



SOS Digital - Providing Support to Students in Distress

Exam Anxiety

Self-Help Guide for Staff



The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the content, which reflects solely the opinions of its authorship. The European Commission is not responsible for the content of this publication.

EXAM ANXIETY: HOW TO RESPOND AND PREVENT IT

How to recognize exam anxiety in students?

- ✓ students who become obsessive and perfectionists.
- ✓ students blocked by fear or memory lapses.
- ✓ students who are nervous or restless.
- ✓ students who show difficulties in maintaining attention and concentration.

Exam anxiety usually manifests through a series of negative and catastrophic thoughts that increase the belief that they will not be able to pass an academic test brilliantly, that they will fail, and in that way, they will compromise their social image. Anxiety usually appears before the actual test, usually during the preparation phase.

However, most professors face students with exam anxiety during the proper exam session: they may witness the so-called 'silent scene' during an oral exam or notice blank answers in a written test. This is independent of the degree of preparation and the positive assessments previously obtained. This reaction may appear indistinctly, even among the most prepared and conscientious students, who have the skills and prerogatives to take the exam.

Which students are particularly vulnerable?

Those who:

- ✓ have a history of poor results in several tests.
- ✓ are afraid of failure or tend towards perfectionism.
- ✓ always feel they are unprepared or not prepared enough.

Many students strongly associate their results to their personal value. In this way they risk undermining their sense of self-efficacy. The students may feel that during the exam, not only their level of preparation, but also their self is being evaluated. The students' attitude towards the examination situation is often extended to the future as well: e.g. **"I will never be able to do anything good", "Others will never take me into consideration".**

HOW TO HANDLE THE SITUATION?

What to do to reduce test anxiety in students

Some tips that can be useful for professors to encourage effective communication, promoting students' perception of being supported during teaching-learning process.

- ✓ **Use of empathic mirroring techniques** > Basically refers to the lack of interpretation and re-elaboration of what has been said by the student. The professors should act as true mirrors, directly reflecting the words of the students without modifying the construction of the speech or the emotional content expressed. For example, "you are telling me that...", "if I understand correctly you are saying...".
- ✓ **Use of contact signals** > These signals consist of benevolent looks, smiles, nods of consent with the head or face. They are important because they indicate an encouraging and reassuring presence, especially in moments of hesitation and uncertainty, without interfering with the content of the communication.
- ✓ **Shift attention away from the evaluation condition** > If necessary, it is useful to create breaks to lower the level of attention and decrease anxiety in the student.
- ✓ **Foster a climate of respect and constructive discussion in the classroom** > Encourage students to actively participate and openly express their doubts and impressions.

A prerequisite for creating a serene atmosphere and favouring the well-being of students is that professors support them and help them to develop a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses.

USEFUL CONTACTS

- ✓ If you are a staff from UMinho please click [here](#)
- ✓ If you are a staff from UniTrento please click [here](#)
- ✓ If you are a staff from USC please click [here](#)
- ✓ If you are a staff from AMU please click [here](#)

REFERENCES

- ✓ Andrews, G., Creamer, M., Crino, R., Hunt, C., Lampe, L., & Page, A. (2003). *Trattamento dei disturbi d'ansia*. Torino: Centro Scientifico Editore.
- ✓ Beck, A.T., & Emery, G. (1988). *L'ansia e le fobie*. Roma: Astrolabio.
- ✓ Rachman, S. (2004). *L'ansia*. Bari: Laterza.
- ✓ Smith, L.L., & Elliott, C.H. (2006). *Vincere l'ansia per negati*. Milano: Oscar Mondadori.