

# **MANAGING EXAM ANXIETY**

**COUNSELLING SERVICES**



**VICTORIA  
UNIVERSITY**

**A NEW  
SCHOOL OF  
THOUGHT®**



# **NOTE: THIS IS NOT AN ALTERNATIVE TO SEEING A COUNSELLOR**

Please contact the Counselling Service if you would like assistance in dealing with your exam anxiety

- Counsellors are available on most campuses.
- Call on 9919 2399, 9919 4418, or 9919 8801 for an appointment.
- Counselling is free and confidential.
- Useful websites are:
  - <http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/>
  - <http://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

# WHAT IS ANXIETY?

We all know what anxiety is when we experience it. How we experience anxiety varies from situation to situation.

Anxiety can be:

A sensation that occurs in one part of your body (e.g. temple, shoulders, stomach) or general tension throughout your body.

It can be associated with the pounding of your heart, sweating, shaking hands, and feeling tension throughout your body.

You also may have thoughts associated with anxiety, such as *“I’m stressed, I’ll never be able to do ...”, “what’s wrong with me ...”, and “I thought I had gotten over this ...”*.

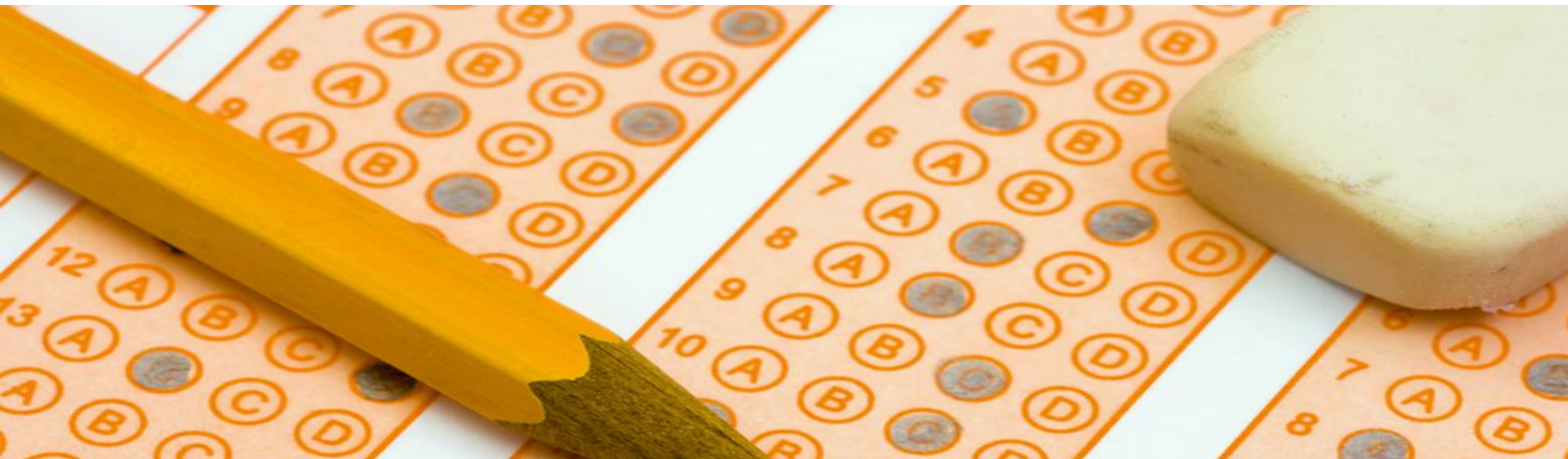
# WHAT IS EXAM ANXIETY?

- Exam anxiety is when you experience these symptoms in relation to exams.
- For some students exam anxiety is needed to get them to apply themselves to their studies. For these students while they find anxiety unpleasant they also find it is helpful. It is the psychological and physiological “*nervous energy*” that accompanies the hard work of study.
- For other students the anxiety associated with exams is so large that it stops them from doing their best in exams. They burn so much “*nervous energy*” all systems shut down as a result of exhaustion.

# WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT EXAM ANXIETY?

We will briefly look at the following things

- Studying
- Getting there
- Sitting the exams
  - i) Being successful
  - ii) Coping with a set-back
  - iii) Dealing with an attack of anxiety before or during an exam



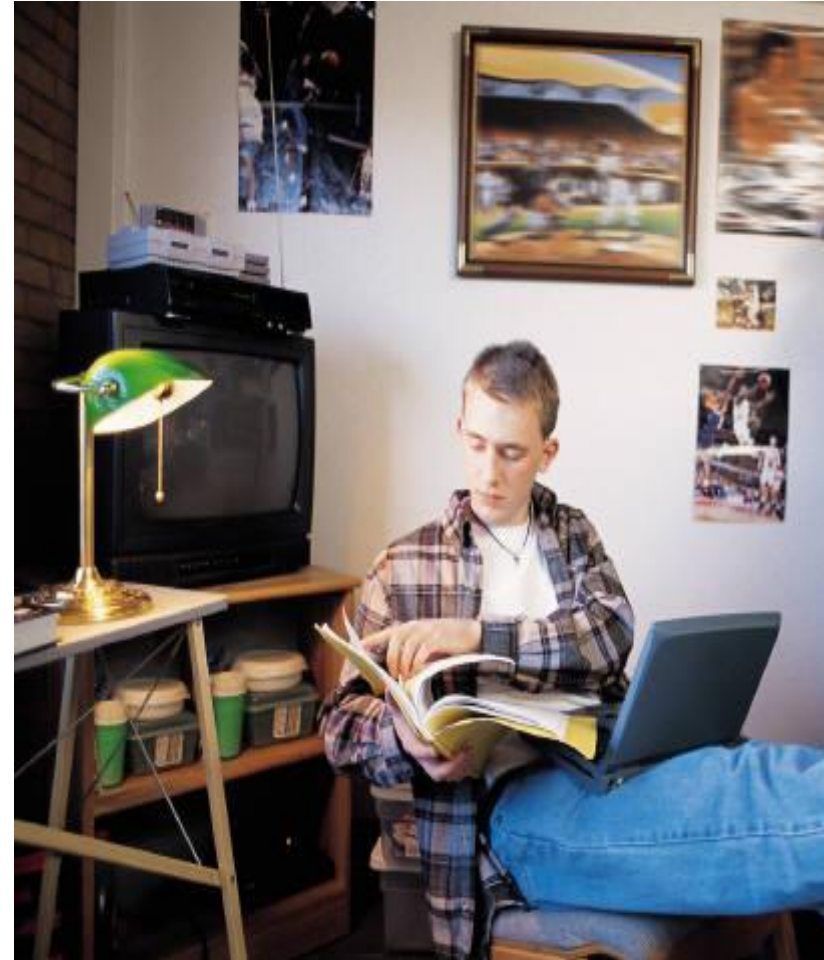


# STUDYING

I know this is not fun, but you have to do it! Prepare, prepare, and prepare – study, study, and study some more.

Make sure that you know:

- the content areas that will be examined
- the type of exam; essay, short-answer, multiple-choice, or lab.
- what previous exams have looked like. It is an excellent idea to be familiar with previous exam papers.



# GETTING THERE

## REMEMBER:

- It may seem obvious .... but, know **WHERE** and **WHEN** the exam will be.
- Make sure you know what equipment you **CAN** and **CAN NOT** take in with you to the exam.
- Check that your buddies have the same information.
- Try and get as much sleep as you can before the exam.
- Leave early for the exam – remember if you are travelling by train it may be delayed, if you are travelling by car there may be an accident that causes a 6 kilometre traffic jam. Better to be early than late.

# PREPARING YOURSELF FOR THE EXAMS

The way we think about ourselves and the way we influence and react to our bodies is important when looking at exam anxiety.

- Just as you have to prepare for each exam and go over the subject contents, you have to prepare yourself for each exam and the anxiety you might experience.
- It may sound odd, but the more you prepare yourself for exam anxiety and what to do if you experience intense anxiety, the less likely you are to need it!
- Breathing – when you are anxious your breathing alters. You can change your breathing to help reduce your anxiety.



# **SIMPLY DO THE FOLLOWING THREE TIMES, AND PRACTISE, PRACTISE, PRACTISE IT FROM TODAY**

- slowly breathe in through your nose while you imagine that your breath is a colour (you choose it) and the breath rises through your nose and into your brain and curves around your head before it descends to your stomach through your throat
- hold for the count of five
- exhale slowly through your partially opened mouth.

Practice this several times a day. When waiting for the traffic lights to change from red to green, when just waiting ... make it an easy habit that you befriend.

# NOW THAT YOUR BODY IS PREPARED, WHAT ABOUT YOUR THINKING?

Most of us have inconsistent thinking! We undermine ourselves with rubbish that we tell ourselves.

- When thinking about your exams you may hear all the “loser”, “useless”, and “failure” voices in your head. You are not alone! Everyone has this jeer squad.
- What can you get your cheer squad to say? Remember it has to be factual and you have to believe what you are saying.
- Affirmations are a good way to do this – do a net search as this is a large topic
- Examples of what your cheer squad may say are:
  - *I know the material and I'll try my best, if I forget one or two things its OK*
  - *Just think about the task – what do I have to do?*
  - *What do I know I can do? Well – do it!*
  - *I'll relax and then look at it again.*

# THE CHEER SQUAD HAS THREE PARTS

## A) YOUR BODY, B) WORDS/THOUGHTS, AND C) YOUR SELF-IMAGE

Every-thing is con-nected.

Now that you know how to relax and say accurate things to yourself you just need to put it together. You do this by seeing it! And, seeing it in three different ways!

- I'm *Perfect* – no exam anxiety and you ace it - nice but it may let you down at times
- I'm *Managing* – your reach a block and feel anxious and put into practice what you have learnt – realistic for most people.
- I've *Lost it* – experience the full strength of the anxiety and believing that you can not recover, but see yourself recovering after about 5-10 minutes – you have to give yourself space and know that you will be able to get it together.

Practice these several times per day. Start by:

- breathing and hearing the positive talk then
- see yourself in the situation (one at a time) and
- see/feel/experience your coping, your success.

# SOME THINGS ARE WORTH REPEATING

- a) STUDY– as much as you need to for each exam
- b) GET THERE – know when and where
- c) PREPARE FOR AND SIT THE EXAM
  - Practice seeing yourself fly through the exam. It does feel good.
  - Practice seeing yourself getting stuck and then getting back into the answer mode. This feels ok.
  - Practice seeing yourself dropping it, allowing yourself some time (5-10 minutes), just to calm down, and then get back into exam mode. This feels hot and bothered, but in the end good.

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# PLEASE GIVE US FEEDBACK

- If you liked/disliked this in part or whole
- If you would like to suggest other presentations

Contact us on [vicuni.secs@vu.edu.au](mailto:vicuni.secs@vu.edu.au)



**GOOD LUCK**  
**WITH YOUR EXAMS**



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