this breathing pattern until you start the test. If you feel nervous while taking the test, do it some more. As you breathe out, let the tension go.
- In your daily life, train yourself to breathe into the belly rather than the chest. This sends a message to your nervous system to calm down. People who belly breathe have been found to be calmer, more focused, less reactive and happier than those who don't.

## **Try progressive relaxation exercises**

This technique can be done before or during the test. It consists of tensing each group of muscles for 5-7 seconds, then relaxing. Take a deep breath before moving on to the next muscle group.

## **When the test is handed out**

- When the test is handed out, do a quick breathing exercise if necessary. Quickly assess the test. What are the major point items on the test? What do you see expected of you on the test? Try to very quickly calculate how much time you should spend per question so that you attempt to complete the test. Go for the major point items over smaller points.
- Read the directions and questions carefully. Remember that you don't have to answer the questions in order. Answer the ones you know first. Mark the ones you'll go back to if you have time. If you're stuck on a question, write what you do know. Sometimes the act of starting will get your brain to remember the next part.
- Always rely on your knowledge and intuition. More than likely, it will be correct.

## **Visit the Counseling and Advising Center**

If these steps don't help your anxiety, visit the Counseling and Advising Center and work with a counselor individually with additional methods.