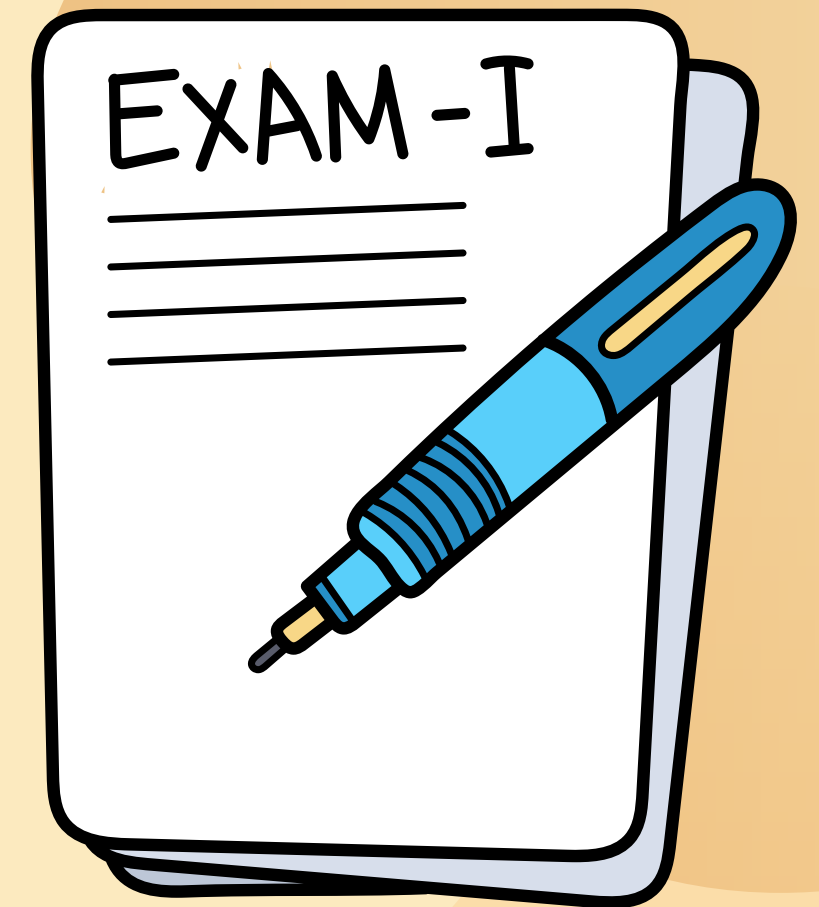


# COPING WITH EXAM ANXIETY

You walk into the exam room with confidence that you have prepared well for the exam and can score. You're feeling a little nervous. When the test arrives, your hand is a little shaky while you're writing your name down on the answer sheet. The first three questions go fine but as you reach the fourth question, it's a bit more difficult. Then, everything goes blank...

Exam anxiety is a common phenomenon that involves feelings of tension or uneasiness that occur before, during or after an exam. Many people experience feelings of anxiety around exam time and find it helpful in some ways, as it can be motivating and create pressure that is needed to stay focused. However, when anxiety begins to affect exam performance, it becomes a problem.



# HOW TO REDUCE EXAM ANXIETY?

- Focus on dealing with it. Ask yourself - what is it you have to do? What can you actually do?
- Just take one step at a time. Worrying won't help.
- Think rationally. Avoid negative or panicky self-statements such as "I am doomed."
- Plan your study ahead. Don't cram the night before the exam as there will be too much material + too little time = ANXIETY. Your efficiency and capacity to retain material will rapidly decrease if you attempt to study 24 hours, 7 days a week.
- Try to stay on a reasonably regular schedule of reviewing, eating, sleeping, and relaxing. Start at least two weeks before exams.
- Don't force yourself to study beyond your normal limit of concentration. If you find yourself able to concentrate for only ten or twenty minutes, study for only that period of time and then take a short break. Your concentration should return. In fact, short and regular study periods are more productive than lengthy single sessions.
- Learn your material thoroughly and organise what materials you will need for the test. Use a checklist.
- Seek help and guidance from lecturers if you don't understand the materials taught in the class.
- Rehearse questions you might expect in your exams.
- Eat a well-balanced diet and drink lots of fluids. Excessive amounts of coffee may produce confusion and even disorganisation of thought processes.
- Be conservative and reasonable about the demands you place on yourself.
- Avoid any substance that promises limitless energy! There's usually a downside, and revision time is not a good time for experiments.
- Don't use drugs or alcohol - they can decrease your ability to think clearly. Take medication only under the supervision of a physician.
- Exercise regularly! Find something you enjoy doing like swimming, jogging, walking or hiking, etc. Yoga, Tai Chi, meditation, or techniques for relaxing the mind and body are worth learning.
- Avoid speaking with fellow students who have not prepared, who express negativity, who will distract your preparation. Reinforce positive self statements to yourself.

## Before Exam:

- Take a practice test the day before.
- Allow yourself plenty of time, especially to do things you need to do before the test, and still get there with time to spare.
- Get a good night's sleep the night before the exam.
- Don't go to the exam hall with an empty stomach. Avoid food with high sugar content which may aggravate your stress level. Fresh fruits and vegetables are often recommended to reduce stress.
- Make sure you know where and when the exam is. Try not to arrive at the exam hall too early, or too late. Seeing and talking to other anxious people will only raise your anxiety. Arriving late may also increase your anxiety.
- Have some light reading to browse through while you are waiting to go into the exam room. Leave textbooks and notes at home.
- Make sure all stationery is in working condition.

## During Exam:

- Take a few deep breaths and sigh to reduce tension.
- Take your time to read through all the questions and instructions carefully. Do it at least twice, to make sure that you get a firm grasp of the questions.
- Manage your time. Keep an eye on the time, so that you have enough time for your final answer. If you don't have enough time, make a skeleton answer in note form. At least you have put something down!
- Don't panic when students start handing in their papers. There's no reward for being the first one to do so.
- If you panic and it gets worse: stop, put down your pen, and relax. Breathe in and out slowly; close your eyes for a few moments. If it helps, put your head on the desk. Shake your arms. Move your head slowly from side to side to relieve tension. Say something positive and encouraging to yourself. Imagine yourself somewhere else (where you feel happy and relaxed).
- If time is running out, concentrate on the questions you know well and/or have the most weight.
- Use all the time allowed for reviewing your answers, completing ideas. Only change answers if you are sure it is right.

## After Exam:

- Leave the exam hall immediately after the exam. Don't discuss with your friends about the exam. No matter how the test went, you can't change the answer on the paper. You can learn from the returned exam paper later.
- List what worked, and hold on to these strategies. It does not matter how small the items are as they are building blocks to success.
- List what did not work as well as what needs improvement.
- Celebrate that you are on the road to overcome these obstacles.