

THE FOUR-STEP MODEL TO REDUCING TEST-ANXIETY

STEP ONE: IDENTIFY

We already did this with our list of thoughts. Which ones seem to commonly apply to you?

Write those and any secondary thoughts or additional ones that apply to you here:

Later, when you notice yourself feeling anxious, write down what thoughts you are having.

STEP TWO: EVALUATE

Are the thoughts correct?. Here's an example:

1. If I don't do well on this test/paper, I will certainly flunk the class.

Q: Why is this most likely not correct?

A: This is just one test. There are others for this class. There is extra credit.
It is graded on a curve- in comparison to others I might be doing great.

The grade is based on more than just this test.

(And, even if I did flunk the class—it's not the end of the world.)

Write down why the thoughts you listed above most likely are not correct:

STEP THREE: RESPOND

What would be a better (more useful) thought about an exam or studying?

For example:

I've done well before on tests. I can do well on this one, too.

I'll put in a good effort.

There will be many more exams. This is just one exam.

Now, respond to some of the thoughts you wrote before.

Now, go to step 3 ½ on the other sheet.

STEP FOUR: RELAX

Because our bodies physically feel the stress of our initial unhelpful thoughts, we can directly change this by using various techniques to relax.

- 1) Tense and relax muscles. Tense various muscle groups for five seconds. Then relax. Do this throughout your body.
- 2) Take deep slow breaths. Four seconds in. Hold for four. Six seconds out. Pause briefly. Think of breathing in relaxation and say “relax” to yourself. Say “calm” as you exhale.
- 3) Investigate other ways to relax. You might blow bubbles. You might buy a “relaxation tape.”

LAST NOTES

Practice! Practice! Practice!

It's helpful to get good at using these techniques. The best way is to practice when you are NOT feeling extremely stressed. Then, later when you are really stressed, you'll have the tools to deal with it.

SECONDARY CATASTROPHIC THOUGHTS (STEP 3 ½)

Sometimes responding to the initial automatic thoughts is not enough because there are other, more intense thoughts “below the surface” of these thoughts.

It is helpful to identify, evaluate, and respond to these thoughts as well.

For example,

“If I don’t do well on this test/paper, I will certainly flunk the class.”

What would that mean?

If I flunk the class, I’ll flunk out of college.

Or If I flunk the class, I’ll have to take it again, and everyone will think I’m stupid.

Or If I flunk the class, I’ll be so discouraged I’ll leave college.

What would that mean?

If I leave college, I’ll never come back and never make good money.

What would that mean?

That would mean I’ll never be successful, and I’ll always be miserable.

Evaluation/Response:

Actually I know people who never attended college and are successful. I can come back to college later if I needed to. Lots of other people take classes over again. At another time in my life or with a different professor it’s very possible I will do even better. I am going to give this exam my best shot now—and whatever happens, happens. (Now—relax!!)

Ask yourself if any of your first, automatic thoughts were true, what would that mean to you about you. Write these secondary, catastrophic thoughts here—
AND RESPOND TO THEM.

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