Staying Calm During Exams

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Here are some tips to help you stay calm during exams.

1. Prepare for your exams well in advance.

Try to keep up with your uni work on a day-to-day basis. Avoid relying on last-minute cramming in the days leading up to an exam.

2. Put the exam in perspective.

It's only an exam. The result is not a reflection of who you are as a person. If you invest too much of your self-worth in studying and exams it can create extra stress and anxiety.

3. Get a good night's sleep beforehand.

It's important that you feel rested on the day of an exam. Even 4-5 hours may be enough. It's hard to produce your best work in the exam if you're feeling exhausted.

4. Eat sensibly before the exam.

Some people overeat when they're feeling anxious, while others stop eating at all. Eating a nutritious meal can help you feel physically comfortable and stay alert and focused for your exam.

5. Stop studying about an hour before the exam.

It's too late now to try and learn what you haven't already covered. Use that last hour to try to relax and compose yourself before going into the exam. Try to visualise yourself calmly sitting in the exam, jotting down notes and answering questions.

6. Know the time and place of the exam.

Allow yourself plenty of time to get there. You don't need the extra stress of worrying if you're going to be on time. Also, make sure you know what you need to bring and get it ready in advance.

7. Develop positive self-talk.

Avoid thinking of yourself and exams in a negative way. Instead of thinking, "I know I'm going to fail" try and think "I'll do my best".

8. Don't talk about the exam before the exam.

Don't talk about the exam with your classmates immediately before going into the exam if you know that it will just make you more anxious.

9. Read over the exam carefully and plan your approach.

Taking a few minutes to work out how the marks are distributed for each question, how long to spend on each question, which question to start with etc., is usually time well spent.

10. Don't hesitate to ask for clarification.

Before you begin answering any questions make sure you fully understand the instructions. If you don't understand, ask for clarification. Don't let anxiety build up unnecessarily just because you're not sure about what you're expected to do. And don't waste time doing more than the exam asks you to do.

11. Don't get stuck.

If your mind goes blank and you can't think of anything to write, go on to another question or another part of the exam, or jot down anything that you can recall on your scratch paper to stimulate your memory and get your brain working.

12. Relax yourself during the exam.

If you're feeling anxious or are not thinking clearly, just stop, close your eyes, and take several slow, deep breaths. Concentrate only on your breathing for a minute or so and then return to the exam paper. Taking a minute to calm yourself and refocus is time well spent.

13. Pay attention only to the exam.

Don't waste time worrying, doubting yourself, wondering how other people are doing, telling yourself that you should have studied more. Don't think about what you should have done, pay attention to what you can do now. Tell yourself, "Right now, I'm going to concentrate on the exam."

References

Sections of this tip sheet were adapted from How to keep calm during tests, Monash University Counselling Service.

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Want to chat to someone?

For a confidential – and free – chat about your general situation, please contact our ECU Psychologist, or the Psychological Counselling Support Team service to make an appointment at any of our campuses.

✉ counselling@ecu.edu.au   ☎ (08) 6304 6706

Alternatively, you can discuss study techniques and tips with a Learning Adviser in our Academic Skills Centre.

✉ learningadviser@ecu.edu.au