
TESTING AND ANXIETY

There is nothing better than getting back a test you studied all semester for and getting that coveted A—unfortunately, this is easier said than done. The good news, however, is that you control the grade you earn. Poor preparation and test anxiety are directly related and are the two main reasons why students fail tests. Preparing to the best of your ability will relieve a lot of your testing anxiety. Some anxiety, however, is a good thing. In fact, anxiety is facilitative of sharp concentration and alertness. But when anxiety impedes your ability to perform to your fullest potential, then it may be time to try some of these helpful hints. Here, we will review how and what to study, how to alleviate test anxiety, and how to learn from your test.

Remember: testing only measures what you can demonstrate about your learning thus far in a course, not your worth as a person.

Test Anxiety Tips

- Know that you know what you know! Most test anxiety comes from a fear of poor performance. Try testing yourself before going into the exam to reduce this fear.
- Walk, ride your bike, dance, do anything physical before the exam. This will help your body expose of some of that extra tension.
- Sleep and eat well, not only before an exam, but every day also.
- Focus on the test itself as opposed to the outcome. Don't let your fear of failure impede your ability to perform.
- Break up studying into smaller chunks of time with multiple mini breaks.
- Avoid the frantic student! You know the one—he will only aggravate you further.
- Have confidence. If you've used your time wisely and studied all you can, then you should trust your memory and analytical skills.

Valuable Pre-Test Questions

What do you know about the test? Knowing the various aspects of the testing situation is valuable in deciding what to study.

What kind of test will it be? Objective, short answer, essay, multiple choice, or a combination?

How many items will be on the test? Knowing the number of items to be asked in proportion to the amount of material to be covered gives an indication of the extent of coverage.

How much time will you have to process the test? Compare the number of questions to the amount of time you have to determine how long you can spend on each question.

What is the relative importance of course requirement? Will text, lab, notes, or all be covered on the test? Knowing what will be covered and to what extent will help you to focus your study time in the most important sources.

What is the emphasis on the various topics? If all the lectures and text readings are covered, which topics are most important? Learn these first.

Who will grade the test? What are the grader's biases? Does he or she check for grammar and spelling or prefer lengthy discussions?

What needs to be studied? Make a list of what you need to read, study, and review. Then plan to spend your time starting with the most important or most difficult material.

Test Preparation Tips

Plan your study time. If you've made a schedule, then you know exactly when your test is coming up. It is never too early to start studying. Knowing how much time you have determines how you will study and what you will study.

Review the subject. List all possible topics and subtopics you think will be on the test. Survey your materials and mark the topics you'll need to spend the most time on and then start with those.

Make exam questions. As you study, develop your own exam questions to help you think actively about the material you're studying.

Use flashcards. Flashcards are a concise way to study vocabulary, dates, names, equations, definitions, main ideas, etc. They are also easy to carry around with you so you can put your "off time" to good use. (If you are dealing with lots of note cards, try breaking them up into groups and learn one group at a time.)

Test Taking Tips

Read the directions carefully. This may be obvious, but it will help you avoid careless errors.

Read all questions before beginning (if there is time). Sometimes instructors will ask questions that reveal answers to other questions, or at least give you a clue as to how to answer.

Answer questions in a strategic order. Answer easy questions first to build confidence, score points, and mentally orient yourself to vocabulary, concepts, and your studies (it may also help you make associations with more difficult questions). Answer difficult questions next.

Review. Resist the urge to run out after you finish your last question. Take the time to review your answers and change any you know are wrong, check for punctuation and spelling, and make sure you haven't skipped any questions.

Post-Test Opportunities for Learning

When most students get a test back, they look at the grade, let out a sigh of relief, and stuff the test in their notebook. This is a missed opportunity! Here are 12 ways to parlay that piece of paper into better grades.

- 1. Check the point total to make sure it is correct.** Look for mistakes in grading.
- 2. Know what questions you missed and why you missed them.** The reason you missed the question is often as important in taking your next test as the answer.
- 3. Study the instructor's comments.** Then you will know what is expected next time.
- 4. Look at the questions.** Look for kinds of questions (and tricky questions) that the instructor likes to use.
- 5. See if the questions came from the text or the lecture.** Concentrate more on that source for the next exam.
- 6. Correct and understand what you missed.** This is information you need to know—it may appear on the next test or the final.
- 7. Analyze the type of problems you missed.** Then review strategies for learning and understanding that type of question.
- 8. Ask questions.** Write down questions you have while the test is still fresh in your mind.
- 9. Review.** Put information back into long term memory.
- 10. Review.** Get a general idea of what kind of test the instructor might give next time.
- 11. Review.** Note how you studied for the exam. Look for better ways.
- 12. Review.** Reviewing gives you a good reason to talk to your professors and let them know you want to improve.