Test Taking Anxiety and Effective Learning

Anxiety is more than just a feeling of uneasiness

While uneasiness is a small facet of anxiety, it can be debilitating and accompanied by physical complaints, such as dry mouth, elevated blood pressure, stiff or sore neck and back, shortness of breath, and hyperventilation. Many of these physical symptoms are caused, in part to a natural "fight or flight" stress response, which causes adrenal glands to send a rush of adrenaline and cortisol.

With all of these physical symptoms, our abilities to think clearly and concentrate are often compromised. So what can we do about it?

Eliminating stimulants, such as caffeine and tobacco, is certainly important, and vigorous exercise can help the body metabolize stress-related hormones, but for managing anxiety tied to test taking, preparation is key, and here are some tips to help you get started:

Be Prepared!

- Get a good night's sleep- In order to be both physically and mentally prepared, be sure to get seven to eight hours of sleep.
- Don't leave material review until the last minute- Realizing five minutes before a test that a particular problem is unfamiliar could cause panic resulting in someone doing poorly on the whole test rather than missing only one or two questions.
- Eat a high energy meal including lean proteins about two hours before a test. Non- fat yogurt is a great "on the go" snack. And be sure to stay hydrated!
- Take a brisk walk and clear your head. Just fifteen to twenty minutes at a brisk pace can help to clear your mind of some of everyday clutter so that you are more able to focus on the task at hand.
- Have a back-up! Be sure to have more than one pencil (with erasers). If it is a math test, check your calculator the night before to make sure it is working properly.

So our pretest routine is complete and it is test time… Here are a few tips on how to approach tests:

- Do a "knowledge dump." *Make notes to yourself in the margin of your test* (formulas you've memorized or common errors to avoid etc.). Doing this will help to avoid second guessing later.
- Scan the entire test. Take note of things, such as the point value of different questions and whether or not there are essay questions. This will allow you to strategically approach the test and to plan the best use of time.
- Do not work problems in order- *Pick out the easier problems* so that you warm up for the tougher questions, and build your confidence, as well.
- Read it twice- *This tip applies to both the directions for the exam and for the individual questions on it.* Be certain you understand what is being asked. Underline or circle individual points that need to be covered.
- Monitor your "inner voice." *Make staying positive a focus.* You know how hard you have worked!
- Check your work. If there are problems, rework them without looking at your original work. This will help you to catch simple errors.

If anxiety is too much to bear no matter how prepared you are, there are people here to help. It is free and confidential!
215-968-8182

Developing as an Effective Learner

Learning Structures

There are stages of learning. In the earliest stages we are able to remember parts or all of some particular information for short periods of time. Our goal is to gain a deeper understanding of course work so that we can not only retain it, but also use it and build upon it later.

What follows is an explanation of the different stages/structures in the learning sequence to help us know where we are and more importantly, help us get to the next step. Take note of the similarities and differences between the pieces of each structure. Consider where questions, keywords, and organization strategies intersect.

Structures of Learning and Critical Thinking	Questions and Key Words	Visually Organizing
Knowledge: Recalling what we have learned or observed. Memorization.	Questions posed: Who, what, where, when, why? Key words: Define, identify, label, list, locate, name, describe, steps, process, or sequence.	List, define, formula, illustration, map, diagram, table, graph, chart.
Comprehension: Ability to provide evidence of understanding by describing and clarifying concepts. The ability to explain the relationship between ideas	Questions posed: Why, how? Key words: Explain, clarify, discuss, illustrate, summarize, restate, infer, give an example, provide an analogy, classify, categorize, explain the importance or significance of…	Summary, example, analogy, web, tree, classification table, feature analysis grid, graph, matrix, index, outline.
Application: Demonstration of the ability to use information, concepts or techniques on our own.	Questions posed: If…then? What is…? How would you apply…? Key words: Demonstrate, apply.	Describe procedure or process using: algorithm, chronology, flow chart, plan, procedure, action chart, parts-function table.
Analysis: Making connections between different pieces of information that may not seem connected initially, drawing conclusions, supporting observations using evidence from what we have found, and making decisions based on a detailed exploration of the information at hand.	Questions posed: Why…? What can you conclude…? What evidence can you find to support…? Key words: Select, propose, sort, analyze, compare/contrast, explain, identify, prove, categorize, deduct, substantiate.	Break down into parts: Venn diagram, flow chart, fishbone diagram, troubleshooting chart, decision tree, parts-function table, stage table.
Synthesis: Solving problems, forming hypothesis and producing original work based on our findings.	Questions posed: Can you give an example of…? How will we solve…? What will happen…? How can we improve…? Key words: Interpret, predict, hypothesize, and apply.	Troubleshooting chart, line graph, cycles, Venn diagram, illustration, decision tree.
Evaluation: Developing the ability to test the quality of the products of work. The ability to definitively state whether or not information is correct, and hypothesis are valid.	Questions posed: Do you agree…? Do you believe…? What is your opinion…? Do you think…? Why? Would it be better if…? Key words: Evaluate, rank, rate, judge, criticize, debate, conclude.	Grid, rating chart, table.