

Steps For Overcoming Test and Performance Anxiety

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- 1) Learn how to relax deeply.

Obtain a relaxation tape from the library or a store that sells relaxation kinds of music. Note that you can obtain tapes that combine music and the voice of an expert hypnotherapist who will guide you in learning to relax. Some of these tapes are specifically for learning to overcome test anxiety and can be very helpful. Do not buy a "subliminal" tape as there is evidence that these sorts of tapes are not effective. It is important that you learn how to become very relaxed when you tell yourself to do so. Learning to do this means learning a skill, which you enhance through practice. When you have learned relaxation, you will be able to become very calm and relaxed quickly.

- 2) Make a list of five situations where you become anxious around test taking. These should be actual situations that you can imagine happening. Then rank order these situations from low anxiety to high anxiety. For example you might become anxious when you receive your test, or when you come to a question you don't know. Write these situations down in order from low anxiety to high anxiety.
- 3) Develop several positive suggestions for yourself. A positive suggestion consists of all positive words. A suggestion such as "Don't feel anxious" is mostly "Feel anxious" with a "Don't" in front of it. It is much better to phrase your suggestion in a positive way like "I've worked hard so I'll do the best I can."
- 4) Make yourself comfortable and then imagine yourself in the first anxiety producing situation. When you start to feel anxious, tell yourself to relax and say your suggestion to yourself. If you still remain anxious, let go of the situation and imagine yourself in a relaxing place. Once you are relaxed, imagine the situation again. Do this over and over until imagining the situation no longer makes you anxious. By overcoming anxiety associated with this situation in fantasy, you will have largely overcome it in real life. You will also be training yourself to think supportive and helpful thoughts in the face of adversity rather than self defeating thoughts.
- 5) Go through all your anxiety producing situations one at a time, learning to become relaxed when you think of these difficult situations.
- 6) If you work on your anxiety using these techniques, you will find that you can markedly improve your anxiety around testing (or any event that makes you anxious). When you go to take the test you will find that you respond to stress more with reasonable thinking and relaxation rather than self-defeating thinking and stress. You must practice though to show improvement in test anxiety.
- 7) For more help make an appointment to see one of the psychologists at the Counseling, Testing and Career Center, 306 Simmons Hall, 330-972-7082