

# How to Keep Calm During Tests

- 1. Prepare well in advance.** Keep up every day if you can, but don't judge yourself harshly if you don't. Avoid last-minute cramming. Don't go without sleep the night before.
- 2. Know the time and place** of the test and what you need to bring. Be on time, neither too early nor too late, with blue books or supplies. Don't rush.
- 3. Don't talk about the test** with classmates immediately beforehand, especially if you know this sort of thing raises your anxiety level.
- 4.** Read over the test and **plan your approach.** Ascertain point values per part, time limits for each section, which question you'll start with to boost your confidence, etc.
- 5.** Don't hesitate to **ask for clarification** from the professor, teaching assistant, or proctor if you have questions about instructions, procedure, etc.
- 6. Be clear about your job.** A test is a thinking task, and your job during an exam is to think as clearly as possible based on what you currently know. Focus on your job (the thinking process) and practice letting go of what you don't control (the grading). Approach the test determined to think to the best of your ability, but also accept the limits of what you currently know as a beginner.
- 7. Reduce anxiety with activity.** If your mind goes blank and you can't think of anything to write, go on to another question or another part of the test. On an essay question, jot down anything you can recall on scratch paper to stimulate your memory and get your mind working.
- 8. Relax yourself physically** during the test, especially if you notice that you are not thinking well or your muscles are tight. Pause, put your test down, and take several slow, deep breaths. Tense and release your muscles. Do this in particular if you notice that you are worrying excessively about one problem, not reading carefully, and unable to recall information you know.
- 9. Pay attention to the test,** not to others. Don't waste time wondering how other people are doing.

(over)

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## ARE YOU "TEST ANXIOUS"?

1. Are you aware of being really nervous on a test, maybe so nervous that you don't do your best and you lose points, even though you know you've studied well and are prepared?
2. Does your stomach ever get tight or upset before or during a test? Hands cold and sweaty? Headaches? Do you have trouble sleeping the night before a test?
3. Do you ever find your mind racing, or dull or "muddy," so that you can't think clearly while taking a test?
4. Do you ever forget material you studied and learned, maybe only to remember it again later after the test is over?
5. Do you "overanalyze" questions, see too many possibilities, choose the complex answer and overlook—and miss—the simpler, correct one?
6. Do you make many careless errors on tests?

**A "yes" answer to any one of these questions suggests that you may be experiencing test anxiety.**

Of course, everyone is anxious about tests; if you weren't, you wouldn't try. A certain amount of tension is good, because it acts as a motivator.

**But** it has been estimated that as many as 20% of college students may suffer from nervousness that is so severe a couple of things may happen:

- Their grades may drop, because anxiety interferes with their mental processes and keeps them from doing their best.
- And the quality of their life may decline, because they're so miserable when they have to take tests.

Most test-takers may benefit from suggestions for ways to self-calm and maintain a productive level of tension while preparing for and taking tests.

**\*If you think you may be "test anxious," you are welcome to speak privately with a counselor at the Counseling Center.**