

Math Anxiety

The following suggestions come from How to Get Good Grades In College “Step Nine: Reduce Test Anxiety” by Woodburn Press (2005).

While a little anxiety before a test improves concentration and alertness, excessive worry, or test anxiety, can lower one’s test scores.

It’s possible for students with test anxiety to get themselves so worked up that they can’t think clearly. The brain is like a computer in that it contains a great deal of information. This information is useless, however, if you’re not able to “access” it when you need it. Having test anxiety is like not having the password to your computer. The information is there, but you can’t get to it.

To reduce test anxiety, study enough to feel confident that you know the material. Then try to replace the worry and negative thinking with thoughts that are positive and relaxing. Some of the following suggestions may help you.

- Start studying early. The night before a test, review the material and get a good night’s sleep. Cramming increases test anxiety.
- Mentally practice going through the testing experience. Close your eyes and see yourself walking confidently into the test, answering the questions correctly, and receiving the grade you want.
- Walk into the test with your head up and your shoulders back. How you act can affect how you feel. If you act confident, you just may find that you feel more confident.
- Try these five relaxation techniques: 1) Take a deep breath, hold it, and then slowly release your breath along with the tension. 2) Start at the top of your head, flexing, and then relaxing each part of your body. 3) Close your eyes and visualize warm sunshine washing over you, melting away the tension, and relaxing all of your muscles. 4) Close your eyes and let your arms hang down at your sides. As you relax, visualize the tension from your head, neck, and shoulders flowing down your arms and out your fingertips. 5) Think of a place where you feel very relaxed and calm. Close your eyes and visualize being in that place.

The more you practice positive thinking and relaxation techniques, the better you’ll get at using them. If you continue to have problems with test anxiety, talk to your adviser or to a counselor. Libraries and bookstores also have books and tapes that can help you.