Self-Scripts to Reduce Test Anxiety

*Here are four questions to answer about test anxiety:*

1. Before tests, do you read, study and recite using your best and most appropriate study skills?  
   Yes _____  No _____

2. During tests, can you get relaxed and comfortable?  
   Yes _____  No _____

3. Do you use the wisest test-taking techniques?  
   Yes _____  No _____

4. Do you talk to yourself in helpful & supportive ways during tests?  
   Yes _____  No _____

Test anxious students often answer question number 4 with a “no”.¹ They talk themselves down during a test. They complain about their professor, look for a trick in each question, call themselves dumb, stupid, incompetent, or worse. Usually, their predictions of failure are correct. People just don’t generally do well when they expect themselves to fail.

Now, consider how you might turn any of your negative self-suggestions around. See yourself relaxing, using the best calming techniques you have available. Tell yourself of what you do know, recalling any facts related to the test question. Stimulate your recall for the material you need to answer the question. Dig out the test-wiseness cue and any other test-taking techniques that you know. Above all, say something kind and supportive to yourself: **You need it at that moment.**

Here are some examples of supportive self-instruction scripts for use during test-taking. Each one was written by a student in a “how to Study” class. Notice that the scripts contain 1) instructions to relax, 2) suggestions for recalling material, 3) test-wiseness cues, and 4) some generally supportive and up-beat language. As you read what other students wrote, consider what you might put in your own script.

**SCRIPT 1** - Relax, get as comfortable as you can. Settle back and breathe deeply. Keep breathing deeply, exhale slowly. You studied for this test and you know the material. You passed the last one and did just fine. You knew it all last night when you studied for this exam. Relax, loosen up your neck muscles. Breathe deeply and exhale slowly. This test will go well when you get calm. You can do it.

**SCRIPT 2** - Calm down, breathe from my stomach and relax. I’ve studied hard to prepare for this exam and I know the materials. I will focus on one item at a time, not on the whole test. I will read each problem calmly and carefully to be sure I understand it, and not let myself get bogged down on one question. I remember the great feeling of accomplishment from getting an A on other exams. Now is my opportunity to experience that feeling again.

**SCRIPT 3** - Relax and take three deep breaths. Don’t panic, I’ve studied and I know this material and I’ll stay relaxed. I’ll think and be aware of all the test-wiseness. I’ll focus on one item at a time and I’ll remain calm throughout the entire test. It’s okay of one item doesn’t come to me right now - it will. I’ll just go on and remember it in a little while. I’ll think about what I learned during that class period. I know this material and I feel good about it.

¹Anxious students answer all the questions with a “no”! But this document focuses on question number 4. If you need help with the first three, see a study skills counselor.
SCRIPT 4 - Relax, if you don’t understand the first part, go on to what you do understand, it will come back to you. When did the professor talk about that? What else was he talking about? What examples did he give? Relax.

SCRIPT 5 - Oh well, I might as well go in and get this thing over with. I’ll just blow it anyway because I didn’t study enough. And even if I had studied more it wouldn’t have helped because I can’t remember most of the things I’ve read when it comes to the test. First, I’ll read through some of it to get a general idea of what’s in it. Here goes, dummy.

Sound familiar? It’s a real script, but it’s a script that ends up hurting the student rather than helping him.

SCRIPT 6 - Relax, breathe from the stomach. Go through the exam and answer the ones I know. Then, go through the test a second time and use test-wiseness cues. Think about what was discussed in class lecture just before the question material. If I’ve got to just plain guess - say the answer is “C” or “True”. Then, tell myself that it’s now unimportant and just forget about the test until I receive my grade.

SCRIPT 7 - Relax, stomach breathe, don’t get too wrapped up in one question. Do the easy questions first, remember past lectures, you studied and are well prepared for this test.

Now write your own script. Be sure to get in the 4 elements:

1. Relaxation
2. Recall of facts
3. Test-wiseness
4. Good vibrations for you