

Test Stress: Ten Terrific Test-Taking Tips

by Chanel Hill

For many of us, the real stress begins when a test actually starts. Here are ten important ways to manage that stress and do your best on an exam:

1. **Show up on time.** Arriving late might make you feel rushed and nervous.
2. **Stay focused and relaxed.** Focused AND relaxed? Doesn't that sound impossible? Well, what we mean is this: keep your mind on the test, but don't tighten up. Try to stay loose and cool so you can move through the questions one by one. If you feel yourself clenching, or you feel so amped-up that you're afraid you might actually snap your pencil in your hand, try that deep-breathing thing for a moment. Then get right back to the test questions.
3. **Sit comfortably.** Don't hunch over the test or stiffen up. Sit in a relaxed way and keep your posture loose so you don't add aches and pains to your list of possible worries.
4. **Expect and accept a little bit of stress.** Don't worry if you still have some stress while you begin the test. Almost everyone feels this-it's there because you want to do your best. The key is to accept it and not let worrying about the stress make you even more stressed. Tell yourself, "I'm a little worried, but that's okay. I'm going to do well on this test because I'm prepared."
5. **Read the directions.** Take the time to read the instructions before you get started. This will keep you from making simple mistakes and guarantee that you won't have to waste time going back and redoing any work because you didn't understand the directions.
6. **Pace yourself.** Your test will probably be timed. Know ahead of time how many questions there are and how quickly you will have to move through each one. Don't focus on the clock as time ticks away, but glance up every once in a while to make sure you're not falling behind pace.
7. **Don't rush.** Try to keep a good pace-but never rush through a question. Make sure you understand what is being asked, then make sure you think clearly about your answer. If the question is multiple-choice, read every single possible answer before you decide which one is the best. Choice A might seem good at first glance, but sometimes the best answer is another one. You can only know which choice is best if you read them all before you answer.
8. **Don't get distracted.** Keep your eyes on your paper, unless it's to occasionally glance at the clock. Don't look at the students around you. Because if they're

nervous, it could make you nervous, and if they're confident-looking, it could make you wonder why it's so easy for them (like, what do they know that you don't?). And if the kid sitting next to you is picking his nose or doing something else that's funny, it could take your mind off the test. Another good reason to stay focused on your own test is that if you start looking around the room, a teacher might think you're trying to cheat.

9. **Focus on the stuff you know.** What happens if you come across a question that absolutely stumps you or seems impossible to answer? Well, since most tests are timed, you should probably skip a question like this and move on to the next one. After all, you don't want to spend ten minutes on a super-hard question, only to have time run out so you have to leave easier questions blank. In other words: if you get stuck, don't stay stuck. Pass on the questions and come back if you have time. You might come up with the answer to the hard question while you're answering an easier one!
10. **Use all your time.** If you happen to finish the test before time is up, don't sit there staring into space. Go back over the questions, especially the ones that seemed hard, and check your work. Fixing obvious mistakes is way better than just waiting for the clock to run out.