Resources: overcoming test anxiety

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I What is in this document?

Test anxiety is real, and it affects many students. Here I put together some tips based on some sources (see references) and my own ideas. I added a section about online testing. There is so much we need to learn about the online testing environment, challenges, pros, and cons. Comments are more than welcome. Also, if you are an student and have tried some of these out, please let me know what works and what does not work for you.

II Tips to overcome test anxiety

- *Establish a consistent pretest routine.* Learn what works for you, and follow the same steps each time you get ready to take a test. This will ease your stress level and help ensure that you're well-prepared. You can even add a short meditation exercise or breathing exercise as part of this routine.

- *Learn relaxation techniques.* To help you stay calm and confident right before and during the test, perform relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, relaxing your muscles one at a time, or closing your eyes and imagining a positive outcome. I strongly suggest adding a short walk before the exam, even 5 minutes only could help you relax.

- *Don't forget to eat and drink.* Your brain needs fuel to function. Eat the day of the test and drink plenty of water. Avoid sugary drinks such as soda pop, which can cause your blood sugar to peak and then drop, or caffeinated beverages such as energy drinks or coffee, which can increase anxiety. Eat a nutritious breakfast before the test and prepare smart snacks for ongoing energy. Look for foods that offer a steady stream of nutrients: oatmeal, walnuts, banana, eggs, or toasts are some options. If you crave something sweet: dark chocolate is a great option.

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- *Get some exercise.* Regular aerobic exercise, and exercising on exam day, can release tension. Consider also some stretching routine, especially if you have spent a lot of time on your chair during the last days.

- *Get plenty of sleep.* Sleep is directly related to academic performance. Pulling an all-nighter can exacerbate your nerves. Getting adequate rest two nights before a test will help you improve your performance.

III   Tips to overcome online-test anxiety

A general strategy is to try to mimic the best that you can the environment that is familiar to you, i.e. the in-person testing. What made you "comfortable" with in-person exams is mainly repetition, you have taken hundreds of them since a younger age. Practice makes perfect, try to do as much online preparation as possible.

- *Set up the place where you will take the exam.* Spending your time studying in the same or similar places that you take your test can help you recall the information you need at test time. Do not try out something new on exam day. Clean up your desk, have scratch paper at hand, pens, and pencils. Adjust the light and room temperature.

- *Charge your devices the night before.* Charge your laptop, your phone in case you need to send out an email from it, your tablet, and any electronic pencil you use. Make sure that every device battery is fully charged, and that you have the chargers at hand.

- *Reset your modem.* Rebooting your modem can fix Internet connection problems, improve slow moving connections, and resolve wireless issues. Do this the day before the test.

- *Kindly ask your roommate or family to keep noises down for the duration of the test.* If this is not an option, ask your professor if you can use earplugs during the exam. Try them before the exam.

- *Know the exam protocol:* make sure you have discussed with the instructor what are the rules for the online exam, what are you expected to do in case something goes wrong, who you should contact, and what to expect. Two general related tips are:

  - Write down the proctor and instructor's contact information in a piece of paper. If you lose internet connection or electricity, contact them immediately from your phone and inform the situation.

  - Write down the exam's information in a piece of paper: zoom id, zoom password, your username, UID, or any information you might need to log in to the exam. Double-check the time of the exam, pay attention to different time zones.

- If the exam is open-notes and/or open-book: *make sure to have all the material organized.* My favorite option is to create a "cheat sheet" even for these exams. Your goal is to use the material efficiently, "ctrl + F" will not get you to the answer. You have to know where to find the answers.

IV   Breathing exercises

Relieve Stress & Anxiety with Simple Breathing Techniques
Three Practices for C A L M

V   References

Test anxiety: Can it be treated?. Mayo Clinic.
10 ways to overcome Test Anxiety. Princeton review.
How to reduce test anxiety for college students. Perdue University.