

Decreasing Test Anxiety

Easing test anxiety requires three main steps: proper breathing, relaxation/visualization, and thought-stopping along with positive “scripting.”

1. **Breathe** – When people are anxious, they often begin to take short, shallow breaths. To break this cycle, you need a deep breath; however, to take a deep breath, you need to first do a long, audible exhale, and then breathe using your diaphragm. Try out these instructions and watch this video from the Anxiety Coach <http://anxietycoach.com/breath1.htm#continue>
2. **Relaxation exercises and/or visualizations** – Learned ahead of time, these techniques are very useful when applied briefly during tests. Yes, it may use a little of your test time, but if you’re highly anxious, then is the time you’re spending on the test helpful at all? Try some of these techniques:

- Hobart and William Smith Colleges have two audios you can play online or download: a 9 minute progressive relaxation, and a 15 minute relaxation with visualizations and affirmations.

<http://www.hws.edu/studentlife/resources/counseling/relax.asp>



- The 20 minute version of this deep relaxation audio by the MacDill Air Force Base also includes a transcript.
- http://macdillafb.bestofhealth.com/Main/Modules/Reduce_stress/relaxation_audio.html
- Scroll down, and you’ll see that this site has a variety of audio clips on breathing, relaxation, and/or visualizations. You’ll need RealPlayer or Quick Time to play them.
- <http://www.allaboutdepression.com/relax/>
- Want something to take with you? Here are some audios on breathing and relaxation in MP3 format: <http://forms.uhs.wisc.edu/relaxation.php>

3. **Thought-Stopping / Positive “Scripting”** – Before you can start any positive thoughts, you have to turn off any negative comments going on in your mind.

- Gently say “stop” (don’t scold yourself!). If the thoughts keep returning, visualize setting them in a pile outside the door to pick up later.
- “Scripting” means that you have pre-planned and practiced some positive things to say. What positive things? The University of Minnesota has some ideas in their pdf, with four main guidelines: (<http://www.ucs.umn.edu/pdfs/lasc/selfscript.pdf>)



- i. Reminders to breathe/relax
- ii. Suggestions for recalling material
- iii. Test-savvy technique reminders
- iv. Generally supportive and upbeat comments

- It is important that these upbeat comments are realistic, or you’ll only react to them with sarcasm! Write and practice these scripts ahead of time. For some of you, replacing the talk with some enjoyable mental music may also be effective.