



Managing Test Jitters

Before the Test

- **Stay on top of your studies.** Keeping up with your classes—even just for 30 minutes a day—will prevent you from feeling behind, cramming information at the last minute, and pulling all-nighters.
- **Develop strong test-preparation skills.** Academic Coaches can help you develop these skills. Test jitters is frequently caused by poor preparation.
- **Know the test-day particulars.** Find out the time and place of the test as well as what you need to bring (blue book, no. 2 pencil, jacket if the room is chilly, etc.). Pack everything you need the night before.
- **Create a stress-reducing “script” to recite to yourself whenever you are feeling stressed.** Your script should include 1) instructions to relax, 2) suggestions for recalling material, 3) test cues, and 4) some generally supportive and up-beat language.
- **Get a full night’s sleep and eat a good meal.** Eating well and getting adequate sleep are crucial to maintaining your mental and physical health. Sometimes lack of sleep doesn’t catch up with you for several days, so be sure to make time for sleeping and eat well for several days before the test.

On the Day of the Exam

- **Avoid talking about the exam.** This can cause you more nervousness, so keep to yourself or try to change the topic if you are chatting with someone.
- **Arrive early.** Give yourself plenty of time to get to class so that you minimize stress. Find a seat with good lighting and few distractions, such as one in the front of the room.
- **Unload on paper.** Spend ten minutes writing about your thoughts, feelings, and fears immediately before taking the test.
- **Affirm your values.** In the face of “stereotype threat”—the possibility that a poor performance will confirm negative assumptions about a group to which you belong—journal briefly about something you value and why it matters to you.

During the Exam

- **Plan your approach.** Unless specified, you can take the test in the order you want. Skim through when you get it—if you can—and choose an approach. The order is up to you: starting with an easy question can boost your confidence, but you may want to begin with written response questions to give yourself enough time.

- **Skip if you get stuck.** If you can't think of an answer for a question, mark it and move on. For essay and short answer questions, jot down what you can recall so you don't forget. You might spark your memory during the rest of the test.
- **Ask for clarification.** Don't hesitate to ask for help from the professor, teaching assistant, or proctor if you are unclear about the instructions, procedure, question wording, etc.
- **Focus on the test.** It may be tempting to compare your performance to other students. The truth is, however, wondering how other students are doing not only creates more stress but also wastes your time.

Still Anxious?

Don't worry; you're not the only one. Everyone is anxious about tests. If you weren't, you wouldn't try. It's fairly obvious that too much stress is a problem. However, a certain amount of stress before the test is good. It acts as a motivator and can enhance performance.

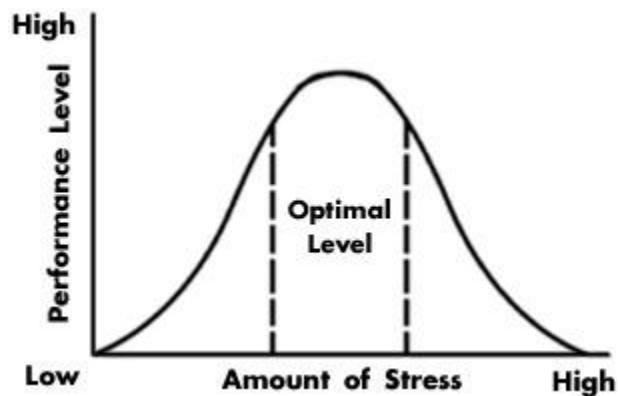


Figure 1. Stress Bell Curve

If you start to feel too anxious...

- **Practice relaxation exercises.** Focus on your breathing. Tense and then relax groups of muscles (shoulders, legs, arms, etc.). Focus on the groups of muscles that get most tense. Practice these same relaxation exercises when you are at home studying so that your body associates relaxation with the material you are studying.
- **Visualize success.** Imagine yourself earning an A on the test, getting a high grade in the course, graduating, having a successful career, etc.
- **Think positively.** Henry Ford said, "Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right." If you find yourself thinking negatively or starting to panic, use thought-stopping techniques (such as silently saying "Stop!" to yourself) to stop the negative thought process. Then say some positive things to yourself to replace the negative thoughts. Recite your stress-reducing script.
- **Detach your self-esteem from your academic performance.** You are much more than just a student. Think about what is special about you as a person separate from the

letter grade on that test and remind yourself liberally of your gifts and talents. This alone can decrease anxiety by putting the current academic situation into perspective.

- **Remind yourself that you know how to deal with this panic now.** Remember, the goal is not to avoid test jitters, but to *manage* it so it helps you, not hinders you.

For more information on managing test jitters, make an appointment with an [academic coach](#). Appointments are available in person at the [Student Success Center](#) or online.

Adapted from "Test Anxiety: Why It Is Increasing and 3 Ways to Curb It," by Valerie Strauss (10 Feb. 2013) and "Reducing Test Anxiety and Stress," by Pasco-Hernando State College.