



Seminars: preparing for a discussion (individual study)

In *Seminars: referring to articles 1*, you are going to participate in a seminar on the topic of stress. Before attending any seminar, it is important that you prepare properly by doing the assigned reading. Therefore, in this session, you will read one article (A or B) assigned to you by your tutor.

Student focused learning objectives

By the end of the session, you will be better able to:

- understand the seminar topic
- identify and use relevant vocabulary.



Reading and note-taking



Seminar preparation checklist

Reading and note-taking

Task 1

In the tutor-led session, *Seminars: agree, disagree, opinion*, you were assigned either article A or B.

Click on the card below for your article, then answer the prediction question on the flip side. Do not read the articles yet.

Article A

In your article, titled '*Stress: To what extent can it be controlled*', the author talks about the causes of stress and how to deal with it. What specific information do you think the author will include?

Article B

In your article, titled '*Stress: Keeping things in perspective*', the author talks about the symptoms of stress and techniques for controlling it. What specific information do you think the author will include?

CONTINUE

Task 2

Read the article assigned to you in class by your tutor. **Do not read the other article!**

Whilst you read, make notes in relation to these questions:

1

Is it possible to live a stress-free life?

2

What steps can people take to control their stress levels?

Stress: To what extent can it be controlled?

Stress arises from a number of factors. For many people stress originates in the work or study situation. For other people it originates in the family, where expectations of family members vary. However, a situation which is stressful for one person will not be stressful for another. Some people appear by nature to be relaxed in any situation, irrespective of how stressful the situation may appear to others. Stress is essentially what individuals experience when they feel threatened or under pressure. The body responds in particular ways to this experience.

The causes of stress

The changing nature of work contributes to stress; in the past, individuals had the same job for a large proportion of their lives, whereas nowadays it is more common for jobs to be on a temporary basis. This can be very stressful from a financial point of view, with families to support and mortgage payments to keep up, and individuals constantly concerned about the security of their jobs. The relationship between employer and employee, the pressure of deadlines and competitiveness between employees, can all cause stress.

For students, the impact of stress is most often felt around exam period; final school exams take on huge importance, as factor which can determine a person's future. International students who are sponsored by their government's companies feel a particular stress due to high expectations they need to fulfil, with the extra challenge of dealing with life in a different culture.

For some people, home life may be a source of stress rather than an escape from it. Family disputes can cause stress, as can the demands of running a home and looking after children.

How to deal with stress

Just as people become stressed in different situations, so their bodies respond in different ways. In order to deal effectively with stress, it is important to identify the symptoms of stress that you as an individual; how does stress manifest itself? It might begin with a feeling of nervousness, an accelerated heart rate and an increase in the rate of breathing. The individual might start to feel tension in the neck or shoulders and a sick feeling in the stomach. Depression, headaches and fatigue may be other responses to stress.

People deal with stress in a variety of ways; some people find meditation a useful way to relax. For other people physical activity is the best stress-reliever, e.g., a workout in the gym or an aerobics class can help get rid of the tensions of the day. Being in touch with nature through gardening or walking are other very common ways that people manage stress. Taking deep breaths can be another simple but effective way of coping.

Finding ways to relax is of course important in managing stress. However, once the triggers of stress have been identified, e.g., a certain situation at work, it is equally important to try and deal with the causes of the stress, rather than simply relieving the symptoms. In addition, a change in lifestyle may be required to make life less stressful overall. This may involve getting more sleep or changing diet. Ten cups of coffee a day may increase stress levels rather than reduce them.

Generally stress is not something that happens suddenly, but is actually an accumulation of various factors. Awareness of these factors is the first step in determining how to deal with it.

McCormack, J. and Watkins, S. (2007). *English for academic study: Speaking*. Reading: Garnet Education.

ARTICLE A

ARTICLE B

Stress: Keeping things in perspective

According to estimates, around 50 per cent, and in some universities nearly 70 per cent of students are working part-time to support themselves while they study. Add to this the exams, the debt and the parties and it is easy to see why many students suffer from stress. Although stress is a natural part of life, when it becomes a regular feature it can be debilitating both in terms of health and finances.

The term “stress” is often used quite loosely to describe even a temporary feeling of being under pressure. The technical definition, however, in relation to work or study is “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them”. In other words stress is not so much about what you feel when you are under pressure but how you react.

Diagnosing stress

Successful treatment of any medical condition starts with diagnosis. The same is true of stress. To manage stress successfully you need to be aware of the symptoms. In ‘Managing workplace stress’ (Williams & Cooper 2002) the authors split the symptoms into two categories – physical and behavioural.

Physical symptoms

- Tiredness

- Nausea
- Headaches
- Muscle tension
- Nervous twitches
- Altered sleep patterns

Behavioural symptoms

- Aggression
- Anxiety
- Poor decision-making
- Inability to prioritise
- Mood changes
- Difficulty in concentrating
- Feelings of failure
- Isolation

If you can identify the systems of stress or possibly even see an emerging pattern to your stress, you can then start to think about possible causes. For example, does the stress only arise at certain points of the year such as exam season? Do you feel stressed and anxious when you have to deliver presentations?

Techniques for dealing with stress

The first action to take if you recognise that you are suffering from stress is to talk to someone. It could be a family member or friend whom you can trust. Most universities now offer counselling services either as part of the university's own central services or as part of the student's union welfare services. The services on offer may also include access to a peer mentor or "buddy" who may well be a student on the same course but in a different year. Contact your student union for more details.

One other useful source of support is "Nightline". This unique service operates after 6pm specifically so that students can talk to someone when perhaps access to other support services or even friends is limited. The service is run by students for students and offers a listening ear for a

whole range of problems that students may have. Nightline operates nationally and in most universities (www.nightline.ac.uk).

At www.stressbusting.co.uk Dr Roger Henderson, a GP, recommends the following five practical techniques for dealing with stress:

- Keep a diary – use it to log situations, events, times places and people that appear to cause you stress, then...
- Talk through your diary with a good friend or partner and ask for impartial advice.
- Learn how to relax – practise deep-breathing techniques such as slow inhaling while counting to five; hold your breath for five seconds then breathe out slowly. Repeat this 10 times when you are feeling stressed and concentrate on nothing but breathing.
- Exercise regularly – brisk walking for 20 minutes three times a week.
- Plan breaks in your day – allocate time in the morning and afternoon when you can have time for yourself.

Adapted from:

Williams, S and Cooper, L. (2002). *Managing workplace stress*. Chichester: John Wiley and Son;

McGuire, R. (2004). *Stress: keep things in perspective*. Retrieved May 5, 2005, from <http://www.pjonline.com/students/tp2004/p18stress.html>

McCormack, J. and Watkins, S. (2007). *English for academic study: Speaking*. Reading: Garnet Education.

Seminar preparation checklist

Before you participate in the seminar on stress, use the checklist below to ensure you are fully prepared:

☐

Read article A or B

☐

Make notes about stress and ways to control it

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Form your own opinion on the topic of stress

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Note reasons and examples to support your opinion

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Review the useful seminar language

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Make a list of useful language that you would like to use in the seminar