

Test Anxiety Cheat Sheet

A before, during, and after plan for exam nerves - written for students who know the material but tighten up when it counts.



1 Read the whole sheet once, before exam week starts.

2 Keep it with your notes so the plan travels with you.

3 Glance at the During steps right before you begin.

BEFORE

Most of the calm you feel on test day is built here

Space it out, test yourself THE WEEK

1 Several short study sessions across the week beat one heroic cram - memory keeps what it revisits. And close the book: 20 minutes of answering from memory beats an hour of rereading, because it rehearses the exact skill the exam is grading.

Stop at a set time THE NIGHT

2 Pick a stopping time and keep it. Sleep is when your brain files what you studied - a rested brain retrieves better than a crammed, exhausted one. One more hour at midnight costs more points than it earns.

Eat something real THE MORNING

3 A nervous body burns fuel fast, and an empty stomach mimics anxiety: shaky, light-headed, foggy. Eat even if your appetite argues - something with protein holds you steadier than sugar or coffee alone.

Arrive early, skip the huddle AT THE DOOR

4 Get there with minutes to spare so rushing doesn't start your alarm system for you. Then step away from the last-minute quiz huddle - panic is contagious, and hallway facts won't stick anyway. Stand somewhere quiet and breathe.

DURING

Three protocols: starting, blanking, clock panic

The 30-second start ritual

5 Before question one: exhale long and slow, twice - the slow out-breath is your body's brake pedal. Read the instructions twice; anxiety loves a misread. Then dump formulas, dates, or key terms into the margin while they're fresh. Now begin.



The blank-out protocol: skip, mark, return

6 A blank is a retrieval jam, not lost knowledge - the file is there, the search is stuck. Skip the question, mark it, keep moving. It usually unjams on its own once your body settles and a later question jogs the answer loose.

The time-panic protocol

7 When the clock spikes your pulse, don't speed up - stop for 20 seconds and triage. Count what's left, collect the easy points first, and leave something on every question. Partial credit beats a perfect answer you never got to.

AFTER

The step almost everyone skips

The no post-mortem rule

8 Skip the answer-comparing huddle - it changes nothing and rehearses dread for next time. Write one honest line about what you'd change ("start with the short answers"), then close the book. Whatever the score, you're done for today.