

TEST PREPARATION TIPS

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Combating Test Anxiety

The first thing you need to know is that a little test anxiety is a good thing. Everyone gets nervous before a big exam - and if that nervousness motivates you to prepare thoroughly, so much the better. It's said that Sir Laurence Olivier, one of the foremost British actors of this century, threw up before every performance. His stage fright didn't impair his performance; in fact, it probably gave him a little extra edge-just the kind of edge you need to do well, whether on a stage or in an examination room.

Stress Management Before the Test

If you feel your level of anxiety getting the best of you in the weeks before the test, here is what you need to do to bring the level down again:

- **Get prepared.** There's nothing like knowing what to expect and being prepared for it to put you in control and relieve your test anxiety. Learn everything you can about the test: The format, the duration, the material covered, and so on. Be overly prepared; learn the material so well that you answers to the questions are practically automatic.
- **Practice self-confidence.** A positive attitude is a great way to combat test anxiety. This is no time to be humble or shy. Stand in front of the mirror and say to your reflection, "I'm prepared. I'm full of self-confidence. I'm going to ace this test. I know I can do it." Say it into a tape recorder and play it back once a day. If you hear it often enough, you'll believe it.
- **Fight negative messages.** Every time someone starts telling you how hard the exam is or how it's almost impossible to get a high score, start telling them your self-confidence messages above. If the someone with the negative messages is you, telling yourself you don't do well on exams don't listen. Turn on your tape recorder and listen to your self-confidence messages.
- **Visualize.** Imagine your way to success. Envision yourself finding out you've aced the test. Create a mental picture of your friends and family congratulating you on your great score. Visualizing success can help make it happen - and it reminds you of why you're going to all this work in preparing for the exam.
- **Exercise.** Physical activity helps calm your body down and focus your mind. Besides, being in good physical shape can actually help you do well on the exam. Go for a run, lift weights, go swimming - and do it regularly.

Stress Management on Test Day

There are several ways you can bring down your level of test anxiety on test day. They'll work best if you practice them in the weeks before the test, so you know which ones work best for you.

- **Deep breathing.** Take a deep breath while you count to five. Hold it for a count of one, then let it out on a count of five. Repeat several times.
- **Move your body.** Try rolling your head in a circle. Rotate your shoulders. Shake your hands from the wrist. Many people find these movements very relaxing.
- **Visualize again.** Think of the place where you are most relaxed: such as lying on the beach in the sun or, walking through the park. Now close your eyes and imagine you're

actually there. If you practice in advance, you'll find that you only need a few seconds of this exercise to experience a significant increase in your sense of well-being.

When anxiety threatens to overwhelm you right there during the exam, there are still things you can do to manage the stress level:

- **Repeat your self-confidence messages.** You should have them memorized by now. Say them quietly to yourself, and believe them!
- **Visualize one more time.** This time, visualize yourself moving smoothly and quickly through the test answering every question right and finishing just before time is up. Like most visualization techniques, this one works best if you've practiced it ahead of time.
- **Find an easy question.** Skim over the test until you find an easy question, and answer it. Getting even one circle filled in gets you into the test-taking groove.
- **Take a mental break.** Everyone loses concentration once in a while during a long test. It's normal, so you shouldn't worry about it. Instead, accept what has happened. Say to yourself, "Hey, I lost it there for a minute. My brain is taking a break." Put down your pencil, close your eyes, and do some deep breathing for a few seconds. Then you're ready to go back to work.

Try these techniques ahead of time, and see how well they can work for you!

Nine Tips For Stress Management

Step 1: Get Information

Knowledge is power. The first step is finding out everything you can about your exam. For example, make sure you know the format of the questions, and the time, location, and duration of the test. Once you have your information, the next steps listed below will show you what to do about it.

Step 2: Conquer Test Anxiety

Having complete information about the exam is the first step in getting control of the exam. Next, you have to overcome one of the biggest obstacles to test success: test anxiety. Test anxiety cannot only impair your performance on the exam itself; it can even keep you from preparing! Stress management techniques will help you succeed on your exam. Learn some strategies now, and practice them as you work through practice exams, so they'll be second nature to you by exam day.

Step 3: Make a Study Plan

Maybe the most important thing you can do to get control of yourself and your exam is to make a study plan. Too many people fail to prepare simply because they fail to plan. Spending hours on the day before the exam poring over sample test questions raises your level of test anxiety, and is simply no substitute for careful preparation and practice over time.

Step 4: Learn to Manage Your Time

Knowing how to use your time wisely will put you in charge of your exam. Here are some test-taking strategies: look through the entire test before you start working so you'll know what's ahead; know the time limit or assign a time limit to each section of the test; don't linger too long on any one question. Practice these strategies as you take some sample tests, and then you'll be ready to use them on test day.

Step 5: Learn to Use the Process of Elimination

After time management, your next most important tool for taking control of your exam is using the process of elimination wisely. It's standard test-taking wisdom that you should always read all the answer choices before choosing your answer. This helps you find the right answer by eliminating wrong answer choices.

Step 6: Know When to Guess

Armed with the process of elimination, you're ready to take control of one of the big questions in test taking: Should I guess? The first answer is: It depends on the type of exam you're taking. Some exams have what's called a "guessing penalty," in which a fraction of your wrong answers is subtracted from your right answers. In this case you should only answer those questions you know or are fairly sure of the answer. However, for most exams the number of questions you answer correctly yields your raw score. In this case, you have nothing to lose and everything to gain by guessing.

Step 7: Reach Your Peak Performance Zone

To get ready for a challenge like a big exam, you have to take control of your physical, as well as your mental, state. Exercise, proper diet, and rest will ensure that your body works with, rather than against, your mind on test day, as well as during your preparation.

Step 8: Get Your Act Together

You're in control of your mind and body; you're in charge of test anxiety, your preparation, and your test-taking strategies. Now it's time to take charge of external factors, like the testing site and materials you need to take the exam. Make sure you bring all the supplies you need such as admission materials, extra pens and pencils, and a watch. Get to the testing site 15 minutes early but resist the temptation to talk to others about the test or to do some last minute cramming. (And **MAYBE**, as one last level of 'decompression' and relaxation, **Visualize** moving smoothly and quickly through the test answering every question right and finishing just before time is up).

Step 9: Do It!

You're ready. You made a study plan and followed through. You practiced your test-taking strategies. You're in control of your physical, mental, and emotional state. You know when and where to show up and what to bring with you. In other words, you're prepared to succeed. You can even look forward to the test because you know that you're going to do you absolute best.