

Revision Strategies and Coping with Exam Stress

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Part 1: Coping with Exam Anxiety

Test Anxiety

Worry / Emotionality / Social Anxiety / Trait or State?

- Anxiety = an evolutionary response (fight or flight).
- Anxiety = manageable (performance Psychology – used in sport).
- Worry leads to decreased performance.
- Emotionality leads to avoidance.
- Disengagement leads to further anxiety and avoidance.



Preparing for the Exam

1. Control the Controllable

- Used in Sport Psychology and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy.
- What is within my control? – what I revise; when I revise; how much I revise; where I revise.
- What is out of my control? – what will be on the actual exam paper: try to block this out of your mind.
- Write lists for each of the above to try to ease anxiety.

Preparing for the Exam

2. Unhelpful Thinking Styles (Automatic Negative Thoughts)

- All or nothing / black or white thinking.
- Over-generalising (“everything is...” / “nothing is...”).
- Mental filtering – only recognising and focusing on failure (past or future).
- Disqualifying the positives.
- Jumping to conclusions.

Try to capture the above and try to question and challenge them.

Preparing for the Exam

3. Helpful Self-Talks

- Counteract the negatives with positives / helpful strategies.
- “If x happens then I will do y.”
- “If I cannot do x then I will do y.”
- “What are 3 things I will do in the exam?: take deep breaths; make sure I use key terms; make sure I keep an eye on the clock.”
- Reappraisal – keep challenging negative thoughts (i.e. “I do not always do x; there have been numerous occasions when I did y”).

Preparing for the Exam

4. Avoid Avoidance

- Avoiding mock exam situations will reinforce anxiety.
- Try not to avoid test situations.
- All of the things that you are worrying about will almost certainly not happen.
- Work your way up through “the hierarchy of anxiety” in order to reduce likelihood of anxiety on the day of “the real exam”:
 1. Non-timed past paper questions completed at home;
 2. Timed past paper questions completed at home;
 3. Timed past paper questions / exams in class;
 4. Mock exams;
 5. The final “real” exam.

Preparing for the Exam

5. Managing Anxiety in the Moment

- Mindfulness, breathing and “higher order thinking” – practise before the day of the exam.
- Practise diaphragmatic breathing (deeper breathing). This is more relaxing than clavicular breathing (shallow breathing) which we do when we are anxious.
- Finger breathing – use index finger on one hand to slowly trace round the fingers on the other – one breath in and one breath out per finger.
- Box breathing – slowly draw a box in the air in front of you with your finger – one breath in and one breath out per line.
- Feet, Seat, Hands – starting with feet, try to focus entirely on and think about each for a few seconds; move up through seat and finish with hands.

Preparing for the Exam

5. Managing Anxiety in the Moment

- Looking ahead in the paper – consider reading the whole paper first and do the questions you can do first; this may give more time during the exam for ideas for other questions to form (may not work for everybody).
- Cognitive Labelling – the physical impacts of excitement and worry are similar; try to re-label the sensation – tell yourself it is excitement.
- Opportunity rather than threat – see the exam as an opportunity to show what you know / something which will take you forward.
- Prior to the exam, write your worries on a piece of paper – screw it up and throw it away.

Preparing for the Exam

6. Putting it into Practice

- Take full advantage of mock and class tests.
- Graded exposure (anxiety hierarchy) – open-book questions; closed-book questions; practice in class; mock exams; final exam.
- Walk / talk yourself through past papers – what will I need to do when I answer this question.
- Visualisation – deep breaths/close eyes/imagine self in the exam – picture the room; picture the paper; try to experience feelings (Opening paper; first questions are fine; Q.8 is awful – not a problem / do it later; feet, seat, hands – re-centre; start OK questions; ideas will come for Q.8).
- Try to practise the above, so it becomes familiar.
- Talk to those who have done exams before – how did they cope?

Recommendations for those with A.D.H.D. (response to question)

- Talk to SENCO about possibility of rest breaks in exams.
- Physicality - try pushing palms together with some degree of force in front of self.
- Chair press-ups - hold on to side of chair and do a "sort of press-up": putting pressure on the hips in this way can reduce stress.

What to do if unable to sleep on night before exam (response to question)

- Try to do revision in a different room to where you sleep and definitely not on your bed.
- Built up a good, regular routine - train your body.
- Do not stay up late cramming.
- Read a book or listen to an audio book to help you get to sleep.
- Counteract any negative thoughts which are preventing you from sleeping – question and challenge them.
- Lots of podcasts about sleep: Nicola Camm is recommended.

Part 2: Revision Strategies

Revision Strategies

- There is no such thing as an easy, quick and interesting revision method.
- Revision is hard work and time-consuming, if done properly.
- There is no "magic bullet" - find methods which suit you and are effective.
- Mix things up to try to reduce boredom – topics and techniques.
- Lots of You Tube resources. Recommended: 1. "Crash Course Study Skills"; 2. "Scientifically Proven Best Ways To Study"; 3. "9 Best Scientific Study Tips".

Revision Strategies - **Do**

- Start early.
- Plan a realistic timetable - a little and often.
- Complete past papers.
- Use mark schemes and examiners' reports.
- Practise evaluation and application questions, in particular.
- Check your time management – how much can you actually write in 10-15 minutes? (do it and see)
- Ask teachers for help, where struggling.

Revision Strategies - **Don't**

- Leave it to the last minute.
- Just focus on knowledge and content.
- Just read back over notes and textbooks – revision needs to be active and involve transformative tasks.
- Try to question spot - anything on the specification is a possibility, even if it was on last year's paper.

Revision Strategies - Recommended Techniques

Personal Learning Checklist

- Make a list in a table of all the topics which need revising for a subject / unit.
- Put three columns beside each topic and label: "I do not understand"; "I understand but cannot write about"; "I understand and am able to write about".
- Use a traffic-light shading system for each column.
- Use the above to prioritise revision topics.

Revision Strategies - Recommended Techniques

Spaced Revision

- Review notes for a particular topic.
- Undertake a transformative task (flashcards, poster, mindmap, Powerpoint etc.).
- Leave the topic for two hours and do something else.
- Test yourself on the topic using a quick quiz method.
- If above completed successfully, do a longer answer question on the topic.

Revision Strategies - Recommended Techniques

A3 to Flashcard

- Gradual process of condensing notes.
- Step 1 – create set of notes on topic using one side of A3.
- Step 2- edit / summarise down to one side of A4.
- Step 3 – edit / summarise down to one side of A5.
- Step 4- edit / summarise down to a flashcard.

Revision Strategies - Recommended Techniques

Folding Frenzy

- Step 1 – Make a page of notes on a topic.
- Step 2 – Fold the piece of paper over and try to summarise, using half the amount of space as previously.
- Step 3 – Fold again and try to further summarise.

Revision Strategies - Recommended Techniques

Cornell Notes

Title / Topic:	
<u>Key Words / Ideas:</u>	<u>Notes:</u>
<u>Summary:</u>	

Revision Strategies - Recommended Techniques

Lots of Retrieval Practice

- Do as many past paper questions (with mark schemes) as possible.
- Get family and friends to test you, wherever possible.
- Explain something complex to somebody unfamiliar with the topic – ensure they understand by the end of the process.

Revision Strategies - Recommended Techniques

Practise P.E.E.L. Paragraphs

- Treat the examiner as if they do not understand and require elaboration of points.
- Practise collaboratively with friends – brainstorm a question requiring evaluation; each write a different paragraph; review and augment paragraphs collaboratively; use mark schemes to add anything extra that has been missed.

Revision Strategies - Recommended Techniques

Mind Maps

- An excellent visual tool and transformative task (do not work for everybody, though).
- Can be done effectively in collaboration with friends.

Revision Strategies - Further Top Tips

- Organise – divide subject folders into units and topics.
- Audit – create checklists of what you need to learn for exam.
- Visuals – display these around your room (mindmaps, posters, key terms and definitions etc.).
- Communicate – talk to teachers and other students.
- Record self on phone – play back to self (during a journey?).
- Divide – break down topics and identify gaps in understanding.
- Engage – do active revision, creating resources.

Revision Strategies - Further Top Tips

- Plan – build in rewards: if I do "x" then I can do "y".
- Hydration and Health – ensure revision is accompanied by suitable drinks and snacks.
- Positive Thinking – "I don't know this YET, but...".
- Rest Breaks - build in regular rest breaks.

Part 3: Exam Technique

Exam Technique

BUG Method (box, underline, glance back)

- Put a box around the command word(s) in questions.
- Underline key information in the question.
- Glance back to check understood question.
- + look at mark allocation and how many lines are provided to answer the question, as this can often be a good indicator.

Explain what is meant by self-determination. (2 marks)

Exam Technique

Timing

- Work out exam timings for each section / question before exam.
- Practise writing under timed conditions.
- Practise writing concisely (identify and eradicate unnecessary waffle).
- Maybe consider doing longer answer questions first (more marks).
- Copy out a passage for 5, 10, 15 minutes to see how much it is possible to write in this amount of time.

Exam Technique

Key Terms and Specialist Terminology

- Imagine you are a chef and key terms are your seasoning and flavourings - "season your answers to avoid them being bland".
- Make glossaries of key terms as part of the revision process.
- Highlight where you have used key terms in practise questions. – Have you used enough? Do you need more?