

JOURNALING ANXIETY

WHAT IS JOURNALING ANXIETY?

Journaling anxiety means taking some time to consciously and intentionally write down what you are feeling and experiencing during moments of anxiety.

WHY WRITE?

The worry we feel competes with our working memory (WM) or short-term memory available to complete a task. For example, when taking an exam, information should move from long-term memory (LTM) to WM as you answer each question. Material in your WM only stays there for up to 30 seconds so when we feel anxious our WM struggles, our focus is disrupted, and performance on the task can suffer.

Writing may help lessen the burden that worries place on WM. This allows an opportunity for your WM to focus and help you complete the necessary task (like answering exam questions) instead of the anxiety overtaking WM. This activity can be useful to do 30 minutes before an exam.

KEY POINTS

Research often shows when we feel a desire to perform at a high level, we worry about the situation and its consequences or outcomes.

Situation: Student preparing for/taking an exam

Consequences: Feeling anxious about taking the exam; worrying about receiving a poor grade

Anxiety is not just a feeling--it causes physiological (physical) changes to our bodies and brains.

Physical symptoms

- Muscle tension, headache, shoulder/neck aches
- Nausea
- Shortness of breath, feeling faint
- Shakiness

Mental symptoms

- Confusion, difficulty thinking clearly
- Making careless errors
- Blank out, forget familiar material
- Difficulty focusing

HOW TO JOURNAL ABOUT ANXIETY

Write about your anxiety on a piece of paper.

- When do you become anxious?
- Physically, how do you feel?
- What mental symptoms are you experiencing?
- What is going through your mind?

Source: Ramirez and Beilock. Writing About Test Anxiety Boosts Exam Performance In the Classroom. *Science* 2011. 321 (211). DOI: 10.1126/science.1199427

Seek help if you feel that the stress you are experiencing is unmanageable. It is important to address this problem early before you experience some of the more serious negative consequences, such as physical symptoms. Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) through UA Campus Health is a great resource, you can find out more at <https://https://caps.arizona.edu>