

Standardized Test Anxiety Hierarchy¹

The Listing cites Anxiety Producing Situations Arranged from Least to Most Anxiety Provoking

1. You are in class and the instructor announces an exam that will be in three weeks.
2. It is two weeks before the exam and you are beginning to outline areas for study.
3. It is two weeks before the exam and you are in your study area beginning to study the material.
4. It is ten days before the exam and you are working in your study area.
5. It is ten days before the exam and you recall that another paper is due on the same day.
6. It is seven days before the exam and you don't seem to have enough time left to cover the required reading.
7. It is five days before the exam and you are working in your study area.
8. It is three days before the exam and you are told that failure of the exam could mean failure of the course.
9. It is the night before the exam and you are working in your study area.
10. It is the night before the exam and you are experiencing difficulty in going to sleep.
11. It is the morning of the exam and you are preparing to leave for class.
12. It is the morning of the exam and you are talking to another member of the class.
13. You are entering the classroom where the exam will be given.
14. You are receiving the exam questionnaire
15. You have read the first few questions and are starting to work.
16. The exam is almost over and you realize you may not finish in time.

¹ In systematic desensitization therapy, a subject is first taught how to induce deep relaxation employing any of a number of techniques. Next, he produces a hierarchical listing of situations that provoke the anxiety reaction that the subject hopes to change. This list arranges the situations from those that provoke mild anxiety to those that provoke the most according to a scale of, say, 1 to 10, or 10 to 100, or whatever. During the systematic desensitization process, the subject will be asked to enter a relaxed state, visualize the least provocative anxiety-producing situation, and strive to hold that situation in mind until fully relaxed. Once that is accomplished, therapist and subject move on to the next situation until all, including the most anxiety provoking, can be held in mind while relaxed. Finally, subjects will be required to actually experience the situations *in vivo*, that is, in the real world where they strive to overcome their fears in actual practice. If the anxiety-producing situation were centered on air travel, for example, the subject would need to take an actual flight to see if his training has worked.