

MATH TESTS

Preparing & Overcoming Anxiety

Test anxiety, to a large degree, is related to test preparation, i.e., the more prepared the student is, the less he/she experiences anxiety. Following is a list of techniques the student can use both before and during a test to perform successfully and overcome anxiety.

BEFORE

ACADEMIC PREPARATION

1. Set up a study schedule and begin at least a week before the test. A good part of the anxiety experienced by students is due to the fact that they won't have enough time to prepare for the test due to the many demands on their time. Once a realistic schedule is set up for study time, much of this pressure is relieved.
2. Write out summary sheets on note cards covering main concepts and examples of each. List all possible topics. NEVER omit a topic. Omitting a topic thinking it won't be on the exam (students have a tendency to do this with "fuzzy" topics) sets one up for anxiety when it appears on the test. The course syllabus will provide what topics are to be covered.
 - Go over class notes and pay special attention to problems that the instructor worked in class and concepts the instructor emphasized. Use Chapter Review or Chapter Tests in the texts for review.
 - Ask the instructor what will be covered on the exam; types of questions (multiple choice, true-false, free form, etc.) and how many questions there will be. If a review sheet or sample test is provided by the instructor, rely on that more than anything else in preparing for the test. Tests from previous semesters are excellent tools for test preparation.
 - Aim for 100% and thoroughly cover all possible topics. With rare exceptions, the goal you set is the highest one you will reach.
3. Learn the general set of directions for solving all the different types of problems that you expect to find on the exam. Often, all the problems of a given type are worked the same way and the same set of directions can be applied to their solutions.
4. Rework all of the problems assigned for homework and any others that apply to the material. The more problems you work, the more skill and confidence you will acquire. Write out all the steps in solving problems; do not do work in your head. Work as many homework problems as you can before checking the answer. Checking the answer after each problem sets up a constant reinforcement that you will not have on the exam. This puts you at a distinct psychological disadvantage when you take the exam which only serves to increase your stress factor.
5. Pretend you are allowed to take a sheet of notes with you to the test. Make such a sheet. Study it until you know it so well you don't need it anymore. It can be the ultimate distillation of your procedures notebook.
6. Create at take practice tests in test-like conditions. This is the best way to determine how well you know the material.
7. Do not cram. In most cases, this leads only to confusion of concepts, especially in mathematics. Eight to ten hours of study is 100% more beneficial spread out over a week or even several days rather than doing it in one setting. It is a known fact that the brain needs time to assimilate new material so take frequent breaks and spread your study time over several days.
8. Do not study right up until exam time. Stop studying at least an hour before the exam. Again your brain needs time to get everything in proper order. It is also important that you be as relaxed as possible when you go into the exam room.
9. Eat well and sensibly. The brain needs food too. Get a reasonable amount of sleep.

□The only-valid excuse for not doing well is that you did not prepare well enough for it.

MENTAL PREPARATION

1. Keep a positive attitude. Anytime the fears come rushing in visualize yourself taking the exam, doing well and seeing an “A” on the paper. Write out a list of affirmations – i.e., “I’m doing well in math,” “I know the material,” “I enjoy math,” etc. Even if you do not initially believe what you are saying to yourself, it sends a message to your subconscious, which, in turn, alters your belief system and your belief system is what creates your reality.
2. If you start to panic, go with the fear and imagine the worst. Go through the whole scenario for not passing the test, failing the course, dropping out of school, not getting a job, and ending up pushing a shopping cart down Skid Row. That will help you get your fears in perspective. Practice deep breathing and visualize the opposite, i.e., getting an “A” on the test, passing the course, getting your degree, etc.

DURING

1. Arrive at the exam room at least ten minutes early. Get settled and relaxed and do deep breathing. Don’t think about the material.
2. Read the whole exam before beginning and figure out how much time is allotted for each problem. If you spend more than the allotted time on one problem leave it and go on. If there is time at the end, you can always go back.
3. Place yourself at home or at the library doing your homework. This will help you create a more relaxed atmosphere for yourself, thus allowing that part of your brain needed for complex thinking to function.
4. First work all the problems about which you feel totally confident. This will help increase your confidence level and get the momentum going. It will also encourage you to try those problems you are not so sure of.
5. Always go with your first instincts in solving a problem. Don’t second-guess yourself. Have confidence in your ability to do well.
6. Work at a reasonable pace and work carefully. Go back and check your answers at the end if you have time.
7. If you start to panic and your mind begins racing, mentally yell, “STOP!” This will stop the racing. Breathe deeply, and see your body releasing all this sand through your pores (this will make your body relax also). Visualize yourself in a calm peaceful place like a summer meadow or a forest or by a stream. Keep on breathing deeply. Take a few minutes to do this with your eyes closed. Then tell yourself you know the material and that the same consciousness that has made you successful in other things can make you successful in math. Then go back to the test.

□Remember, you create your own reality. Believe you will be successful and you will.

References:

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