

# Student's Guide to Combating Test Anxiety Specifically "Going Blank"

## Reasons this might happen:

- You are worried or upset and thinking "worried" thoughts.
- This signals the brain to get ready to "fight" whatever is worrying you. (This is the "Fight or Flight" response.)
- The brain produces the hormones, adrenaline & cortisol.
- Adrenaline and Cortisol are "neuro-blockers" and hormones which help the "large" muscles perform beyond their usual capacity.
- If you are anxious when you sit down to take the test, your body is ready to "run-away" from it, not relax and think deep thoughts. The Fight or Flight hormones are literally blocking your ability to think clearly.



## IF YOU FEEL YOURSELF BECOMING ANXIOUS DURING A TEST:

*(This whole process should take less than 30 sec.)*

1. Let go of your pencil or pen. (This subconsciously signals to the brain that you're not working for a moment and you can relax.)



2. **Controlled Breathing:** Close your eyes & take a slow deep breath. (Breathe in to a count of 4 or 5, hold for 4 or 5, then release for 4 or 5, hold for a count of 4 or 5, then start again. Do this at least 3 times.)

3. **Sensory Activation:** While doing your controlled breathing, imagine yourself in a place that is pleasant, calm, comforting, relaxing. (Have this "place" ready to go before you take the test.)

\* Be sure to incorporate all five senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell.



4. Tell yourself you CAN do this – give yourself a little "pep talk".

5. Slowly open your eyes. Calmly, pick up your pen/pencil.



6. Start working on the test again. Possibly skipping the problem that you had been working on, and going on to the next one.

## AFTER YOU COMPLETED THE TEST – BEFORE YOU TURN IT IN!

If you have a few extra minutes of time left after you have finished the test, **DO NOT LEAVE EARLY!** Instead, turn the test over and "pretend" you've turned the test in. Start thinking about all the things you need to do the rest of the day – just as if you HAD turned the test in.



In other words, think about anything **OTHER** than the test. What you want to create is the same feeling you have **AFTER** the test when you suddenly remember the correct answer. But now, if you **DO** remember – you still have the test in front of you & can change it.

## BEFORE TEST DAY:

- Go to every class meeting.
- Do your homework regularly. Get into a routine. Schedule a regular time and place to do your homework. Take a 10 minute break for every hour and a half that you study.
- Get immediate help on any topic that is difficult. Don't wait - Get help from your teacher, tutors in the TLC, students from your class (study group), friends, family...
- Create "cheat sheets" or study cards – even if you don't (can't) use them, just creating them will help you organize and memorize the material.
- Request a test review sheet or review suggestions from your teacher. Completely finish the test review or review problems at least a day before the test.
- Take a practice test just like it was the real thing, timed, no notes, etc... (Instructors and tutors in the TLC can help you figure out how to create one.)
- Learn to break any bad habits of feeding into your anxiety during a test by thinking negative thoughts. Don't let your thoughts spiral. **If you wouldn't say it to the person sitting next to you, DON'T say it yourself.**
- Maintain a positive attitude and take care of yourself (eat nutritious meals, get enough sleep, and exercise.)

## ON TEST DAY BEFORE YOUR TEST:

These will help your body "use up" any of the unhelpful hormones (neuro-blockers) running around in your system and help you produce "happy" hormones – serotonin and endorphin.



- Exercise gently (go for a walk around the building, dance to some favorite tunes)
- Eat something light (but limit the amount of caffeine)
- Listen to music you enjoy (music that makes you feel happy, peaceful, relaxed...)
- Laugh – watch a sit-com, read comics, etc...
- Take your books with you – gives your brain a sense of "normalcy"
- Quit studying AT LEAST 30 minutes before the test - DO NOT CRAM at the last minute.
- Don't go to class early (unless the instructor is starting early.) Students in the room might add to your anxiety.
- As soon as the teacher starts the class, write down formulas or facts you want to remember on a piece of scratch paper or at the top (or back) of the test. (This is called a "memory-dump")
- Look over the whole test. Do the familiar ones first.
- When checking your answers, go with your first instinct when you're not sure. DO NOT change an answer if you are not absolutely certain you have written the incorrect answer.