

Guided Imagery Script for Taking Exams

[Adapted from materials from Inner Health Studio and Queen's University Learning Strategies Development]

Office of Academic Success

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Many people experience anxiety associated with exam taking. This guided imagery will help you relax and visualize the process of taking an exam successfully. Visualizing success can promote increased confidence. Relaxation can help you manage the anxiety so that you can do the best you can on the exam.

Recommendation: Practice with this script each night and/or morning before your next exam *and* in the 10-15 minutes prior to taking the exam. When you're anxious, taking time to manage your thoughts is just as important (arguably more important) than flipping through your notes one more time.

Begin by becoming very relaxed. Make yourself comfortable in a setting free of distractions for the next few minutes. Find a naturally relaxed sitting position and open posture, your hands resting in your lap or at your sides, your legs uncrossed, and your head balanced in a neutral position.

Start to relax your body. Take a deep breath in...hold it gently...and let it out....

Breathe in again...pause...and exhale fully....

Breathe in...pause... and out....

In.... Out.... In.... Out....

Keep breathing naturally. With each breath, you become more and more relaxed.

If any anxious thoughts linger, leave them where they are for the moment. You can tend to them later.

(Pause.)

Pick a spot in the room for your eyes to comfortably focus on. Hold the focus briefly, and then let that focus go soft. You can let your eyes close anytime you like.

Notice some areas in your body where tension tends to linger: your shoulders, jaws, neck, back, chest, stomach, and hands.

Focus first on your shoulders. See how your shoulders relax as your attention is focused on them. Feel the muscles as they loosen and your shoulders as they ease off....

Allow your jaws to relax. Let your lower jaw drop slightly, allowing a space between your upper and lower teeth. Feel the muscles of your face become smooth, loose, and relaxed.

Turn your attention to your neck. See how you can let the tension go as you relax the muscles of your neck. Let the relaxation flow down the length of your spine, relaxing all the muscles along the way. Feel the relaxation in your neck and back. As you become aware of the rhythm of your breathing, let the tension in your chest dissipate with each breath and feel your stomach muscles smooth themselves out and the calm settle in.

Now focus on your hands. Open and close your hands a few times...wiggle your fingers... and then relax. Let your hands be limp and loose.

Scan your body now for any other areas that might be tense. For each area, imagine directing your breath to that area. Imagine breathing in relaxation....and breathing out tension. Breathing in a feeling of relaxation and exhaling all the tension. Feel your muscles relax with each breath.

Continue to scan your body, relaxing each area.

(Pause.)

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Now you are feeling calm and relaxed. Your whole body feels heavy, and you feel grounded and centered.

(Pause.)

Begin to visualize now the process of taking an exam.

Imagine yourself on the day of the exam. You are feeling a little excited to take the exam and share what you know; at the same time, you are feeling confident. You imagine walking calmly into the room where the exam is going to be. You say, *"When I get to my seat, just think about the situation, not my anxiety."*

You see yourself sitting in your chair. You notice your surroundings. You hear the other students shuffle in their seats. You smile to them. You feel the desk. You feel the pen in your hand. You see the test being handed out. You feel a hint of the old anxiety rising. You say, *"I can be anxious later, now is the time to take the exam."*

Now, the exam is in front of you. You are scanning over the entire exam calmly and confidently. You discover that you already know something about each answer. You feel relaxed, happy. You start to organize your time. You say, *"I will think rationally and not allow my anxiety to take over.... I've done well on exams before so there's no reason I can't today.... Breathe and relax.... I am ready to rise up to meet this challenge. It's time for me to show the professor what I know."*

Take in a deep breath and, slowly and calmly, let it all out. You feel your body relax and allow your mind to become calm. In this state of calm, you are able to concentrate and see things clearly. Now you begin writing quickly and deliberately. You effortlessly recall the information you studied. The ideas are flowing from your pen with ease. Some of the questions are easy and straightforward, and you answer them quickly. Some questions take more thinking. You expect this, and you are prepared. You find ways to show what you know.

You are now finished, and you close the exam and calmly put away your writing tools. Finally, you are handing in the test with a big smile on your face. The proctor smiles back. Savor this feeling.

You imagine that you did ok on the exam. You feel proud of yourself for your accomplishment of working through the exam calmly and confidently. You say to yourself, *"It worked. I got through it without blanking out! I did feel stress but I managed it. Good for me!"*

Imagine getting the exam results. Feeling confident and excited.... and seeing the results: You get an excellent grade, exactly what you were hoping for. This feeling of success and accomplishment is so wonderful, you want to take another exam just to experience it all again.

(Pause.)

Enjoy the feelings of success.

(Pause.)

Now you have completed this visualization experience, you are feeling more mentally prepared for the process of taking an exam. You may even find that completing this guided imagery exercise helps you feel motivated, helps you feel calm, confident, and in control.

Begin to wake up your mind and body.... returning your awareness to the present.

Wiggle your fingers. Feel your hands and arms reawakening.

Wake up your feet and legs by wiggling your toes.

Shrug your shoulders.... Turn your head from side to side.... Feel your body waking up.

When you are feeling awake and alert, you can return to your usual activities, feeling energized, motivated, and confident.