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This is Only a Test

Taking exams is part and parcel of the business of being a student. But even the best test takers can grow anxious from time to time. Nevertheless, the stress of taking an exam lessens greatly when you take control of the situation.

Take care of the physical

While part of the test-taking ethos seems to mandate that all students must wait until 36 hours before the exam to begin a sleepless marathon of study and junk food, nothing could be worse. You're sharper as a test taker if you're well nourished and have had a good night's sleep. If you find yourself constantly in cram mode, you may need to create a study schedule or analyze if and how you are procrastinating.

Plan ahead

It's a good idea to gather what you'll need for the test beforehand. There's nothing more stressful than scurrying around your room 13 minutes before the exam in a desperate hunt for pens, pencils, erasers, calculators or the novel from which you'll need quotes.

Getting there

You don't want to arrive for an exam late or you'll miss important instructions or clarifications. It's also not a good idea to arrive to the test site too early. There is always (at least) one stressed-out student sharing prophecies of doom and despair, informing everyone within earshot how little he knows, how he didn't study enough, how he *just knows* that such-and-such obscure scrap of minutiae will be worth 35 points. Fifteen minutes of that guy and you'll be questioning anything you've ever known. Get to the exam room about five to seven minutes before the exam. And don't listen to that panicky student.

Remember to breathe

As we get nervous, our breathing tends to become shallow and rapid, often without our noticing. In general, this is not useful; in particular, it is not conducive to the test-taking endeavor. Take a moment before the exam is handed out to regulate your breathing, inhaling slowly and deeply, exhaling slowly and completely. It helps to close your eyes.

When the test comes

- Know how much time you have to complete the exam.
- **READ THE DIRECTIONS AND QUESTIONS CAREFULLY.** There's nothing worse than losing credit on information you know simply because you didn't read the question or the directions completely.
- Look over the entire test before you start to answer any questions. You don't need a sudden, unpleasant surprise with just 10 minutes left.
- If you get truly stuck, move on. Tell yourself, "I don't know this yet" and come back to the question when you're finished with the rest of the exam. Remember, you need to accumulate as many points as possible in the allotted period of time. Use your time wisely.

In conclusion...

If you've prepared well, taken advantage of resources such as study groups, old exams, the TA, the professor's office hours and your Learning Instructor, then have a little faith in your preparation. A little bit of confidence can go a long way in alleviating your anxiety.