



How You Can Reduce Your Students' Exam Anxiety

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One of the great rewards for a teacher is to help a student succeed. Anxiety can interfere with student success. Perhaps the three most anxious times for students are: studying for an exam; taking the exam; and waiting for the results.



You can reduce student anxiety by guiding students in their exam preparation, by creative exam drafting and by getting the results back to students quickly for their review as a part of the learning experience. Here are several suggestions for creating lower-stress and more successful exams.

No tricks

An exam should be a valid test of knowledge and performance and not a surprise as far as content or contain trick questions. Prior to giving an exam some basic information about the exam should be distributed to your students.

Some of the key points to discuss are:

- ▶ What areas will be covered;
- ▶ The question format and types (essay, multiple choice, etc.),
- ▶ How the grading will be performed (percentage for each section),
- ▶ How much time will be allowed for the exam.

Very Important: Clarify issues

At the beginning of the exam, you can read the instructions aloud with your students. Allow adequate time to clarify any exam issues and perhaps ease the transition to a test-taking mode of thinking.

Require an Outline for All Essay Questions

One approach is to require students to write a brief outline (graded for a few points) for all essay answers. An outline helps students organize their answers and assists them by having them write their first thoughts on paper (which are usually their best) before these thoughts are forgotten under the pressure of the exam.

Time Management

During the exam, keep your students posted on how much time has passed and how much of the exam should be completed. Writing it on the board may be less distracting than calling it out. This helps the students with time management. These time updates are also an ideal point to remind the students to check their essay answers against their outlines to ensure they have written about everything they have planned to cover.

Question Order Can Make a Significant Difference

Finally, the order of the questions in an exam is crucial to eliciting the best scores. The best way to order an exam is to place the easiest section first and make each succeeding section a bit more difficult.

Once students have begun the exam, they will be calmer and should then be able to handle a tougher section later. The exam could be a disaster if the first question is so difficult that students panic before they have a chance to begin and succeed.

It's also possible they will spend too much time on the first question and not have enough time to finish the rest of the exam.

Scoring and Presenting Results

Let the students know how and when the results of the exam will be available (such as in class, by e-mail, LMS account, website logon, etc.).

It is imperative that you meet that promised goal of score presentation and timing. This is good classroom management practice and sets an example for students on how to establish and meet realistic goals. You want to provide the students any critical feedback, and an important element of feedback is its timeliness.

One of the teacher's primary goals should be to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and help students put into practice the knowledge and skills they gain.

Help your students manage and overcome test anxiety, and you'll be teaching for success.