

Test-Taking Strategies

<http://www.uhs.umich.edu/testanxiety>, accessed November 28, 2011



What is test anxiety?

Exams are among the greatest sources of stress in college. Some level of nervousness before tests can motivate you; however, too much stress can interfere with your ability to prepare for and perform on tests. Test anxiety has two components: physical reactions and worry. When kept in check, physical reactions (heart pounding, sweaty palms, etc.) do not usually impair performance and may enhance your ability to focus on the immediate task. Worry (that is, thinking about failure rather than preparing to succeed) is more harmful. You can use the following tips to control worrying.

Before the test:

- Schedule time for reviewing material.** Daily reviews help you retain information better than last-minute cram sessions.
- Make a checklist of information covered since the last exam.** Master main concepts and important details.
- Review class notes and readings.** Information included in assigned reading and emphasized again in lecture is likely to be on the exam.
- Attend office hours** and ask questions.
- Review with other students** or work on practice questions.
- Review definitions of terms** used by your instructor.
- Devise memory tricks** for recalling information.
- Ask the instructor what the test will cover** and in what format.
- Review the syllabus.** Anything listed will likely be on the exam.
- Talk positively to yourself while studying and during the exam.**

During the test:

Take a deep breath before beginning. See our [One-Minute Stress Strategies](#) handout for other quick stress reducers.

Minimize distraction. Wear comfortable clothes. Bring extra pens or pencils.

Review the instructions and the whole exam thoroughly before starting.

Stay aware of time. How much time will you need for each test part? Stick to your plan, if you can. Stuck? Skip it and come back to the question.

Use any extra time to review answers and add improvements.

Strategies for projects:

Essay tests: Construct a short outline, then begin your answer with a summary sentence. Proofread for missing words or important facts and check your spelling. Expand answers as time allows.

Multiple-choice tests: Read all options. Eliminate those that are obviously wrong. Beware of qualifying words, such as “only,” “always,” “most.”

Make a small mark by any questions you are unsure of and review them after answering everything else.

Math problems: Don't rush. If you have time, recheck your calculations.

Papers: Plan a timeline that allows thorough research of the topic, organizing the information into an outline, writing (including a rough draft), and editing. Break the paper into manageable sections. Include all necessary citations.

Presentations: Use an outline to organize information. Spend time on an attention-grabbing introduction and conclusion. Use visuals and props, if possible. Practice your presentation aloud (by yourself with a mirror or with a practice audience). Concentrate on eye contact, speed and volume.

Volunteer to go first. You'll have a shorter waiting time—less anxiety—and will not be compared to others who presented before you.