

# TEST ANXIETY STRATEGIES

## Quiz

Check the response that seems most characteristic of you.

Never, Sometimes, Usually

Have trouble sleeping the night before a test.	-----
Before a test, I get a headache.	-----
I lose my appetite before a test.	-----
Because of panic, I have cut class on a test day.	-----
My heart pounds just before or during a test.	-----
During a test, my palms sweat.	-----
I have become nauseated and had to leave the classroom.	-----
I have had pains in my neck, back, or legs during a test.	-----
I feel nervous and jittery when I am taking a test.	-----
During a test, my chest feels tight and I have trouble remembering.	-----
I make careless errors on tests.	-----
My mind goes blank during tests.	-----
I worry when other students are finished before I am.	-----
I feel pushed for time when I am taking a test.	-----
I worry that I am doing poorly and everyone else is doing well.	-----
When I am taking a test, I think about my past failures.	-----
During a test, I feel as if I studied all the wrong things.	-----
I can't think clearly during tests.	-----
I have a hard time understanding and remembering test directions.	-----
I remember answers to questions I left blank or got wrong after.	-----

Questions 1-10 on the self-assessment refer **to physical symptoms** of test anxiety; questions 11- 20 refer to **mental symptoms**.

If you checked “sometimes” or “usually” ten or more times, you may have some test anxiety. Visit a counselor and talk about how you feel before, during, and after taking tests.

Test anxiety is a learned response; and because you learned it, you can unlearn it. This lesson will give you a better understanding of test anxiety and identify coping strategies to reduce it.

## What Causes Your Test Anxiety?

If you are like most test-anxious students, your anxiety results from several common causes:

- Being afraid you won't live up to the expectations of important people in your life; worrying that you will lose the affection of people you care about if you don't succeed
- Believing grades are an estimation of your personal worth
- Placing too much emphasis on a single test
- Giving in to guilt feelings or anxiety as a result of inadequate preparation for tests
- Feeling helpless, believing that you have no control over your performance or grades

## Expectations

Many students' perceptions of what their parents or important others expect are inaccurate. If you worry that you will alienate people you care about unless you do well in college, you may become fearful and anxious that you will disappoint them or make them angry. If you believe that you can't live up to the expectations of others, tests may make you especially anxious.

## Grades and Self-Esteem

A grade of D, F, or even C for some students translates into —I'm stupid" or —I'm not college material." These feelings may lead to a loss of self-esteem and more anxiety. Students who equate test grades with self-worth are assigning more importance to grades than they deserve. One real value of testing is that it gives you an opportunity to find out what information you understand well enough to associate with material that you will learn later. Before your next exam, you can give this material a quick review. Mistakes on a test pinpoint areas that you need to study more thoroughly for the next exam.

## Feelings of Helplessness

If you have an external locus of control, you may not see the connection between study and grades. You may become anxious because you cannot predict the outcome of a test. Even if your locus of control is internal, you may feel temporarily helpless in a testing situation when you know you have not studied enough. Feeling guilty for not meeting your responsibilities may cause you to experience test anxiety.

Once you have identified the cause of your test anxiety, you can take steps eliminate it. The chart on the following page shows you how to start.

## Test Anxiety: Causes and Eliminators

**Cause:** Trying to meet other people's expectations

**Eliminator:** Decide whether living up to these expectations is something you want to do for yourself. Set your own goals and live up to your own expectations.

**Cause:** Fearing loss of affection

**Eliminator:** Understand that people like you and value your presence in their lives for many reasons, none of which is the grade you made on a test.

**Cause:** Letting grades determine your self-worth

**Eliminator:** Realize that a grade is only an approximate measure of your performance. Grades have nothing to do with you as a person but are a helpful guide to what you need to review.

**Cause:** Placing excessive emphasis on a single test

**Eliminator:** Your semester grade may also include quizzes, homework, papers, presentations, lab reports, and class participation. Keep up with the material as if you must take a major test every week to demonstrate what you are learning and how to apply information.

**Cause:** Giving in to guilt or anxiety due to lack of preparation

**Eliminator:** College requires a commitment of time and money. If you are truly well prepared, you'll forgive yourself for a few mistakes due to stress or anxiety. If you feel guilty, it may be because you have not really done your best to make school a priority and focus in your life.

**Cause:** Underpreparing and going blank

**Eliminator:** The purpose of tests and exams is to evaluate your retention of course material and apply the information to demonstrate understanding or to solve new problems. Failing to properly prepare and doing poorly on the exam becomes a self-perpetuating cycle of low effort leading to low grades.

**Cause:** Feeling helpless, with no control over what happens

**Eliminator:** Take charge by developing an internal locus of control. Improve your study habits. Prepare for your next test, starting now. Observe the connection between the amount and quality of your studying and the grade you earn.