**Managing Test Anxiety**

What does test anxiety feel like?

* Some students feel mainly physical distress symptoms such as headaches, nausea, faintness, feeling too or cold, etc.
* Other students express more emotion, wanting to cry or laugh too much, or feeling angry or helpless.
* The major problem of test anxiety is usually its effect on thinking ability; it can cause you to blank out or have racing thoughts that are difficult to control.
* Although many, if not the vase majority, of students feel some level of anxiety when writing exams, most can cope with that anxiety and bring it down to a manageable level.

What can you do to control test anxiety?

*Before the test:*

* Be well prepared for the test.
* Include as much self-testing in your review as possible. Ask your professors if they will give you practice tests and take them in the same environment where the actual test will take place
* Make summary sheets or note cards that highlight the most important information. Put the information in your own words.
* Get enough sleep several days before the exam. Sleep deprivation is cumulative and can have serious consequences for memory and concentration.
* Avoid caffeine and other stimulants, which can increase anxiety.
* Anxiety is contagious. Avoid others who are talking anxiously about the exam.
* As you anticipate the exam, think positively, i.e. “I can do OK on this exam”, “I have studied and do know my stuff”. Do some serious thought-stopping if you find that you are mentally comparing yourself to your peers or thinking about what your parents, professors, romantic partner, etc. may say about your performance on this exam.
* Before you go to bed on the night before the exam, make sure to collect together anything you will need for the exam – pen, pencil, ruler, eraser, calculator, etc. Double-check the time of the exam and the location.
* Set the alarm clock and then get a good night’s sleep before the exam.
* Get to the exam in plenty of time.
* Do not study up to one hour before the exam. Visualize yourself taking the test in a calm and confident manner.

*During the test:*

* Sit in a location in the exam room where you will be distracted as little as possible.
* Remind yourself that a little nervousness just means that your body and mind are ready for a challenge.
* As the papers are distributed, calm yourself down by closing your eyes and taking some slow, deep breaths.
* Make sure to read carefully any instructions on the top page of the exam. Think of the exam as an opportunity to show what you know – NOT as a measure of your value as a person.
* As you work on the exam, focus only on the exam, not on what other students are doing.
* If you feel very anxious or even panicky in the test, take a few minutes time out and calm yourself down:
  + Stretch your arms and legs and then relax them again. Do this a couple of times. Take a few slow, deep breaths.
  + Do some positive internal self-talk; say to yourself “I will be Ok, I can do this”.
  + Interrupt the anxiety by doing something such as asking the instructor a question, getting a drink, or sharpening your pencil
* Start with questions you know.
* For essay questions, make a short outline and write a summary sentence so you know where you’re going.
* For multiple choice questions, read all options first then eliminate the most obvious. Rely on your first impression and then move on quickly. Beware of words such as: only, always and most.
* If the exam is more difficult than you anticipated, try to focus and just do your best at that point. It might be enough to get you through, even with a reasonable grade.
* When the exam is over, treat yourself to something fun.

*After the test:*

* Learn from your performance. Review the test carefully to find out where you can improve.
* See your professor to review what you can do for the next test.
* Use your test as a guideline for preparing for the next exam.
* Separate your grade from your self-esteem.
* The most successful performers focus on what they can do better in the future rather than what they did not do in the past.
* Compliment yourself on any improvements, including an improvement in your anxiety level.
* Change doesn’t happen overnight – be patient.