Test anxiety affects each and every student to some degree or another. For some, this leads to strong, deliberate preparation. For others, it leads to a lack of sufficient preparation due to the anxiety of simply thinking about the test. Exams don’t have to be this nerve wracking! The sure way to alleviate test anxiety as much as possible and to perform at your best is through effective planning, active preparation, and accurate prediction.

**THE BIG PICTURE**

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**1. EFFECTIVE PLANNING**

Use the *Five Day Study Plan* to list specific goals for each session. Start with the oldest material first in your test prep and add one or two new concepts to each study session. Vary your test prep by preparing study tools (note cards, rewritten notes, concept maps, and study guides) during your first session. In your second session, review the prepared materials and create new tools for the next concept. Continue to alternate preparing new material and reviewing prepared material (i.e., notecards), making sure that each day includes a bit of both. All material should be prepared by the fourth study day, which leaves the last day for practice tests and review.

**2. PREPARE ACTIVELY**

After you’ve planned, use your study sessions for active preparation. Apply your active learning strategies to create new material based on your notes and textbook information. Strengthen your memory pathways by forming new concept maps, charts, graphic organizers, mnemonics, etc. Use these new resources you’ve developed for review throughout your preparation time. The ideal test preparation is to create new content and review all previously designed content each day. See our *Learning Styles* resource for more on how to prepare according to your unique learning style preferences.

In active preparation, consider your Critical Thinking skills as explained in our *Critical Thinking* resource. It is important to consider not only what you are studying but also how you are studying it. Recall that the further you go along the levels of Critical Thinking, the more deeply you understand the topic. Take the time to work through your Critical Thinking skills in order to prepare yourself for all types of exam questions.
3 PREDICT ACCURATELY

As you prepare for the test, try to think about what kinds of questions the professor might ask. Independently predict the questions in order to engage your mind and help you think like the professor.

**Exclusive/Inclusive:** Develop practice questions using exclusive words like “always” and “never.” These exclusive words often result in false statements. This helps you identify when a question may be trying to “tip off” a true statement by including one of these qualifying words. Exclusive and inclusive questions are most often characteristic of true/false questions.

**Negatives:** Prepare for questions including “NOT” which force you to look for the choice that doesn’t fit. When you see these types of questions cross out the correct answers (which make the statement true) first. The remaining answer is what you should choose! These are often multiple choice questions.

**Multiple Choice:** Use the process of elimination and cross out the answers that you know are incorrect. Often, professors will include one option that is clearly not correct, one or two choices that are variants or related to the right answer, and then the correct answer. Understanding this will greatly increase your chances of choosing the correct one!

**Essay:** Use Critical Thinking skills to prepare for essay writing prompts. Include words like “compare/contrast,” “analyze,” “apply,” and “evaluate” and think through exactly how the professor is looking for you to respond. Consider the main ideas/concepts from the course material that would be important to cover, and think about how the individual parts of that concept relate to each other and to the whole of the material. It’s important to think through practical applications of the material. And, be sure to think through each part of the prompt and answer it thoroughly.

**Trust your process:** Remember, for all of your exam questions, if you can’t think of a concrete, 100% sure reason to change your answer, don’t change it! Your first reaction is generally your most reasoned response. If you plan effectively, prepare actively, and predict accurately, you will greatly increase your confidence going into the exam. Reducing your test anxiety by taking deliberate control of your preparation will not only lead you to do your best but also to truly learn the content as deeply as you possibly can.