

Steps for Overcoming Test and Performance Anxiety

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- 1) Learn how to relax deeply.

It is important that you learn how to become very relaxed when you tell yourself to do so. Obtain a relaxation CD by going to music store or listening to the relaxation script available at our website (www.uakron.edu/counseling). Our script is only 15 minutes and is quite effective for inducing relaxation. You want to learn to associate the word “relax” with a calm feeling. Listening to a relaxation script that repeatedly cues you to relax will do this for you. Learning to relax, and relax on command, means learning a skill, which you enhance through practice. When you have learned relaxation skills, 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, when people finishing the test around you leave, or when you come to several questions you don't know. A big one is hearing others talk about the test in the hallway before you enter the testing room, and not knowing what they are talking about. 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. Phrase your suggestion in a positive way like "I don't have to get them all to do well" when you come to questions you don't know
- 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 (covertly), you will be on the way to overcoming it in real life. You will be training yourself to relax and 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, and learn 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 stressful situations with more reasonable thinking and relaxation rather than self-defeating thinking and anxiety. Because you are calmer, your test responses will be more intuitive. You must practice to show improvement in test anxiety.
- 7) For more help make an appointment to see one of the psychologists or counselors at The Counseling Center. They can construct a customized program for you.