

Tips for a Calm, Confident, Energetic Approach to Testing

Do you sometimes feel worried, anxious, panicky or tired prior to exams? If so, you're not alone. For a variety of reasons, researchers find that 10 – 20% of medical students experience some form of test anxiety. To replace negative thoughts with more accurate and realistic assessments of your abilities, utilize this four-step process whenever you find yourself thinking a negative thought:

1. Ask yourself if the thought is true. Most of the time, your answer will be “no” and you can reject the thought.
2. Even if the thought is true or partly true, ask yourself if it is useful to think this thought at this time. Usually, your answer will be no. Then, ask yourself if you can put your time and mental energy into figuring out how to approach the problem or question as opposed to thinking the negative thought.
3. Ask yourself if thinking this way helps you achieve your goals? The answer again is typically “no.” If your immediate goal is to concentrate your attention on carefully reading, analyzing, and selecting the best answer, then the negative belief is interfering with your goal.
4. Finally, ask yourself if you want to reject this negative thought. (Answer “YES!”). Then, replace that thought with a true and positively stated replacement, such as one of the following:
 - “I am tense, so I need to relax for a moment. Take a deep breath. That’s better, some anxiety is actually helpful to me. I’ll do the best I can on this exam.”
 - “I can’t remember this. Mmmmm... let me see if I can eliminate some options (make notes). I’ll move on and come back to this question. This will give my brain some time to recall what I’ve studied, and then I’ll be able to answer or eliminate more options.”
 - “Okay, so this is a complex question. I’m going to carefully read and identify the significant information, re-read the question so that I know what to focus on, and then anticipate the answer. If I don’t know, I’ll diagram or make some notes to eliminate options and then make an educated choice. Then, I’m going to let it go and move on to the next question.”
 - “If I miss a question or two, I’ll still be fine. I can make a few mistakes. I’m just going to do my best and utilize an effective approach to reading and answering each problem.”

“Put all your thoughts and energy in the direction you want to go” (Kelman & Straker, 2000, p. 173).

Source

Kelman, E. & Straker, K.C. (2000). *Study without stress*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.