

10 Top Tips for Exam Stress

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1 Stress is helpful!

Make friends with Stress. Stress is a natural human response to life but having too much of it can cause problems. Without the stress of the alarm clock in the mornings we'd be likely to find it harder to get up, but if it rang intermittently all day, it would probably become too much. Exam nerves are a necessary tickle for most people.

2 Fear – Clear your Mind

Stress is an instinctive response to fear. People respond differently to fear: either by preparing to fight, or freezing or taking flight. If you were walking in a forest and a grizzly bear (fear) came along, you'd probably fight the bear, or freeze and hope that it does not notice you, or you'd run like hell. This makes sense, but if the bear were invisible, a fear that is only in your mind, you'd still be likely



to respond in a similar way. To clear your mind it would be helpful to understand what fears you have about the exams. Either way, whether you fear failing or succeeding, do fear the exam a little, as this tells you that it matters to you, but get to know what frightens you. And learn to calm down a little.

3 Plan a Schedule for Success

Plan to meet the exam with reduced fear now that you know that the 'bear' is kindly and helpful! However if fear were to surprise you in the exam, perhaps you can plan to approach the exam fear by fighting it, by recognising it as a feeling of fear only, and then putting all your energies to answering the questions, rather than freezing or running out of the exam hall.

Timetabling can give you structure, so write it down. Allow more, rather than less time for revision in small (40 minute) doses. Lists, and ticking off completed tasks, can feel good. You can do this for revision as well as in the exam. Include light meals, non-alcoholic drinks and some leisure in your schedule.

4 Advantages of Procrastination

Leaving things till last minute can be tempting but usually is not fair on you. Consider six benefits to procrastinating and write them down. Yes, benefits, such as "I like working intensely so reduce the time available", "I want to work throughout the summer so that I don't need to feel lonely during the holidays". Understanding your resistance to study can help you to make more informed choices.

5 Take Breaks Regularly

If you work at full tilt you'll exhaust yourself, as well as feeling that it's such a big deal to start working, that who would want to do it. But if you promise to take regular breaks, and then keep your promise, use an alarm clock if need be, you'll feel that revision is less of a task. Coffee/tea/coke are not so helpful because they contain stimulants, go for herb teas, water, juice, light meals and any other little treats, such as a walk in the park, swim, chat to a friend on the phone (for 10 minutes) ...

6 Support Services

Use the university support services. The Counselling & Wellbeing Service offers counselling sessions and workshops on Confidence Building & Goal Setting, Relaxation and Exam Stress and The Learning Development Unit can help with exam techniques and so on. It's fun to hear that you are not alone and it is also a break from revision.

7 Anxiety

If anxiety attacks you in the exam and you can't fight it off easily, practice the following in advance and use it in the exam:

1. Stop.
2. Feel both feet firmly on the ground.
3. Close your eyes if you like.
4. Relax shoulders and arms, jaw and cheeks.
5. Count a few deep breaths out.
6. Calm for one minute.
7. Think of your name, write it down and then slowly return to the task.

Your thinking will come when you make friends with the task. Remember that leaving the exam room is pointless. It's just a feeling of wanting to take flight, which will pass. After the exam there is no need for post mortems, go for a meal out and have fun!

8 Relax

Relaxation is needed during revision period too. Take time out at scheduled intervals. See good friends, no harm in a feel-good movie or a jog around the street. There are also techniques that help you relax at a drop of a hat. Calming, as described above, and then visualising a favourite safe place for example. You are welcome to contact the Counselling & Wellbeing Service for further information or to look up the website for tips.

9 Sleep well

Sleep helps you to relax, too. In some ways you revise in your sleep. Let your mind converse with itself about what you've learned and what you think of it during the night. Calming activities and unwinding are good, such as a warm drink (not coffee) and a lovely bath; even clean sheets, if you can find some.

10 Good Luck

On the day before each exam, check the venue, know exactly where it is, pack your bag with all the bits and bobs that you'll need including your Student ID card and Oyster card, home keys, pens, calculator, money, food etc. It's worth putting in the effort to being prepared. Arrive early and spend time away from others - And then Good Luck.