

Reducing Test Anxiety

Test anxiety has always been around but with general levels of anxiety rising, the anxiety around testing has also risen. Since data is such an important part of decision-making in schools, it can have real impacts on students' grades, and potentially on their programming or curriculum.

So often, students with test anxiety are provided an accommodation of separate setting or additional time but this also brings in its own challenges - who supervises, where do they go, etc.

Instead, there are some things that teachers can do in their classroom that can reduce the anxiety for students:

- Make sure that students are aware of the test and what will be on it. Teachers could provide study guides beforehand but there are even better active learning strategies such as having students write their own test questions (and then potentially use them in the test) or completing practice tests in pairs to work through tricky problems,
- Provide time at the beginning of the class to preview the test. With no pencils or items in hand, let them look through the test and think about what knowledge or processes they will need. Let them then take a minute to clarify any questions they have around those.
- Allow those who need extra time to go ahead and start the test while others may be still reviewing or clarifying. Trying to provide the additional time at the beginning of the test means everyone finishes at the same time, both reducing some of the stigma for additional time, but also making it easier for collection and grading.
- Chunk the test or have it in sections. Some students get overwhelmed by large tests so allowing students to see only pieces at a time, hand those in and then collect the next question, can help them manage their anxiety. It also allows you to keep an eye on their time management. If you create a test that gets progressively harder then this also allows students to reach the level that best suits them.
- Allow headphones to be used - either to reduce noise, to listen to music, or to allow for text to speech.
- Allow students to make choices about their physical setting such as area of the room, height of desk possibly, and make sure they are physically comfortable
- Start with a Brain dump - have the students write down everything they know or everything they are worried about at the beginning.
- Talk through worst case scenarios - what happens if you fail, what happens if you forget everything you learned, what happens if
- Allow for breaks, walks to the toilet, water and possibly even snacks
- Make the test visually have space. Allow for plenty of working out space, allow gaps between questions. You might even have a dedicated doodle area!
- Don't have extra credit questions. Questions are either part of the test or they aren't, don't be ambiguous.

For additional ideas, check out these resources [here](#) and [here](#).

Understanding and Addressing Test Anxiety in the Classroom

The Growing Challenge

While test anxiety isn't new, its prevalence has increased alongside rising general anxiety levels. With schools heavily relying on data-driven decisions, test performance can significantly impact students' grades and educational pathways.

Moving Beyond Traditional Accommodations

Traditional solutions like providing separate testing rooms or extra time, while helpful, create logistical challenges regarding supervision and space. Instead, teachers can implement classroom-wide strategies that benefit all students.

Practical Strategies for Teachers

Before the Test

1. Preparation and Preview

- Provide clear information about test content and format
- Use active review strategies:
 - Have students create their own test questions
 - Implement paired practice tests
- Allow students to preview the test without writing materials

2. Anxiety Management

- Address questions and clarifications upfront
- Start with a "brain dump" exercise
- Discuss and address worst-case scenarios

2. Physical Environment

- Let students choose their seating location and desk height
- Allow headphone use for noise reduction or music
- Ensure physical comfort

3. Test Presentation

- Include ample white space
- Provide sufficient working space
- Add designated doodle areas
- Avoid extra credit questions to reduce ambiguity
- Break the test into manageable sections
- Present questions in order of increasing difficulty
- Allow section-by-section completion

During the Test

1. Flexibility

- Let students who need extra time start early (This approach helps everyone finish together, reducing stigma)
- provide check in points for timing
- Allow breaks, bathroom visits, and water
- Permit light snacks

After the Test

1. Feedback

- Give written feedback first to each student
- Review common mistakes
- Only now hand back the actual test with the score on the back page or with the frontpage stapled face down to protect privacy

This comprehensive approach helps create a more supportive testing environment while maintaining academic standards.

For additional ideas, check out these resources [here](#) and [here](#).