Here are some sample coping thoughts. Choose two or three that are meaningful to you, or make up your own. Then memorize them or write them down on an index card. As you feel your anxiety start to mount when you are visualizing your threatening scene or when you are taking a test, repeat a coping thought over and over until your level of panic starts to drop. Or you may want to interweave one coping thought with another. See what works best for you. If at any time these statements lose their meaning, try different ones.

**Sample Coping Thoughts**

- *I can feel anxious and think at the same time.* This is only anxiety—I’ve been through this before.
- *I can practice my relaxation exercises and relax.* Just breathe and relax.
- *Everything is going to be okay.*
- *I can do well on this test even though I feel afraid.*
- *Take it slowly, one step at a time.*
- *I can get through this.*
- *I have time. I don’t need to rush.*
- *If I stop thinking I’m scared, I won’t be scared.*
- *I’ve prepared, I just need to slow down.*
- *This anxiety will lessen—I can wait it out.*
- *This feeling isn’t dangerous—I’ll be all right.*
- *Fighting this feeling isn’t going to help, so I’ll just let it pass. I can ease this anxiety by taking deep belly breaths.*
- *Lots of people feel this way when they take tests. I’m not the only one. All I can do is my best.*
- *I can do it!*

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Tips for Terrific Test Taking

Come Prepared. Arrive early for tests. Bring all the materials you will need such as pencils and pens, a calculator, a dictionary, and a watch.

Stay relaxed and confident. Don’t let yourself become anxious. Don’t talk to other students before a test; anxiety is contagious. Instead, remind yourself that you are well-prepared and are going to do well.

Be comfortable but alert. Choose a good spot to take the test. Make sure you have enough room to work. Maintain an upright posture in your seat.

Preview the test. Spend 5-10% of your test time reading through the test carefully, marking key terms and deciding how to budget your time. As you read the questions, jot down brief notes indicating ideas you can use later in your answers.

Answer the questions in a strategic order. Begin by answering the easy questions you know, then those with the highest point value. The last questions you answer should be those that are the most difficult, take the greatest amount of writing, or have the least point value.

When taking a multiple choice test, know when to guess. First, eliminate options you know are wrong. Always guess when there is no penalty for guessing and/or you can eliminate options. Don’t guess if you are penalized for guessing and you have no basis for your choice. Since your first choice is usually correct, don’t change your answers unless you are sure of the correction.

When taking essay tests, always think before you write. Create a brief outline by jotting down a few words to indicate ideas you want to discuss. Then, number the items in your list to indicate the order in which you will discuss them.

When taking essay tests, always get right to the point. State your main point in the first sentence. Use your first paragraph to provide an overview of your essay. Use the rest of your essay to discuss these points in more detail. Back up your points with specific information, examples, or quotations from your readings and notes.

Review your test. Reserve 10% of your test time for review. Make sure you have answered all the questions. Proof-read your writing for spelling, grammar and punctuation. Check your math answers for careless mistakes (e.g. misplaced decimals). Match your actual answers for math problems against quick estimates.

Analyze your test results. Each test can further prepare you for the next test. Decide which strategies worked best for you. Identify those that didn’t work well and replace them. Use your test to review when studying for final exams.

Relaxing in the Face of Fear

Everybody has the ability to relax. And everybody can learn to relax their body, even in the face of apparently threatening circumstances – like taking a test. By relaxing the body, you will also calm down your racing mind and your fearful feelings – which allows you to think more clearly. It is hard to experience fear or anxiety when your body is relaxed.

Abdominal Breathing

Breathing from your abdomen helps you become more aware of the sensations in your body and less able to run your mind around the same thought loops that anxiety often produces. You’re able to maintain a more calm emotional state. Learning to breathe from your abdomen can produce the exact physiological changes that will help you do well on a test. With a little practice, anyone can learn to take deep, full-belly breaths in most situations.

Coping Thoughts

A large part of your test-taking fear is created by the negative thoughts that your brain is telling you about the way that you feel. Once you are able to recognize these thoughts as the habitual babble that they really are, you will be able to respond to them with coping thoughts—true statements that counter the automatic negative thoughts your mind produces in a fearful situation. Using coping thoughts can help you loosen up the control your fear has over you.

Most of your negative thoughts will be variations on one theme, regardless of what fearful or anxiety-provoking situation you are in. Often, only the details change from situation to situation. Here is an example of a common thought pattern:

Part one: I am so ________ (nervous, spacey, tired, afraid, unprepared, and so on)

Part two: that I won’t be able to _______ (in this case it’s “do well on this test”)

Part three: and then ________ (dire consequences) will happen

Once you recognize the pattern, you don’t need to look any further for truth in the content. It’s just a habitual way of thinking. So, how to switch it off? You can accomplish this by having a few strategic coping thoughts firmly in mind when you enter the classroom.