

Accepting Anxiety



We all hate being anxious. It's a horrible feeling, it feels overwhelmingly disturbing, and understandably, we try to keep it at bay by avoiding anything that might make us anxious, or by doing things that help us feel safer in those situations where we feel anxious.

If you're not willing to have it, you will.

Look at this sentence. What does it mean? "If I'm not willing to be anxious, I will be anxious?" What does that mean? Our mind might say:

"Hmmm. So if I'm not willing to be anxious, I will be anxious. I hate being anxious, so I guess I could give it a try. I'll try to be more willing to feel my anxiety so I won't be anxious"

Okay. But if you decide you could be willing to be anxious, in order to get rid of the anxiety, then you're *not really willing* to be anxious, and that will result in feeling more anxious!

This is not mumbo jumbo!

Read it again!



It sounds weird, not right. Yet it seems that it's true. If you are only willing to feel anxiety because you hope that by being willing to feel it, it will reduce your anxiety, *then it cannot work*. That is not the same as being willing to feel your anxiety.

Anxiety is normal. We all feel it. We will all continue to feel it at times.

To help start practising willingness to accept anxiety:

- Notice when you start to feel the normal body response to unhelpful thoughts
- Don't struggle or fight with the feelings and thoughts, just let them be
- It will pass

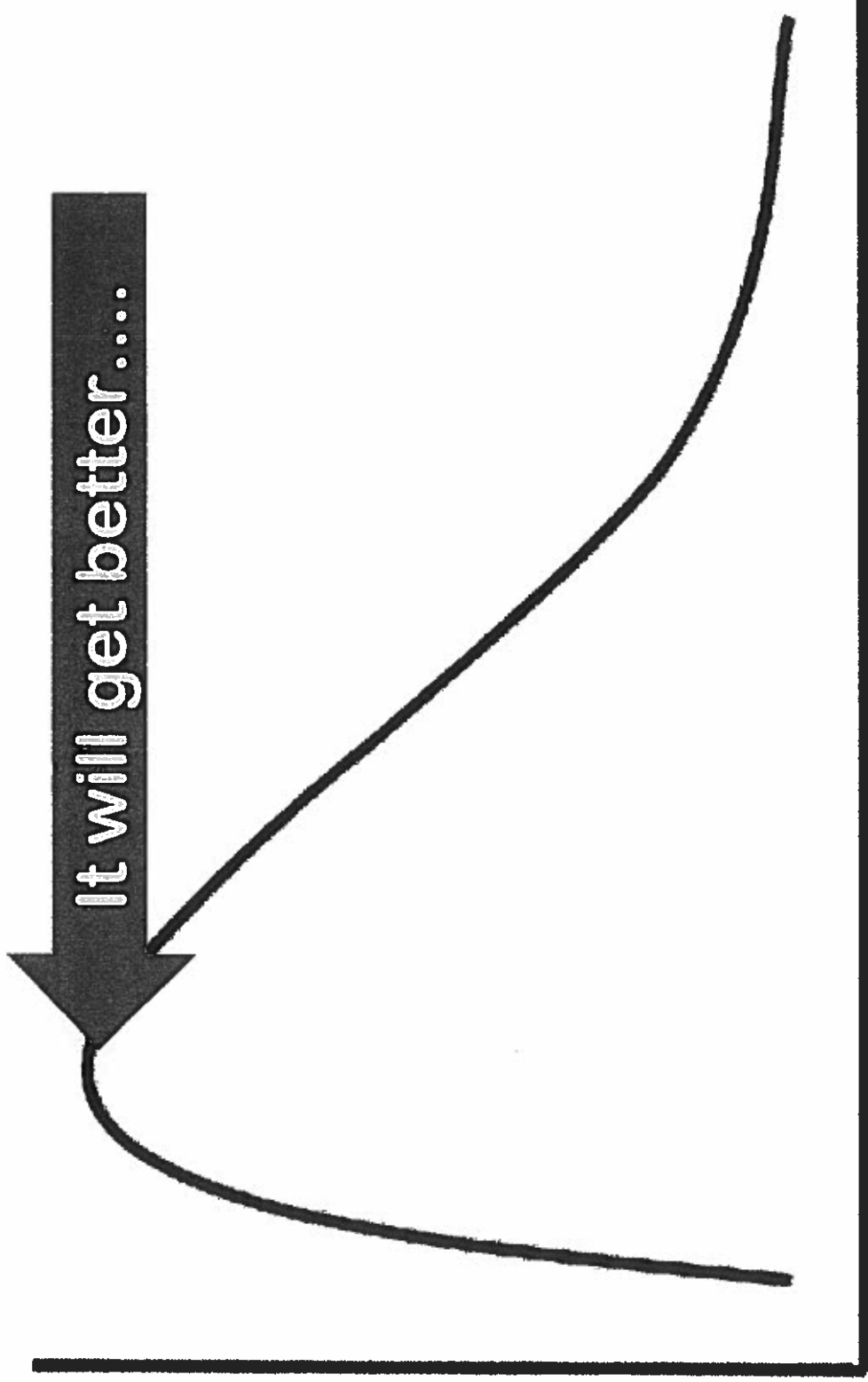
JUST NOTICE - This is just a normal body response to unhelpful thoughts. It will pass.....

Habituation Curve

High

A N X I E T Y

Low



Low

EXPOSURE

High

REPETITION/DURATION

Tap out a
rhythm

Colouring

Count
backwards to
1000 multiples
of 7

Favorite Song

Mindful
colouring

Count to 100

Think of 10
different
animals

Count
backwards in 3s

Think of 10
(blue) things

Shopping list

Simple or repetitive
distracting activities
can be especially
helpful

One animal or
country for
each letter of
the alphabet

Say the
alphabet slowly

Say the
alphabet
backwards

Count things that you can
see that begin with a
particular letter



Mindfulness Exercises

2. MINDFULNESS OF THE EXTERNAL WORLD

Background: We carry with us our 5 senses - touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight - but we often register those sensations unconsciously. Using these tools, we can become aware, accepting and mindful of the external world. We can only see, smell, touch, taste and hear in the present.

5,4,3,2,1 Exercises

These are exercises in noticing what is around us:

1. Sight: Look around you and name as you look at 5 different objects (variation: 5 blue/black/green objects), then do the same for 4 of those 5 objects, 3 of those 5 objects, etc
2. Sight & Touch: Look at, name and touch 5 different objects, noticing their texture, temperature, mass and weight as you do so. Then do the same for 4 of those objects, 3 of those objects, etc
3. Sight, Touch and Smell/Taste: Look at (in a garden or a kitchen), name, taste and smell 5 different objects, noticing their colours, texture, taste and aroma. Then do the same for 4 of those objects, 3, 2, 1.
4. Hearing: Close your eyes and listen for 5 different sounds. Then 4, 3, 2, 1.

Other Exercises on the External World

1. Mindfulness on washing the dishes
2. Mindfulness on walking
3. Mindfulness on sitting in the garden
4. Mindfulness on driving a car through traffic

Notice physical sensations through the body - sights, smells, sounds, tastes, touch/sensations.

calming technique

Everyone knows that breathing is an essential part of life, but did you know that breathing plays an essential role in anxiety? This information sheet will briefly discuss the role of breathing in anxiety and guide you through a simple calming technique that uses breathing patterns to help you relax.

Breathing is a powerful determinant of physical state. When our breathing rate becomes elevated, a number of physiological changes begin to occur. Perhaps you've noticed this yourself when you've had a fright; you might suddenly gasp, feel a little breathless and a little light-headed, as well as feeling some tingling sensations around your body. Believe it or not, the way we breathe is a major factor in producing these and other sensations that are noticeable when we are anxious.

Anxious breathing

You might already know that we breathe in oxygen – which is used by the body – and we breathe out carbon dioxide. In order for the body to run efficiently, there needs to be a **balance** between oxygen and carbon dioxide, and this balance is maintained through how fast and how deeply we breathe. Of course, the body needs different amounts of oxygen depending on our level of activity. When we exercise, there is an *increase* in **both** oxygen and carbon dioxide; in relaxation there is a *decrease* in **both** oxygen and carbon dioxide. In both cases the balance is maintained.

When we are anxious though, this balance is disrupted. Essentially, we take in more oxygen than the body needs – in other words we overbreathe, or *hyperventilate*. When this imbalance is detected, the body responds with a number of chemical changes that produce symptoms such as dizziness, light-headedness, confusion, breathlessness, blurred vision, increase in heart rate to pump more blood around, numbness and tingling in the extremities, cold clammy hands and muscle stiffness.

The normal rate of breathing is 10-12 breaths per minute – what's your breathing rate?

The Calming Technique

While overbreathing and hyperventilation are not specifically dangerous (it's even used in medical testing!), continued overbreathing can leave you feeling exhausted or "on edge" so that you're more likely to respond to stressful situations with intense anxiety and panic.



Gaining control over your breathing involves both slowing your rate of breathing and changing your breathing style. Use the calming technique by following these steps and you'll be on your way to developing a better breathing habit.

- 1 Ensure that you are sitting on a comfortable chair or laying on a bed
- 2 Take a breath in for 4 seconds (through the nose if possible)
- 3 Hold the breath for 2 seconds
- 4 Release the breath taking 6 seconds (through the nose if possible), then pause slightly before breathing in again.
- 5 Practise, practise, practise!

Breathing tips

- When you first begin changing your breathing, it may be difficult to slow your breathing down to this rate. You may wish to try using a 3-in, 1-hold, 4-out breathing rate to start off with.
- When you are doing your breathing exercises, make sure that you are using a stomach breathing style rather than a chest breathing style. You can check this by placing one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest. The hand on your stomach should rise when you breathe in.
- Try to practise at least once or twice a day at a time when you can relax, relatively free from distraction. This will help to develop a more relaxed breathing habit. The key to progress really is practise, so try to set aside some time each day.

By using the calming technique, you can slow your breathing down and reduce your general level anxiety. With enough practice, it can even help to reduce your anxiety when you are in an anxious situation.

progressive muscle relaxation

One of the body's reactions to fear and anxiety is muscle tension. This can result in feeling "tense", or can lead to muscle aches and pains, as well as leaving some people feeling exhausted. Think about how you respond to anxiety. Do you "tense up" when you're feeling anxious? Muscle relaxation can be particularly helpful in cases where anxiety is especially associated to muscle tension. This information sheet will guide you through a common form of relaxation designed to reduce muscle tension.

Muscle tension

Muscle tension is commonly associated with stress, anxiety and fear as part of a process that helps our bodies prepare for potentially dangerous situations. Even though some of those situations may not actually be dangerous, our bodies respond in the same way. Sometimes we don't even notice how our muscles become tense, but perhaps you clench your teeth slightly so your jaw feels tight, or maybe your shoulders become. Muscle tension can also be associated with backaches and tension headaches.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

One method of reducing muscle tension that people have found helpful is through a technique called Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR). In progressive muscle relaxation exercises, you tense up particular muscles and then relax them, and then you practise this technique consistently.

preparing for relaxation

When you are beginning to practice progressive muscle relaxation exercises keep in mind the following points.

- **Physical injuries.** If you have any injuries, or a history of physical problems that may cause muscle pain, always consult your doctor before you start.
- **Select your surroundings.** Minimise the distraction to your five senses. Such as turning off the TV and radio, and using soft lighting.
- **Make yourself comfortable.** Use a chair that comfortably seats your body, including your head. Wear loose clothing, and take off your shoes.
- **Internal mechanics.** Avoid practicing after big, heavy meals, and do not practice after consuming any intoxicants, such as alcohol.

general procedure

- 1 Once you've set aside the time and place for relaxation, slow down your breathing and give yourself permission to relax.
- 2 When you are ready to begin, tense the muscle group described. Make sure you can feel the tension, but not so much that you feel a great deal of pain. Keep the muscle tensed for approximately 5 seconds.
- 3 Relax the muscles and keep it relaxed for approximately 10 seconds. It may be helpful to say something like "Relax" as you relax the muscle.
- 4 When you have finished the relaxation procedure, remain seated for a few moments allowing yourself to become alert.

Relaxation sequence

1. **Right hand and forearm.** Make a fist with your right hand.
2. **Right upper arm.** Bring your right forearm up to your shoulder to "make a muscle".
3. **Left hand and forearm.**
4. **Left upper arm.**
5. **Forehead.** Raise your eyebrows as high as they will go, as though you were surprised by something.
6. **Eyes and cheeks.** Squeeze your eyes tight shut.
7. **Mouth and jaw.** Open your mouth as wide as you can, as you might when you're yawning.
8. **Neck. !!!** Be careful as you tense these muscles. Face forward and then pull your head back slowly, as though you are looking up to the ceiling.
9. **Shoulders.** Tense the muscles in your shoulders as you bring your shoulders up towards your ears.
10. **Shoulder blades/Back.** Push your shoulder blades back, trying to almost touch them together, so that your chest is pushed forward.
11. **Chest and stomach.** Breathe in deeply, filling up your lungs and chest with air.
12. **Hips and buttocks.** Squeeze your buttock muscles
13. **Right upper leg.** Tighten your right thigh.
14. **Right lower leg. !!!** Do this slowly and carefully to avoid cramps. Pull your toes towards you to stretch the calf muscle.
15. **Right foot.** Curl your toes downwards.
16. **Left upper leg.** Repeat as for right upper leg.
17. **Left lower leg.** Repeat as for right lower leg.
18. **Left foot.** Repeat as for right foot.

Practice means progress. Only through practice can you become more aware of your muscles, how they respond with tension, and how you can relax them. Training your body to respond differently to stress is like any training – practising consistently is the key.



Quick Relaxation Techniques

Different relaxation techniques appeal to different people. Please try out each technique and rate it out of 10, then choose the one(s) that suit you best.

Whole body tension

Score
out of 10

- Tense everything in your whole body, stay with that tension.
- Hold it as long as you can without feeling pain.
- Slowly release the tension and very gradually feel it leave your body. Repeat three times.

Imagine air as a cloud

Score
out of 10

- Open your imagination and focus on your breathing
- As your breathing becomes calm and regular, imagine that the air comes to you as a cloud.
- It fills you and goes out.
- You may imagine the cloud to be a particular colour

Pick a spot

Score
out of 10

- With your head level and body relaxed, pick a spot to focus on (eyes open at this point).
- When ready, count 5 breaths backward with each breath allow your eyes to close gradually.
- Concentrate on each breath
- When you get to 1, your eyes will be closed. Focus on the feelings of relaxation.

Counting ten breaths back

Score
out of 10

- Allow yourself to feel passive and indifferent, counting each breath slowly from 10 to 1.
- With each count, allow yourself to feel heavier and more relaxed.
- With each exhale, allow the tension to leave your body.

Transformations: pick one that works or make up your own

Score
out of 10

- | When you think of images like... | Imagine... |
|----------------------------------|---|
| ▫ Tightly twisted ropes | ➤ The twisted ropes untwisting |
| ▫ Feel of cold, harsh wind | ➤ The cold wind becoming warm and soft |
| ▫ Hard, cold wax | ➤ The wax softens and melts |
| ▫ Tense, red muscles | ➤ The red muscles soften or lighten to pink |

Affirmations: pick one that works or make up your own

Score
out of 10

- | | |
|---|--|
| ▫ Breathe deeply and slowly.... | ➤ This discomfort will pass....let it go |
| ▫ Let the tension flow away.... | ➤ I have the power to handle this. |
| ▫ I am calm and relaxed, ready for anything ... | ➤ Relax the jaw, lower the shoulders. |

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Positive Self- talk / Coping Thoughts Worksheet



Positive statements encourage us and help us cope through distressing times. We can say these encouraging words to ourselves, and be our own personal coach. We have all survived some very distressing times, and we can use those experiences to encourage us through current difficulties. Examples of coping thoughts might be:

- Stop, and breathe, I can do this
- This will pass
- I can be anxious/angry/sad and still deal with this
- I have done this before, and I can do it again
- This feels bad, it's a normal body reaction – it will pass
- This feels bad, and feelings are very often wrong
- These are just feelings, they will go away
- This won't last forever
- Short term pain for long term gain
- I can feel bad and still choose to take a new and healthy direction
- I don't need to rush, I can take things slowly
- I have survived before, I will survive now
- I feel this way because of my past experiences, but I am safe right now
- It's okay to feel this way, it's a normal reaction
- Right now, I am not in danger. Right now, I'm safe
- My mind is not always my friend
- Thoughts are just thoughts – they're not necessarily true or factual
- This is difficult and uncomfortable, but it's only temporary
- I can use my coping skills and get through this
- I can learn from this and it will be easier next time
- Keep calm and carry on



Yes!

Write down a coping thought or positive statement for each difficult or distressing situation – something you can tell yourself that will help you get through. Write them down on a piece of card and carry it in your pocket or handbag to help remind you.

Difficult or distressing situation	Coping thought / Positive statement

■ Preparation

- It's not going to be as bad as I think.
- It won't last long and I can cope with it.
- I am getting better and need to go to rebuild my confidence.
- If I do get bad feelings, I know they won't last long and I can cope with them.
- It's better to go than not to go. Worry doesn't help.
- I might enjoy it if I go.

■ Coping

- Concentrate on what is going on.
- I can tolerate anxiety; I've managed it many times before.
- Remember to relax and think positive.
- This is just anxiety; it is an unpleasant feeling but I've never been ill.
- Concentrate on what I have to do.
- I know I am going to be OK.
- The feelings are unpleasant but not harmful or dangerous.
- One step at a time.
- The feelings *always* pass away.

■ Praise/Review

- I can be pleased with the progress I'm making.
- I achieved that; I'm getting better.
- I coped with that.
- I did that well.
- If I keep this up I'm going to get really good at this.
- I handled that; it should be easier next time.

Top tips for coping with anxiety

1. Remember that the feelings are nothing more than an exaggeration of normal bodily reactions to stress – your threat system has been activated
2. Remember they are not in the least harmful or dangerous, just unpleasant
3. Try and stop adding to your anxiety with unhelpful thoughts (consider attending the Challenging Unhelpful Thinking Habits workshop) and notice how the anxiety will start to fade away
4. If you find yourself worrying a lot try and postpone your worries and you will hopefully find your worries do not seem as important or bad as you originally feared / thought
5. Focus on what is happening outside of your body rather than your body sensations (Mindfulness of the External World can help with this)
6. Try and let the fear pass, without fighting it or running away from it – just accept it (external mindfulness / mindful breathing can help with this)
7. Muscular relaxation can help you relax when your body feels really tense and uncomfortable and can be particularly effective in helping you get to sleep
8. A healthy lifestyle is likely to help: good diet, regular exercise, activities that give you both a sense of achievement and pleasure
9. Remember it is better to learn to cope with anxiety than try and avoid it and situations that make us feel anxious
10. Make use of the many self-help resources available – visit our website:
www.manchester.ac.uk/counselling

- 1** Remember panic feelings are only normal reactions that are exaggerated – they are not dangerous.

- 2** They are not harmful and nothing worse will happen. The feelings will soon pass.

- 3** Notice what is happening in your body now. Stay with the present. Slow down, relax, but keep going.

- 4** Thinking about what might happen is unhelpful. Only now matters.

- 5** Accept the feelings. Let them run through you and they will disappear more quickly. Try not to fight the panic. Float over it.

- 6** Monitor your level of anxiety: 10 (worst) to 0 (least). Watch the level go down.

- 7** Stay in the situation. If you run away, avoid or escape, it will be more difficult in the future.

- 8** Take a few slow, deep breaths. Breathe from your stomach – say the word ‘calm’ as you breathe out.

- 9** Consciously relax your tense muscles. Feel yourself relaxing. Drop your shoulders.

- 10** Now begin to concentrate again on what you were doing before. Slowly move on when ready.

Resources available from the UOM Counselling Service Website

Go to : <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/counselling/>

Relaxation audio downloads from the Counselling Service Website:

<http://www.counsellingservice.manchester.ac.uk/self-help/>

Drop ins session and workshops available at the Counselling Service

<http://www.counsellingservice.manchester.ac.uk/workshops/>

NHS Self Help Guides - These self help booklets have been written by clinical psychologists with contributions from service users and healthcare staff, including topics such as anxiety, sleep and bereavement. <http://www.selfhelpguides.nhs.uk/manchester/>

Online Self-help Tool

Silvercloud is an online self help tool, free to students and staff of the University. Are you worried, feeling low, stressed out or finding it hard to sleep? If you've answered yes to any of these questions, then think about trying our new Silvercloud online, multimedia programme. It uses clinically proven tools to identify your key problems and offers programmes of activity to help you overcome them.

<http://www.counsellingservice.manchester.ac.uk/silvercloud/#d.en.391669>

Support Services - Here you can find out about the Support Services available to you during your time at University, including the Disability Advisory Support Service, Nightline, the Student Support team and more. <http://www.studentsupport.manchester.ac.uk/taking-care/support-services/>



UOMWellbeing (@ WellbeingUOM)

Follow our [WellbeingUoM](#) twitter account for daily tips to help you take charge of your wellbeing and useful links to interesting wellbeing resources.

Other resources

AnxietyBC <https://www.anxietybc.com/adults/introduction>

AnxietyUK <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/>

Useful Apps

You can learn technique to help with your anxiety with the following app, which is available for iPods, iPads and PCs.



- MindShift
- Self help for Anxiety Management
- Stop Panic and Anxiety Self Help
- The Worry Box
- Breathe2Relax
- Pacifica
- Headsapce
- Calm

Positive Steps to Wellbeing

Be kind to yourself



Our culture, genes, religion, upbringing, education, gender, sexuality, beliefs, and life experiences make us who we are. We all have bad days.

Be kind to yourself. Encourage rather than criticise yourself. Treat yourself the way you would treat a friend in the same situation.

Exercise regularly



Being active helps lift our mood, reduces stress and anxiety, improves physical health, and gives us more energy.

Get outside, preferably in a green space or near water.

Find an activity you enjoy doing, and just do it.

Take up a hobby and/or learn a new skill

Increase your confidence and interest, meet others, or prepare for finding work.



Have some fun and/or be creative

Having fun or being creative helps us feel better and increases our confidence.

Enjoy yourself!



Help others



Get involved with a community project, charity work, or simply help out someone you know.

As well as benefiting others, you'll be doing something worthwhile which will help you feel better about yourself.

Relax



Make time for yourself. Allow yourself to chill out and relax. Find something that suits you – different things work for different people.

Breathe... (imagine a balloon in your belly, inflating and deflating as you breathe in and out)

Eat healthily

Eat regularly, eat breakfast, eat healthily, eat fruit and vegetables, drink water.



Balance sleep

Get into a healthy sleep routine – including going to bed and getting up at the same time each day.



Connect with others



Stay in touch with family and friends - make regular and frequent contact with them.

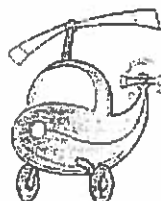
Beware drink and drugs



Avoid using alcohol (or non-prescribed drugs) to help you cope – it will only add to your problems.

See the bigger picture

We all give different meanings to situations and see things from our point of view. Broaden out your perspective and consider the bigger picture ('the helicopter view')



What meaning am I giving this? Is this fact or opinion? How would others see it? Is there another way of looking at this? How important is it, or will it be in a year's time? What can I do right now that will help most?

Accepting: 'It is as it is'

We tend to fight against distressing thoughts and feelings, but we can learn to just notice them and give up that struggle.



Some situations we just can't change. We can surf those waves rather than try to stop them.

Allow those thoughts and sensations just to be – they will pass.

Fighting Test Anxiety

Text anxiety is a result of worry and stress. It manifests itself physically through episodes of sweating, nausea or "butterflies" in your stomach, and psychologically through confusion, mental blocks and panic attacks. Whatever the form, test anxiety most often arises for one of three reasons:

Poor study skills

A lack of efficient study skills can greatly contribute to exam stress. Organization and preparation are key weapons in your fight against test anxiety.

Prior negative experiences

Let's say you put forth a great effort preparing for a chemistry exam. But when exam time came and the test was passed out, to your horror you discovered that the questions were gleaned from material you didn't review. As a result, you bombed the test. A bad experience like this may undermine your confidence and negatively affect your performance the next time you take a test.

Fear of the unknown

Not knowing what to expect on an exam is a fundamental source of anxiety. Things go much more smoothly when you have some idea of what to prepare for.

Controlling Test Anxiety

Fortunately, test anxiety is a well-recognized problem that can be effectively controlled with proven techniques.

Plan your attack

You will feel most anxious when you are least prepared. For that reason, it's important that you develop good study habits. Set up times to work on your homework on a regular basis:

plan to cover a specific amount of homework during each work session. Schedule your study time so that you are best able to concentrate free from distraction and fatigue. Recognize your individual procrastination habits and learn to overcome them.

If you think you need help developing good study skills, you can seek help in a number of ways. Ask

academically successful friends for tips on how they study. Organize study groups with friends in order to force yourself to be conscientious in your work. Hunt Library and the Carnegie Mellon Bookstore both contain informative books on developing good study skills. You might also consider contacting a study skills tutor through the walk-in tutoring service of Student Affairs.

Make known the unknown

Often, finding out additional bits of information about an exam can greatly reduce the anxiety you feel. Inquire beforehand about the type of questions that will be on the exam, how many points each question will be worth, how much time will be allotted and so on.

Give yourself a pep talk

Consciously try to stop yourself from thinking negative thoughts. Turn bleak messages into encouraging ones. For instance, before the exam begins, instead of thinking, "Boy, I'll be lucky to get a 'D' out of this," give yourself positive encouragement. "I've attended class, I've read all the material, I've studied as much as I could—I'm as prepared as I can be." Say this out loud to help drive the thought home. Even if you don't believe yourself at first, repeatedly encouraging yourself this way will

ultimately help you gain confidence.

Visualize success

Visualization is a powerful tool for success. Pro basketball players imagine the ball swishing the net before they shoot. Baseball players imagine the feel of the bat smacking the ball. Instead of imagining yourself failing the test and feeling miserable afterward, turn that thought around. Imagine yourself turning over the first page and finding that each problem was exactly like a homework problem that you worked out. You work through the questions confidently, answering each one, turn the exam in, and, finally, receive word of your good grade. The key to effective visualization is *detail*. Be specific in imagining the good things that are going to happen.

Focus on detail

Whenever you feel an inordinate amount of anxiety—say, as an exam is being passed out—you can help calm yourself by focusing your attention on some small detail. Study the face of your watch or concentrate on the noise of a fan. Filling your attention so completely leaves no room for anxious thoughts.

Concentrate on breathing

Deep-breathing exercises are a well-known technique for combating nervousness and anxiety. Whenever you feel your heart racing or your forehead sweating, force yourself to *slow down* and take deep, calm breaths. Concentrate on the air flowing in and out of your nose and lungs. Do this for four or five minutes and you'll find yourself feeling much more relaxed.

Fighting Test Anxiety

Imagine the worst
Before the exam begins, imagine the worst that can happen if things go wrong. Will you get a "B," a "C"? Will you flunk the exam? If so, will you immediately get kicked out of school, or will you have a chance to redeem yourself? Usually our fears are far more disturbing than reality. Explore your fears to the point of absurdity and they'll seem far less frightening.

Don't study the last minute before the exam
You'll find that studying right up until the last minute hurts more than it helps. In the last few minutes before an exam, you can't learn anything new and you'll mix up what's already in your long-term memory. Frantically searching for that one last bit of information you think you need only results in more anxiety and confusion. Relax—you've studied as best you can. Give yourself only calming, positive messages before the exam.

Don't go into the classroom until the exam is about to begin
Often, while you're waiting you'll overhear other students guessing about what might be covered. Although it's a good study strategy to brainstorm with others in the days before the test, at this point listening to all these conjectures may only undermine your confidence. Trust yourself—you've planned your attack and it's a good one, no matter how much it differs from others'.

Take good care of yourself
Inadequate sleep, poor eating habits and insufficient exercise are destructive to your mind as well as to your body. Stay away from foods high in sugar and fat content; these make you sluggish. Exercise, even if

only by taking short walks. Doing so helps energize your mind and body.

Expect setbacks
You will always experience setbacks whenever you try to change your behavior. Don't let them get the best of you. If you have a bad experience, your efforts haven't all been in vain. Simply try again with a firm resolution to make things better. If you do, ultimately they *will* be better.