Generally, we all experience some level of nervousness or tension before tests or other important events in our lives. A little nervousness can actually help motivate us; however, too much of it can become a problem—especially if it interferes with our ability to prepare for and perform on tests.

Dealing with Anxiety

The first step is to distinguish between two types of anxiety. If your anxiety is a direct result of lack of preparation, consider it a normal, rational reaction. However, if you are adequately prepared but still feel anxious, "blank out," and/or overreact your reaction is not rational. While both of these anxieties may be considered normal (anyone can have them), it is certainly helpful to know how to overcome them.

Preparation Can Help

Preparation is the best way to minimize rational anxiety. Consider the following:

- Avoid "cramming" for a test. Trying to master a semester's worth of material the day before the test is a poor way to learn and can easily produce anxiety. This is not the time to try to learn a great deal of material.
- Combine all the information you have been presented throughout the semester and work on mastering the main concepts of the course.
- When studying for the test, ask yourself what questions may be asked and try to answer them by integrating ideas from lectures, notes, tests, and supplementary readings.

- If you are unable to cover all the material given throughout the semester, select important portions that you can cover well. Set a goal of presenting your knowledge of this information on the test.

Changing Your Attitude

Improving your perspective of the test-taking experience can actually help you enjoy studying and may improve your performance. Don't overplay the importance of a grade—it is not a reflection of your self-worth nor does it predict your future success.

Try the following:

- Remember that the most reasonable expectation is to try and show as much of what you know as you can.
- Remind yourself that a test is only a test—there will be others.
- Avoid thinking of yourself in irrational, all-or-nothing terms.
- Reward yourself after the test—take a hike in the woods, go out to eat, or visit with friends.

Don't Forget the Basics

Students preparing for tests often neglect basics like biological, emotional, and social needs. To do your best, you must attend to these needs. Think of yourself as a total person—not just a test taker.

Remember to:

- Continue the habits of good nutrition and exercise. Continue your recreational pursuits and social activities—all contribute to your emotional and physical well-being.
- Follow a moderate pace when studying; vary your work when possible and take breaks when needed.
- Get plenty of sleep the night before the test—when you are overly tired you will not function at your absolute best.
- Once you feel you are adequately prepared for the test, do something relaxing.

The Day of the Test

To be able to do your best on the day of the test we suggest the following:

- Begin your day with a moderate breakfast and avoid coffee if you are prone to "caffeine jitters." Even people who usually manage caffeine well may feel light-headed and jittery when indulging on the day of a test.
- Try to do something relaxing the hour before the test—last minute cramming will cloud your mastering of the overall concepts of the course.
- Plan to arrive at the test location early—this will allow you to relax and to select a seat located away from doors, windows, and other distractions.
- Avoid classmates who generate anxiety and tend to upset your stability.
- If waiting for the test to begin causes anxiety, distract yourself by reading a magazine or newspaper.

During the Test: Basic Strategies

Before you begin answering the questions on the test, take a few minutes and do the following:

- First review the entire test; then read the directions twice. Try to think of the test as an opportunity to show your professor what you know; then begin to organize your time efficiently.
- Work on the easiest portions of the test first.
- For essay questions, construct a short outline for yourself—then begin your answer with a summary sentence. This will help you avoid rambling and repetition which can irritate the person grading the test. Short-answer questions, answer only what is asked—short and to the point. If you have difficulty with an item involving a written response, show what knowledge you can. If proper terminology evades you, show what you know with your own words.
- For multiple choice questions, read all the options first, then eliminate the most obvious. Unsure of the correct response? Rely on your...
Test Anxiety

After the Test

You promised yourself:

Think for a moment about the post-exam review.

Blow your pants ahead—then go shocks. It

Feel something.

Ask the instructor a question.

If allowed, get a drink or go to the bathroom.

Maintain a positive attitude.

Take a couple of slow deep breaths and try to

Listen and take notes through your body.

Concentrate on the question, not on your

Focus on answering the question, not how the

Tell yourself, I can be anxious here now. The

What excess anxiety is any of the following ways:

During the Test: Anxiety Control

Keep extra tight—and only if you are not anxious.

answer well. Recheck your answers only if you

Best concentrate on those problems which you can

answer well. You will be unable to finish the entire

check if I answered 100% correctly. If you are not sure, ask.

Do not rush through the test. Wear a watch and

monitor, or

check qualifying words such as: only, every, or

first impression, then move on quickly. Beware of