

# What is test anxiety?

Even if you've never heard the term "test anxiety" before, you're probably all-too familiar with its symptoms. Test anxiety is a form of performance anxiety that can affect people both physically and mentally, from headaches and nausea to difficulty concentrating and persistent thoughts of failure. Far from being a one-time experience, your past run-ins with test anxiety can cause a negative mindset that affects your performance on future tests, according to the [Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#).

This form of anxiety has different triggers for everyone, including fear of failure and associating self-worth with test performance. It's also more common than one might believe—[one 2010 study](#) found that it can affect anywhere from 10 to 40 percent of all students.\*

The good news is, you don't have to suffer through a college career marked by test anxiety. Use these expert tips to overcome test anxiety by knowing what to do both before and during the test.

## Test anxiety tips: What to do before the test

### 1. Make a plan

"Break down the amount of material into reasonable chunks over the amount of time available, and stick to the study schedule," says Reyna Dave, manager of in-home tutoring service [Learning Period](#). "Have in mind what should be mastered in each study session, and be able to assess whether the goal was met at the end of the session."

Creating a plan will give you confidence that you have time to review all the necessary material. You can also block off extra time to focus on the topics that are hardest for you. Strong preparation, while not a direct answer for day-of anxiety, can be a confidence booster that may help keep anxiety-based self-doubt at bay.

### 2. Practice, practice, practice

"The goal is to learn good habits that take over on test day. This means practicing," says Will Haynes, tutor and teacher with [The Princeton Review](#). He advises taking practice tests, focusing on problem areas that would be helpful to you and then reflecting on your score to identify why you got each question right or wrong.

Haynes cautions that practice can cement bad habits as well as good, so it's important to evaluate your progress and make adjustments along the way. Once you've pinpointed where you're going wrong, you can practice correcting the bad habit so it becomes second nature to avoid those mistakes on test day.

### 3. Try different study strategies

Rote memorization and reading information over and over can only get you so far, especially if you have trouble concentrating before a test. That's why Dave recommends that students attempt to reframe their understanding by trying a new study format.

Shaking up your study strategy can even be fun! Dave suggests the gamification of studying as one out-of-the-box option. Get together with a group of friends to quiz each other, game-show style. You could also try setting personal challenges like seeing how quickly you can answer a set of multiple choice questions, or setting a timer to freewrite a sample essay without using the backspace key. These different approaches may help jog your memory when you otherwise could be drawing a blank.

### 4. Practice guided meditations

If fear and pressure to do well are at the heart of your test anxiety, you might benefit from practicing guided meditations. These mental exercises are designed to help you calm down quickly in stressful situations so your body becomes used to managing the overwhelming emotions that could otherwise cause you to shut down during a test. Meditation is a skill like any other, so Dave recommends starting now and committing to a regular meditation routine if you want to strengthen your ability to remain calm under stress.

There are plenty of free resources to help you develop a meditation practice. Kaiser Permanente offers free [meditations for managing panic and anxiety, building self-confidence and handling stress](#), all of which can help you manage your test anxiety. You can also try following [guided imagery scripts specific to test anxiety](#). No matter your approach, learning a few simple meditation strategies can help you refocus during times of high anxiety.

### 5. Consider working with a tutor

Sometimes your best study strategy is knowing when to get outside help. "Sometimes we do little things that cause big problems, but they are hard for us to see," Haynes says. "It often helps to work with a tutor who can better identify where you are making mistakes."

Tutoring doesn't have to be expensive or inconvenient. Many schools offer [tutoring services](#) and academic support to their students that can take place in person, online or over the phone.

## Test anxiety tips: What to do the day of the test

### 6. Put your health first

You'll feel more mentally prepared if your basic physical needs have been met. A good night's sleep should be a priority. Don't be tempted to spend all night cramming. "If a proper study schedule has been adhered to, there is no need for an all-nighter," Dave says.

A healthy breakfast is also a must. Anxiety-induced nausea may entice you to skip eating altogether, but there are some nutritious options that can boost your brain power while calming an upset stomach. Try having a glass of water with an apple, which will [slow down digestion](#) and may [reduce anxiety](#).

## 7. Skip difficult questions

"Don't waste time and energy; go for the questions you know first," Haynes says. Not only does this strategy save time, it can also boost your confidence to focus on questions you're sure about.

Haynes emphasizes that you don't have to answer questions in order. Giving yourself freedom to answer questions in any order can relieve pressure and help you regain control of a stressful situation. Don't let yourself dwell and get locked into a spiral of doubt—move on and knock out the easier questions. Additionally, for some topics, you may find context clues in other questions that may help with the questions you're stuck on.

## 8. Slow down

It's counterintuitive to slow down when you have limited time to complete a test, but slowing down can help you focus and be calm. "You get good scores by getting questions right, not by attempting more questions," Haynes reminds us.

Take a few deep breaths if you find yourself starting to rush. This can also be a good time to put your guided meditation into practice. You might lose a few moments of test time, but the calm and confidence you'll gain will be worth it.

## Tackle your next test with confidence

Now you're ready to put these test anxiety tips into play, so you can ace your next exam and get back to the learning you enjoy most.

Overcoming test anxiety begins long before the big day. Plan ahead and leave enough time to prepare by checking out our article, "[7 Effective Time Management Tips for College Students](#)."

\*McDonald, A. S. (2001). The Prevalence and Effects of Test Anxiety in School Children. Educational Psychology.

Source: Ashley Brooks, <https://www.rasmussen.edu/student-experience/college-life/test-anxiety-tips/>