

Reducing Test Anxiety during Term Break

“Why worry? If you’ve done the very best you can, worrying won’t make it any better.” - Walt Disney

By now, you will have likely had your first tests of the semester, and perhaps these are your first tests of your university career. If they did not go well, you may be thinking that nerves, stress, and anxiety got in the way and impacted your performance. Perhaps you did well but are not accustomed to the level of stress that you experienced before, during and after these tests. Either way, you may be looking for ways to reduce the anxiety you were feeling so that finals are a more positive experience.

The good news is that there are proven, easy, effective strategies to deal with test anxiety that should improve your experience and your performance. Here are some tips to keep in mind as you think about and prepare for the next round of tests.

- Remember that some anxiety is helpful and can improve performance. Remind yourself that all those signs of anxiety you may be experiencing – sweaty palms, racing heart, shallow breathing, muscle tension – are your body getting ready for action.
- Try to practice some simple relaxation strategies. Breathe deeply from your belly by inhaling slowly (a count of four), pause and hold a moment, then fully exhale (another four count). Pause and hold a moment before repeating several times. Alternately you can practice relaxation by using a calming app (the free [Mindshift app](#) has several short relaxation strategies), practicing meditation, or using a relaxation strategy, such as [Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#). You can try these while studying or thinking about upcoming tests to help create a connection between being relaxed and the test situation.
- If your thoughts are getting in the way, try taking a step back from them. If you are thinking thoughts such as “I’m going to fail” “I will freak out and blank” or “I’m not prepared,” try repeating them back with the preface “I’m having the thought that ...” and they will have less impact.
- Remind yourself of your past successes, the many tests you did well on, your ability, the studying you have done and the ways you have overcome adversity in the past.
- Finally, an easy and effective strategy is to write about your worries before your exam. Show up early to your tests and find a quiet place to freely write down all your worries about the test. By dumping these thoughts out, you can clear your head and perform better on your exam.