Taking Control of Test Anxiety

**Leading up to Test Day**

1. Maintain a regular schedule that your body and mind are accustomed to.
2. Keep up with your healthy eating, exercise, sleep, and recreational activities. Avoid caffeine, energy drinks, or other stimulants that induce nervousness and reduce concentration.
3. Keep up with your school work for this test and your other courses.
4. Use good study habits that work for you (e.g., flash cards, rewriting key points, writing out sample answers to possible essay questions, studying alone, studying with others).
5. Use exam study periods that match your concentration span and times of peak mental acuity. Spread the times you study over several days to increase retention (i.e., avoid “cram sessions”).
6. Try to find out as much about the test as you can. If you were not provided with a study guide, ask the professor to give you (and the rest of the class) a feeling for what the test will be like.
7. Develop a step-by-step approach to studying; break the material into manageable units.
8. Begin studying, even if you have only a short period of time.
9. Study where you will not be distracted, turn off your messaging services (phone, e-mail, etc.)
10. Maintain a positive attitude towards the material and the test. Meet and develop a rapport with your professor to reduce feeling that they are an “opponent.”
11. Learn and practice relaxation techniques such as belly breathing and muscle relaxation.
12. Use imagery to boost confidence (i.e., visualize yourself taking and doing well on the test).
13. Prepare and pack all materials that you will need for the test (e.g., pencils, calculator, notes) the night before the test.
14. Keep a healthy perspective … tests are important but one test does not define you as a person or define your abilities as a student.
15. Get a good night’s sleep.

**Day of the Test**

1. Wake up early enough (set an alarm or two) that your brain can focus when you get to the test.
2. Eat a light and nutritious breakfast, avoid junk foods that will lead to a “sugar high” followed by a “crash” and coffee, soda/pop, energy drinks if they make you “jittery.”
3. If possible, try to do something relaxing in the time before the test.
4. Avoid talking to other students about the exam as you may pick-up on their anxiety.
5. Arrive to the test knowing that you are prepared and with a positive attitude.
6. Don’t arrive too early if waiting increases your nervousness or too late to reduce feeling rushed.
7. Calm yourself with positive visualization and relaxation techniques.

**During the Test**

1. Expect some nervousness as this demonstrates that you care about learning and want to do well on the test. However, take a minute to calm yourself with breathing or muscle relaxation techniques.
2. Implement your strategy for taking the test. Consider the DETER stragegy:

* **Directions** … Read the test directions carefully, ask the professor if something is not clear.
* **Examine** … Examine the entire test to determine exactly what you have to do. Jot down memorized details or immediate thoughts to some questions.
* **Time** … Decide how much time you will spend on each item; you will likely want to spend more time on questions that are worth more points.
* **Easiest** … Complete questions that are easiest first so that you build your confidence and do not waste time by getting stuck on more difficult questions. Answer “long-shot” items last.
* **Review** … Review your answers for completeness and accuracy. Don’t assume your first answers are perfect in the same manner that a first draft of a paper is seldom perfect.

1. Focus on the test and ignore other things around you.
2. Don’t panic when others hand in their tests. There are no extra points for handing in your test early and often times the first to hand in their test have not completed the whole test.
3. Use thought stopping and positive self-talk if you find yourself worrying (i.e., replace thoughts of “I should have studied more” with “I am prepared for this test”).

**After the Test**

1. Let it go … you cannot change anything once you have turned in your test. Be confident that you have done as well as you can.
2. Give yourself a short break to clear your mind, but then turn your attention and efforts to other assignments and tests.

**After the Test is Returned**

1. Analysis your results and reflect on how you could have done better. Consider both your preparations for the test and your actual test-taking behaviors.
2. Communicate with your professor to understand what you did wrong and to ask how you might do better in the future.
3. Start thinking about how you will prepare for the next test, but be accepting of your best efforts and know that you will keep working to improve.