"Anxious" or "Worried" Thoughts	Challenge	Realistic Thoughts
"I'm not good at tests. I'm going to fail. I'll never pass this course!"	Have I fallen into a thinking trap? Yes, I am **fortune telling**—predicting things will turn out badly before I have even taken the test.	I have passed tests before, and I have studied and am prepared for this test. Even if I don't pass this test, it doesn't mean I can't pass the course.
"I'm stupid. I'll never be able to pass math."	What would I say to a friend if they had that thought?	I am **labeling** myself and being unfair to myself. I don't know for sure that I won't pass math. I will study tonight and try my best on the test. Even if I did fail math, I still have other things that I am good at.
"I'm going to fail this test, fail the course and my life will be over."	Am I **catastrophizing**—imagining the worst possible outcome, that probably won't happen? What things could I do to cope if I did fail?	Even if I failed this course, my life would not be over. Failing a course will not kill me or mean that my life has lost meaning. There is so much more to life than this one course, and so many other things that I can do.
"I always make mistakes. Everyone thinks I'm stupid anyhow. I was going to study all day but I procrastinated and only studied for an hour and now I am going to fail."	Am I being fair to myself? Is my judgement based on facts or feelings? Am I 100% sure that I will fail?	I am **overgeneralizing**. I don't always make mistakes. I know that my friends don't think I'm stupid. I'm just feeling stressed-out and so I was **mind-reading**. I did study today, but I am using **black and white thinking** to make myself feel bad for not studying as much as I had planned. I have studied and I think I know it, and so now I will try my best on test.

Test Anxiety

During a test, do you ever:

- Feel like your mind goes blank?

- Become frustrated or overwhelmed?

- Find yourself thinking "I can't do this" or "I'm stupid"?

- Suddenly 'know' the answers after handing in the test?

- Score much lower on tests than on assignments?
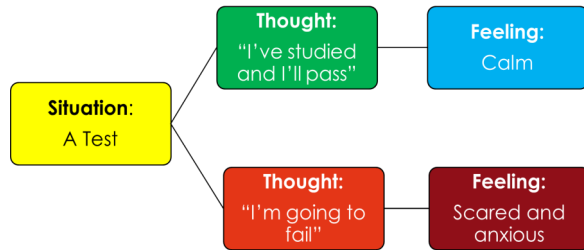
YES?
Then this information is for you!

Information in this pamphlet is summarized from "Test Anxiety" by Mark and Karen Gilbert.

https://www.anxietybc.com/sites/default/files/Test_Anxiety_Booklet.pdf

What is Test Anxiety?

A little bit of anxiety or stress about a big event like a test is completely normal and healthy. However, when that stress gets too intense it causes anxiety, tension, and nervousness. This is a very common problem among students, and is known as 'test anxiety.'

Test anxiety is like not having the password to a computer. The information is there in the computer, but you just can't get to it.

Signs and Symptoms of Test Anxiety:

- Racing thoughts, 'going blank,' not being able to concentrate, negative self-talk, comparing yourself to others, feelings of dread.

- Fidgeting, pacing, putting things off, procrastination.

- Headaches, nausea, diarrhea, sweating, shortness of breath, light-headedness or fainting, rapid heartbeat, etc.

- Feeling scared, disappointed, angry, helpless, and crying or laughing uncontrollably.

Realistic Thinking

When you have a test coming up, do you think positively about yourself and how you think you'll do? How you think about yourself has a huge impact on how anxious and scared you will feel.

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Situation:          Thought:              Feeling:
A Test              "I've studied         Calm
                    and I'll pass"

                    Thought:              Feeling:
                    "I'm going to         Scared and
                    fail"                 anxious
```

Coping Statements

Coping statements help us to remember how we can cope with a situation.

Examples:
"If I get anxious I will try some calm breathing"
"I just need to do my best."
"This has happened before and I can handle it."
"My anxiety won't last forever."
"People cannot tell when I'm feeling anxious."

Positive Self-Statements

Regularly practice being kind to yourself by saying positive things about yourself, rather than being overly self-critical.

Examples:
"I know I can do this."
"Everyone experiences anxiety."
"I can handle this."
"Lots of students struggle with tests."
"I am a capable person and I will do my best."

Thinking Traps

Often, students with test anxiety fall into 'thinking traps' - these are patterns of thinking that are overly negative and not a fair assessment of the situation.

Do you ever fall into these anxiety-causing traps? Check-off the boxes if you do:

☐ **Fortune-telling**
Example: "I know I'll mess up"

☐ **Black and white thinking:**
"I planned to study for three hours but I only studied for one! Now there is no way I will pass!"

☐ **Mind-reading**
"Everyone thinks I'm stupid"

☐ **Overgeneralization**
"I always fail tests"

☐ **Labeling**
"I'm dumb"

☐ **Over-estimating danger**
"I'm going to have a heart attack"

☐ **Filtering**
"I missed three questions, so I know I did poorly"

☐ **Catastrophizing**
"I'm going to freak out and everyone will know"

Ask yourself:

1. Am I falling into a thinking trap?

2. Am I basing my judgement on the way I feel instead of the facts?

3. Am I 100% sure that I will fail?

4. Well, what's the worst that could happen? If the worst did happen, what could I do to cope with it?

Challenge Your Thinking

Example:
"I am going to fail this test"

Am I falling into a thinking trap?

Yes, I am fortune-telling, predicting that things will turn out badly before they even happen. But I still think that I am going to fail.

Am I basing my judgement on feelings rather that facts?

I might *feel* like I am going to fail, but there is no evidence to support it. I've prepared for the test, and I have passed other tests before.

Am I 100% sure that I will fail?

Well no, I might pass. But what if I fail?

What's the worst that could happen? If I did fail, what could I do to cope?

The worst thing that could happen is that I could fail the test. It'll be disappointing, but it won't be the end of the world. I could go to the instructor to see if there is any way to pass the course, or see how to do better on my next test.

See the back panel of this brochure for more examples of how to challenge negative thinking.

Practice Good Test Taking

⇒ Start studying early and regularly throughout the semester
⇒ Do not cram
⇒ Get a good night's sleep
⇒ Come early, prepared, relaxed and ready
⇒ Ignore how quickly others finish
⇒ Pace yourself, leaving time at the end
⇒ **Remember: a test is only a test. You will do your best and that will be enough!**

Practice calm breathing:
1) Close your eyes.
2) Breathe in through your nose for 8 seconds
3) Exhale slowly for ten seconds, then continue until your lungs are completely empty.
4) Repeat until you feel complete calm; focus on keeping your shoulders down and expanding then emptying your rib cage.

Do a body check:
1. Close your eyes.
2. Focus on the muscles in your feet—are they tensed? Relax them completely.
3. Repeat with your ankles, then your calves.
4. Work all the way up your body to the tips of your fingers, your jaw and your face.
5. Repeat as needed.

Questions about test anxiety?

Talk to a Learning Support Specialist!

learningsupport@nlc.bc.ca