

## Overcome Exam Nerves and Academic Anxiety

By Steve Mueller Monday February 14, 2011

This article will show you how you can overcome exam nerves and exam stress with the same techniques I was able to combat test anxiety effectively and leave it behind forever.

***Exam nerves, test anxiety, academic anxiety or exam fear...*** no matter how you call it the fearfulness about upcoming tests and exams seems to have been an omnipresent element of my thoughts whenever the time of an exam approached. One night before the actual test started I was often lying awake in bed for hours, worrying about all possible occurrences during the test, inclusively the possibility that exam anxiety could arise or that I would blackout during the test, leaving a blank piece of paper behind. My mental pressure started to increase the sooner the test started and during the test I often experienced fear of failure. It often went so far that I couldn't really concentrate myself on the questions and tasks of the test and just skimmed over these, because I was so in hectic and fearfulness. Careless mistakes were an omnipresent element of nearly all of the tests I wrote that often worsened my grades.

An important thing to note is that I was really young at the time my exam phobia peaked, no older than 14 years. However, when looking back I see how much exam anxiety influenced my life and became one of the reasons I couldn't commit my knowledge on paper. When making a leap in time to the day I was 21 I just had started studying at a university, after finishing an apprenticeship and gaining my first work experiences. I had gained a lot of knowledge and experiences during all the years, but one thing that I had left behind during this time was the exam anxiety, and it was never to be seen again. *So, how did I do it?*

## ***How did I overcome academic anxiety?***

### **I discovered the secret about my fears**

Okay, okay. The word "secret" might sound a little bit exorbitant, I'm sure some scientists might have discovered it centuries ago. However, I wasn't aware of it and even more important: I didn't make use of it until I realized what it was. When I was around 19 or 20 I started to realize that I had in nearly every situation of my life the power and control to respond fearful to the situation or not. It was an amazing realization for me to know that fear was just an instinctual response towards potentially dangerous and threatening situations that jeopardize my life. Having this in mind I felt like having discovered a mysterious secret of life, as it allowed me to think about threatening situations where fear was essential to save my life; exam anxiety was definitely no dangerous situation for me. All these insights I gained helped me to realize that being fearful about exams is simply unnecessary, a waste of time and ineffective.

**So, how did I make use of the fact that I was the one who could control nearly all of my fears?** I started to tell myself:

*It is my choice to respond fearful towards a situation or not!*

At this point you might either agree with me, or completely disagree with my thesis, which is why I would like to show you how much control you have about your fears with some everyday examples. If a fearful person decides to ride a really fast rollercoaster for the first time, it is very likely that this person will experience fear during the ride and consider it as a torture. However, whenever a rollercoaster enthusiast takes a ride he enjoys the amazing feeling of adrenalin pumping through his veins, happiness hormones start to arise and he will cheer whenever the rollercoaster makes

a looping and he gets pressed into his seat. The same goes when it comes to horror movies, as there are many people who really love the fearful moments and are excited whenever a shocking scene occurs, whereas others try to avoid these sort of movies completely, as they experience pure anxiety while watching it.

### **SUMMARY:**

- *Anxiety will paralyze you and prevent you from thinking straight; it will make you nervous, increase your careless mistakes and will make you to behave hectically. In all honesty: none of these characteristics are helpful in exam situations.*
- *However, by realizing that you are not in mortal peril during an exam situation you can take a lot of pressure off your shoulders and reduce exam nerves. Make yourself clear that there is no need to be fearful of an upcoming exam, if you are prepared for it!*

### **I changed my mindset**

At this point I had discovered that I had control over my fears, but in order to overcome exam anxiety completely I also needed to change my mindset towards exam situations. Exam anxiety is all about negative mindsets and attitudes towards situations that are uncomfortable for every one of us. However, by taking control of your attitudes and mindsets towards these situations you have the power to reduce exam stress and overcome exam fear completely. Have a look at the negative mindset I had towards exams when I was a very young student:

*Exams are fearful and hectic situations that automatically spell trouble for me. I don't feel confident or comfortable during exam situations and will*

*most likely panic mentally. During the exam I will be forced to commit everything I studied on paper, but most of it will be forgotten when the exam begins. I will be punished with bad marks. I'm extraordinary pessimistic about the outcome of the test, even before it had begun.*

Now, that sounds really bad, doesn't it? By way of comparison I would like to illustrate the attitudes and mindsets towards an exam situation when I grew older and had begun studying at university:

*Every test and exam is a great challenge for me that I can meet. I'm excited about the upcoming test as it is the possibility for me to write an excellent exam. I have prepared myself for the test as conscientious and concentrated as possible and am excited to bring my knowledge to paper. I furthermore enjoy my relaxed and confident state of mind during an exam and do not start rushing as this will only provoke careless mistakes.*

Now, that is a huge difference and two completely different attitudes towards exam situations. The first one was extremely anxious and pessimistic, whereas the second one showed confidence and self-assuredness.

Here are some further statements that can help you to improve your attitude towards exam situations. Feel free to write them down, print them out or read them out aloud before an exam.

- *I'm positive about the upcoming exam*
- *I know I can do it, no matter how difficult it becomes*
- *An exam is an exciting challenge for me*
- *I feel confident before and during the exam*
- *It's only a test. I will not be punished and I'm not going to die*
- *Every exam is an opportunity for me to show my knowledge*

- *I know that I did everything to ace the exam with ease*
- *I'm in a confident and relaxed state of mind that helps me to remember everything I studied*

### **SUMMARY:**

- *Change your attitudes towards your exams and consider them to be exciting challenges, that's what they are, nothing else.*

### **Preparation and studying**

One of my biggest fears that caused me to have exam nerves revolved around the question: "Am I prepared enough for this test? Could I possibly have forgotten anything?" The exam fear often arose as a logical consequence of being badly prepared for the test.

### **SUMMARY:**

- *Be prepared for your upcoming exams and invest enough time to study for it. If you are excellently prepared and studied as much as possible then there is no need to be fearful about the exam.*

### **I started to visualize**

Something that helped me to be prepared for the test situation was visualizing it some days before the actual test. I imagined myself sitting at my classroom and felt comfortable and relaxed when visualizing that the test had begun. I also thought about some confident thoughts that would possibly pop in mind during the test and how relaxed I would respond to time pressure and hectic. Furthermore, I imagined that I would lay my pen aside and began to relax for a second whenever I didn't know the answer to a question, as by doing so I encouraged myself to remember the answer. If

you want you can also picture yourself when receiving a excellent mark some weeks after the exam.

### **Reduce anxiety during the exam**

Even the best preparation and the most positive mindsets cannot prevent some little exam anxiety from arising every once in a while. Therefore, it was very helpful for me to know some excellent techniques to reduce anxiety during an exam. Whenever I felt the anxiety paralyzing me I lay my pen aside for a second, started to breathe deeply, tried to calm down and started to relax. Any kind of fear during the exams is counter-productive as it will increase your stress-level, cause you to become hectic and constricts the blood flow to your brain.