Definition: a type of performance anxiety – the feeling someone might have in a situation where performance counts or pressure is high to complete the task.

* “If you’re doing work that’s important to you, you’ll always feel some type of anxiety.” – Thomas Frank
  + Anxiety is an indicator that what you’re doing is important (not being apathetic). However, too much stress and anxiety can release the neurochemical cortisol, and too much cortisol can hinder the ability of the hippocampus to recall memories.

**How do I know if I’m experiencing test anxiety?**

* Physical symptoms:
  + Headache, nausea, rapid heart rate and breathing, light-headedness, gastrointestinal issues, excessive sweating
    - Often these symptoms can lead an individual to experience a panic attack
* Emotional symptoms:
  + Intense feelings of anger, fear, helplessness, or disappointment
* Behavioral/Cognitive Symptoms:
  + Difficulty concentrating, negative thinking (pessimism), comparative thoughts (comparing self to others, to past exam results)

**Three Main Areas that typically cause test anxiety:**

1. Fear of Total Failure (the Stakes): while pressure to perform can act as a motivator, it can be devastating to a student that ties their self-worth to the outcome of a test.
   * Problem: One of the biggest parts of test anxiety is the feeling that this test means EVERYTHING. In reality, there are very few actual exams that will make or break your entire future.
   * Solution: try thinking of exams as a learning opportunity rather than as a judgement of its or your worth.
     + Active recall strengthens your mastery over the material (during exams)
2. Fear of Not-Knowing: waiting until the last minute to study, not preparing effectively, or not studying at all can leave students overwhelmed and anxious.
   * Problem: People are naturally afraid of what they don’t understand (survival mechanism)
   * Solution: gain as much exam experience as you can. Replicate the testing conditions when you’re studying:
     + Practice quizzes, study guides, using notes to test yourself and create practice exams
     + Spend time quizzing yourself in a classroom similar to the one you’ll be tested in
     + Replicate time constraints as well
   * You want to get to an exam and not feel like it’s the first time you’ve taken it.
   * Make a Study Plan – schedule studying during the weeks leading up to the exam.
3. Fear of Repeating Past Mistakes: bad experiences taking tests or problems during tests can lead to a negative mindset during test-taking and influence the performance or results of future tests.
   * Problem: Students may believe they are defined by their past successes or failures (and we’re more likely to remember the failures because of a negativity bias)
   * Solution: gather as much information about your past “failures” as possible to prevent similar mistakes and set realistic exam goals
     + Ask for old exams, get feedback on papers, etc.
     + Look at what you didn’t understand and try to answer questions correctly
     + Figure out why you made mistakes:
       - Was I unprepared? Why was I unprepared? Did I not put enough time into studying? Did I ignore study guide information? Did I use an ineffective method for studying? Did I rush or go too slow?
     + Failure is a great teacher – maybe even better than successes.
     + Make a plan of action for doing better next time.

**Additional Strategies:**

* Before the Exam:
  + Eat healthy (fiber and carb heavy foods)
  + Limit stimulant consumption (caffeine, energy drinks, sugars)
  + Sleep at least 6 hours every night
  + Exercise/spend time outdoors or moving around
  + Make time for yourself/take breaks
  + Come prepared: bluebook/scantron, pencil, study guide, water bottle, etc.
* 10 Minutes Before the Exam:
  + Write down your worries!
    - Take out a sheet of paper and spend 5 minutes writing out any anxieties that you have associated with the exam.
    - Then write a solution for each of these worries.

*Why does this work? Putting your anxieties into an external system that you can trust allows you to get those thoughts out of your head before an exam.*

* During the Exam:
  + Write down everything you remember
  + Skip over difficult questions, come back to them later
  + Check over all of your work – Scantron, test booklet, etc.
* After the Exam:
  + Meditating & Practicing Breathing Exercises (if experiencing symptoms of anxiety)