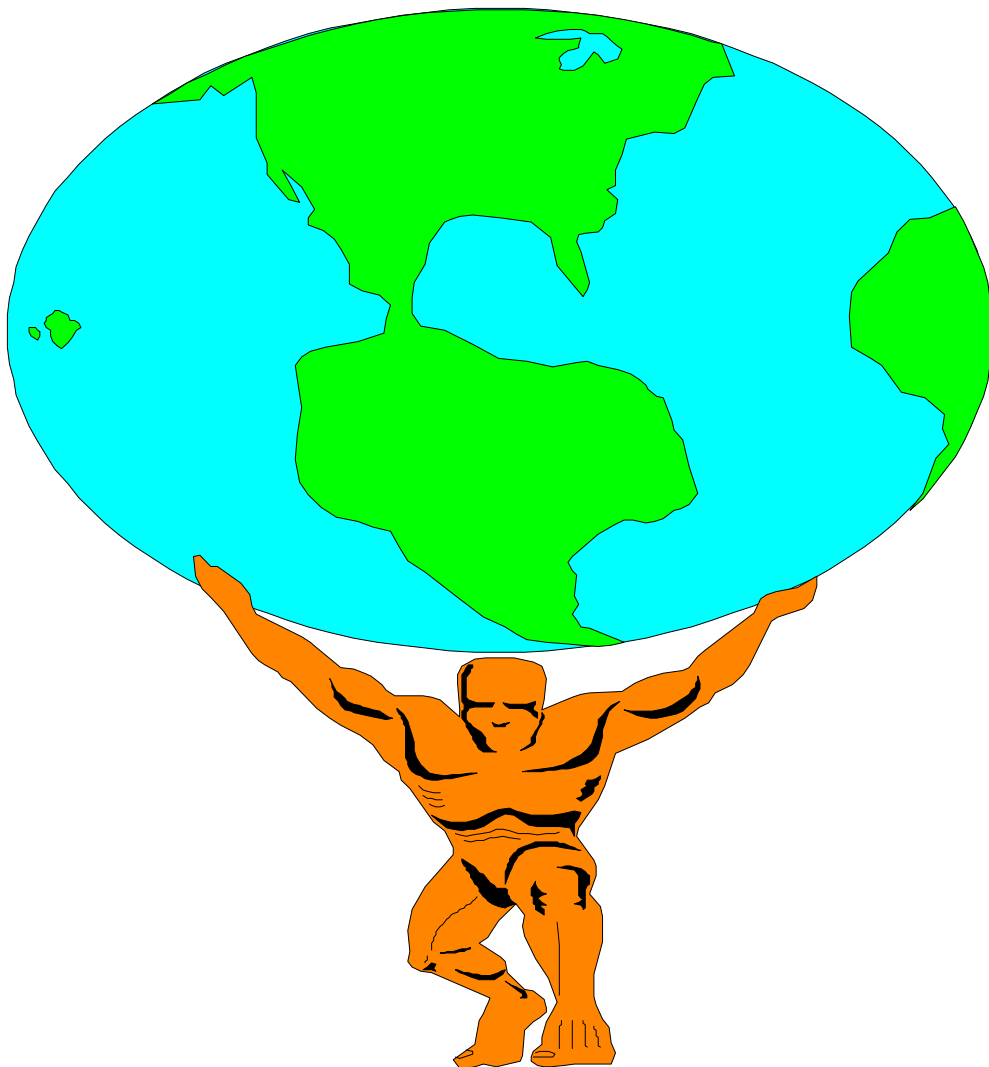




Gordano School

**Learning
To Fear**

Stress Management



**Are you holding the weight of the world on your
shoulders ?**

What is Stress

Stress is not necessarily something bad – it all depends on how you take it. The stress of exhilarating, creative successful study is beneficial, while that of failure, humiliation or infection is detrimental. However stress is often viewed as a "bad thing", with a range of harmful biochemical and long-term effects.

The most common definition of stress is that **stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that “demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to put together.”**

Fight-or-Flight—The Brain bit

There is the well-known “fight-or-flight” response to stress. When an organism such as a human being experiences a shock or perceives a threat, it quickly releases hormones that helps it to survive.

In humans, as in other animals, these hormones help us to run faster and fight harder. They increase heart rate and blood pressure, delivering more oxygen and blood sugar to power important muscles. They increase sweating in an effort to cool these muscles, and help them stay efficient. They divert blood away from the skin to the core of our bodies, reducing blood loss if we are damaged. As well as this, these hormones focus our attention on the threat, to the exclusion of everything else. All of this significantly improves our ability to survive life-threatening events.



We also experience this almost any time we come across something unexpected or something that frustrates our goals. When the threat is small, our response is small and we often do not notice it among the many other distractions of a stressful situation.

However this reaction in our body for survival also has **negative consequences**. In this state, we are excitable, anxious, jumpy and irritable. This actually reduces our ability to study effectively. With trembling and a pounding heart, we can find it difficult to operate and to study to our best level. The intensity of our focus on survival interferes with our ability to study and to take exams successfully. We find ourselves more accident-prone and less able to make good decisions.

We need to keep this fight-or-flight response under control to allow us to think clearly, to be able to access all of that vital information we have stored away ready for our exams and to enable us to be able to analyse and evaluate effectively. In the long term we need to keep it under control to avoid problems of poor health and burnout.

This booklet will give you some tips on how to tackle stress enabling you to be successful in your studying, revision and examinations at Gordano. If you want to talk with somebody please don't hesitate to come and find a member of staff—we will all be pleased to see you !

Stress Diaries



The idea behind Stress Diaries is that, on a regular basis, you record information about the stresses you are experiencing, so that you can analyse these stresses and then manage them. This is important because often these stresses flit in and out of our minds without getting the attention and focus that they deserve.

As well as helping you capture and analyse the most common sources of stress in your life, Stress Diaries help you to understand:

- The causes of stress in more detail;
 - The levels of stress at which you operate most efficiently; and
- How you react to stress, and whether your reactions are appropriate and useful.

Stress Diaries, therefore, give you the important information that you need to manage stress.

Using the Diary:

Stress Diaries are useful in that they gather information regularly and routinely, over a period of time. This helps you to separate the common, routine stresses from those that only occur occasionally. They establish a pattern that you can analyse to extract the information that you need. Make regular entries in your Stress Diary. Also make an entry in your diary after each incident that is stressful enough for you to feel that it is significant.

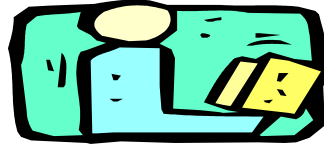
Every time you make an entry, record the following information:

- The date and time of the entry.
- How happy you feel now, using a subjective assessment on a scale of -10 (the most unhappy you have ever been) to +10 (the happiest you have been). As well as this, write down the mood you are feeling.
- How efficiently you are studying now (a subjective assessment, on a scale of 0 to 10). A 0 here would show complete inefficiency, while a 10 would show the greatest efficiency you have ever achieved.
- How stressed you feel now, again on a subjective scale of 0 to 10. As before, 0 here would be the most relaxed you have ever been, while 10 would show the greatest stress you have ever experienced.
- The most recent stressful event you have experienced.
- The symptom did you feel (e.g. “butterflies in your stomach”, anger, headache, raised pulse rate, sweaty palms, etc.).
- The fundamental cause of the stress (being as honest and objective as possible).

How well you handled the event: Did your reaction help solve the problem, or did it inflame it?

You will reap the real benefits of having a stress diary in the first few weeks. After this, the benefit you get will reduce each additional day. If, however, your lifestyle changes, or you begin to suffer from stress again in the future, then it may be worth using the diary approach again. You will probably find that the stresses you face have changed. If this is the case, then keeping a diary again will help you to develop a different approach to deal with them.

Understanding Your Stress Diary



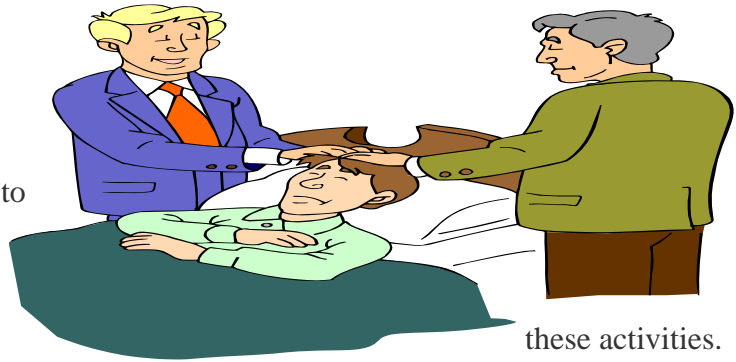
- Look at the different stresses you experienced during the time you kept your diary. List the types of stress that you experienced by frequency (number), with the most frequent stresses at the top of the list.
- Next, prepare a second list with the most unpleasant stresses at the top of the list and the least unpleasant at the bottom.
- Looking at your lists of stresses, those at the top of each list are the most important for you to learn to control.
- Studying through the stresses, look at what you think are the underlying causes and how well you handled the stressful event. Do these show you areas where you handled stress poorly, and could improve your stress management skills? If so, list these.
- Compare the numbers you entered for “Happiness” and “Efficiency” against the numbers for “Feeling of Stress”. You may find, for example, that you are most efficient in your studying and study when you are moderately stressed.
- Look through your diary at the situations that cause you stress. List these.
- Finally, look at how you felt when you were under stress. Look at how it affected your happiness and your study, understand how you behaved, and think about how you felt.
- Having analysed your diary, you should understand what the most important and frequent sources of stress are in your life. You should appreciate the levels of stress at which you are happiest. You should also know the sort of situations that cause you stress so that you can prepare for them and manage them well.
- As well as this, you should now understand how you react to stress, and the symptoms that you show when you are stressed. When you experience these symptoms in the future, this should be a trigger for you to use appropriate stress management techniques.

Summary

Stress Diaries help you to get a good understanding of the routine, short-term stresses that you experience in your life. They help you to identify the most important, and most frequent, stresses that you experience, so that you can concentrate your efforts on these. They also help you to identify areas where you need to improve your stress management skills, and help you to understand the levels of stress at which you are happiest, and most efficient.

Study Analysis

To be a successful student you need to fully understand what is expected of you and know the 'goalposts'. By understanding the priorities in your school work you can focus on This helps you get the greatest return from your studyload under control.



these activities.
the studying you do, and keep

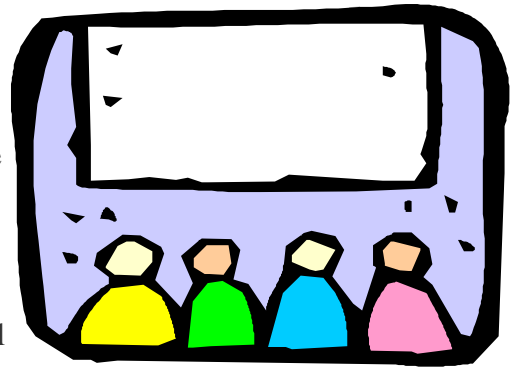
To conduct Study Analysis, go through the following steps:

- What do I need to do to ensure that I have all of my notes and eliminate any gaps ?
- What can I do to chunk down my notes to my preferred learning and revision structure ?
- What I am doing now that really doesn't help me get a better grade in my exams ?
- Do I waste time, pretending that I am working/revising ?
- When do I work best (time of evening)?
- Do I give myself breaks to ensure that the quality of studying and revision is high ?
- Do I give myself rewards to help motivate me (ie work for 2 hours then watch a bit of TV) ?
- I am going over the units/modules I like and I am good at ?
- Am I neglecting the units/modules that I am not good at ?
- I am revising and learning work that is on the syllabus ?
- You should now know what you have to do to be successful in your school work. You should have a good idea of the most important things that you have to do, and also the least important.
- Be assertive in explaining to friends that you have your own studying to do.

Performance Planning

Rational Thinking and Positive Thinking techniques will help you manage the fears, anxieties and negative thoughts that may arise in a small performance.

For larger events, it is worth preparing a Performance Plan. This is a pre-prepared plan that helps you to deal effectively with any problems or distractions that may occur, and perform in a positive and focused frame of mind.



To prepare your Performance Plan, begin by making a list all of the steps that you need to do from getting prepared for a performance through to its conclusion.

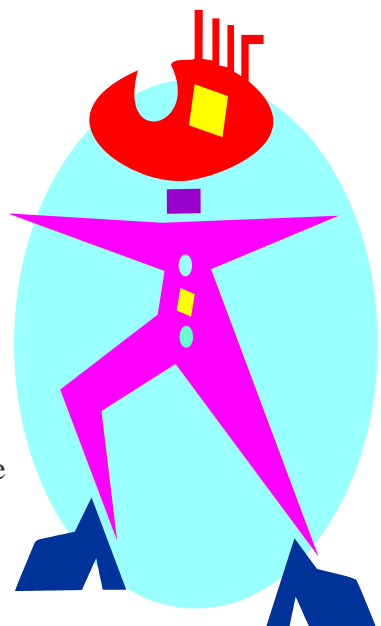
Start far enough in advance to sort out any equipment problems. List all of the physical and mental steps that you need to take to:

- Check exam dates / performance dates and record in your journal, ensuring that you know exactly what exam paper you are taking and if it is a morning or afternoon exam
- Check and prepare equipment needed
- Check your travel arrangements to get to school;
- Pack your equipment and resources the night before;
- Go through your revision cards / mind maps
- Focus and wait for your performance; and deliver your performance !

Next, work through each of these steps. Think though:

- Everything that could reasonably go wrong at each step with equipment and arrangements; and
- Any distractions and negative thinking that could undermine your confidence or stop you having a positive, focused frame of mind at the start of and during your performance.

Work through all of the things that could go wrong. Look at the likelihood of the problem occurring. Many of the things you have listed may be extremely unlikely. Where appropriate, strike these out and ignore them from your planning.



Look at each of the remaining contingencies.

These will fall into three categories:

1. Things you can eliminate by appropriate preparation, including making back-up arrangements and acquiring appropriate additional or spare equipment;
2. Things you can manage by avoiding unnecessary risk; and
Things you can manage with a pre-prepared action or with an appropriate stress management technique

Also, prepare the positive thinking you will use to counter fears and negative thoughts both before the event and during it.

Use stress anticipation skills to ensure that you are properly prepared to manage stress. Then use thought awareness, rational thinking and positive thinking skills to prepare the positive thoughts that you will use to protect and build your confidence.

Write your plan down on paper in a form that is easy to read and easy to refer to.

Keep it with you as you prepare for, and deliver, your performance. Refer to it whenever you need it in the time leading up to the event, and during it.

Summary

Performance Plans help you to prepare for an important performance, such as an examination.

They bring together practical **contingency planning** with **mental preparation** to ensure that you are fully prepared to handle any situations and eventualities that may realistically occur.

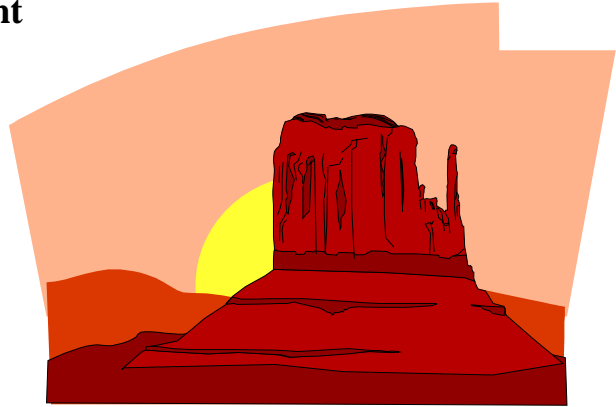
This gives you the **confidence** that comes from knowing you are as well prepared for an event as is practically possible to be. It also helps you to avoid the unpleasant stresses that come from poor preparation, meaning that you can deliver your performance in a relaxed, positive and focused frame of mind, whatever problems or upsets may have occurred.



Imagery – Mental Stress Management

Sometimes we are not able to change our environment to manage stress – this may be the case where we do not have the power to change a situation, or where we are about to take an important exam.

Imagery is a useful skill for relaxing in these situations.



Imagery is a potent method of stress reduction, especially when combined with physical relaxation methods such as deep breathing.

You will be aware of how particular environments can be very relaxing, while others can be intensely stressful. The principle behind the use of imagery in stress reduction is that you can use your imagination to recreate, and enjoy, a situation that is very relaxing. The more intensely you imagine the situation, the more relaxing the experience will be.

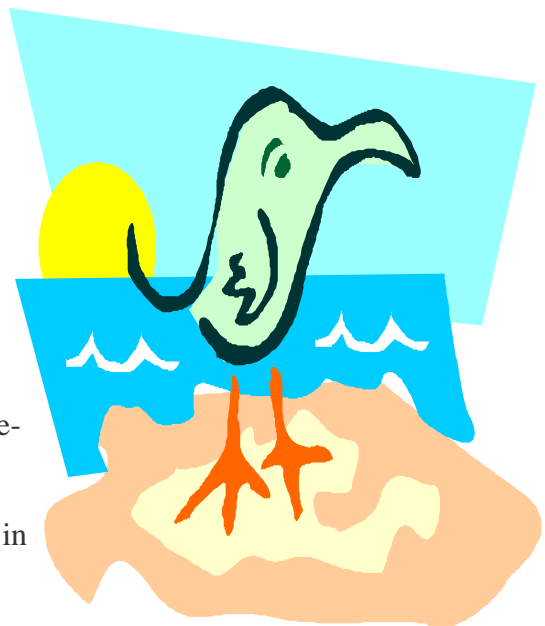
By imagining a pleasant and relaxing scene (which reduces stress) you can see the stress in your body reduce. By imagining an unpleasant and stressful situation, you can see the stress in your body increase.

Imagery in Relaxation

A good way to use imagery is to imagine a scene, place or event that you remember as safe, peaceful, restful, beautiful and happy.

You can bring all your senses into the image with, for example, sounds of running water and birds, the smell of cut grass, the taste of cool white wine, the warmth of the sun, etc. Use the imagined place as a retreat from stress and pressure.

Scenes can involve images such as lying on a beach in a deserted cove. You may “see” cliffs, sea and sand around you, “hear” the waves crashing against rocks, “smell” the salt in the air, and “feel” the warmth of the sun and a gentle breeze on your body.



Other images might include looking at a mountain view, swimming in a tropical pool, or whatever you want.

Other uses of imagery in relaxation involve creating mental pictures of stress flowing out of your body, or of stress, distractions and everyday concerns being folded away and locked into a padlocked chest.

Imagery in Preparation and Rehearsal

You can also use imagery in rehearsal before a big event such as an examination, allowing you to run through the event in your mind.

Imagery also allows you to practice in advance for anything unusual that might occur, so that you are prepared and already practiced in handling it.

This is a technique used very commonly by top sports people, who learn good performance habits by repeatedly rehearsing performances in their imagination.



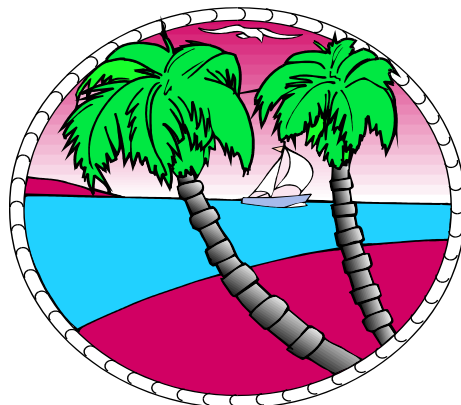
When the unusual eventualities they have rehearsed using imagery occur, they have good, pre-prepared, habitual responses to them.

Imagery also allows you to pre-experience achievement of your goals, helping to give you the self-confidence you need to do something well. This is another technique used by successful athletes.

Summary:

With imagery, you substitute actual experience with scenes from your imagination. Your body reacts to these imagined scenes almost as if they were real, calming you down and letting adrenaline disperse.

To relax with imagery, imagine a warm, comfortable, safe and pleasant place, and enjoy it in your imagination.



Physical Relaxation Techniques

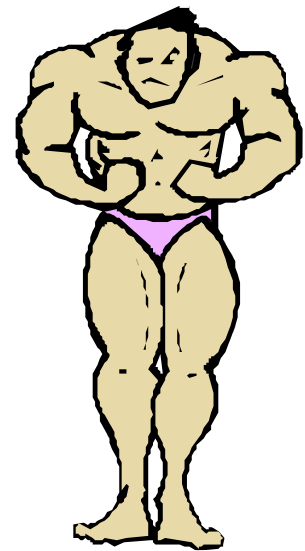
Deep Breathing, PMR and 'The Relaxation Response'

Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is a simple, but very effective, method of relaxation. It is a core component of everything from the "take ten deep breaths" approach to calming someone down, right through to yoga relaxation and Zen meditation. It works well in conjunction with other relaxation techniques such as Progressive Muscular Relaxation, relaxation imagery and meditation to reduce stress. To use the technique, take a number of deep breaths and relax your body further with each breath.

Progressive Muscular Relaxation

Progressive Muscular Relaxation is useful for relaxing your body when your muscles are tense. The idea behind PMR is that you tense up a group of muscles so that they are as tightly contracted as possible. Hold them in a state of extreme tension for a few seconds. Then, relax the muscles normally. Then, consciously relax the muscles even further so that you are as relaxed as possible.



By tensing your muscles first, you will find that you are able to relax your muscles more than would be the case if you tried to relax your muscles directly.

Experiment with PMR by forming a fist, and clenching your hand as tight as you can for a few seconds. Relax your hand to its previous tension, and then consciously relax it again so that it is as loose as possible. You should feel deep relaxation in your hand muscles.

The Relaxation Response

This method tackles the fight or flight tendencies of stress and the direct effects include deep relaxation, slowed heartbeat and breathing, reduced oxygen consumption and increased skin resistance.

This is something that you can do for yourself by following these steps:

- Sit quietly and comfortably.
- Close your eyes.
- Start by relaxing the muscles of your feet and work up your body relaxing muscles.
- Focus your attention on your breathing.

Breathe in deeply and then let your breath out. Count your breaths, and say the number of the breath as you let it out (this gives you something to do with your mind, helping you to avoid distraction).

Do this for ten or twenty minutes.

Thought Awareness, Rational Thinking and Positive Thinking

Quite often, our experience of stress comes from our perception of the situation. Often that perception is right, but sometimes it is not. Often we are unreasonably harsh with ourselves or jump to wrong conclusions about people's motives. This can send us into a downward spiral of negative thinking that can be hard to break

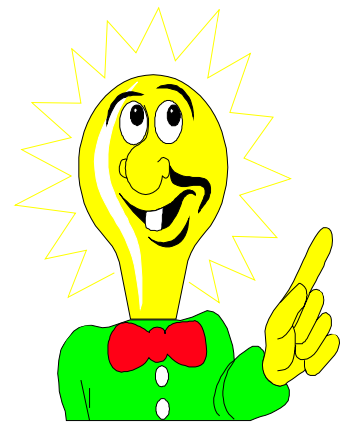
In becoming stressed, people make two main judgments: First, they must feel threatened by the situation, and second, they judge whether their capabilities are sufficient to meet the threat. How stressed someone feels depends on how much damage they think the situation can do them, and how closely their resources meet the demands of the situation.

Perception is key to this as situations are not stressful in their own right. Rather it is our interpretation of the situation that drives the level of stress that we feel.

Thought Awareness

You are thinking negatively when you fear the future, put yourself down, criticise yourself for errors, doubt your abilities, or expect failure. Negative thinking damages confidence, harms performance and paralyses mental skills.

A major problem with this is that negative thoughts tend to flit into our consciousness, do their damage and flit back out again with their significance, having barely been noticed. Since we do not challenge them, they can be completely incorrect and wrong. Yet, this does not diminish their harmful affect.



Thought Awareness is the process by which you observe your thoughts and become aware of what is going through your head.

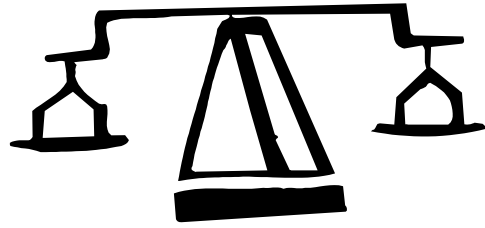
One approach to it is to observe your stream of consciousness as you think about a stressful situation. Do not suppress any thoughts: Instead, you just let them run their course while you watch them, and write them down as they occur.

Another more general approach to Thought Awareness comes with logging stress in your Stress Diary. One of the benefits of using the Stress Diary is that you log all of the unpleasant things in your life that cause you stress for one or two weeks. This will include negative thoughts and anxieties, and can also include difficult or unpleasant memories and situations that you perceive as negative.

By logging your negative thoughts for a reasonable period of time, you will quickly see patterns in your negative thinking. You should be able to see the most common and the most damaging thoughts. Tackle these as a priority.

Rational Thinking

The next step in dealing with negative thinking is to challenge the negative thoughts that you identified using the Thought Awareness technique.



Look at every thought you wrote down and rationally challenge it. Ask yourself whether the thought is reasonable: Does it stand up to fair scrutiny?

As an example, by analysing your Stress Diary you might identify that you have frequently had the following negative thoughts:

- **Feelings of inadequacy**
 - **Worries that your performance in your exams will not be good enough**
 - **An anxiety that things outside your control will undermine your efforts**
- Worries about other people's reactions to your studying and/or exam results**

Starting with these, you might challenge these negative thoughts in the ways shown:

- **Feelings of inadequacy:**

Have you planned your revision ?

Are you revising effectively and chunking down ?

Are you doing past papers ?

Have you planned, prepared and rehearsed appropriately?

If you have done all of these, are you setting yourself unattainably high standards for your exams ?

- **Worries about performance:**

Have you planned appropriately?

Do you have the information, notes and resources you need for your exams?

Have you cleared the time you need to revise?

Have you prepared appropriately?

If you have not, then you need to do these things quickly. If you have, then you are well positioned to give the best performance that you can.

- **Problems with issues outside your control:**

Have you conducted appropriate contingency planning?

Have you thought through and managed all likely risks and contingencies appropriately?

If so, you will be well prepared to handle potential problems.

Worry about other people's reactions: I

If you have put in good preparation, and you do the best you can, then that is all that you need to know.

If you perform as well as you reasonably can, then fair people are likely to respond well.

If people are not fair, then this is something outside your control.

Often, the best thing to do is to rise above unfair comments.

Positive Thinking

Where you have used Rational Thinking to identify incorrect negative thinking, it can often be useful to prepare rational positive thoughts and affirmations to counter them. Be positive !

Affirmations help you to build self-confidence. Your affirmations will be strongest if they are specific, are expressed in the present tense and have strong emotional content..

Positive affirmations might be:

- **Feelings of inadequacy:** “I have worked hard for this. I have the knowledge, the tools and the resources I need. I have thought through and prepared for all possible issues. I can do a superb job in my exams.”
- **Worries about performance:** “I have researched and planned well for this, and I thoroughly understand what I have to do to get a good grade. I have the time, resources and help I need. I am well prepared to achieve.”
- **Problems issues outside your control:** “I have thought through everything that might reasonably happen and have planned how I can handle all likely contingencies.

Worry about other people’s reaction: “I am well-prepared and am doing the best I can. Fair people will respect this. I will rise above any unfair criticism.

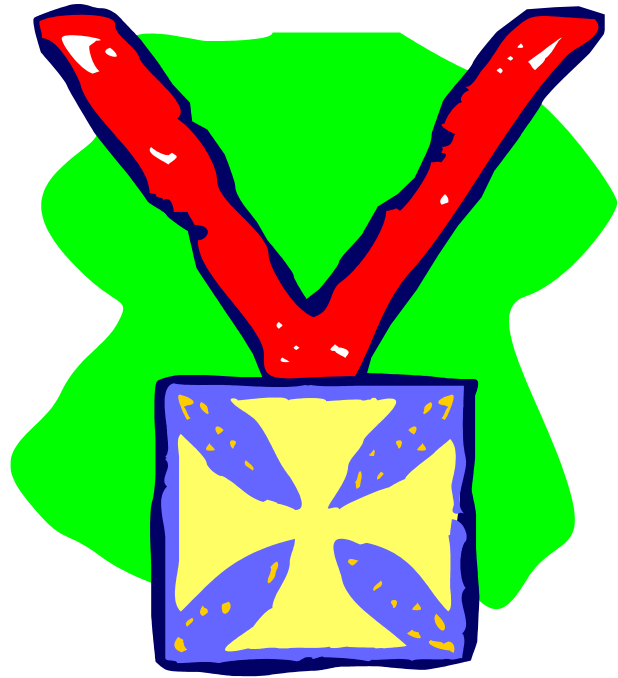
Re-cap

This set of tools helps you to manage and counter the stress of negative thinking.

Thought Awareness helps you to understand the negative thinking, unpleasant memories and misinterpretation of situations that may interfere with your performance and damage your self-confidence.

Rational Thinking is the technique that helps you to challenge these negative thoughts and either learn from them or refute them as incorrect.

Positive thinking is then used to create positive affirmations that you can use to counter negative thoughts. These affirmations neutralise negative thoughts and build your self-confidence.

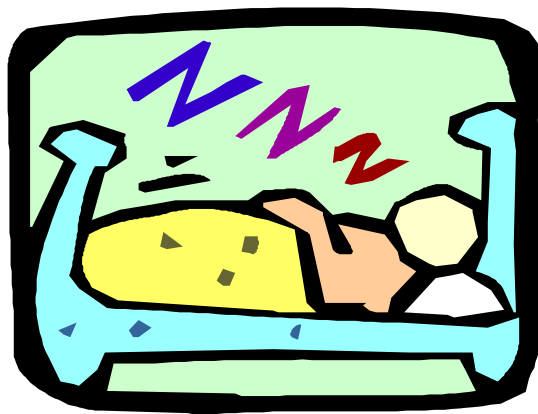


Rest, Relaxation and Sleep

Rest and Relaxation

Rest is what we do to let stress subside. Rest at the end of a day, and at the end of a week, helps us to calm down.

Doing fun things that we enjoy in our leisure time compensates us for the unpleasant stress we experience at school/revising/taking exams, bringing some balance back into life. This is particularly important if we routinely experience unpleasant levels of stress.



A good way of getting rest and reducing stress is to take up a sport or a hobby. If you spend all your working day competing, then can be very pleasant to be completely noncompetitive for some of your free time.

Slow physical activities such as sailing or walking are good for this, as are others where there is little or no pressure for performance. Reading novels, watching television or socialising can also be very restful. A change is as good as a rest !

During your exams you will be studying harder and longer than ever before. However it is important that you give yourself breaks and carry on doing some non-studying activities to reduce the stress of exams and revision. Physical exercise is a good stress buster and also keeps your brain sharp !

Sleep

The average person needs approximately eight hours sleep a night

If we are regularly short of sleep, then our concentration and our effectiveness suffer and our energy levels decline.

This diminishes our effectiveness in our job, and can therefore increase stress. As our concentration wanders, we start to make mistakes. As our energy declines, we become less good at planning, managing what we have to do and generally less productive. This means that a situation that is already difficult and stressful can become worse, needing even more sacrifice to bring it back under control.

Make sure that you get enough sleep. If you have become used to being tired all the time, you will be amazed by how sharp and energetic you will feel once you start sleeping normally. During the examination period do not reduce your sleeping time to get more studying in—you need that energy. If you go to bed late because you are watching TV then STOP NOW—you will get better grades by being fresher during the exam period. Use your study time wisely before the exams, not to stay up late !

