



Academic Stress: Coping Strategies

Do you get caught up worrying about final tests and papers? Do you feel overwhelmed with test anxiety? Do you hold such high expectations for yourself that your brain freezes up? Do you procrastinate so much that you end up cramming all your studying in the night before? Well, you are not alone. Here are eight tips to help you cope with academic stress successfully.

1. **USE CAMPUS RESOURCES.** Sometimes we can talk ourselves out of getting help. It can be scary to join a new study group or go to office hours, but doing so is a healthy risk worth taking.

The Center for Academic Resources (CFAR) has drop-in study groups, study skills groups, time management groups, and study mentoring. Office hours are posted and available. TA's have study groups and lab groups. Some professors post notes online.

There are groups here at PACS that address such topics as anxiety, negative moods, and social fears. There are urgent care/same-day appointments and counselors ready to help you at PACS when things get too stressful or too overwhelming.

2. **STAY PRESENT.** The past is gone, and the future is not yet here. The moment over which you have full control is the **present** moment. When you notice that your attention has drifted to the future or to the past, gently refocus yourself to the present moment.

3. **LEARN NEW SKILLS THROUGH PRACTICE.** We are human and we make mistakes. Every mistake you make provides you with an opportunity to learn about yourself.

The way you learn a new skill is by practicing. If you want to improve your singing, learn to play an instrument, become a gourmet chef, or sharpen your sports performance, you have to practice. The more you practice healthy thinking patterns and behavioral choices, the better you will feel. The more you practice good study skills and time management, the more prepared you will be for the test or for writing the paper.

4. **USE POSITIVE SELF-TALK.** How you talk to yourself influences how you feel about yourself. If you "beat yourself up" and "belittle yourself," you might start believing the voice of that internal critic. If you learn instead to "cut yourself some slack" or be a "support for yourself," then you will feel more hopeful, have more energy to achieve results, and be more likely to realize your full potential.

Throughout the day, notice your thoughts. Are they anxious? Negative? Self-critical? If so, then you can choose to disregard them, gently letting them float away. You can practice replacing negative thoughts with thoughts that are helpful and inspiring. You can learn to be kind to yourself.



5. **TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR MISTAKES.** When you make a mistake, take responsibility for it. If you are late when turning in a paper or lab, acknowledge your mistake, and then take action. You can apologize to a professor or lab partner and then be more prepared next time.
6. **FORGIVE YOURSELF.** We are taught to apologize to others when we have been unkind to them or when we have made a mistake that affects them. But we sometimes don't forgive ourselves for mistakes. It is important to forgive yourself when you stumble. If you do poorly on a test, forgive yourself. If you make an unhealthy choice, forgive yourself. Compassion is something that we can give not only to others but to ourselves as well.
7. **FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL.** Some of us are taught that we are responsible for others' happiness and that we should NOT focus on ourselves. We are taught that, to focus on our needs is "selfish." However, if you don't take care of yourself, you will have little to offer others over the long-term. Realize that you are ONLY in control of yourself; others are in control of themselves. You do not have the power to control others' actions, feelings, behaviors, or choices. Others make their own decisions about their lives and even if they make decisions you do not agree with, it's their right to make those decisions.

You can study in the library even if your roommate wants you to stay in the dorm and study with her. You can go to study hours even if friends are not going. You can control your own choices even if others disagree with you.

8. **PRACTICE GOOD SELF-CARE.** It's important to take care of ourselves. Forgetting to eat or eating pizza and chips for dinner every night depletes our bodies of energy and nutrients. Staying up all night studying or sleeping all day makes concentrating on studies difficult. Staying in our dorm rooms all day and night, not going outside, and ignoring friends keeps us alone and isolated.

Getting at least seven hours of sleep at night, eating three meals each day, exercising at Hamel Rec., going for walk, laughing with others, taking a hot shower to relax at night - these are good things for ourselves. Do three positive things for yourself every day when academic stress is high. You'll be glad you did.



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