

# Test Taking Skills

## Coping with Test Anxiety Using

## Reading Strategies

Although they may not seem related, reading strategies can greatly reduce test anxiety by increasing information retention and understanding--thus boosting confidence

### Reading Strategies for Assigned Reading: Finding Key Information

- **Skim** through the whole chapter first to prep your brain for what you're about to learn. **If there's a summary at the end, read that.**
- **Stop and ask a question** about each heading. Determine if you can answer such questions as "What is \_\_\_\_" or "What is the impact of \_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_?"  
*When you ask questions about what you're about to read, you get your brain interested in finding the answer, such that you'll not only pay more attention to it, you'll be more likely to remember it.*
- **Use think-aloud strategies whenever possible.**  
*("Ok, so this relates to that, which is a necessary component of...")*
- **Connect what you're learning about to experiences** you've had and/or examples in movies, TV, cartoons...something that would be memorable and applicable.  
*The more "out there" the better. Then write it down!*
- **Take notes as you go**—in the margins, on another piece of paper, on your computer...whatever works for you.
- **Start a "Vocab List"** and add new words to it, along with their definitions and any memory aids that will help (**mnemonics**, like "ROY G BIV" or "Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally," stick figure drawings, or connections to a class discussion).

### Maximizing Efficiency and Recall During Test Taking

- Jot down any information that's consuming space in your brain that you'll need for the test
- Skim the whole test and develop a plan for where to start
- Read and pay careful attention to all directions and instructions.
- Decide exactly what the question is asking.
- Read and respond to items one at a time rather than thinking about the whole test.
- When you identify wrong answers to eliminate, cross them out.
- Don't spend too much time on any one question.
- Skip difficult questions until all other questions have been answered. On a piece of scrap paper, keep a record of all the unanswered items to return to, if time permits.
- Only change an answer if you discover new information that makes you feel sure the first one you picked was wrong.

# Strategies to Lessen Test Anxiety



## Before the Test

- **Know the test.** Check with the teacher to make sure you know what material will be covered, and that you have all the notes and other materials you will need to adequately prepare.
- **Implement an effective study plan.** Space study sessions out over the course of a week, rather than cramming days (or the night!) before. Use a variety of study strategies, and enlist the help of friends to quiz you on trouble spots.
- **Use practice tests.** Construct practice tests covering the test material. Use the same format your teacher will be using for the real test. Use test-taking strategies and simulate testing conditions as much as possible to get yourself used to them. The more experience you have, the less anxious you are apt to be during the real test.
- **Use good coping skills.** Find ways to de-stress that take your mind off your studies, at least temporarily. Take breaks from studying, have a snack, or get some physical exercise.
- **Prepare physically.** Get a good night's rest the night before a test, and be sure to eat a healthy breakfast in the morning. Being sleep or nutrient-deprived will have a direct impact on your ability to access your frontal lobe. You won't perform at your best if you are tired or hungry.
- **Put things in perspective.** Avoid a perfectionist attitude about academic performance. Impossible expectations can increase stress levels and have a negative impact on achievement.
- **Write down all your test-related worries.** Studies looking at MRIs of the brain have shown that purging your brain of all your worries just before a test helps to free up cognitive space to dedicate to information retrieval.



## During the Test

- **Cover parts of the test with a piece of paper if necessary to keep you from getting distracted or overwhelmed.** Leave harder questions to come back to later, and make sure you read directions, questions, and possible answers carefully.
- **Try positive self talk.** Negative thoughts and beliefs can become self-fulfilling prophecies. Try replacing these with more positive affirmations that support and encourage your efforts.
- **When you feel your stress level increasing, stop and consciously relax.** Use stress reduction techniques like deep breathing (inhale to the count of 5 and exhale to the count of 5), muscle relaxation (tensing up all of your muscles and then releasing them), stretching or visualizing yourself leaving the testing room afterwards feeling confident and in control.

