

## HOW TO OVERCOME TEST ANXIETY

(Adapted from the work of Rose Oliver, Ph.D., Albert Ellis Institute)

Overcoming test anxiety requires 1) a willingness to recognize that we *do* have control over our own behavior, and 2) it means to give up caring desperately about the outcome.

1. *Challenge your irrational belief system.* Can a test make you anxious? No! Only you can make you anxious!
2. *Sincerely convince yourself that you are not your test score!* A test outcome is not a measure of your worth as a person. If you fail, you are not a failure!
3. *Actively work on distinguishing between demands and preferences.* Replace self-statements like “I absolutely must do well” with “I’d like to do well, but I’ll survive if I don’t.”
4. *Practice thought-stopping.* Intrusive thoughts, such as, “I know I can’t pass,” “This is awful,” “I’m no good,” can, with practice, be stopped. Learn to become aware of these self-defeating negative thoughts when you prepare for an exam. Say “Stop!” or “Cancel that!” whenever these thoughts intrude upon your studying.
5. *Use imaging.* Imagine yourself in a test situation. Look over the test. You feel calm and focused. You do not permit intrusive thoughts to enter your head. You pay attention to the test questions and answer to the best of your ability. You finish the test and feel good about your effort.
6. *Overcome blocking.* Blocking occurs at the moment when anxiety overwhelms you, panic substitutes for reason, and frustration and anger block the flow of thought. If you encounter a test item you can’t answer, calm yourself, rationally decide to leave the question which stumped you, continue with the exam, and come back to that item later. In this way, the tendency to block will not interfere with the rest of the test. You increase the probability of passing by doing what you know best first. Your anxiety level drops considerably, you reinforce yourself by doing what you can, and you are now able, with less anxiety, to face the more difficult items.
7. *Accept anxiety.* Ask yourself: what’s so awful and terrible about getting anxious? Anxiety is part of the human condition. Some people are more easily aroused than others. No one is ever completely free of it. **BUT YOU DON’T HAVE TO CATASTROPHIZE ABOUT IT AND THEREBY DIMINISH YOUR PERFORMANCE!**
8. *Accept imperfection and uncertainty:* Imperfection and uncertainty are part of living. Anyone who demands perfection and certainty cuts himself or herself off from the zestful experience of reaching for new challenges. **LEARN TO EXPERIENCE EACH TEST AS A CHALLENGE AND NOT A DOOMSDAY TRAP!**

