

Foster Care to Academic Success

Test Taking Anxiety

It's normal to be a little nervous about taking an exam, especially if it's an important one and your grade depends on it. A mild case of nerves isn't bad – it can give you just the adrenaline you need to push yourself to do your best. And being overconfident never helped anybody; if you're over confident you're likely to make careless mistakes and finish too quickly.

BEING PREPARED is the best way to avoid being overanxious before a test. Makes sense – if you're ready, what is there to be worried about?

Here are suggestions on how to face a test with a serene calm manner ... like you're going on a peaceful hike in the high snow-covered mountains ... no, not really but at least you won't be biting your nails.

- **Space your studying** over several days so you can review everything and be sure you know it.
- **Exercise!** Regular exercise does wonders for your stress level.
- **STOP STUDYING AT LEAST ONE HOUR BEFORE THE TEST** - in the last few minutes before a test, for every new fact you memorize three old ones will fly out of your head.
- **Have something to eat.** You don't want a rumbling stomach during the test! An apple is a better choice than a candy bar.
- **Get to the classroom a few minutes early.**
- **Before you start, READ THE INSTRUCTIONS** and review the whole exam so that you know exactly what you have to do and how to pace yourself. Don't spend 20 minutes on a 5-point question.
- **Write any formulae, equations, important facts and key words in the margin of your exam book.** That way you don't have to worry about remembering them.
- **Answer the easy questions first**, to get them out of the way and give you confidence to tackle the harder ones.
- **With the harder questions, circle key words and rewrite the question to make sure you understand it.** If you don't understand something, raise your hand and quietly ask the teacher.
- **Answer EVERY question if possible.**
- **Write neatly** - if the professor can't read your answers, he can't grade them!
- **Don't worry about how quickly other students finish** – take your time.
- If you finish early, go over each answer but **DON'T** change anything unless you are absolutely positive of the correction.

And if you panic during the exam –

- **Take a few slow, deep breaths**
- **Don't focus on your panic**
- **Remind yourself that you are doing your best**
- **Take another few slow, deep breaths**
- **Continue to work through the exam, question by question by question**
- **Again, consciously relax and remind yourself you are doing your best**
- **Think of us, standing behind you in a row, saying YOU CAN DO IT!!!**

Foster Care to Academic Success

Test Taking Anxiety

Now, how can you tell the difference between normal anxiousness and full-blown test anxiety? Here's a checklist. If you answer yes to more than one or two sentences you may suffer from test anxiety and perhaps the suggestions below will be of some help to you. You might also want to visit your school counselor to seek further professional advice.

√	My attitude towards tests ... true or false
	I have trouble sleeping at night and spend the last few minutes before sleep worrying about upcoming tests.
	The day of an exam, I have drastic appetite changes and either overeat or don't eat at all.
	When studying for or taking an exam, I often feel hopeless.
	While studying for or taking an exam, I have problems concentrating and feel bored or tired.
	I often yawn while studying or during an exam.
	During an exam, I often feel confused or panicky.
	During an exam, I may experience sweaty palms or mental blocks.
	While taking an exam, I sometimes experience nausea and feel like I might vomit or faint.
	After an exam, I pretend it meant nothing to me and I discard the result as meaningless.
	After an exam, I sometimes feel guilty and berate myself for not studying hard enough.
	I sometimes get angry or depressed after an exam.
	As a general rule, I view test taking as a very stressful situation and dread it.

Dealing with your stressful thoughts –

- **If you feel your anxiety level rising, tell yourself to STOP before it gets out of control.** Take a couple of deep breaths and tell yourself things will be okay. Make a mantra – whatever works for you; “This too shall pass,” “The end is in sight,” “I’m going to be a teacher...” – and repeat it slowly in your head or out loud if you can.
- **Daydream. Yeah, daydream.** Give yourself a five-minute vacation to think about other things. Hum your favorite song, remember your last great vacation or dream about your next, smile about something your child did or imagine petting your dog.
- **Think positive thoughts!** This sounds like a cliché; “have a nice day and think positive thoughts, ma’am,” but it works. Imagine success rather than dread failure. Praise your own efforts, and remind yourself that you are doing your very best. Then, do your very best.
- **Focus.** After you’ve taken a few minutes out to daydream, FOCUS. Think about the little picture – getting through one chapter, memorizing 20 vocabulary words, passing the next quiz – and make it your goal to succeed at that one thing.

Dealing with physical tension –

- Try “focal breathing”
 - Exhale while slowly counting to 10. Feel that your lungs are completely empty.
 - Breathe in through your nose, slowly counting to 10. Keep your shoulders down and focus on pushing the air towards your stomach. You should feel your lower body expand and, at the end of the breath, some pressure on your lower back.
 - Exhale slowly through your mouth, with your lips in an “ooh” position. Pretend you’re trying to blow out a candle.
- **Do a body check.** Sitting comfortably, start with your feet and move up your body checking for tension in each body part and actively relaxing each one in turn.

Foster Care to Academic Success

Test Taking Anxiety

- **Tense and relax.** Like the body check, start with your feet but actively clench each muscle group for three seconds before releasing it and relaxing it completely.

Remember, if you experience true test taking anxiety to the point that you feel sick, make an appointment to visit the counseling center at your school.

Final thoughts –

- Don't cram!
- Think positive thoughts.
- Get enough sleep the night before the exam.
- Eat something before the exam.
- Remind yourself that a test is just a test, and that you did your best.

Do your best!
And good luck.