



TIP SHEET: Coping with Exam Pressure

Completing VCE exams and university exams can be really stressful. There can be a lot of pressure to do well and get 'good' results. This can include pressure that you put on yourself as well as pressure you feel from others.

However, there are a range of things that you can do to put our best foot forward, and manage the feelings of anxiety and negative thinking associated with exams which will help you to achieve your best. This tip sheet has a range of suggestions that you might find useful. Suggestions include:

1) techniques for managing mood, 2) techniques to change thinking so that it is more positive and 3) specific behaviours and activities that can improve mood, negative thinking and maximise effective study time.

COPING STATEMENTS:

Here is a list of coping statements and more positive ways of thinking. Review the list and **choose three or four statements that stand out for you**. Write them down and display them somewhere prominent (e.g., on your calendar, in your diary, on your study desk) so that you can **read and re-read them until they become second nature**. You can use these coping statements in the lead up to the exams as well as in the actual exam itself.

Remember: limit the number of statements so that they don't lose their meaning or 'power' in reducing your anxiety.

- STOP! These thoughts aren't good for me.
- I'll ride this through - I don't need to let it get to me.
- This is just anxiety talking.
- I can do my coping strategies and allow this to pass.
- I'm going to be all right. I'm just going to relax, calm down, and everything will be okay.
- I've done this before so I know I can do it again.
- I can be anxious and still deal with this situation.
- When this is over, I'll be glad that I did it.
- I'll just let my body do its thing. This will pass.
- Take three deep breaths and focus on the questions.
- I accept the things I cannot control.

- I always give my best effort and that is good enough.
- I will manage. Just take one step at a time.
- I know that with time and effort I can accomplish anything.
- I'm going to give this my best shot.
- I can deal with whatever happens.
- There are always options.

THINGS YOUR CAN DO:

There are a range of things that you can do to help you to study more effectively. Good preparation increases confidence and is more likely to lead to success.

Often there is a notion that students need to sit at their desk and read their text books for long periods of time. This is not necessarily the case. Young people (and older students too) need to find ways of studying that work best for them. This involves identifying specific ways of taking the information in and keeping it in your memory bank so that you can recall the details during the exam itself. Here are some suggestions.

- **CHANGE THE STUDY ENVIRONMENT**
 - Find a quiet place with enough room to spread your things out
 - Minimise the distractions and interruptions
 - Good lighting
- **PLANNING**
 - **Find your best time.** Do you study better in the morning or night time?
 - **Take regular breaks.** Studying for too long can decrease your performance.
 - Get up and move away from your desk
 - Have a drink or something to eat
 - Stretch your legs
 - Take a bathroom stop
- **DON'T CRAM FOR EXAMS!** Cramming for exams can make you feel more overwhelmed, have trouble remembering, make you lose sleep and perform poorly.
 - **Study in blocks of time.** For example, you might study for say one or two hours and then take a break.
 - **Set yourself targets or timelines** e.g., review chapter X on Monday and chapter Y on Tuesday, English first and then maths
 - **Make "to do" lists**
- **GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP.** When you are tired, you will probably find it difficult to take information in let alone remember it later. Refer to the "12 Tips for Getting a Good Night's Sleep" blog.

- **SELF-CARE.** It is important to take care of yourself and stay motivated.
 - **Do something that you enjoy.** For example, continuing with your usual activities and/or choosing to do something a little different.
 - Exercise e.g., a walk or bike ride
 - Play sport
 - Get out and about with friends and family
 - **Listen to music**
 - **Use deep breathing, relaxation exercises and meditation**
- **CHOOSE A STUDY TECHNIQUE THAT WORKS BEST FOR YOU**
 - Using a coloured highlighter for the 'important' bits
 - Taking notes
 - Writing notes in your workbook/textbook
 - Researching topics on the internet
 - Reading your notes aloud
 - Studying with friends – it is important to stay focused on the task at hand rather than just chat
- **PRACTICE.** Simulate the exam environment and complete a practice exam.
- **ASK FOR HELP IF YOU'RE STUCK**
- **GET SOME EXTRA SUPPORT.** If you feel overwhelmed it can be helpful to talk with your parents, a trusted teacher or the school counsellor. Your GP can refer you to a professional such as a psychologist.

Best of luck with your exams!