

# OBU

## COUNSELING SERVICES



## Test Anxiety

### What can I do to reduce the influence of this problem? I hate it!

#### How do I know if I am experiencing an unhealthy dose of Test Anxiety?

*Most people experience some level of anxiety when preparing for or taking tests. A little anxiety can be helpful to push us to get started and begin studying. Remember, worry or anxiety that produces responsible action or planning is usually healthy. Test Anxiety, however, is crippling. If most of the indicators below are part of your experience, it's likely that you have developed a problem:*

1. I have a terrible time just getting started studying for tests. It's not that I'm lazy. I'm willing to work hard.
2. I truly expect to do poorly on a test no matter how much or how hard I study.
3. I'm filled with thoughts of failure, consumed with what is "sure" to happen if I fail this test, this course, and...
4. When taking a test, I often experience physical symptoms like sweaty palms, an upset stomach or nausea, a headache, trouble breathing, a rapid heart rate, and tension in my muscles.
4. During tests, I find myself getting easily confused and have difficulty organizing my thoughts.
5. Frequently I "draw a blank" on items I know I studied well. It's as if I have become mentally paralyzed by an intense fear of failing, during an exam!

6. My grades earned on my other assignments or papers are much higher than my test scores.
7. Then, answers I couldn't recall during the exam begin to come to me once it's over! It's so frustrating!

#### **If this is all too familiar, here's what you can do to reduce its impact:**

- **Outline, organize and thoroughly review your study material.** Quiz yourself or discuss it with your classmates if this is helpful to you. Give yourself the confidence of knowing that you have studied and prepared well for the test.
- **Keep yourself in the present** (both your body and your mind/thoughts) Anxious thoughts try to pull you into the future towards a terrifying calamity your mind has concocted. (See Dan for specific techniques to assist you with calming your body and reducing symptoms of intense anxiety such as rapid heart rate, shortness of breath, sweating, muscle tension/pain, racing thoughts, headaches, etc.) In short, by engaging your sensory system you can effectively "bring your body back into the present" (bring & take a drink of water, feel the floor with your bare feet, look briefly around the room - these can prove helpful), and then move to center your thoughts around your real, current situation, present

physical environment, immediate safety. At this stage it can be helpful to tell yourself (audibly) that, "Nothing terrible is actually happening to me right now." I'm not failing this test. I'm prepared for it well."

- **Relax your body** as best you can **by slowing and calming your breathing**. It may help to close your eyes for a short time while doing so. Practice relaxing your body (and slowing your heart rate down by slowing your breathing) the night before and morning of the exam.



• Work to **reject that nagging voice of self-defeat** that relentlessly taunts you. See her for the ugly old hag she is! You do NOT want to carry her into the room with you, nor through life.

- **Keep your thoughts positive**, while studying and during the test. "I am ready for this exam. I can do this."
- Take care of yourself. This includes getting **plenty of sleep the night before, and eating a light nutritious meal the morning of the test**. Avoid junk food, sugar and caffeine! Take a good **walk or jog**, getting some exercise the day before. This can help "burn off" some of your anxious energy.
- Avoid remaining too serious too much of the time before or between exams. **Laugh**, allow a bit of comic relief however you are able, but without any kind of "put-down" oriented self-talk.
- Allow yourself **time to relax** and shift your focus of thought for **the hour before** your test.
- **Read up on, and utilize good test-taking strategies** (specific to the kinds of test questions you anticipate). Consider just a few:
  - Mark and **come back to difficult or confusing questions**
  - Read only the question, then **answer multiple-choice questions in your head** before inspecting the options offered.
  - If you go blank, skip the question** and go on.
  - On essay questions, **begin with whatever you know** on the topic and allow your mind give you more as you go.
  - Don't panic when others begin turning in their papers. There's **no bonus for the 1st to finish**, nor penalty for being last.
  - Answer the **easiest questions first**, as it can build your

confidence, and allow you to get more done.

-Once you have completed and submitted your test, **forget about it** for a while. Don't let yourself predict the worst, you'll know the outcome when your grade is posted. Shift your attention to your next task or exam.

-**Avoid "cramming" for tests** the evening before. You'll just add to your stress. Pace and meter your time studying well in advance of an exam.

- **Look forward** to a little innocent fun & relaxation later.

**Then, consider this...**

**If** God is big enough to know the hairs on your head, every day & aspect of your life before even one had begun, your needs before you ask, and your thoughts before you ever speak...

**If** He is powerful and all knowing enough to have created life forms that can reproduce, heal themselves, adapt to their environments (something that man - in all his amazing intellect - will never likely achieve), manage and coordinate with perfect precision untold numbers of cells and billions of neurological impulses within your body each day, and then design an ecosystem suitable, and a solar system, galaxy and universe perfect to keep it all alive and thriving...

**If** God knows when every small creature is born and dies, and if NOTHING occurs outside of His knowledge, It's a pretty sure bet that He can watch over you and work out everything that occurs in your life for your good and His glory, as He's promised to do for those who love Him. Your scores on this semester's finals aren't likely to throw Him for a loop.

- Dan



Need to talk?

- phone: 245-5591
- email: [jarboed@obu.edu](mailto:jarboed@obu.edu)
- walk-in: Evans Student Center - Student Services Office



You are at a critical juncture or crossroads in life, and **who you will become** is taking shape rapidly. We want you to become all you were meant to be, and "We're here to help" isn't just a polite gesture. It's for real. Come by, send an email, or call 5220 to set up a time to talk together.