

How to Keep Calm During Tests

Prepare well in advance. Keep up day to day if you can, but do not judge yourself harshly if you don't. Avoid last minute cramming. Don't go without sleep the night before (although 4 or 5 hours may be enough). Stop studying an hour or so before the test, relax and compose yourself.

Know time and place of the test and what you need to bring. Be on time, neither too early nor too late; bring supplies. Do not rush.

Do not talk about the test with classmates immediately beforehand if you know it raises your anxiety level. To do so may nourish group paranoia.

Read over the test and plan your approach. Ascertain point values, time limits, which question you'll start with, etc.

Don't hesitate to ask for clarification from the professor, teaching assistant, or proctor if you have questions about directions, procedure, etc. rather than letting anxiety build up because you are not sure about what you are expected to do.

Develop an aggressive yet realistic attitude. Approach the test vigorously determined that you will do your best, but also accept the limits of what you know at the moment. Use everything you know to do well, but do not blame yourself for what you do not know.

Activity reduces anxiety. If you go blank and cannot think of anything to write, go on to another question or another part of the test. On an essay, jot down anything you can recall on scratch paper to stimulate your memory and get your mind working.

Relax yourself physically during the test. If you notice you are not thinking well or feel 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 excessively about one problem, not reading carefully, or forgetting information you know.

Pay attention to the test, not to yourself or others. Do not waste time worrying, doubting yourself, wondering how other people are doing, blaming yourself, etc. Don't worry about what you should have done; pay attention to what you can do now.

Adapted from the Learning Skills Center, University of Texas at Austin.