

## Reducing Math Test Anxiety II - Taking Math Tests

### Also refer to Reducing Math Test Anxiety I - Preparing for Math Tests

Reducing test anxiety does not only involve doing something differently during the test.

### **Test Anxiety**

If you are reading this document, you probably have experienced test anxiety. Test anxiety can range from "butterflies" to nausea. It can occur during a test or just while thinking about taking a test. Many students complain of going "blank" on a test due to test anxiety.

Some amount of anxiety is positive and natural. This amount of anxiety helps keep you mentally and physically alert. Too much anxiety, however, may actually interfere with your test taking abilities. It may cause physical distress and emotional upset, block your ability to recall information, and cause a decrease in concentration as you spend more time and energy worrying about doing poorly on the test than working on the test.

### **What are the Causes of Test Anxiety?**

Test anxiety is often a learned response to negative emotions associated with a history of past failures. You may have experiences of blanking out on a test. One of the main causes of this is lack of preparation for an exam. Be sure to review Reducing Math Test Anxiety I - Preparing for Math Tests. If you have adequately prepared for the test, your anxiety may be the result of negative thinking and focusing on your past performance on tests.

### **Immediately before the Test**

Arrive early so you can find a seat in an area where you'll be comfortable. Avoid people who are talking about the test material.

If you are feeling anxious, try one of these five short-term relaxation techniques to reduce your anxiety. (One of these techniques will work best for you. Picking the correct one can only be done through trial and error.)

1. Count to three works by slowing down your breathing rate.
  - a. Inhale through your nose to a slow count of three.
  - b. Hold this to a slow count of three.
  - c. Exhale through your nose to a slow count of three.
  - d. Hold (without inhaling) to a slow count of three.
  - e. Repeat several times.
2. Tension Differential works by physical relaxation of your muscles.
  - a. From a sitting position, place your feet flat on the floor.
  - b. Hold the underside of your chair with your hands.
  - c. Push down with your feet and pull up on the chair at the **SAME TIME**.



2. **Preview the test.** Put your name on the test and start previewing. Previewing the test requires you to look through the entire test, reading the directions, in order to find different types of problems and their point values (if these are given). Put a mark by the questions that look easy. These are the questions that you will solve first.
3. **Do a second memory data dump.** If anything was jarred from your memory while previewing the test, write down this information by the information from the first memory data dump.
4. **Be aware of the time.** While you shouldn't be preoccupied with the time, it is important to be aware of it and how much of it you have left for taking the test so you can organize your time efficiently. You must determine the best way to get the most points in the least amount of time. Be aware of the point value of each question (if this is given) as well as how difficult you think that question will be for you to solve (which will relate to how long it will probably take you to solve it).
5. **Answer the easiest problems first, skipping the more difficult.** Solve the easiest problems first (hopefully you marked most of them when you previewed the test.) Try to answer the easier problems efficiently and quickly, so you'll have more time to spend on the difficult problems and the ones worth more points. If you find a problem that you do not know how to work, read it twice and automatically skip it. Reading it twice will help you understand the problem and put it into your working memory. While you are solving other problems, your mind is still working on that problem. Difficult problems could be the type of problem you have never seen before or a problem in which you get stuck on the second or third step. In either case, skip the problem and go on to the next one.
6. **Use your problem solving skills:** Use critical thinking and creative problem solving. Let your mind ponder possibilities and what-ifs. Illustrate the problem by drawing a picture, diagram or chart to help you understand the problem. Ask yourself questions. "What is being asked? What do I already know? What are the givens? What do I need to find out? How does this connect and relate with other concepts? What is the point of the question?" Break the problem down step by step. Make an estimate, or a calculated guess to give you an approximate answer.
7. **Write out all of your steps.** Clearly show your work by writing down each step of each problem. This will allow you to retrace your steps if you get stuck, as well as get partial credit if you don't get the correct final answer. If you wrote your work on scratch paper, be sure to staple it to your math test when you turn it in. If you miscopied the answer from the scratch paper, you may get credit for the answer. If you get the answer incorrect due to a careless error, your work on the scratch paper could give you a few points.
8. **Review the skipped problems.** Do as much work as you can on each problem, even if it is just writing down the first step. If you cannot write down the first step, rewrite the problem. Sometimes rewriting the problem can jar your memory enough to do the first step or the entire problem. Look for a similar problem and determine what

method worked for that problem and how it relates to the one you are currently working on. While it's important to write down as much as you can for each problem, remember not to waste too much time on guessing or trying to work the problems you cannot do.

9. **Review the test.** Look for careless errors or other errors you may have made. Students usually lose two to five test points on errors that could have been caught in review. Do not talk yourself out of an answer just because it may not look right. This often happens when an answer does not come out even. It is possible for the answer to be a fraction or decimal. Ask yourself if the answers are reasonable and make sense. Perhaps check the problem by reworking it on a separate piece of paper and comparing the two answers. *Example: The answer to a problem of trying to find the area of a rectangle cannot be negative.* Remember: Research reveals that the odds of changing a correct answer to a wrong answer are greater than the odds of changing a wrong answer to a correct one.
10. **Use all the allowed test time.** There is no prize for handing your test in first. Do not leave the test room unless you have reviewed each problem or until the bell rings. Don't be concerned with your classmates.
11. **Use relaxation techniques.** During the test, some of the short-term relaxation techniques you've already learned may be helpful. Other suggestions for reducing test anxiety during the test include getting up to get a drink of water, eating a little something or chewing gum.

### **Multiple Choice Test**

If it is a multiple choice test, do not make the classic mistake. Do not assume that because the answer may be in front of you, the test is easier or you do not need to study as much. The choices given are called distracters. They are very common wrong answers that have been carefully planted by experts to trap you. The most efficient way to take a multiple choice exam is to read the question but cover up the distracters with a sheet of paper or index card. Answer the question without looking at the distracters. When you have answered the question, locate the answer, circle it and move on.

### **After the Test**

1. **Celebrate.** Reward yourself for making it through!
2. **Review your graded test.** Review your test as soon as you get it back. Where did you make your mistakes? What will you do differently next time? Learn from your mistakes so you won't make them on subsequent exams.