

Tips for Supporting Students with “Test Anxiety”

- Assessments can significantly increase student anxiety.
- Test anxiety can depress scores significantly, in which case, it doesn’t serve as an accurate measure of what a student has actually learned.
- More importantly, a poor test score as a result of anxiety serves to reinforce the student’s fear of tests, increases frustration, and contributes to low self-esteem.

Here are **5 easy tips** to help your students perform their best on exams.

1. Students with anxiety often ascribe great importance to each exam, as they often feel the results reflect their ability to learn. **Help your students to put exams in perspective.** Present them as an opportunity for the students to discover what they know and what they may need to practice. They are merely a snapshot of their progress to this point.

Afterward, **include a review of answers and concepts** so all students have accurate information, and begin to see assessments as learning opportunities. Consider including options to improve learning, perhaps by asking students to write out their initial thinking used to arrive at the incorrect answer, why it may not have been accurate, and how they can now apply the information correctly. Perhaps using this as an opportunity to earn course points. Also consider offering alternate types of assessments throughout the semester such as papers, group projects and presentations to reduce the high stakes nature of a smaller number of tests.
2. Provide study or review guides to help **focus student attention on the concepts** they need to understand for the course and assessments. Allow time in class or during “office/student hours” to provide students with opportunities to get feedback regarding the accuracy of their understanding of these concepts.
3. **Remind students to practice retrieval skills when studying.** Students can learn the vocabulary and basic concepts first using online or homemade flash cards. Remind them that the benefit comes in struggling to learn the concepts. Students often flip the card too soon. Once familiar with the vocabulary and concepts, encourage them to study in small groups to ask the “how” and “why” questions (elaborative rehearsal) for deeper understanding (“How is this important...? Why may this impact...? What are some concrete or relevant examples of....).
4. Remind students that “cramming” before a test may produce a passing grade; however, it does not promote long term learning or deep understanding of concepts. Encourage, and provide homework that **spaces out studying and practice.** Encourage reasonable time increments over a period of days or weeks. This will increase student learning and deeper understanding of concepts, which improves the ability to apply the ideas to new situations.
5. **Verbalize instructions for exams** as well as providing them in written format. Keep the instructions brief, uncomplicated, and use language familiar to the class. Allow a short period of time for any clarification questions before the exam begins.