

# Staying Calm during Exams

## Counselling Service Tip Sheet



Here are some tips to help you stay calm during exams, so that you can reach your potential.

### **1. Start to prepare for your exams well in advance.**

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

### **2. Put the exam in perspective.**

It is 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 additional stress and anxiety.

### **3. Get a good night's sleep**

### **beforehand.**

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

### **4. Eat sensibly before the exam.**

Some people overeat when they are

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 in to 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 that 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. Develop positive images.**

In preparation for your exam(s) spend just 5 minutes each day imagining yourself actually doing the exam, feeling calm, relaxed, well-prepared, clear-headed and confident. See yourself answering all the questions with ease and accuracy.

### **9. Don't talk about the exam with your classmates.**

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.

### **10. Read over the exam carefully and plan your approach.**

Taking a few minutes to determine 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.

### **11. 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 are not sure about what you are expected to do and don't waste time doing more than the exam asks you to do.

### **12. 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 mind working.

### **13. Wear your watch and keep track of time.**

Pace yourself. Allocate an appropriate time to each question and try to stick to it. You can always go back and add something if you have a few minutes left at the end.

### **14. Relax yourself during the exam.**

Relax yourself during the exam if you

notice that you are feeling very anxious or are not thinking well. Stop, close your eyes if necessary, 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 may be time well spent.

### **15. 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 "I can be anxious later, 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 (<http://www.adm.monash.edu.au/commserv>).

More information is available from:

- Counselling Tip Sheet: Managing Stress
- Counselling Tip Sheet: 20 Strategies to Overcome Procrastination
- Counselling Tip Sheet: Tips for Successful Time Management
- Counselling Tip Sheet: The Benefits of Relaxation
- Counselling Tip Sheets: Relaxation and Stress Reduction Techniques

## **Acknowledgements**

Editors: Mel Johnston and Nichola Webb

Please note that this tip-sheet provides information and guidance only - it is not a substitute for professional counselling and support.

CRICOS IPC 00279B

## **ECU Counselling Service**

Reception: Mount Lawley: Building 3, Room 128

Joondalup: Building 34, Room 245

Telephone: 9370 6706 Email: [counselling@ecu.edu.au](mailto:counselling@ecu.edu.au)