

Tips for Reducing Test Anxiety

Developed by College Board and The Jed Foundation

You're more than a test score. SAT® scores are just one part of your college application. And if you're taking a PSAT-related test, colleges won't see your scores. Here are some helpful strategies to calm your nerves before and during a test. The goals: stay focused on the content of the test, keep your mind and body calm, go in well-prepared, keep perspective and remember that you are ready to tackle the test.

Preparation reduces test-taking anxiety.

Nothing helps reduce test anxiety better than preparation. A good study plan that is organized, incorporates learning and practicing good problem-solving strategies, and includes practice tools & tests will help your mind and body get used to the content of the test. Practicing test content until you feel really confident helps strengthen your readiness. Using mind & body calming tools while you practice and prepare strengthens your test-readiness even more. If you're taking the SAT or PSAT-related test, you can prepare for free on [Official SAT Practice on Khan Academy®](#).

The day of my exam, I won't cram anything, and I try to just focus on relaxing rather than the material. It's all about good organization skills. When I organize my studying into little bits each day, then do a quick review the day before the test, it tends to help me hold onto and remember the material. - Heleni T., college student

Care for your body and your mind.

Because feelings of anxiety happen in body and mind, caring for and calming your mind and body reduces test anxiety. Here are some self-care strategies that really help:

- **Get good rest.** It's important to study, but when you are sleep-deprived because of too much studying (or too much time on your screens) your anxiety can get worse.
- **Get regular exercise.** Take a break, get outside if you can, and get moving every day at least once. Exercise is a great anxiety reducer.



Another strategy I use is remembering to pause and take a breath. I find that pausing, instead of rushing to remember everything, helps me refocus and recall all that I studied. - Brittany J., college student

When you feel nervous, physical signals like a racing heart, sweating, or shakiness tell your mind to stay anxious. When you learn & practice one of the relaxation techniques listed below, you can calm your body & send calming messages to your mind when preparing for a test or taking a test.

- **Practice mindfulness techniques**, like mindful coloring or simple meditation. Train your mind to stay focused on the task at hand instead of on anxious thoughts.
- **Practice breathing techniques**, like mindful breathing, deep breathing, or box breathing. They are great for calming the mind and the body.
- **Practice physical relaxation techniques**, like progressive muscle relaxation, the Benson breathing technique, the 5-4-3-2-1 technique, or ragdoll. These can be practiced before, during, or after a study or test session to help you let go of any physical stress you are feeling.



“ I talk my nervousness through with my friends. We laugh it off and joke about it and shake off our nervousness and it helps. - Molly L., high school student

Remember that connecting with others is a great anxiety-reducer. Your friends, family, school counselor, social worker, tutor, or teacher are good people to check in with when you need more support. And there are mental health professionals in your community who specialize in helping young people calm their anxiety down when it feels out of control.

Positive self-talk also can help. Remind yourself of your skills and unique strengths (“I am really good at math”), your preparation (“I have studied hard and I am ready for this”) and your strategies (“I can skip this question and come back to it”) when you start to feel nervous.

“ I tell myself not to worry about how I am doing because worry shuts my brain down and it won’t help me think.” Sam M., high school student

Practice makes prepared when facing test anxiety.

It is important to choose strategies that work for you, and it’s also important to practice them. Test anxiety is a loop between our body and our mind, so we can only ‘retrain’ that loop with practice. The more you practice calming strategies and positive self-talk outside of a test-taking situation, the more relaxation-ready you are when test-taking anxiety rears up for you.



Don’t forget to celebrate!

After a test ends, remember that letting go and moving on helps reduce test anxiety for the next test. Tell yourself, “I was prepared, I did my best, now it’s time to move on.” Give yourself a reward for all your hard work: connect with friends, watch a favorite show, or plan an activity that you really enjoy.

“ After a test, I go do something I enjoy - rewarding myself for showing up and doing my best. - Ana G-S, college student