



Mindful Testing

Given the amount of testing that students have to cope with throughout the year, we recommend introducing and practicing one or two brief mindfulness practices that utilize **breath** to mindfully manage your and your students' anxieties about testing. Use the two practices detailed below throughout the year and intensify the frequency in the weeks leading up to major exams or standardized tests. *It takes time and repeated practice for mindfulness to become integrated into students coping skills.*

There are many ways to incorporate teaching students about mindful testing into your class:

- At the start of each lesson that focuses on preparing for an upcoming test
- During a discussion with students about test-taking skills
- During a discussion with students about studying for tests

By repeatedly using these practices whenever discussing or teaching content for tests, you are helping students to get into the habit of engaging their body's relaxation and regulating systems before taking tests. Test anxiety can derail students' abilities to show what they have learned.

Tests are stressful and the goal of mindfulness is to change how we experience that stress and our reaction to it.

These mindful testing practices are beneficial for students of all ability levels. Oftentimes, high ability students experience the most distress by tests, but they have learned to hide it well. The pressures that high ability students place on themselves to do well can be psychologically damaging.

Practice 1: Settling Into The Test

Tell students that they will be regularly practicing a mindful way of starting any test. Tell them why: Slow, deep controlled breathing calms the brain and reduces the cortisol levels that increase our heart rates and our anxiety. Tell them that when taking a deep breath they need to exhale longer than they inhale. Now, practice inhaling for a slow count of three, pausing for a moment, and then exhaling for a slow count of four. Then begin the mindful practice of *Settling Into the Test*.

Modeling is one of the best ways for your students to learn, so do it with them!

Ask students to:

1. Stand next to their desks with their hands over their heads and take a deep belly breath; inhale and exhale
(add modified instructions for students' different levels of physical mobility)
2. Press their shoulders down, away from their ears and take another deep belly breath; inhale and exhale
3. Slowly lower their arms and take a third deep breath with their shoulders still pressed down, away from their ears; inhale and exhale
4. Slowly settle into their seats
5. Take a deep breath and press their feet into the floor; inhale and exhale
6. Take another deep breath with their feet still pressed into the floor; inhale and exhale
7. End by relaxing their bodies while taking one final deep breath; inhale and exhale

While students are still learning to master their breathing remind them to inhale for a count of three, pausing for a moment, and then exhale for a count of four. Count it out for them.

Practice 2: Reconnecting With Your Body

Tell students that getting caught up in your thoughts can increase the anxiety of getting stuck on a challenging question, and that one way to change this is to get out of your thoughts and into your body by using your breath to reconnect with your body.

Help students practice this by letting them know that you will interrupt them once or twice during class tests so they can learn how to interrupt themselves when they encounter a difficult question or feel themselves getting anxious during a test. Tell students that you will signal the start of the interruption by sounding a [*chime \(you can use this link for an audio chime\)*](#).

After sounding the chime, ask students to:

1. Press their feet into the floor and take a deep belly breath; inhale and exhale
2. Keep their feet pressed to the floor, and press their backs into their chair and take another deep belly breath; inhale and exhale
3. Take one final deep belly breath before returning to the test; inhale and exhale

While students are still learning to master their breathing remind them to inhale for a count of three, pausing for a moment, and then exhale for a count of four. Count it out for them.