

Visualization & Relaxation

Stress Management

Visualization

Daniel J. Boorstin said of Americans, "We suffer primarily not from our vices or our weaknesses, but from our illusions. We are haunted, not by reality, but those images we have put in place of reality." Our imaginations either free or bind us. **Visualization** takes positive messages one step farther. It uses imagination to put positive messages into action. Thus, instead of imagining the worst and seeing yourself fail, you imagine success. Just as you sometimes embellish the worst with all the gory details, you now imagine the best in all its splendor.

Begin your visualization of academic success by closing your eyes.

Imagine yourself in class.

Picture yourself as a confident student who understands the lectures and participates actively in class.

Watch yourself study for the course.

See yourself actively reading and understanding text information.

Imagine yourself preparing for a test.

You do not feel anxious or tired.

Feel yourself learning and feeling good about what you learn.

The feeling intensifies.

You feel prepared for a test.

Imagine yourself closing your books and gathering your notes.

Picture yourself falling to sleep.

You feel yourself waking up refreshed and ready.

Watch yourself review the information.

You are calm and prepared.

See yourself going to the class in which you have an exam.

See yourself walking into the class and sitting down.

Visualize yourself being calm and collected.

Watch your instructor give you your test.

Imagine yourself carefully listening to the verbal instructions and estimating the time needed to complete each section.

Watch yourself take the test.

You are calm and confident.

You think logically.

You remember accurately.

Watch yourself complete the test and turn it in.

Visualize yourself leaving the room.

You are pleased with yourself and your performance.



Relaxation

"Relax, you won't feel a thing," say many doctors right before they give you an injection. And while you're sure to feel the needle going in, it really does hurt less if you can ease the tension in your body. Similarly, relaxation eases stress. Even in the throes of a stressful situation, relaxation occurs. How long it takes for you to relax depends on the time you have available and the way you relax.

1. Sit or lie in a comfortable position with your eyes closed.
2. Picture yourself in a quiet place in which you have felt relaxed in the past (the beach, the forest, a park, your backyard, your room, or elsewhere). Imagine that you're there once more.
3. Breathe in deeply, hold for one count, and exhale. Repeat the word *calm* each time you inhale. Repeat the word *down* each time you exhale.
4. Beginning with your toes, flex, then relax those muscles. Progress to the foot, ankle, leg, and so on.
5. Let your thoughts drift. Allow them to come and go without intervention.
6. Remain calm and quiet. If possible, stay in this state for at least twenty minutes.
7. Open your eyes and remain quiet. Enjoy the feeling of relaxation.

Early humans responded to threats by either fighting or fleeing. Contemporary life is not that simple, but people still have this fight-or-flight instinct. As a result, our muscles often respond to stress even when these options are not available. Steps for progressively relaxing your mind and muscles appear below. You can also relax your muscles by doing a physical body check. Whenever you feel tense, stop and see if any muscles are involved that really don't need to be. For example, suppose you feel your shoulders tense as you read. Since shoulder muscles play little part in reading, you need to make a conscious effort to relax them. Finally, conscious deep breathing also relaxes the body.

Taking a vacation is also relaxing. Of course, if you're enrolled in school and studying for an exam, you can't go to Nassau for the weekend. A mental vacation serves the same purpose as a real one. It's just not as much fun! Mental vacations, however, are fast and inexpensive. To take one, you simply close your eyes. You visualize your favorite vacation spot. Or you see a place where you wish to vacation. You don't have to always picture quiet, relaxing places. You can imagine yourself shopping, sightseeing, playing sports, or whatever you like to do. Another type of vacation also serves to relax you. Simply changing the way you do things is a kind of vacation. For example, try going to class by a different route, eating in a different location, or shopping at a different grocery. These simple changes of pace refresh you.

Laughter releases tension, too. It often allows you to put things into perspective. If you have time, you can watch a favorite comedy. If not, listening to a radio station that tells jokes and plays upbeat songs yields the same effect. Print cartoons and funny stories also entertain and relieve stress. Browsing through humorous greeting cards at a store is also relaxing.