

Exam Stress-Busting Advice

Before your exams

1. Don't Panic.

Avoid panic. Exam nerves are natural but panicking will only make things worse and you may not be able to think clearly.

2. Stay positive.

Believe in yourself. If you prepare for your exams properly you should do fine. Your teachers have worked hard to make sure you have studied everything you need to for the exam. They believe you can do it and so should you. If you believe you can do it, then you can.

3. Don't bottle things up.

If the exams are making you feel worried or depressed, talk to your friends, your parents/guardians or your teachers. Don't bottle things up. You're not the only one to feel worried about exams - we've all been there. Remember, everyone reacts in different ways to exams.

4. Keep things in perspective.

Exams might seem like the most important thing you have to focus on right now, but they are only a small part of your life. There are thousands of successful people who didn't do as well as they wanted in their exams. It's great to do well but remember that you can only do your best and that is what your teachers and your parents/guardians ask of you.

5. Plan.

Timetables and study plans

You should know when your exams will be so work out a plan or timetable for study. If you don't know when the exams are, speak to your teachers or your examinations officer.

Make sure you leave plenty of time to revise so that you don't have to cram at the last minute. If you plan you will become more confident and will be better prepared for your exams so you should also be more relaxed. Include some flexibility in your plan in case something happens and you fall behind your timetable/schedule.

Use your plan or timetable to monitor your progress. If you fall behind on your plan or timetable, work out how to get back on track. Avoid falling behind further as you may become more stressed and anxious. Set yourself some realistic goals at each study period eg to cover a particular topic.

Study approach

Plan your approach to studying. There are many different ways to study. Some people prefer to study in silence, some like to work in the library and others prefer to work at home. Some people like to make short notes, others prefer to mix topics/subjects (eg difficult or easy topics). Students have also found that using key words, memory aids and practising exam questions helps them prepare. Wherever you choose to study make sure you have plenty of room to set out your notes and books so you are organised. Pick the approach that best suits you. Your teachers can help advise you on how you should study for their subjects.

Test yourself on what you have learnt as you study.

6. Rest and relaxation.

Make sure you allow yourself time for fun and relaxation away from where you are studying so that you avoid exhaustion. Include regular breaks into your study plan or timetable and make sure you get enough exercise and sleep to keep yourself relaxed and refreshed. If you exercise you will be able to sleep better and you will wake up refreshed in the morning.

If you feel you are starting to lose concentration, take a short break. Your mind is probably tired and you will waste time trying to study. The break will mean that you will come back refreshed. Research shows that taking breaks (eg 10 minutes for every hour of studying) will help your brain to learn and remember things and also lengthen your concentration. Don't overload your brain in a study session.

You are not wasting time by taking some time out to relax from your studies but are helping yourself to work more effectively.

7. Ask for help.

If you don't understand something ask your friends, parents/guardians or your teacher for help. You may find that you can help a classmate in something they don't understand - you may be able to help each other. Don't stress yourself but take action to find out answers to problems.

8. Use revision papers.

You can use revision papers to prepare mock exam answers which will help you focus your revision. They will also help you get used to the way questions are asked and how they should be answered. The more you practice, the more confident you will become. You can also make up your own questions.

There are also a number of study guides available that you might find useful and these can be purchased at most good bookstores.

9. Eat and drink well.

Fizzy drinks, tea and coffee contain caffeine and this can mean that you're not able to think as clearly. You can keep your mind active by eating healthily and regularly. If

you don't drink enough you could dehydrate and you may suffer from headaches, tiredness and poor concentration.

On the morning of an exam, make sure you eat breakfast. Go for something like wholegrain cereals eg bran, egg, toast which are slow energy burners.

10. Study away from distractions.

Make sure you have a quiet area to study with no distractions. Turn the television off. Don't fall into the trap of watching one programme and then starting your study. You'll quickly find that it's time to go to bed when you're about to turn off the television. This will only knock your studying back and cause you stress and anxiety.

Take short rests during your study time for relaxation away from where you are studying. If your mind gets too tired you will have difficulty remembering what you have been studying.

If you prefer to study in the evening, don't go straight to bed afterwards because your mind will still be thinking over what you have learnt. Take some exercise, go for a walk or do something else that will help relax you from your study time.

11. Prepare everything you need for the exam.

The night before the exam, make sure you have your calculator (if needed), your pens and pencils, your admission card and a watch so you can monitor the time during the exam. Your teacher or your examinations officer can advise you on what you are allowed to take into each examination.

12. Exam day rush.

Instead of trying to learn new topics on the day of the exam, look over your notes/key points.

Don't leave yourself short of time on the day of an exam. Work out how you are getting to the exam and make sure you have plenty of time to get there so that you are not rushed. If you have time, you may want to find a quiet place to relax rather than waiting outside the examination centre with the accompanying noise and tension from your classmates.

During the exam

1. Take deep breaths.

Taking several long, slow, deep breaths will help to calm you down and help you feel more relaxed. Tell yourself that you are calm and that you will do well. Remember – positive thinking!

2. Reading instructions and questions.

Make sure you read each question carefully and listen to instructions given by the invigilators. Read the front of the exam paper which has important information on what

questions you are required to answer and how many marks are awarded. Ask an invigilator if you are unsure.

3. Staying in control.

If your mind goes blank, don't panic! Panicking will just make it harder for you to remember what you learnt. Everyone panics. Put your pen down and go back to taking several long, slow, deep breaths until you feel more relaxed again. Try to stop any negative thoughts and keep telling yourself you can do it. Eventually you will settle down again and you will be able to continue with your questions.

If you find that you are stuck on a question, take a deep breath, move on to the next question and come back to the other question later when you have more time to concentrate on difficult questions. Do not waste all of your time on one question when there are others you could easily answer. Make sure you divide your exam time according to the marks allocated for each question.

After the exam

1. Stay positive.

If you found part of an exam difficult, don't panic or get annoyed. You are not the only one. You will only know how you did when you get the results. You may be surprised! Exams are mostly about technique and the more you do, the better you get. Some students prefer to leave the examination centre immediately so they don't have to discuss their answers with other classmates after the exam.

Yes, exams are important but if things don't go as you had planned you have so many options open to you. Talk to your teachers and your parents/guardians. Ask for their advice on what you should do. They are on your side and are there to support you. They have been there too.

Remember – you did the best you could and no one can fault you on that. Stop wasting time criticising yourself for where you think you went wrong. You'll probably find that you have done better than you thought. Focus on what you did right and learn from your mistakes. Don't dwell on questions you think you didn't do well in or waste time comparing your answers against other students. Wait and see what the results say.

Whether you did well or didn't do as well as expected you are still to be congratulated. Everyone knows how hard you worked and so should you. Treat yourself!

2. Plan your next steps.

Work with you parents/guardians and your teachers to look at the options open to you. You may decide to go into the world of work or you may decide to continue studying at either University, your school or at a college of further and higher education.

Find out everything you need to know and talk through it with your teachers and family. Remember that schools, colleges and Universities have open days and many have information on their websites that might help you. You can also talk to careers advisors in your school.