

Tips to turn off test anxiety

by Dr. Brenda Eastman
Contributing Writer

Do you walk into the classroom where a big exam is scheduled with sweating palms, pounding heart, and bladder sensations that pull you back into the restroom?

Many people do. However, if you consider yourself to be a test anxious person, then you probably also perceive that you deserve better test grades than you get.

There is help for test anxiety. First, it's helpful to understand the two major components of test anxiety. One is "emotionality," the sympathetic nervous system arousal that brings us clammy hands and butterflies in the stomach. It may surprise you to know that students who consistently get "A's" on tests experience the same degree of emotionality. They, too, stop in the restroom and find the pencil slipping in their grip. Why, then, are they not shaken by this?

The difference between the successful test-taker and the anxious test-taker is the interpretation they make of their symptoms of arousal. The test-anxious student interprets the physiological sensa-

tions of anxiety as evidence that he is falling apart. They confirm his fears that he will be unable to "think straight." Our "Dean's List" student, on the other hand, views the arousal as an indication that he is really "up" for the test. The bodily symptoms of anxiety remind him of how much energy he has invested in preparing for this test. He's keenly aware that he is ready to "pour it on."

Thus the "A" student uses the emotional arousal as a focus for the test. In contrast, the test-anxious student interprets it as something to worry about. Not surprisingly, we have the stage set for a vicious cycle of emotional arousal leading to worry, and worry leading to greater emotional agitation and distractibility.

The second component of test anxiety is worry. The test-anxious student has cornered the market on worry. He actually worries during the test! While the "A student" is putting down answers on paper, the test-anxious student is distracted by other thoughts, like "Oh, no, I don't recognize question two!" "Three essays. What if I only get one right? Maybe I'll get a 'D'. That would make my

grade point average a 2.1..."

The trouble, as you know, is that the test situation is no place to worry. When you get this distracted, you're not giving your attention to the test itself.

What can you do to curb test anxiety?

1. The biggest part of the cure is to study! (Sorry that this first tip is not more exciting or more magical.) Truth is, all the studies on text-anxious students show this to be the key to resolving test anxiety.

2. Spaced study is better than massed study (cramming). By studying 45 minutes every day for two weeks prior to the exam, you are better prepared and more relaxed and confident.

3. Find some of the material confusing? Check out the Academic Services Center for assistance, or request guidance from your professor.

4. Do not plan to cram right before the test. Studying during the hour before the test makes sense only if you have a very small amount of material that you selected in advance for review at this time. For example, the night before the test, you might decide

that you would review a particular formula right before the exam. Under these circumstances, you may get the benefits of recency effects on memory.

5. If you feel anxious, practice relaxation techniques. Take a deep breath. Breathe in and out slowly. Focus on your breathing. This has a remarkable quieting effect on anxiety.

6. Ask yourself, what is the worst that can happen? Yes, you can fail the test, flunk out of Penn State, and get disinherited by your rich aunt. But, the sky will still be blue, roadside stands will still be open selling ice cream cones, and big friendly dogs will still want to lick your hand (especially the one holding the ice cream cone).

Some people find it helpful to think of an image that is comforting. For me, it might be the recollection of a big old kitchen on a farm in New Hampshire. The woodbox is piled high with wood and newspaper, and raised doughnuts are sizzling on the woodstove. The image of this, and the couple who live there, immediately puts everything else in perspective. What's your image? At the lake? The beach? A park?

At camp?

7. When you get the test, fill out the identifying section with name, date. Action inhibits fear! Start talking yourself (under your breath) through the test. "First question? Well, I know two things about it..." Talking to the test focuses your attention on the test. You are not to talk about distractors, e.g., counting questions, worrying. The only thing you have to do for the next hour is to respond to these questions!

If you have memorized facts and are afraid you'll forget them, jot down notes in the margins. You can return to them for reference later on in the test.

With multiple choice questions, see what responses you can eliminate. Still uncertain of the correct answer? Put an asterisk by the question, and move on. You will go back to it later. Often the intervening questions will jog your memory, or give away the correct answer.

An important rule of thumb is not to waste time staring at questions that you can not answer. Go on to a new question and return to them later.

Finally, you're confronting an

essay question. You're unsure of a good answer. Start writing what you do know. Often you'll mention at least one key idea and earn credit for that. The same advice applies to questions that are problems requiring a solution, e.g., physics, statistics. Answer questions; don't leave them blank.

8. Hang in there for the full test period. Resist the temptation to chicken out and escape by handing the test in early. If you're confused, unclear, use the time to relax (deep breaths) and go back over the questions. Check your answers. Add points of information as they occur to you. Don't throw the opportunity you have away.

9. At the end of the hour, when you've turned the test in, forget about it. When you get it back, you can analyze the test for insights about the kinds of errors you made. Now's the time to get that ice cream cone. Somewhere, a big dog is waiting.

10. For further help with test anxiety, stop by the Personal Counseling Office, 213 Glennhill, to talk with Louanne Barton or Dr. Brenda Eastman. Call 898-6162 for an appointment. GOOD LUCK WITH THOSE FINALS!

Behrend College enters the Jones Zone

by Lisa Hahn
Collegian Staff Writer

The lights go down, the music plays, and on the screen before you are many interesting and unusual slides being shown. You're not sure just what is going to happen next,

and then all of a sudden a voice beckons you to "enter the JONES ZONE."

April 22, Scott Jones livened the Behrend Campus with his comical and music-filled show. The performance lasted about two hours, containing such bizarre elements as

Suckerman and other various rubber toys. Yet there were also very serious musical parts to the show. Jones entered Reed 117 wearing a monkey mask, a silver tinsel wig, a scarf that looked like a piano keyboard, and a head apparatus that had two lights in front of his eyes making him look like he was possessed. Upon seeing this, you knew you were in for something entirely out of the ordinary. As time progressed, the journey into the

Jones Zone became more interesting.

Initially, Jones sat at the piano with his "Monkey face" on and played his rendition of Chopsticks; his left hand on the piano keys and in the hand were a pair of wooden chopsticks that did just as good a trick as his right hand could have. Finally Jones unmasked himself and began a series of "old people on the highway" jokes. Next came the highlight of

the show: the toybox. Each time Jones reached his hand into it, the audience waited with anticipation to see what would appear next. There was Gumby with his horse Pokey, little jumping dogs, and of course Suckerman. You ask, what is Suckerman? Good question, in fact I was never sure just what it was supposed to be. Appearing half man, half octopus, it was a rubber human shaped doll which stuck to almost anything if it was

thrown at because of the tentacle-like arms with suction cups all over. If Suckerman stuck to something, it "sucked," and he proved this by throwing Suckerman at a John Denver album (incidentally, it stuck).

The show continued alternating between joke periods and numbers on the piano. Jones is a very talented pianist and vocalist, and his fifth album is going to be a very serious musical endeavor. His previous four are a combination of music and some of his comedy work.

The last part of the act was a sort of "home movie," when once again Jones showed slides. These were pictures he had taken all over the country, mostly of weird signs. This slide show generated the most laughs from the audience as it was the most different part of the show.

In addition to playing the piano, Jones plays the guitar. He started playing the piano when he could reach it, and the variety in the show comes from him and his family always being kind of weird. He says that everything together "makes for a more balanced show," and he is right. Jones says he likes touring colleges best, and we were certainly delighted to have him perform at ours.

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