



## Conquering Test Anxiety

Test anxiety can interfere with your ability to perform at a level that is true to your preparation on a test. Students who experience test anxiety may become overwhelmed in a testing situation to a degree that they find it difficult to effectively recall previously learned information. We place a lot of importance on tests in academic and professional settings so it can feel like our entire future depends on how well we perform on a *single test*. This is a natural response to a high pressure situation but there are several things you can do to minimize this experience.

### What does it look and feel like?

There may be physical and cognitive effects that show up during the test. Physical effects include:

- Elevated heartrate
- Difficulty breathing
- Uneasy stomach
- Excessive sweating
- Tense muscles

Most people with test anxiety also have trouble *reading and comprehending clearly, remembering* information they knew well before the exam, and a sense of *dread* and *panic* about their performance.

### How to reduce test anxiety

Consider the cause. If your test preparation is lacking or could be improved further, check out some of the resources available on *effective preparation* and make small changes to increase your confidence and mastery over the test content. However, if you believe that there is little room for improvement in your study strategy, here are some recommendations that many students find useful:

#### Before the test

- Be certain that you have prepared adequately. Reduce study materials to outlines, note cards, or summaries. Space out review sessions by hours or days.
- Arrive at the testing location early and pick out a seat of your choosing.
- Develop supportive self-statements. Test anxiety is usually made worse by the defeating and perfectionistic messages we give to ourselves. Try to replace this negative self-talk with more empowering messages. Catch yourself when you start to think, “I’ll never pass this exam”, and replace that with “I know this information and

just need a minute to collect myself". Create your own message that is unique to your situation.

- Learn relaxation and deep breathing techniques (mindfulness of breath, progressive muscle relaxation). Familiarize yourself with the relaxation resources on the webpage and spend a few minutes practicing each day at least one week before the test. With practice, you will be ready to apply these skills during the test to reduce some of the physical side effects and improve your focus.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle with adequate sleep, exercise, and good nutrition. Set aside some "downtime" to unwind, even if you are short on time.

### **During the test**

- Before you begin, take a few minutes to quickly look through the entire test so you can budget your time accordingly.
- Pace your concentration. Take short breaks to stretch every so often and if you start to feel fatigued, take a few deep breaths or get a drink of water.
- Be fully present. This is not the time to let your mind carry you into the past or worry about the consequences in the future. If you start to get distracted, acknowledge what caught your attention and bring yourself back to the present.
- Remind yourself that the time for preparation and worry is over. Do the best you can with the resources you have available.
- Try not to be concerned about what others are doing. Although this is normal, maintain your focus on the test instead.
- Save time to review your answers but don't change your responses unless you are sure that the second answer is correct.

### **After the test**

- Reward yourself for completing the test and avoid dwelling on potential mistakes.
- Don't engage in an excessive analysis of your performance by checking your materials or discussing questions with others.
- Learn from the entire process of preparation and performance to improve on the next one.
- If you continue to feel distressed or discouraged, explore other resources offered by the Academic Skills Assessment Program (ASAP) on [www.wellness.uchicago.edu/ASAP](http://www.wellness.uchicago.edu/ASAP)