

TALKING YOURSELF THROUGH TEST ANXIETY

Having a positive attitude before, during, and after an exam can really make a difference on your performance. By creating positive statements and trying to have a more encouraging mindset, you can use these tools when you feel anxious about an exam. This is also known as positive self-talk or thought-stopping. Recent research, including a 2023 narrative review on nursing students, shows that positive self-talk is an effective strategy for managing test anxiety. Sometimes it can be difficult to think of positive statements if we don't have a lot of practice with it. Read through the examples on the next page to give you some ideas.

BEFORE THE EXAM:

By being prepared for anxiety to hit while taking an exam, you can have positive statements ready to combat test anxiety. Create two positive statements you can use before an exam.

1. _____

2. _____

DURING THE EXAM:

Many different things trigger anxiety during the exam: other people finishing before you, getting stuck on a question, feeling as though you may run out of time, etc.

Reflect back on the last time you experienced test anxiety. Identify what may trigger your test anxiety and make a positive statement you can use to lessen this anxiety for your next exam.

Test anxiety trigger:

Positive statement:

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AFTER THE EXAM:

Many students feel anxiety after exams because they worry about how they did and what their grade will be. Construct a positive statement you can use if you experience this type of anxiety.

Positive statement:

BEFORE THE EXAM:

- I'm going to take it one question at a time.
- I'm not going to panic if I don't know the first question. I can come back to it after I get started.
- I won't eliminate all my anxiety—a little bit is actually helpful if kept at a manageable level.
- This exam might be difficult, but I believe in my abilities.

DURING THE EXAM:

- It's ok if someone finishes before me, that doesn't impact me.
- Drawing a blank is perfectly natural. I'm going to skip it and come back to this question later.
- If I'm not sure of several questions in a row, I'm not going to panic. I'll take a few deep breaths and refocus.
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AFTER THE EXAM:

- I finished the exam and I'm proud that I _____.
- I am pleased with the progress I'm making.

I did what I could for that exam. Now I can focus on what's next. If I got a question wrong, that is an opportunity for me to learn. It doesn't mean I'll never understand the material.

Want to learn more and get support developing your own stress management plan? You can meet with an Academic Skills Tutor for free! For assistance, email thinktank@email.arizona.edu or call the THINK TANK front desk at 520-626-0530.

Sources:

Nolting, P. D. (2000). *Math Study Skills Workbook: Your Guide to Reducing Test Anxiety and Improving Study Strategies*. Houghton Mifflin.

MJ Bidgoli, A Mansouri, P Darabiyan. "Factors Affecting Iranian Nursing Students' Test Anxiety: A Narrative Review." *International Research in Medical and Health Sciences*, vol. 2023. [Accessed April 2024]. Available: <http://www.irmhs.com/index.php/irmhs/article/view/109>.