

CCA Certification Exam Preparation Tips

Reducing Exam Taking Anxiety

Exam anxiety is when you excessively worry about doing well on an exam. Most students experience some level of anxiety before and during an exam which is normal. It's a reminder not to panic and to relax and cope steadily with the situation. There are many ways to effectively control and cope with this anxiety.

The main cause of exam anxiety is a lack of preparation such as:

- Cramming the night before the exam
- Poor time management
- Failure to organize notes and information
- Poor study habits
- Worrying about past performance on tests
- Worrying how friends and other students are doing
- Worrying about the negative consequences of failure

The key to reducing anxiety is to be prepared; this means starting early, maintaining good study habits throughout the course, and properly preparing yourself on the day of the exam.

Starting the Course

Exam preparation begins the first day of class. Start preparing to write the exam early in your education program by mastering the materials every step of the way; this will set you up for exam success. Strategies include:

Note Taking – Take thorough notes in class, if you miss something go back and ask a classmate or your instructor.

Time Management – Careful planning and good time management skills are essential. Set up a daily study schedule and stick with it so you are well prepared when it is time to write the exam.

Study Environment – The environment in which you study can have a big effect on how efficient your study time is. Here are a few recommendations:

- Minimize distracting noise and interruptions. Culprits are family and friends. Consider a “Do Not Disturb” sign and turning off phones/emails during your allotted study time.
- Study space should be neat and tidy with plenty of room to work.
- The room should be cool rather than warm.
- Have everything you need close at hand (books, pencils, paper, coffee, dictionary).
- A desk and straight-backed chair is best. Don't get too comfortable, a bed is a place to sleep not study.

During the Course

Prepare for the exam throughout your course by keeping up with the readings and assignment deadlines. Maintain your study schedule and ensure you are creating good study notes to review before the exam. Strategies include:

Develop good material to study by:

- Taking detailed notes and identify important concepts, topics, skills, and keywords.
- Outline the main ideas, concepts, and information onto a sheet that can be easily reviewed many times.
- Generate questions from your textbooks and lecture notes.
- Focus on key words, concepts and examples in your textbooks and lecture notes.
- Make charts and outlines to organize the information in your notes and textbooks.

Review your notes regularly: Repetition builds confidence in what you have learned. Read over your lecture notes, handouts, lab assignments, and reports carefully and integrate all these sources of information in your study notes.

- Organize the material to help you see connections and get the material into your long term memory.

Don't be embarrassed to ask for help and feedback: If there are topics you don't understand or problems you just can't seem to solve, ask your instructor and/or get a tutor.

- Form a study group with your classmates to share notes and review together.
- Take advantage of any option for feedback. Learn from your mistakes as well as your successes.

Studying for the Certification Exam

Prepare for the exam by reviewing your notes, getting help with problem areas, and ensuring you are prepared mentally and physically for the day of the exam.

Don't Cram: Cramming doesn't work, it puts things into your short term memory and if you are exhausted it is *very* short term. If you study and did your assignments throughout the course and prepared for the certification exam during the weeks prior, you will feel much more prepared and confident on exam day.

Set a study schedule: If there is a lengthy time between your course and when you are taking the exam it is important to make a study schedule and stick to it. This keeps the information fresh and will prevent you from procrastinating and forgetting information.

Utilize a productive study environment: Continue to study in an environment that is familiar and free of distractions. This space should be neat and equipped with everything you need to study (books, paper, pens).

Look at past tests: Examine old tests from your course. This may help you identify your strengths and weaknesses. It also reinforces what your instructor thinks you need to know for the exam.

Adapted from:

TestTakingTips.com; <http://sfs.studentservices.dal.ca>; <http://ub-counseling.buffalo.edu/stresstestanxiety.php>; and <http://www.studygs.net/tstprp8.htm>

Practice: Do as many problems from the text, study guides, and notes as you can. This will help you to better understand the underlying concepts.

Review the accompanying “Tips for Answer Multiple Choice Questions”

Sleep well and exercise: Being physically and mentally prepared is key to reducing exam anxiety. Make sure you get enough sleep and eat healthy meals leading up to the exam so that you will feel your best on the day of.

- Exercise is a great way to reduce anxiety leading up to the exam.

Gather Materials: Make sure you have everything gathered ahead of time that you need to take to the exam such as current photo identification (i.e. driver’s license or passport), number 2 pencils, an eraser, money for parking if required.

Know when and where: Make sure you know the time of your exam and where it is taking place. If the exam is in a location you are unfamiliar with make sure you have directions and the address written down.

Day of the exam

On the day of the exam dress comfortably and double check that you have all the needed supplies.

Arrive Early: Give yourself ample time to find exactly where you need to go to write the exam, to get registered and settled in your seat. A good rule of thumb: If exam starts at 10:00 am plan to arrive at the exam no later than 9:15 am. This greatly helps to eliminate any additional stress.

Strategies for Reducing Anxiety during the Exam

- Think what is it you have to do. Focus on the exam not the fear and take it one step at a time.
- Concentrate on what you can do to be successful on the exam rather than the negative consequences of failure.
- Think rationally and positively; no negative or panicky self-statements.
- Don’t worry; worrying will not help anything.
- Accept that your anxiety will rise a bit.
- If you are feeling tense, relax and remember you are in control. Take a slow, deep breath.
- Try to keep your fear manageable and if fear comes, just pause, focus on the present, and have confidence in yourself.
- Think positive statements: I am prepared for the exam. I know the material. I can handle it. I am in control.
- Remember, anxiety is not the worst thing that can happen. We all experience anxiety.
- Maintain a positive attitude while preparing for the exam and during the exam. Expect to do well.

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Tips for Exam Writing

- Stay relaxed, if you begin to get nervous take a few deep breaths slowly to relax yourself and then get back to work.
- Read the exam directions slowly and carefully.
- If you don't understand the directions on the exam, ask the proctor to explain it to you.
- Do the simple questions first to help build up your confidence for the harder questions.
- If you don't know an answer to a question skip it for the time being (come back to it later), and remember that you don't have to always get every question right to do well on the exam.
- Don't worry about how fast other people finish their exam; just concentrate on your own exam.
- Focus on the question at hand. Don't let your mind wander on other things.

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