



Reduce exam anxiety

Introduction

Most students worry far more about exams than assignments, which can lead to exams becoming a bigger deal than they need to be. People usually feel anxious about something when they do not know what to expect. A fear of the unknown will commonly cause a person to start to imagine a worst case scenario, which can cause them further worry. These feelings can inhibit people's performance during an exam and ultimately affect their grade. There are strategies that you can use to change how you think about exams and help to reduce feelings of anxiety.

Build up to an exam

The best way to minimise exam anxiety is to prepare thoroughly:

Revise - Revision is very important and the more you revise the more comfortable you feel with your subject matter, which can help boost your confidence. If you approach exam revision in an organised, on-going and systematic way, you will optimise your chances of passing and reduce examination fears.

Attend revision sessions - Make sure that you do not miss any revision sessions that are timetabled. These are good opportunities for you to ask your lecturers questions about exam format and content. Developing a better appreciation of what the exam will involve will enhance revision effectiveness and help you to feel more relaxed.

Review previous exam papers (if available) - Most people worry about exams because they do not know what to expect. Working through previous exam papers will give you a better appreciation of the exam process and help to reduce fear of the unknown. Previous exam papers are normally available via the digital library; if you cannot find one relevant to your unit speak to your Academic Liaison Librarian.

Distractions - You will need to invest a significant amount of time revising for exams but it is also important that you maintain a social life. Make sure that you continue to do things that you enjoy whilst preparing for the exam (such as exercising, seeing friends or watching television). These are all good distracters and will help to take your mind off the upcoming exam.

Talk about your worries - It can be helpful to talk about your exam concerns. This could be with friends and family. If you do not feel comfortable speaking to friends/family, you might consider contacting the free University counseling service. If you have been experiencing long term anxiety you may wish to contact the University's Mental Health Adviser to ask about special exam arrangements.

The day before / day of an exam

There are several ways to reduce your levels of anxiety on the day of an exam, allowing you to focus on the task at hand:

Do...

- Have a quick look over the material you have revised to refresh your memory
- Think positively – the more you dwell on negative outcomes, the more nervous you will become
- Get prepared for your exam the day before – find out where the exam is taking place and prepare items such as your student ID to avoid panicking on the day
- Spend some time relaxing the evening before your exam and make sure you get a good night's sleep
- Plan out how you will use your time during the exam

Do not...

- Try and learn new information on the morning of your exam – you will panic and may forget information you have already revised
- Stay up all night cramming in extra revision – it is highly likely you will forget anything you haven't previously learnt
- Go to your exam on an empty stomach as you will be distracted and unable to think clearly.
- Spend a lot of time talking to friends about how they have revised for the exam
- Drink lots of caffeine before the exam – drink water instead

During the exam

The following tips may help you reduce your anxiety and ensure you work at an optimum level:

- Take your time
- Make sure you read the brief carefully - the last thing you want to do is misunderstand the question and waste time writing a wrong answer
- Budget your time – ensure you have enough time to read and understand the question(s), plan your answers, answer the right number of questions and, if there is time, check your answers
- There is no use in rushing your answers, so do not panic if you see other students finish before you
- Breathing deeply and slowly will help you to stay calm

Further information

The Learning Resources Study Hub provides a range of opportunities (such as workshops and drop-ins) for you to enhance your academic skills. For more information visit:

lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub

