

How to Calm Test Jitters and Do Well on the Test

Be Prepared.

Nothing helps you stay calm during the test as well as knowing that you have truly prepared for the exam. Study well in advance and follow test preparation suggestions from Student Support Services to help you be at your best. Be sure you have everything you need for the test: pens, pencils, blue books, erasers, calculators, rulers, etc. Put all of these materials in your bag or backpack the night before so you will be ready. Get a good night's sleep the night before and eat before taking the test. You need to be at your best physically to do well mentally. Dress in layers if the classroom temperature is not reliable or comfortable.

Arrive at the Test Early.

Get to the classroom with time to spare. Allow yourself enough time to get settled, lay out your supplies, and relax. Having a few minutes to catch your breath will help you relax and focus on what is ahead. Allow at least five extra minutes so you're not dashing in at the last minute, huffing and puffing.

Choose Your Seat Carefully.

Sitting near your friends during a test can be disrupting. If you see your friends turning in tests early, it may pressure you to do the same, even if you aren't finished. Choose a seat in the front of the room, so you can clearly see the instructor. Also, stay away from students who tend to chew and snap gum loudly, read questions aloud to themselves, play with their pens, etc. Avoid all possible distractions.

Be Cool.

Since you have arrived at the test early and are fully prepared for success, you should be relaxed. If you have last-minute jitters, take a few deep breaths and focus on a pleasant scene. Imagine being at the lake, beach, or park, for example. Remind yourself that you are well-prepared. Convince yourself that other students have aced this test and you can, too. Stay focused on the task at hand.

Don't Talk About the Test with Classmates Immediately Beforehand, If You Know It Will Raise Your Anxiety Level.

If you talk about being nervous or scared, it might make things worse and make you more paranoid and not focused on the test.

Pay Close Attention to ALL Directions – Spoken and Written.

Usually the directions are given both orally and in writing. Pay very close attention to them, because doing so can make the difference between a high grade and a low one. Ask yourself these questions:

- “How many questions do I have to answer?” On some tests you need to answer all questions, on others, only a few. Look for phrases like, “Choose one of the four possible essay topics”, etc. Look over ALL topics or problems before beginning.
- “Where do I have to write my answers?” You might have a special answer sheet, a text booklet, or your own paper.
- “Will I be penalized for guessing?” The instructor might subtract a point for incorrect answers. If there is no penalty for guessing, never leave an answer blank.
- “How much information do I have to include?” You might have to show every step in a math problem, for instance, or include four paragraphs in your essay.

If you still have questions or things are unclear after the instructor speaks and you have read all of the directions, raise your hand and get the answers you need. Be sure you completely understand the directions before you plunge into the test.

Budget Your Time.

Before you start working on the test, figure out how much each part counts. On some tests, every question is worth the same amount. On others, some sections may be weighted differently. The amount that each question or section is worth affects the time you should spend on each part of the test. Spend the most time on sections that count the most. Spend the least time on sections that count the least. You also may need to budget your time if you are writing an essay. Don't make yourself frantic trying to stick to the exact schedule, but do try to keep track of time and stay focused. Here are some essay writing guidelines.

If you have half an hour to write an essay....

Planning	3 minutes
Drafting	15 minutes
Revising and Editing	10 minutes
Proofreading	2 – 3 minutes

If you have an hour to write an essay....

Planning	5 minutes
Drafting	40 minutes
Revising and Editing	12 minutes
Proofreading	2 – 3 minutes

If you have time left over, spend it:

- Double-checking your answers. Only change them if you are POSITIVE that the answer you had originally is wrong. Usually your first answer is the correct one.
- Returning to questions you could not answer the first time
- Proofreading your essay for errors in grammar, usage, and punctuation
- Recopying messy parts of your essay

Activity Reduces Anxiety

If you go blank and can't think of the right answer, go on to another question or another part of the test.

Relax Yourself Physically During the Test.

If you notice during the test you are not thinking well or are tight, pause, lay your test aside, and take several slow, deep breaths. Concentrate on your breathing. Do this if you notice that you are worrying too much about one problem, not reading carefully, or forgetting information you know.

Read the Entire Test

Before you start working on the test, take a few minutes to skim everything. Look for:

- The types of questions (short answer, true-false, etc.)
- The content of the questions
- Which questions look easy and which ones look difficult

Jot Down Notes and Key Facts

Write down any important facts or details while they are still fresh in your memory. This information may help you later in the test. Also, having some notes reduces test anxiety because it reminds you that you have learned a lot. Depending on the test content, you may want to jot down:

- Math formulas
- Science facts
- Key historical dates and events
- Important fictional characters or real-life people
- Literary terms (rhyme, simile, metaphor, allegory)
- Geographical places and features (lakes, rivers, oceans, etc.)
- Foreign language words and their definitions

Don't Second-Guess Yourself

There are NO set patterns for tests. The pattern of letters doesn't matter at all. If you start to think that you have chosen the wrong answer, analyze the question rather than the answer pattern.

References and Resources

* Rozakis, Laurie. (2003). Test-taking strategies and study skills for the utterly confused. McGraw-Hill, New York.

*UT Austin Learning Center

* University at Buffalo Counseling Center: <http://ub-counseling.buffalo.edu/stresstest anxiety.shtml>

* Campus Blues: <http://www.campusblues.com/test.asp>