

# Confront and Conquer Test Anxiety!

Review the questions and answers below to learn how to reduce test anxiety.

## Q. How do I know if I have test anxiety?

A. Signs of test anxiety can include any of the following:

- Mental blank-out
- Racing thoughts
- Difficulty concentrating
- Negative thoughts about past performance or consequences of failure
- Knowing the answers after the test, but not while taking it
- Symptoms may include nausea, faintness, sweating or fast heartbeat

While a small amount of anxiety can enhance your test performance, a high degree of anxiety or stress can hinder your preparation and performance (Educational Testing Service, 2005; Sefcik, Bice & Prerost, 2013).

## Q. What are effective ways to cope with test anxiety?

A. There are several strategies you can utilize to minimize and manage test anxiety.

1. Learn as much as you can about the upcoming test or confront what is worrying you by seeking to understand the content tested, format of questions, and time provided. Review sample questions from question banks to help you understand and practice with exam-type questions.
2. Create an organized study plan and stick to it. Often, you may feel anxious because you haven't yet mastered the content. By creating notes you can easily turn into study aids (e.g., flashcards or concept maps/pathways), reviewing current content utilizing your notes regularly, and incorporating daily review of practice questions utilizing random sequencing, you will increase retention and be able to identify areas that need more attention many days or weeks prior to an exam.

❖ *Tip: If you find yourself procrastinating, monitor your thoughts. This could be a sign of anxiety. Reduce procrastination by working to stick to your study plan and implementing the [Pomodoro Technique](#). To increase productivity, consider utilizing a [Pomodoro Timer App](#).*

3. Reframe or counter negative thoughts with positive thoughts and actions. Take out a piece of paper and make two columns. In one column write down your negative thought. In the other column write a positive thought that argues against it. See examples below:

Negative Thoughts	Positive or Realistic Alternatives
<b>I always do poorly on these types of tests.</b>	I've implemented a positive study plan and have practiced these types of questions.
<b>If I don't pass this exam, I'm a failure.</b>	I'm going to pass this exam by utilizing effective test-taking strategies. Right now, I'm going to read the stem and then I'm going to carefully read the body of the question ...
<b>I'm going to freeze and not be able to answer all of the questions.</b>	I'm ready for this exam and feeling some anxiety is normal. To stay calm and refocus, I'm going to take a few deep breaths and exhale slowly. Then, I'm going to imagine a clam, peaceful setting. Next, I'm going to open my eyes and strategically work through each question using a consistent test-taking approach remembering that each question carries an equal weight on the exam.
<b>There's an impossible amount of concepts I'm being tested on in this exam. How can I possibly pass?</b>	I don't need to know the answer to every question. However, I am prepared. If I don't know the answer, I will identify the best possible answer, mark the question, and use the "skipping technique" to let my subconscious work on the question, while I move on. When I come back to the question, I'll be better prepared to confirm the best answer.

❖ *Tip: If you find you are anxious prior to an exam, experiment with this approach: (1) Find a quiet space, away from your peers, (2) take out a piece of paper and write everything you are thinking for 5 – 10 minutes, (3) then, either reframe thoughts or rip up the paper and throw it away. The act of purging your negative thoughts can help minimize anxiety and enhance performance.*

4. Pay attention to physical signs of test anxiety. They may be clues that you need to schedule time for mental and/or physical health in your study schedule. Prior to an exam, be sure you are eating well and exercising. Surround yourself with positive people and take study breaks to socialize with friends and family. Monitor your sleep habits to make sure you are getting enough sleep. A lack of sleep can contribute to memory loss and lack of concentration (Educational Testing Service, 2005; Sefcik, Bice & Prerost, 2013).

## To learn more ...

- [Test Anxiety: Why the Struggle to Remember is Worth It](#)
- [Stop Fighting Your Negative Thoughts](#)
- [USMLE Success Academy: Test-Taking Strategy for the USMLE Exams](#)
- [Test Taking](#) (University of Texas Health Science Center School of Medicine)
- [Self-Talk for Reducing Anxiety](#) (David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, scroll down to Anxiety and Stress Management to find the link to a worksheet focused on “productive” self-talk.)

## References

- Educational Testing Service. (2005). *Reducing test anxiety*. The Praxis Series. Retrieved from [https://www.ets.org/s/praxis/pdf/reducing\\_test\\_anxiety.pdf](https://www.ets.org/s/praxis/pdf/reducing_test_anxiety.pdf)
- Sefcik, D.J., Bice, G., & Prerost, F. (2013). *How to study for standardized tests*. Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning, LLC.