Reducing Test Anxiety

Before the test

- Start preparing for exams as soon as you can; cramming is a big culprit of test anxiety.
- Talk to your professor or TA about suggestions for studying effectively. Ask about the test format (will it be essay, objective, fill-in-the-blank?).
- Create and review summary sheets with an overall view of the material.
- Write out 3x5 cards (flash cards) for quizzing yourself on specific concepts or formulas.
- Practice writing and taking your own tests—without referring to notes or other resources when answering questions. This will help you get used to the time limit and see what concepts you need to spend more time reviewing.
- Get plenty of sleep the night before the exam.
- Get out stress through physical activity.
- Do not have more caffeine than usual.
- Relax just before the exam with stretching or a pre-exam playlist. Remember to breathe deeply and slowly.
- Avoid last-chance studying right before the exam; remember you are already prepared.
- Avoid listening to others or discussing the exam with others while waiting for the exam. The anxiety of others can “rub off” and suddenly you begin to doubt yourself.
- Approach the exam with confidence. It is not a judgment of your ability, competence, or future potential. It is one measure of your knowledge at this particular moment. You have prepared; now it's time to show it!
- Plan a reward as something to look forward to after the exam.

During the test

- Review the entire test before answering any questions. Read the directions twice. Then, plan out your approach to the exam.
- Avoid making snap judgments. Anxiety will be worst at the start.
- Remember that having moderate levels of test anxiety is normal and even helpful. Don’t feel pressured to be completely free of anxiety.
- If you go blank, skip the question and come back to it later.
- To provide an outlet for anxiety and increase accuracy, jot down why you are choosing or eliminating answers to multiple-choice questions.
- If you’re taking an essay test and you go blank on the whole test, pick a question and start writing. It may trigger the answer in your mind.
- Remind yourself that perfection is not expected on essay tests. Just write.
- Make a schedule for answering questions. Allow more time for higher point questions. Pace yourself to answer as many questions as possible.
- Focus your attention on the test. Don’t waste time and energy thinking about the consequences of not doing well or wondering what others are doing.
- Don't get bogged down by questions you don't know; move on. Later, the answer may come to you or you may get clues from other exam questions.
- Replace any negative thoughts with positive ones (“The test is important, but there will be others.” “Feeling challenged is a good thing; I can handle it.” “I can figure it out.”)
- Ask for clarification from the professor (or proctor) if directions are unclear.
- Don't panic when other students start handing in their papers. There's no reward for being the first to finish.