

# Test Taking: Being Relaxed During Tests

Academic Success Center

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Testing in itself can cause stress or anxiety, but we often carry these into the test. The following steps are prospective ways to calm yourself during an exam.

**Before leaving for the test:** Minimizing your tension during a test begins with your behaviors before the test. Consider the following:

- ◆ Follow your regular sleep pattern the night before. Set two alarms for morning tests.
- ◆ Pack the items you need the night before.
- ◆ Avoid caffeinated beverages and energy drinks.
- ◆ Wear loose fitting clothing that will not restrict your circulation while seated.
- ◆ Stretch to loosen your body and encourage circulation; practice deep/slow breathing.
- ◆ Change negative thoughts into positives. Some examples:
  - Instead of, *“I won’t do well”* think to yourself, *“I will do my best.”*
  - Instead of, *“I failed before and I will fail again”* think to yourself, *“I learned from my mistakes on the previous test.”*

**Arrive early**, and do the following steps to ease yourself into the testing situation.

- ◆ Select a seat that is comfortable for you with good lighting and space.
- ◆ Arrange the items you need that are allowed during a test (pen/pencil, calculator, etc).
- ◆ Sit quietly with good posture, and breathe deeply and slowly.
- ◆ Run through your mind concepts that may be on the test. Continue to breathe deeply and slowly.

**While testing**, address the following, each which is a potential sign of creating tension for yourself.

- ◆ **If you are breathing quickly**...adjust your posture and consciously focus on deep, slow breathing for 10-15 seconds. Return to the test.
- ◆ **If you are holding your pen/pencil too tight**...set down the pen/pencil. Then, clench and loosen your grip 4-5 times, and shake it briefly. Grasp your pen/pencil again but loosely. Return to the test.
- ◆ **If you are hunching over or slouching**...you could be limiting circulation. Sit up straight and take deep, slow breaths. You will notice that breathing changes, which allows more oxygen into your body. Keep this posture, and return to the test.
- ◆ **If your back feels stiff**...you could be limiting circulation. Raise and lower your shoulders a few times, while also pulling your shoulders forward and backwards.
- ◆ **If your legs feel stiff**...stretch them out straight (try to not kick the desk in front of you). Massage your calves with a free hand. Alternatively point and clench your toes a few times.

When finished with your test, take a few moments to relax stretching your tense body parts and returning to deep breathing. Then, use the remaining time to review your work and make improvements.