

Academic Resources

How to Reduce Test Anxiety

To reduce test anxiety, you need to understand both the relaxation response and how negative self-talk undermines your abilities.

Relaxation Techniques

The relaxation response is any technique or procedure that helps you to become relaxed and will take the place of an anxiety response. Someone simply telling you to relax or even telling yourself to relax, however, without proper training, does little to reduce your test anxiety. There are both short-term and long-term relaxation response techniques which help control emotional (somatic) math test anxiety. These techniques will also help reduce worry (cognitive) anxiety. Effective short-term techniques include The Tensing and Differential Relaxation Method and The Palming Method.

Short Term Relaxation Techniques

The Tensing and Differential Relaxation Method

The Tensing and Differential Relaxation Method helps you relax by tensing and relaxing your muscles all at once. Follow these procedures while you are sitting at your desk before taking a test:

1. Put your feet flat on the floor.
2. With your hands, grab underneath the chair.
3. Push down with your feet and pull up on your chair at the same time for about five seconds.
4. Relax for five to 10 seconds.
5. Repeat the procedure two to three times.
6. Relax all your muscles except the ones that are actually used to take the test.

The Palming Method

The palming method is a visualization procedure used to reduce test anxiety. While you are at your desk before or during a test, follow these procedures:

1. Close and cover your eyes using the center of the palms of your hands.
2. Prevent your hands from touching your eyes by resting the lower parts of your palms on your cheekbones and placing your fingers on your forehead. Your eyeballs must not be touched, rubbed or handled in any way.
3. Think of some real or imaginary relaxing scene. Mentally visualize this scene. Picture the scene as if you were actually there, looking through your own eyes.
4. Visualize this relaxing scene for one to two minutes.

Practice visualizing this scene several days before taking a test and the effectiveness of this relaxation procedure will improve.

Short-term relaxation techniques can be learned quickly but are not as successful as the long-term relaxation technique. Short-term techniques are intended to be used while learning the long-term technique.

Long Term Relaxation Techniques

The Cue-Controlled Relaxation Response Technique is the best long-term relaxation technique. Cue-controlled relaxation means you can induce your own relaxation based on repeating certain cue words to yourself. In essence, you are taught to relax and then silently repeat cue words, such as "I am relaxed."

After enough practice, you can relax during tests. The Cue-Controlled Relaxation Technique has worked with thousands of students

Negative Self-Talk

Negative self-talk is a form of worry (cognitive) anxiety. This type of worrying can interfere with your test preparation and can keep you from concentrating on the test. Worrying can motivate you to study, but too much worrying may prevent you from studying at all.

Negative self-talk is defined as the negative statements you tell yourself before and during tests. Negative self-talk causes students to lose confidence and to give up on tests. Further, it can give you an inappropriate excuse for failing tests and cause you to give up on learning.

Students need to change their negative self-talk to positive self-talk without making unrealistic statements. Positive self-statements can improve your studying and test preparation. During tests, positive self-talk can build confidence and decrease your test anxiety. These positive statements; as well as others, can help reduce your test anxiety and improve your grades. Before the test, make up some positive statements to tell yourself.

The 12 Myths about Test Anxiety

1. Students are born with test anxiety.
2. Test anxiety is a mental illness.
3. Test anxiety cannot be reduced.
4. Any level of test anxiety is bad.
5. All students who are not prepared have test anxiety.
6. Students with test anxiety cannot learn math.
7. Students who are well prepared will not have test anxiety.
8. Very intelligent students and students taking high-level courses, such as calculus, do not have test anxiety.
9. Attending class and doing my homework should reduce all my test anxiety.
10. Being told to relax during a test will make you relaxed.
11. Doing nothing about test anxiety will make it go away.
12. Reducing test anxiety will guarantee better grades.

Reference:

Paul D. Nolting, Ph.D., *Winning at Math*, 1997 1989 by Academic Success Press, Inc