

Get a Grip: Exam Anxiety and Beyond

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Big accounting exam today and you're out of control!

Stress isn't something that gets left behind after college graduation. Stress is simply a part of life. It will follow you from your college career into your professional career. So instead of struggling with it, learn to manage it. The college experience provides you with opportunities to develop stress management skills. With a little instruction and practice now, these skills can become second nature and will provide benefit in future professional endeavors.

Anxiety is a determinant of your performance. As anxiety increases, performance improves, to a point. As anxiety continues to increase, though, performance actually declines. The level of anxiety is crucial. Being a little nervous prior to a big performance sharpens your senses and helps you perform better. Some students, however, are prone to test anxiety, an overwhelming sense of panic that overcomes them when they sit down to take a test. The key is learning how to control anxiety just enough to maximize performance.

As a student, you face exams, presentations, and project deadlines. Look at these as opportunities to practice stress management. Use these occasions to explore the best ways to manage your anxiety level. Try focusing on the following strategies.

Organize: Adding a little organization to your life will really improve classroom performance. Use a daily planner and write down all important classroom events. Plan a reasonable study schedule around these classroom events that will provide plenty of preparation time. Utilize all resources available to you. If practice test questions are available from your instructor, be sure to spend some time reviewing them. If you know what to expect on test day, your stress will be lowered. Eliminating uncertainty reduces stress.

Exercise: Regular exercise will help stabilize your energy levels. High levels of anxiety can create nervous energy, which can distract you and detract from your performance. Become familiar with what triggers your anxiety. Leave some time on those high anxiety days for a jog or a walk. The exercise will use some of that extra energy. If you already regularly exercise, add a little extra workout.

Relax: Remaining relaxed and calm will enhance the quality of your work. Operating at a frenzied pace can cause you to make mistakes. What you don't need, when you are stressed, is more stimulation. Avoid consuming excessive amounts of caffeine the

morning of an exam. Try deep breathing exercises instead. Try to keep from becoming overexcited. As every golfer knows, hurrying to make your tee time ruins your score. Don't ruin your test score by rushing to make test time, arrive at the classroom early.

Focus: Concentration is important to good mental performance. Staying up all night studying or preparing a presentation can keep you from doing your best. At some point during the prior evening, you must put away the materials and get some sleep. Being tired at an exam is a sure way to lower your performance.

Aspire: Setting realistic goals will provide a solid foundation for success. When setting goals, remember that you don't have to do perfect work to be a success. If you overweigh the significance of everything you do in life, you are destined for a life on Prozac. Micro-managing every aspect of your college career will not provide overall success. Any test is one small part of one grade among many you will receive at college. Though you want the best score possible, keep in mind the small difference a few points, on one test, in one class, will make to your GPA. Try your best, and always keep things in perspective.

Balance: Balancing academic activities with non-academic activities will reduce anxiety levels. Make sure to schedule time for hobbies, friends, and other social activities. By allowing yourself some down time, you'll be more focused and better able to retain material when it is time to study. Remember recruiters are looking for individuals that are multifaceted. So join a student club, learn how to golf, or volunteer in your community. It will give your brain a chance to recharge and it will show recruiters that there is more to you than just an academic record.

By practicing these stress-busting strategies now, you will be rewarded with life-long skills sure to aid in your future undertakings. After graduation, as you enter your professional career, you will encounter stressful situations that are strikingly similar to those you face as a student. Project deadlines, competition, and a perpetually overflowing in-box await you as an accounting professional. With the stress management skills learned in college, these realities will be easier to tackle. By proving yourself, promotion and advancement will follow.

Later in your professional career, as you move into supervisory roles, you need to not only manage the stress you encounter, but also help your subordinates to manage their stress. By providing your employees with the tools necessary to manage stress, you, as a manager, will be rewarded with higher productivity, less employee sick days, low turnover, and a pleasant work environment.

So the next time you feel stressed, remember that school is your opportunity to practice stress management skills. By learning to "get a grip" on anxiety, your future successes will be plentiful and satisfying. Anyone truly interested in controlling anxiety should obtain more in depth information.