

# Test Performance

## Emotional and Physical Factors Affecting Test Performance

### Negative Factors and Positive Solutions

#### Factor 1: Panic

Panic is irrational, self-made, and self-defeating. It can affect your memory, your concentration, and even physical abilities such as speaking and writing. People usually get themselves into a condition of panic by concentrating on irrational (not true) and/or negative thoughts about themselves.

**Solutions:** Panic can be controlled by re-focusing on (1) rational thoughts, and (2) those areas of a subject you have studied and know well.

*HINT:* One way to prevent panic in the first place is to study and review throughout the course rather than right before the exam (see Factor 5).

#### Factor 2: Carelessness

When we're careless, we may (1) read questions incorrectly, (2) miss key words, (3) read only the first few words in a question, or (4) make assumptions and start writing too soon.

**Solutions:** To prevent carelessness—Read questions twice before answering and proofread your answers before turning in your exam.

#### Factor 3: Lack of Focus

Some exams call for facts, others demand analysis, judgment, and interpretation. All require some level of attention to the course content and information you have learned.

**Solutions:** During the time allowed for the test, block out other thoughts and be “in” the material.

Examine the questions carefully, looking for clues and connections to what you have studied. Get “in the zone”!

#### Factor 4: Excessive Anxiety

An optimum amount of test anxiety can actually facilitate test performance by increasing alertness and motivation. However, *excessive* anxiety can result in poor concentration, carelessness, a feeling of restlessness, and poor test performance. If you feel you have an excessive amount of anxiety during exams you may want to get professional assistance from the counselors in the Wellness Center.

**Solutions:**

1. Do not schedule stressful appointments or events just before exams.
2. Think calm and relaxing thoughts about yourself, and talk to friends who boost your self-esteem.
3. On the day of the test, avoid people and situations that are stressful to you.
4. Arrive at the exam room just a few minutes early, and focus on what you know about the subject rather than what you do not know.

#### Factor 5: Cramming

Cramming is different from a final review of material. Cramming refers to an effort to master an abundance of new material in a relatively short period of time. Cramming is almost useless as a means of passing final exams because information learned in a period of less than twenty-four hours, without time for repetition, is difficult for most of us to recall.

**Solutions:** For best long-term recall of information, use a series of study periods broken by rest intervals. The process of learning continues even when you're on a break! Many people find that spreading study over as much time as possible prevents physical and emotional fatigue and heightens motivation. Ideally, you'll have time for a final review—a last effort to organize and brush up on previously learned material—which can really make a difference in your performance.

### Factor 6: Inadequate Diet

Your brain cells and nerve cells use sugar (from carbohydrates) to produce energy. When blood sugar available to these cells decreases to a certain level you may experience slower thinking processes, irritability, and even depression. This is not the best mental condition for superior test performance! Consuming high-sugar foods and beverages such as candy bars and soft drinks can set you up for a blood sugar crash.

**Solutions:** Eat a variety of foods containing combinations of protein and carbohydrates so that sugar is released into your system slowly over time. If you find you tire easily and/or become irritable soon after eating, take advantage of professional resources in the Wellness Center.

### Factor 7: Lack of Exercise

The life of a student is not always very active. Sitting and looking at books, papers, and a computer can really slow down your body.

**Solutions:** Go for walks, play an intramural sport, babysit a toddler, park farther away from your destinations, take a dance class—stretching your muscles and getting blood pumping will help your brain!

### Factor 8: Low Motivation

Many students are not motivated to perform well on tests because they do not relate test performance to their goals or values.

**Solution:** Try thinking about these questions:

1. Will doing well on the test help me reach my long term goals?
2. Will doing well on the test make life easier or better this semester?
3. Is doing well worth my time right now?

### Factor 9: Lack of Sleep

Sleep deprivation, even for the sake of studying, always impairs thinking and memory to some degree. On tests of knowledge or skill, performance is negatively affected by lack of sleep.

**Solution:** As best you can, try to maintain consistency in your activity/sleep cycle according to your individual needs. Your brain will thank you.

### Factor 10: Poor Attitude

Many students view tests as boring—merely something to be tolerated. In their minds the exam process is just a way of giving information from lectures or textbooks right back to the instructor.

**Solutions:** Try thinking of yourself as an athlete, ready and willing to display your skill on the exam.

You have practiced, you have a game plan, and you are now ready to match your wits with those of the test maker. The test is an opportunity to perform—a chance to display your talents, knowledge, and self-confidence.