Reduce Test Anxiety in Seven Days

Begin to substitute relaxation responses for the anxiety you now experience when studying for and taking tests.

Each day of the program you will:

1. Find a quiet place where you can relax and be free from distractions and interruptions.
2. Imagine the first of the four scenes for that day, holding the mental image in your mind for about 10 seconds. The more closely you recreate the actual setting and its physical details, the better the desensitization benefits will transfer to the real environment later on. Picture yourself studying with concentration and efficiency, but also being relaxed and comfortable.
3. Erase the mental image of the first scene and do relaxation for about 10 seconds.
4. One at a time, imagine the three remaining scenes, and do relaxation after each one.
5. End the session by breathing deeply and exhaling slowly, gently and then more vigorously moving your hands and feet, opening your eyes, and stretching before arising.

Now, starting with the first session, which is seven days before your exam, do one complete session each day. If you have more than a week to prepare for your exam, repeat the scenes causing you the most anxiety or simply start the entire program over again.

Seven Days Before Your Exam

Imagine yourself in the setting where you usually study. The test is one week away. One at a time, imagine these four scenes:

1. What you see in your study setting as you look straight ahead of you (hold for 10 seconds and then relax 10 seconds before the next image)
2. What you see as you look to your right (hold for 10/relax for 10)
3. What you see as you look behind you (hold for 10/relax for 10)
4. What you see as you look to your left (hold for 10/relax for 10)

Be aware of your room and its furnishings, the material on your desk, the words and diagrams on the pages of your books and notebooks.

Six Days Before Your Exam

Again, picture yourself in your normal study setting. Imagine that the exam is now only four days away. Picture in your mind the specific material you’re reviewing, and what you see as you look straight ahead, to your right, rear, and left. Remember to relax for 10 seconds between each new image.

Five Days Before Your Exam

Imagine that you are in a setting different from the one before. You are reviewing material you know will be covered on the exam. Imagine how the study material and setting look in front of you, to your right side, left side, and behind you. Relax 10 seconds between each new image.

Continued on the next page
Reduce Test Anxiety in Seven Days

Four Days Before Your Exam
Visualize 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. Relax 10 seconds between each change of image.

Three Days Before Your Exam
Imagine it is the morning of the exam. You are aware that this is the day of the exam. Because you have studied well, you know the material to be covered on the test. You feel prepared, confident, and relaxed. Imagine what it looks like ahead of you, to your right, behind you, and to your left. Relax 10 seconds after each scene you imagine.

Two Days Before Your Exam
Picture yourself on the way to your exam. You go to school, enter the building, walk down the hall, and enter the classroom. You believe the exam will be a challenge but you know you have prepared well, and still feel confident and calm. Imagine what you see in front of you, on your right side, behind you, and to your left. Relax 10 seconds between scenes.

One Day Before Your Exam
Visualize yourself sitting in your seat in the classroom just before the exam is about to start. The instructor passes out the test. You receive your copy, look at the exam, and begin taking the exam feeling thoroughly prepared and alert, but very calm and relaxed. Imagine these events and what the room will look like in front of you, on both sides, and behind. Allow 10 seconds of relaxation between each scene.

Relaxation Phrases

I feel quiet and calm.
My whole body feels heavy and warm, and very relaxed.

I am beginning to feel more and more relaxed.
I feel very quiet and calm.

My feet feel heavy and warm.
I feel very relaxed. My whole body feels warm and relaxed.

My ankles, knees, and hips feel warm and relaxed.
My whole body feels comfortable, calm, and relaxed.

My stomach, chest, and back feel heavy and relaxed.
My mind is quiet and calm.

My shoulders, arms, and hands feel warm and relaxed.
My thoughts are turned inward, and I am at ease.

I can feel warmth flowing down my arms into my hands.
I can visualize myself as still and relaxed.

My neck, jaws, face, and forehead feel smooth and relaxed.
I am alert, but in a very calm, quiet way.

Source: Eugene Hakanson, Ed.D. Ron Ronacher, Ph.D., Portland State University