

HOW TO REDUCE TEST ANXIETY

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

There are both short-term and long-term relaxation response techniques that help control emotional (somatic) and worry (cognitive) test anxiety. Once these procedures are learned, the relaxation response will take the place of an anxiety response.

THE TENSING AND DIFFERENTIAL RELAXATION METHOD

1. Put your feet flat on the floor.
2. With your hands, grab underneath the chair.
3. Push down with your feet and pull up on your chair at the same time for about five seconds.
4. Relax for five to ten seconds, two or three times.
6. Relax all your muscles except the ones that are actually used to take the test.

THE PALMING METHOD

1. Close and cover your eyes using the center of the palms of your hands.
2. Prevent your hands from touching your eyes by resting the lower parts of your palms on your cheekbones and placing your fingers on your forehead.
3. Think of some real or imaginary relaxing scene. Mentally visualize this scene. Picture the scene as if you were actually there, looking through your own eyes.
4. Visualize this relaxing scene for one to two minutes.

DEEP BREATHING

1. Sit straight up in your chair in a good posture position.
2. Slowly inhale through your nose.
3. As you inhale, first fill the lower section of your lungs and work your way up to the upper part of your lungs.
4. Hold your breath for a few seconds.
5. Exhale slowly through your mouth.
6. Wait a few seconds and repeat the cycle.

TIGHTEN AND RELEASE

1. Tighten the muscles in your toes. Hold for 10 seconds, release and enjoy the sensation of release of tension
2. Move slowly through your body— feet, legs, abdomen, back, neck, face- contracting and relaxing muscles as you go
3. Breathe deeply and slowly

MELT THE TENSION

1. Close your eyes.
2. Visualize warm sunshine washing over you and melting away the tension from your body and relaxing all your muscles
3. As you relax, visualize the tension flowing from your shoulders, back, neck down your arms and out your fingertips

LONG-TERM RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

The cue-controlled relaxation response technique is the best long-term relaxation technique. It is presented on side two of the audiocassette *How To Reduce Test Anxiety* (Nolting, 1986). Cue-controlled relaxation means you can induce your own relaxation based on repeating certain cue words to yourself. In essence, you are taught to relax and then silently repeat cue words, such as "I am relaxed." After enough practice you can relax during tests.

NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

Negative self-talk (cognitive anxiety) is defined as the negative statements you tell yourself before and during tests. Negative self-talk causes students to lose confidence and to give up on tests. Students need to change their negative self-talk to positive self-talk without making unrealistic statements.

During tests, positive self-talk can build confidence and decrease your test anxiety. Using positive self-talk before a test can help reduce your test anxiety and improve your grades.

EXAMPLES OF NEGATIVE SELF-TALK:

- "No matter what I do, I will not pass the course."
- "I am no good at math, so why should I try?"
- "I cannot remember the answers or I have forgotten the information. I am going to fail this test."
- "I failed this course last semester, and I am going to flunk out again this semester."

EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE SELF-TALK

- "I failed the course last semester, but I can now use my study skills to pass this course."
- "I went blank on the last test, but I now know how to reduce test anxiety."
- "I know that with hard work, I will pass the class."
- "I prepared for this test and will do the best I can."
- "I feel good about myself and my abilities. I am not going to worry about that difficult problem. I'm going to use all my test time and check for careless errors. Even if I don't get the grade I want on this test, it is not the end of the world."

THOUGHT-STOPPING TECHNIQUES

Some students have difficulty stopping their negative self-talk. These students cannot just tell themselves to eliminate those thoughts. These students need to use a thought-stopping technique to overcome their worry and become relaxed.

To stop your thoughts in the classroom or during a test, silently shout to yourself "Stop" or "Stop thinking about that." After your *silent shout*, either relax yourself or repeat one of your positive self-talk statements. You may have to *shout* to yourself several times during a test or while doing homework to control negative self-talk. After every shout, use a different relaxation technique/scene or positive self-talk statement.

Thought stopping works because it interrupts the worry response before it can cause high anxiety or negative emotions. During the interruption, you can replace negative self-talk with positive self-talk statements or relaxation. Students with high worry anxiety should practice this technique three days to one week before taking a test. Contact the campus counselor if you have additional questions about how to reduce test anxiety/negative self-talk statements.

REFERENCE:

Paul D. Nolting, Ph.D., *Math Study Skills Workbook, Your Guide to Reducing Test Anxiety and Improving Study Strategies*, 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.