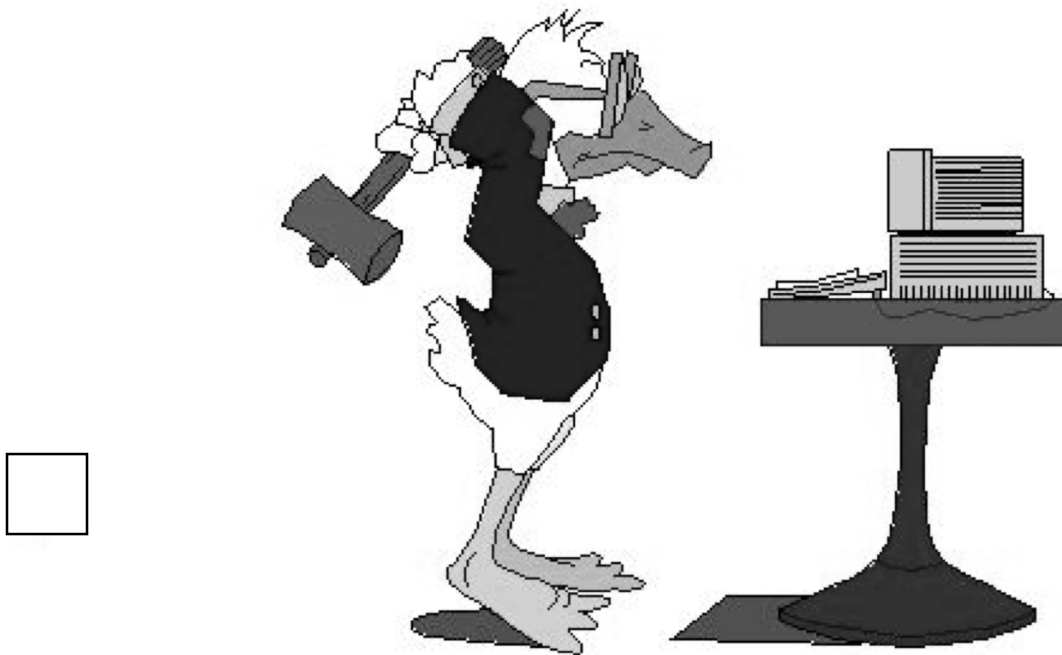


# Test Anxiety!

## And How to Deal With It Effectively



# What is Test Anxiety?

- My head feels like it's in a clamp.
- My stomach hurts.
- I'm sweating.
- I studied this stuff yesterday, why can't I remember?
- I can't think!
- As soon as I leave the test, I remember everything.

# Where does it come from?

- Well, there is some good news and some not so good news

# First, the Good News

- There are two pieces of good news:
  - 1. Test anxiety is not genetic.
  - 2. Test anxiety is something you've learned to do and can be unlearned.



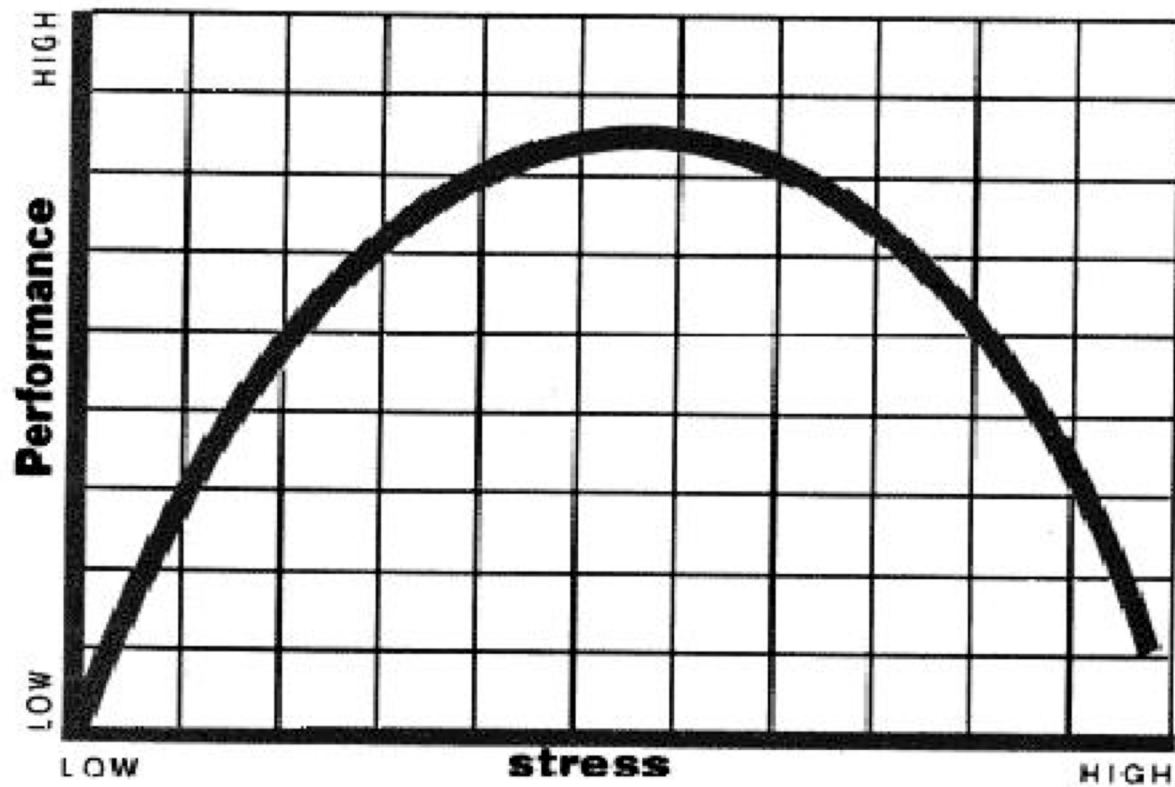
# Now, the other news.

- You have spent a lot of time learning and practicing how to be anxious about tests.
- But, before we learn something new, there are few things to remember first.



# Some Anxiety is Good for You

- Look at this chart -

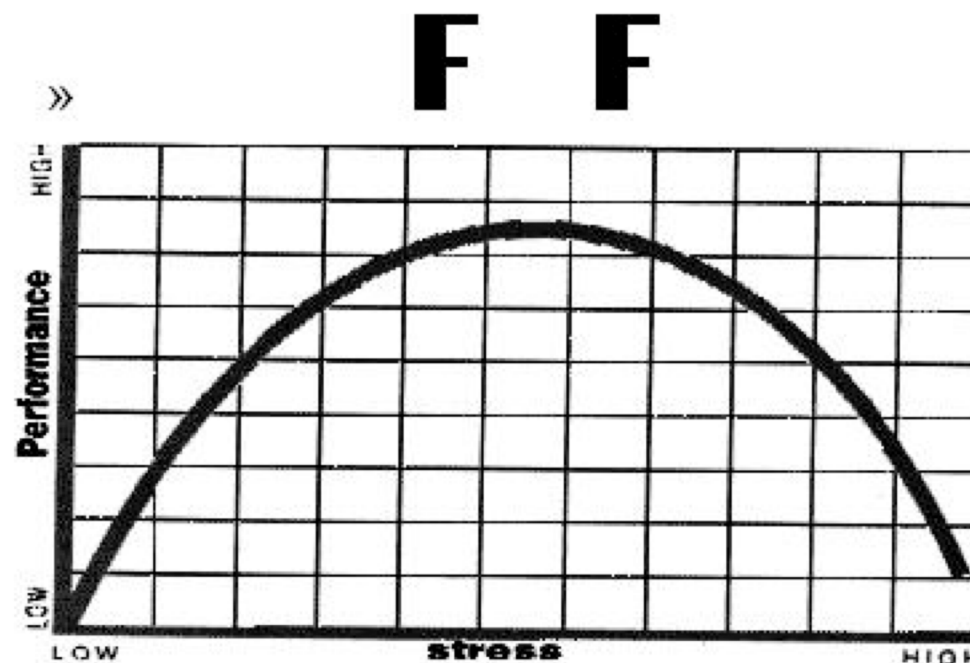


# What does it mean?

- Everyone needs some “stress” to perform at the peak of their abilities, so at the beginning, as stress increases, so does performance.
- But, if stress keeps increasing, there comes a point, for you, where your performance will drop off - that’s what you would call “test anxiety”.

# “The Zone”

- The best place to be on this chart for optimal performance is in the middle. Athletes call this “the zone”.



# “Take me to ‘the zone!’”

- There are a number of factors that can increase your performance. In each case, we will be working on reducing stress to get you back into the zone.
  - 1. Physical factors - relaxation, rest, etc.
  - 2. Rehearsal - practice, practice, practice
  - 3. Thought - what you think is what you get



# Physical Factors #1

## Take care of yourself

- Basic health is key in optimal performance.
  - Eating right, sleeping right, and exercising all help your body to be prepared to be able to work.
  - Not abusing your body also helps - using alcohol or drugs (including caffeine) that alter your natural state detracts from your abilities to function. - Let me tell you a story...

# When anxiety is not anxiety

- So, an unnamed student decided to cram for an exam. In order to cram, she decided to start drinking coffee. By 10:00 p.m., a whole pot of coffee was consumed.
- At 11:00, the student noticed that her hands were shaking, her heart was racing, her head was pounding, and her breathing was fast...

## The rest of the story

- Her diagnosis: “I must be so anxious for having waited so long that I can’t concentrate anymore.” She spent the rest of the night alternately trying to sleep and study, neither of which she managed very well. She went to the test exhausted with a large sense of dread.
- The other diagnosis: caffeine overdose.



## Physical Factors #2

- Beyond basic health, learning a relaxation technique allows you to better control your anxiety, if it does become a problem, by teaching you how to slow down your body's pace to a level where you can perform better. - Here's a simple technique you can do anywhere...

# Simple Breathing Technique #1

- 1. Get comfortable. Close your eyes (after you read all the instructions) and take a deep breath.
- 2. Hold the breath for a split second then breath out slowly.
- 3. Repeat this a couple more times.
- 4. Breath normally, but slowly for a couple of minutes.

# Simple Breathing Technique #2

- That's all there is to it. Most people will find that just slowing down feels better.
- As you practice doing this more, you will find that your body will learn that you want it to relax and that, just by getting comfortable, you will begin to feel yourself slowing down.



# Practice, practice, practice #1

- See if this is true for you -
  - The more experience you have doing something, the better you tend to be at it.
  - The less experience you have doing something, the more difficult and overwhelming it may seem.
- Most people report that new things are more difficult than familiar things.

# Practice, practice, practice #2

- Here's the basic rule:
- The more you practice something just the way you will have to “perform” it, the easier it will become to perform it.
- Many people report anxiety when they have to perform without adequate practice...



# Practice, practice, practice #3

- Yes, another story:
- A student goes to a math class and is taught  $a+b=c$ . She studies at home over and over again,  $a+b=c$ ,  $a+b=c$ ,  $a+b=c$ .
- She gets to the test and sees the following equation:  $a=b-c$ .
- She panics because she was not taught this in class and has never seen this before.



# Practice, practice, practice #4

- There are 3 basic kinds of tests:
  - 1. Multiple choice
  - 2. Essay
  - 3. Concept learning (story problems)
- Each test requires different kinds of practice.



# Practice for Objective Tests

- Objective tests (like multiple choice, true-false, short answer, and matching) ask you to know how discrete bits of information are connected.
  - Like: a) 1492 connects to b) Columbus sailed the ocean blue.
- Practice for these by some method approximating flash cards usually is best.

# Practice for Essay Tests

- Essay tests ask you to tell how things are related or not related to each other or ask you to show you know content.
  - Compare/contrast
  - Describe/discuss
- Outlining and understanding main points and how they are connected works best.

# Practice for Concept Learning

- Concept learning asks you to show you know the concept by being able to use it.
  - Math story problems
  - Using a concept in a different way than was discussed.
- Studying the concepts from different angles and views to see how they connect to each other works best.

# Study First...

- Remember, the best way to reduce anxiety is to practice in the same way you will have to perform.
- **BUT**, first you have to study the material.
- This means you might want to study far enough ahead to allow yourself the time to practice.

# Practice Second

- After you've studied the material and know it, practice it like you're taking the test.
  - Ask yourself the same types of questions as the test you will take (multiple choice, essay, concept learning)
  - Time yourself
- As you practice, look for any information you are missing or that is weak for you.

# Practice a Little More #1

- After you've identified weak areas, study more then practice again.
- If you're unsure that you have studied everything you need to know, get an appointment with your instructor a few days before the exam.
- Take a list of the things you know. Ask if the list is complete. Do not ask...

## Practice a Little More #2

- “What’s on the test?” Teachers hate that, they really do.
- So, study and practice. Find your weak points. Study and practice.

# What you think is what you get!

- The third part of reducing test anxiety is entirely within you. It's what you're thinking about how you are going to perform.
- Here comes another story...



# How Thinking Makes You Anxious #1

- Well, you've waited 'til the day before the exam because you've said to yourself,
  - “I can only study when I feel energized and now I feel really energized. But, since I've waited so long, I'm not sure I can do very well because I may not have enough time to study everything.”



# How Thinking Makes You Anxious #2

- “And, since I may not have enough time to study everything, it might be that what I study won’t be on the test and what I don’t study may be on the test.”
- “What if I get to the test and I can’t recognize any of the questions?”
- “What if I really bomb the exam?”
- “What if I just freeze?”



# How Thinking Makes You Anxious #3

- Now, instead of actually studying, you close your eyes and picture yourself going to the exam, full of dread, knowing that you don't know. You see yourself sitting in the desk as the test papers get passed back. You can clearly see yourself looking at the top page of the exam and blanking out completely.
- And you rehearse this over and over again.

# Test Anxiety!!!!

- So, you go to class the next day, full of dread and when the test hits your desk, you look down at the first page and blank out.
- No surprise here. You have just demonstrated the power of positive thinking!

# A Psychological Truism

- Psychologists and great thinkers who study humanity like to believe that they know lots about people. The truth is, we don't know that much.
- BUT, here's one thing we do know:
  - *What you think will happen has a dramatic and often direct effect on how you behave.*

# What you see is what you get!

- Each time we imagine something or ask ourselves questions, or make statements to ourselves, a part of us hears each of these as a suggestion for action.
- Remember how we get good at things - practice, practice, practice.
- If you practice how awful you will perform, it is likely that that is how you will act.

# Thinking for Positive Results

- The third part of reducing test anxiety is to reduce and/or eliminate negative messages and images you give yourself about how you will do on the test and replace those thoughts with more realistically positive thoughts and images.

# Some Examples

- All these examples are based on the assumption that you have taken adequate time to prepare...
  - “I may not answer all the questions, but I can start with the ones I really know and move to the harder ones and do the best I can.”
  - “Even if I feel a little shaky, I can still perform to the best of my ability and let the anxiety energize me.”



# Some More Examples

- “I have studied this material to the best of my ability and will answer the questions as best I can.”
- “Expecting myself to get all the questions correct is not a good strategy. It is likely I may get several questions wrong. But that will not deter me from doing my best.”
- “I can allow myself to relax enough so that I can perform at my peak level.”

# Seeing is Believing

- You can also imagine yourself doing a good job.
  - Close your eyes and watch yourself feeling confident about your ability to perform as you walk to the test. Feel a sense of anticipation of wanting to start the test to show what you know. Watch yourself working through the test and feeling good about your performance. Imagine skipping a hard question for now and coming back to it later. Leave the test excited.

# Summary #1

- 1. The first key to reducing test anxiety is good basic health - eating, sleeping, exercising - and avoiding mood enhancing foods and drinks like caffeine and alcohol.

## Summary #2

- 2. Studying in advance and practicing the way you will be tested allow you to be in the “zone” with your skills. Knowing how to study differently for different types of exams is critical to practicing appropriately.

## Summary #3

- 3. Learning a stress management technique can help you to reduce the symptoms of anxiety and stress. Deep breathing, soothing imagery, quiet time, etc. all help to teach your body to slow down so that you can perform to the best of your ability.

# Summary #4

- 4. Thinking realistically positive thoughts and practicing your performance positively in your mind increase the likelihood of good performance. Rehearsing disaster has the opposite effect. Learn to stop negative thinking and replace it with appropriate positive thoughts.