

7 Day Test Anxiety Desensitization Program

This 7-step program will help you begin to replace anxiety responses with relaxation responses.

The procedure involved in this test anxiety desensitization program involves visualizing a series of test-preparation and test-taking scenes.

Find a quiet place where you can be left alone and become very calm and relaxed. Minimize the likelihood of interruptions by silencing your cell phone, turning off notifications, and closing the door. Lie on your back, get as comfortable as you can, and close your eyes.

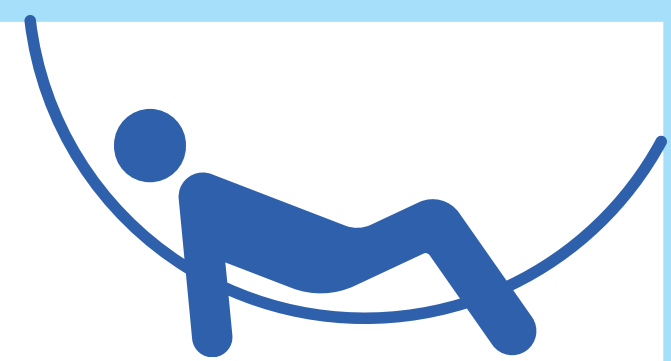
Now you are to create mental images of scenes. They should be recreations of both your study and testing environments. You will imagine the place where you study for one scene and the testing space for another. For each scene you first imagine what it would look like if you were staring straight ahead. Next, picture what you would see if you looked to your right, then behind you, and finally to your left. In other words, you visualize four different views within each scene to completely picture in your mind's eye the physical environment. You may wish to first imagine an empty gray screen. After viewing the four images for a particular scene, you then "erase" them by imagining again the gray screen. Try to hold each view of the scene for at least 10 seconds.

After visualizing each scene, you are to do a relaxation exercise for about 10 seconds. Keeping your mental screen blank, repeat one or two of the relaxation phrases listed below. You may also take a few deep breaths, slowly exhaling to feel the relaxation, or say "Calm" or "Relax" to yourself.

When finished with the desensitization scenes and relaxation for that day, gradually and easily become active again by taking a deep breath and slowly exhaling, moving your hands and feet, opening your eyes, and stretching your body before coming to a seated position.

List of Relaxation Phrases

1. I feel quiet and calm.
2. My feet feel heavy and warm.
3. I am beginning to feel more and more relaxed.
4. My ankles, knees, and hips feel warm and relaxed.
5. My stomach, chest, and back feel heavy and relaxed.
6. My shoulders, arms, and hands feel warm and relaxed.
7. I can feel warmth flowing down my arms into my hands.
8. My neck, jaws, face, and forehead feel smooth and relaxed.
9. My whole body feels heavy, warm, and very relaxed.
10. I am alert, but in a very calm, quiet way.
11. I feel very quiet and calm.
12. I feel very relaxed.
13. I can visualize myself as being still.
14. My whole body feels warm and relaxed.
15. My thoughts are turned inward, and I am at ease.
16. My whole body feels comfortable, calm, and relaxed.



7 Days Before Your Exam

Imagine yourself in the setting where you usually study. You're looking at your class notes and textbook. The next test is one week away and you know what will be covered on the test. Imagine yourself in the setting where you usually study. One at a time, imagine these four scenes: What you see in your study setting as you look straight ahead, what you see as you look to your right, what you see as you look behind you, and what you see as you look to your left.

Be aware of the room and its furnishings, the materials on your desk, the words and diagrams on the pages of your books and notebooks. Be specific as you visualize each scene. Imagine the details. The more closely you recreate the details in your mind's eye, the better the desensitization benefits.

6 Days Before Your Exam

Again, picture yourself in your normal study setting. Imagine that you are preparing for the exam and reviewing the material to be covered. Picture in your mind's eye the specific material you're reviewing, as well as what you see as you look straight ahead, to your right, in the rear, and to your left. Remember to relax for 10 seconds between each new image.

5 Days Before Your Exam

Imagine yourself studying for the exam. If you sometimes study in more than one place, imagine that today you are in a setting different from the one before. You are reviewing material you know will be covered on the exam. Picture yourself studying with concentration and efficiency, but also being relaxed and comfortable. Relax 10 seconds between each new image. Remember to relax for 10 seconds between each new image.

4 Days Before Your Exam

Imagine yourself studying for the exam. Remember to relax for 10 seconds between each new image.

3 Days Before Your Exam

Once more imagine yourself confidently and calmly studying for the exam. Remember to relax 10 for seconds between each change of image.

2 Days Before Your Exam

Picture the setting and events of the evening before the exam. You have finished studying for the exam and feel confident you have covered the material and are well-prepared. Imagine yourself as you prepare for and get into bed. You feel drowsy and relaxed, and sleep comes easily. You have a normal night's sleep. Picture yourself in that setting, and what it looks like in front of you, to your right, behind you, and to your left. Relax for 10 seconds between each change of image.

The Night Before Your Exam

Imagine yourself confidently and calmly taking the exam. Imagine feeling drowsy and relaxed before you go to sleep. Relax for 10 seconds between each change of image.

Adapted from Eugene Hakanson and Ron Ronacher, Portland State University