

10 Ways to Overcome Test Anxiety



Has this ever happened to you? You've been studying hard for a test, but when you walk into your exam, your mind goes blank. As you sit down to start your test, you notice your sweaty palms and a pit in your stomach.

If these classic signs of test anxiety sound familiar, your grades and test scores may not reflect your true abilities. Learn ways to manage test anxiety before and during a stressful test.

What is Test Anxiety?

While it's completely normal to feel a bit nervous before a test, some students find test anxiety debilitating. Racing thoughts, inability to concentrate, or feelings of dread can combine with physical symptoms like a fast heartbeat, headache, or nausea. Test anxiety has the power to derail weeks and months of hard work.

Test Anxiety Tips

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, causes of test anxiety may include a fear of failure, lack of adequate prep time, or bad experiences taking tests in the past. You're not alone! Here's what you can do to stay calm in the days leading up to and during your test.

1. Be prepared

Yes, this seems obvious, but it bears repeating. If you feel confident that you've prepped thoroughly, you'll feel more confident walking into the test.

2. Get a good night's sleep

Cramming is never the answer, and pulling an all-nighter can exacerbate your nerves. Having adequate rest (9–10 hours per night) is likely to be more beneficial than rereading a text until dawn.

3. Fuel up

Eat a nutritious breakfast before the test and pack smart snacks for ongoing energy. Look for foods that offer a steady stream of nutrients, rather than a sugar high followed by a crash.

4. Get to class—or the testing site—early

Feeling rushed will only amp up the anxiety. Pack everything you need for the exam the night before and set the alarm, so you can get out the door on time.

5. Have a positive mental attitude

Bring a picture of your happy place or come up with a morale-boosting mantra like “I can do this” or “I worked hard and deserve this.” Peek at your picture or recite your mantra, right before the test begins.

6. Read carefully

Read the directions thoroughly and read all answers before making a choice or starting the essay. There is nothing worse than putting time into a question and realizing you are not solving for x , or the essay is off target. Slowing down can help you stay focused.

7. Just start

The blank page can maximize your anxiety. After you’ve read the directions, dive right in by making an outline for an essay answer. Or, find some questions you can ace to build up your confidence and momentum. You can always go back and change things later if needed, but a few quick answers can get the ball rolling.

8. Don’t pay attention to what other people are doing

Everyone else is scribbling away? Ack! What do they know that you don’t? It doesn’t matter. Pay attention to your own test and pace, and forget about the other students in the room.

9. Watch the clock

Realizing that time is almost up and there are lots of test questions left can make it hard to do anything useful in those final minutes. Stay on pace by scoping out the whole test before getting started. Mentally allocate how much time you’ll spend on each section. If there’s time to recheck, even better.

10. Focus on calm breathing and positive thoughts

Deep breathing can slow down a beating heart or a racing mind, so practice these techniques at home. The very act of concentrating on breathing and thinking can biometrically alter those anxious feelings.

Sometimes just remembering that *some* test-taking anxiety is a normal part of school can help make it easier to handle.