Managing Exam Anxiety
Counseling Center

- Accessibility and Disability Service
- Counseling Service
- Research Unit
- Testing Office

www.counseling.umd.edu
301.314.7651
In this workshop, you will learn the skills to manage exam anxiety.
Topics

- Warm Up Questions
- Definition
- Causes
- Signs
- Management
Warm Up

• Raise your hand if you’ve had the following thoughts while taking an exam:
  – “I should have studied more.”
  – “I’m going to fail.”
  – “Why can’t I get this?”
  – “Ugh that person’s already done.”

• Think of a time you did well on an exam. What was different about that exam?
Definition

• Anticipatory: feeling distress when studying or thinking about the exam

• Situational: feeling distress while taking the exam

Some anxiety is normal and necessary for motivation, mental alertness, and physical energy
Anticipatory Signs

- Distracting yourself
- Avoiding studying
- Procrastination
- Negative thoughts
- Feeling paralyzed

“I can’t even start”
Situational Signs

• Physical
  – headache, stomach upset, sweating, shortness of breath, increased heart rate

• Cognitive
  – “freezing,” confusion, self-defeating thoughts

• Emotional
  – low self-esteem, depression, anger, hopelessness

• Behavioral
  • Fidgeting, tapping, walking quickly
Causes

- Lack of preparation
- Fear of failure
- Poor testing experiences in the past
- Focusing on how others are doing on the test
- Issues outside of school
- Poor eating, sleeping, and exercise habits
Management

• Physical
  – Deep breathe
  – Make stress your friend

• Cognitive/Emotional
  – Reframe your thoughts
  – Self-compassion

• Behavioral
  – Put the time in to study
  – Exam desensitization

Challenge and normalize
Physical

• Don’t go to the exam on an empty stomach
  – Eat: fruits, vegetables, yogurt, lean meat
  – Avoid: energy drinks, processed foods, fried foods
  – Eat a banana! Studies show they reduce performance anxiety

• Deep breathe (activity)

• Tense and release muscles throughout your body

• Learn the difference between your anxious nausea and true nausea

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyBdA61GmJ0
How to Make Stress Your Friend

• When you change your mind about stress you change your body

• The Social Stress Test (Harvard)
  – Participants were told to view their physical stress response as helpful
    • “Your body is energized and preparing you to meet this challenge”
    • “That pounding heart is preparing you for action”
    • “Breathing faster? No problem, you’re getting more oxygen to your brain”
  – Less stressed out, performed better, more confident
  – Physical reactions were the same as someone experiencing joy— and courage!
Cognitive/Emotional

• Visualize yourself doing well
• Strive for a relaxed state of concentration
• Reframe negative thoughts to positive ones
• Focus on the task at hand

Stop shoulding on yourself!
Behavioral: Before Exam

• Allocate study time each week throughout the semester!
• Create study plan/study group
• Mimic the study environment
  – Complete homework and practice exams without notes
• Get a good night’s rest
• Arrive 30 minutes early to acclimate to room and deep breathe
## Sample Study Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Hours Needed</th>
<th>Dates to Do</th>
<th>Study Group or Tutor?</th>
<th>Meeting w/Instructor?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Contact study group</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12/4</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic A</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12/4-12/6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Rational Functions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Exponential Functions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Linear Functions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic B</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12/7-12/9</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Addition method</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Subtraction method</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Graphing method</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic C</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12/10-12/12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Solve by factoring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Solve using quadratic equation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Review</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12/13-12/14</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Practice Tests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE STUDY CYCLE

BEFORE CLASS - PREVIEW
- Identify sections to be covered in the next class/lecture (use your syllabus)
- Take 10-15 minutes to look over chapter headings, keywords, & chapter summary
- Formulate questions you want to ask and answer during class.

Prepare for Success
- Analyze returned tests and learn from the results. What worked well and what didn’t?
- Think realistically and manage time with a study schedule
- Study when and where you’re the most alert

TEST
- Arrive early to minimize anxiety
- Get an overview before you begin
- Read directions carefully
- Keep track of your time
- Practice relaxation & positive self-talk

STUDY - SELF-TEST
- Interact with material — Organize, develop concept maps, charts, tables, or diagrams, summarize, process, re-read, fill in notes, reflect, etc.
- Rehearse — Do practice problems without looking at the steps in your text or notes, boost memory with repetition, use mnemonic devices, etc.
- Elaborate — Explain ideas aloud (to self or others), write and answer practice test questions.
- Apply — Challenge yourself to apply the knowledge to problem-solving, or real-world situations
- Retrieval — Put material away and practice retrieval by recalling as much information as possible.

DURING CLASS - LISTEN & TAKE NOTES
- Use an effective notetaking system during lecture
- Listen to find answers to your questions
- Include what the professor says in addition to material on the board
- Leave space in notes to add material later

AFTER CLASS - RSQIC
- Review — As soon after class as possible, read notes and text material and fill in gaps.
- Synthesize the lecture and reading materials. Summarize your learning in a few sentences.
- Questions — Clarify questions using resources such as instructor, TA, text, other students, tutor, etc.
- Connect new information with previous learning.

Typically, students only remember 5% of lecture information that is not included in their notes.

Synthesize — integrate the main concepts and explain in your own words

Learning Assistance Service
2202 Shoemaker Building • 4281 Chapel Lane • 301-314-7693 • http://www.counseling.umd.edu/las • las-cc@umd.edu • https://lasonline.umd.edu
Study Groups

• Get 3-4 classmates’ numbers or email addresses at the start of the semester
• Meet once per week
• Have a group leader that keeps the group on track and on task
  – Decide as a group what material will be covered that week
Behavioral: During Exam

• Answer the questions you know first
• Only change your answer if you know it is wrong
• Remain positive, focused, and continue to deep breathe
Take Home Points

• Prepare well and desensitize yourself to the exam environment

• Breathe deeply and visualize yourself doing well

• Normalize your physical symptoms

• Challenge your thoughts and engage in positive self-talk before/during exam

• Stay focused on the task at hand