

**ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW
OFFICE OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT**

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OVERCOMING TEST ANXIETY

Introduction

Most students experience some level of anxiety during an exam. However, when anxiety begins to affect exam performance it has become a problem. There are resolutions for this problem.

Physical Signs of Test Anxiety

During an exam, as in any stressful situations, a student may experience any of the following bodily changes:

- Perspiration
- Sweaty Palms
- Headache
- Upset Stomach
- Rapid Heartbeat
- Tense Muscles
- Trembling Hands.

Effects of Test Anxiety

- Nervousness:
 - Difficulty reading and understanding the questions on the exam paper.
 - Difficulty organizing your thoughts.
 - Difficulty retrieving key words and concepts when answering essay questions.
 - Doing poorly on an exam even though you know the material.
- Mental Blocking:
 - Going blank on questions.
 - Remembering the correct answers as soon as the exam is over.

How to Reduce Test Anxiety

- Preparation – be prepared for your exam, review your notes, and include as much self-testing in your review as possible.
- Healthy Lifestyle – if you have been prescribed medication for anxiety -- be certain to take the medication, practice good nutrition and exercise.
- Relaxation – take some personal down-time, listen to soothing and inspirational music.
- Meditation – think about your positive accomplishments, your successful relationships, exams that you have done well on in the past, your bright future, and be thankful.¹
- Visualization – close your eyes and see yourself as confident about your ability to perform, watch yourself working through the exam, and see yourself leaving the exam excited.
- Organization – organize everything you need for the exam the night before.
- Rest – set the alarm, get enough sleep.
- **Exam Day** – have something nutritional for breakfast (fruit and juice), allot enough time for traffic, arrive at least twenty minutes prior to the exam, sit in a location in the exam room where there will be minimal distractions, and be cautious about talking to other students about the exam material immediately before the exam.
- **Anxiety during the exam – calm yourself, take slow, deep breaths, stretch your arms and legs and then relax them, do some positive internal self-talk (“I can do this”), focus on the exam.**
- **Reward yourself** – if you do not have other exams or commitments, take the night off. If you have other exams, **prepare** for those exams and plan a reward for later!

Most anxiety-producing events are not inherently awful. What makes these events feel distressing is the way we react to them. We can reduce anxiety when we take time to prepare, meditate, reflect, and be thankful for the learning and exam opportunities. Optimal exam performance results as we put our exam experiences in proper perspective.

Help! Where to find it:

- **The Office of Academic Support, first floor of the Raba Law Faculty building, Rooms 106 (A, B & E) • (210) 436-4340 or (210) 436-3541 • academicsupport@stmarytx.edu.**
- **The Counseling and Testing Center, located in the Center for Life Directions building • (210) 436-3135.**

¹ For spiritual meditation, read Philippians 4:6-8.