



Texas Woman's University

**Counseling**  
*Center*

Presents



# HESI Preparation & Coping Skills

# Hints for Effective Studying #1

- Start early – do not try to cram for this.
- Do practice questions – lots of them.
  - Carefully review the rationale for both wrong and right answers (take notes!).
- Study in groups to clarify information and increase understanding.
  - You benefit from learning from others and from teaching others.

# Hints for Effective Studying #2

- Take short breaks while studying.
  - Don't study too long at one sitting.
  - Don't take too long of a break either. 😊
- If you can, study in an environment similar to the one in which you will be taking the test.
  - For example, doing questions on the computer, studying at school in a quiet place.

# Hints for Effective Studying #3

- Study for both factual and conceptual items
  - Factual items will require you to know concrete information (what do you give to counteract the effects of a particular drug).
  - Study facts with something like flashcards – repetition is the key to learning facts.

# Hints for Effective Studying #4

- Conceptual items require you to understand the big picture, how facts fit together, critical reasoning skills.
  - Study for these questions by
    - Looking at the big picture
    - Thinking about how various things fit together
    - Examining a concept (and some facts) from every angle
    - Making-up clinical scenarios and answering questions related to these scenarios



# It Is More Than Just Studying...

Introduction to the  
DE-STRESS Model



# DE-STRESSing is a Way of Life #1

- D – Diet
- E – Exercise
- S – Support System
- T – Time Management
- R – Rest/Relaxation
- E – Escapes
- S – Study Smart
- S – Self-talk

# DE-STRESSing is a Way of Life #2

- **Diet:** Maintain a balanced, consistent diet: food (veggies, protein, whole grains), vitamins, water, etc. Watch out for too much processed sugar, caffeine, or other stimulants. They won't help!
- **Exercise:** Work-out, go for walks, stretch, do yoga, go dancing. The more physically fit you are, the better your body can cope with stress. Remember: more blood moving = more oxygen circulating = better attention, concentration, and learning.

# DE-STRESSing is a Way of Life #3

- **Support System:** Utilize your supportive resources during this stressful time. Friends, family, classmates, and/or a therapist can be supportive. Tell them what you need and how they can help. Spirituality and religious communities are also a great source of support.
- **Time Management:** Develop and use written daily and weekly schedules. Make them balanced, concrete, specific, and flexible.

# DE-STRESSing is a Way of Life #4

- **Rest/Relaxation:** Get adequate amounts of sleep. (No cramming the night before!) Invite relaxation into your life. Deep breathing, visual imagery, gross muscle relaxation, and meditation are often helpful.
- **Escapes:** Make sure you schedule escapes into your everyday life. All studying and no balance makes for a stressed-out, ineffective student. TV, books, time with people, time alone, movies, spiritual activities are all healthy escapes.

# DE-STRESSing is a Way of Life #5

- **Study Smart:** See the first 5 slides of this presentation. In addition: develop and keep a study routine. Create a healthy study environment (quiet, well-lit, at a desk, few distractions). Reward yourself via contingencies (If I study for \_\_\_ hrs., I'll do \_\_\_). Take breaks. Frequent, short breaks are generally more effective than long, less frequent breaks.

# DE-STRESSing is a Way of Life #6

- **Self-Talk:** Become aware of your self-talk. Watch out for negative, unrealistic, catastrophic messages. Focus on positive, encouraging reality-based messages to yourself. Consciously stop negative/pessimistic talk (tell yourself “NO!”) and counter it with a positive message.



# DE-STRESSing and Test Anxiety

- The DE-STRESS model provides a good foundation for preventing test anxiety.
- It helps prepare you physically, mentally, and emotionally to cope with the stress of the testing situation.
- It generally creates a healthy, positive lifestyle.



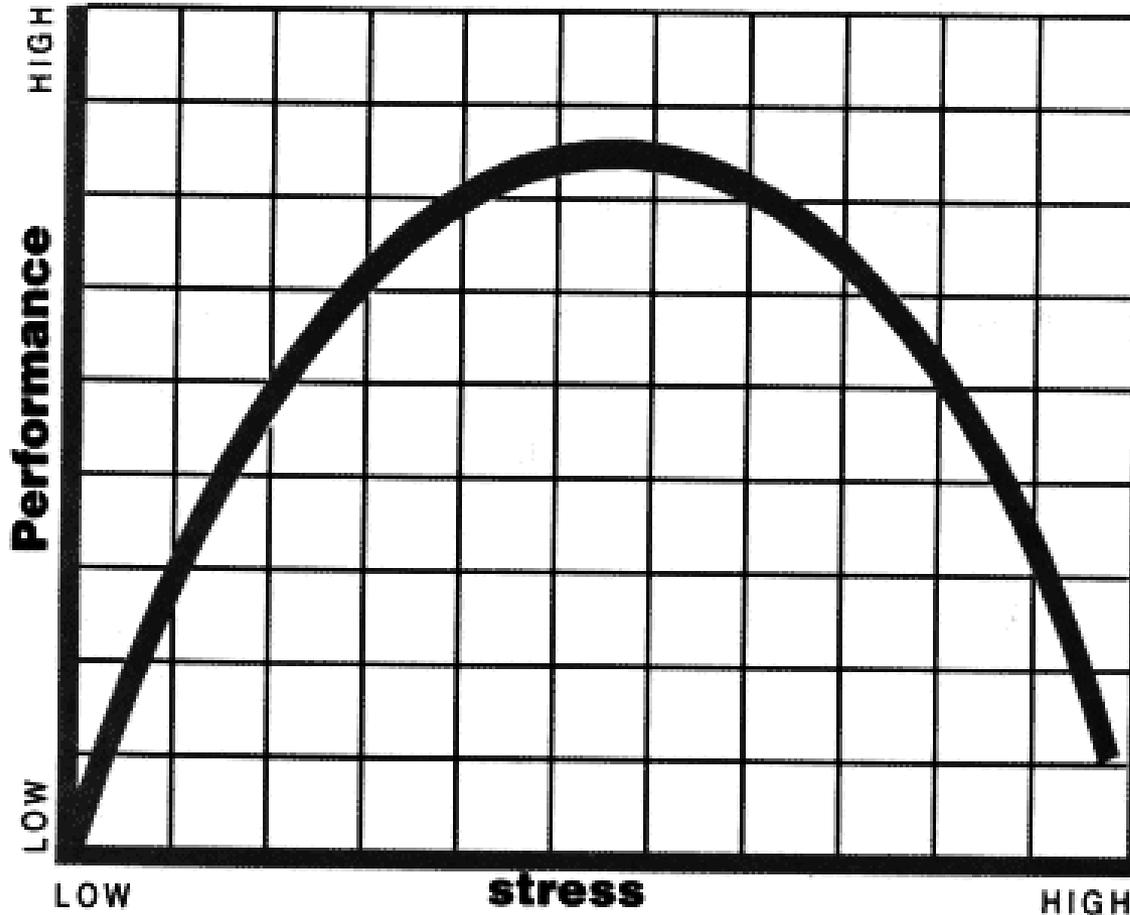
# Test Anxiety

What Is It and How to Overcome It

# Test Anxiety – Not all Anxiety is Bad

- Another way to think of anxiety is to think of it as a high level of “arousal.”
- Arousal is a good thing – without it we would be unconscious, or at least lethargic or bored or uninspired.
- Optimal performance requires optimal arousal, which is slightly different for each person.

# Test Anxiety – Arousal and Performance



# Test Anxiety – Arousal and Performance

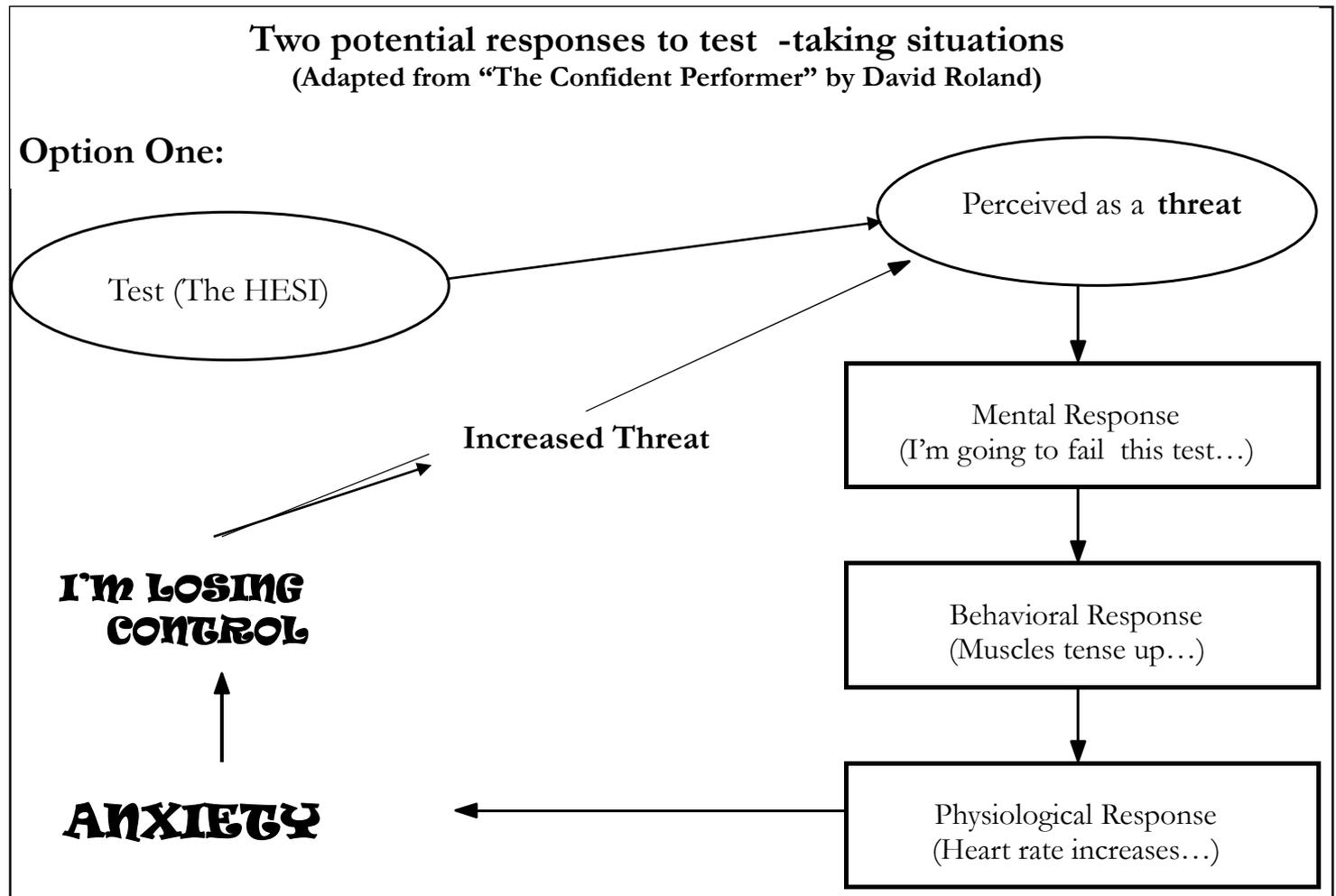
- Notice that too *little* stress or arousal leads to under-performance.
- Also, too *much* stress or arousal leads to under-performance as well.
- The best place to be is in the middle of the graph.
- Here's what happens when arousal gets too high.....

# Test Anxiety – Arousal Gone Awry

- Activation of your body's fight or flight response:
  - Sympathetic nervous system activation
  - Hypervigilance (over thinking, easily distracted)
  - Memory problems
  - Attention/concentration difficulties
  - Brain drain....



# Test Anxiety – How it Looks

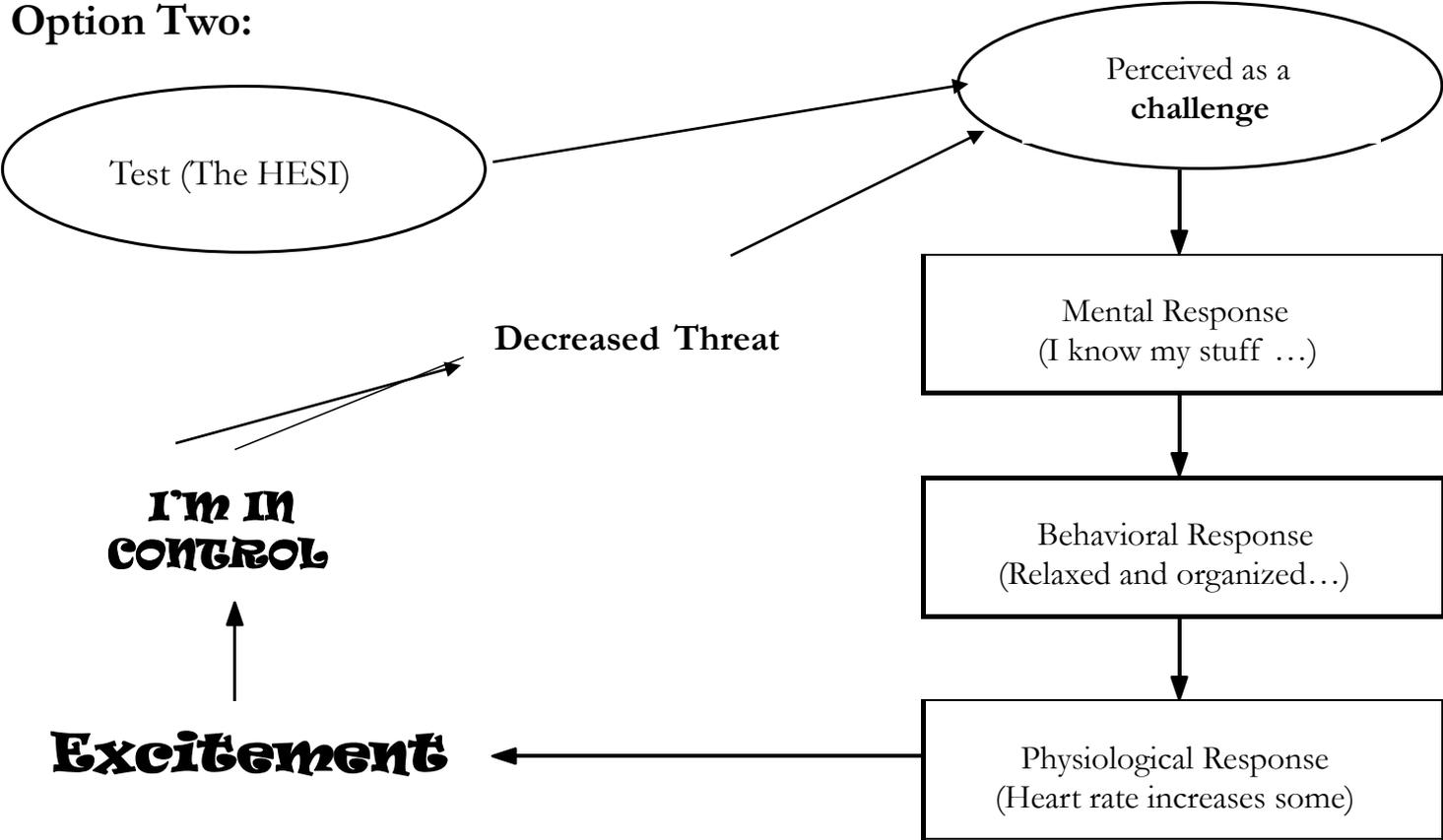


# Test Anxiety – Arousal Used Effectively

- When arousal is used effectively there is:
  - Moderate activation of sympathetic nervous system
  - Increased concentration and recall
  - A sense of “flow”
  - The task is perceived as a challenge and opportunity rather than a threat
  - Here’s what it can look like...

# Test-Taking – How it Could Be

Option Two:



# Steps to Overcome Test Anxiety

- Study! Feeling prepared is the best defense and will help the HESI feel like a challenge rather than a threat.
- Incorporate the DE-STRESS model into your life.
- Monitor your self-talk and replace negative thoughts with positive, adaptive ones.
- Practice intentional relaxation and imagery techniques on a daily basis.

# Overcoming Test Anxiety Self-Talk

## #1

- Anxious Self-Talk
  - I never do well on tests...
  - My entire future is riding on this test!
- Effective Self-Talk
  - While sometimes I struggle, I am prepared for this test and I can do it...
  - Yes, this test is important, but I can cope if I have to take it again. Focus on the present, not the future.

# Overcoming Test Anxiety Self- Talk #2

- Anxious Self-Talk
  - This is too hard for me.
  - I'm going to fail...
- Effective Self-Talk
  - I can do this, even if it is hard. I've been preparing for this test for at least 2 years.
  - Don't focus on pass or fail right now. Just focus on doing my best.

# Overcoming Test Anxiety Self-Talk

## #3

- Anxious Self-Talk
  - My heart is beating fast (or my hands are cold, or...); I'm panicking...
  - Everyone is doing better than I am...
- Effective Self-Talk
  - I need a certain level of arousal to perform at my best. It doesn't mean I'm panicking.
  - It doesn't matter what everyone else is doing. I can only control myself. Focus on the questions.

# Overcoming Test Anxiety Self-Talk

## #4

- Anxious Self-Talk
  - My mind is blank; I can't remember anything!
  - If I don't know that answer, I won't know the others...

- Effective Self-Talk
  - Take a deep breath, focus on relaxing for a moment and things will start to come back...
  - I won't know every answer and that's OK. But there are many answers I will know.

# Overcoming Test Anxiety Self-Talk

## #5

- Anxious Self-Talk
  - This was never covered!!!!!!!!!!
  - I can't do this!!!
- Effective Self-Talk
  - Take it easy. Think it through and maybe I can figure it out. Just take it slow, but don't give it too much time. If I really don't know it, I can let it go.
  - Yes, I CAN do this. Just stay focused, relaxed and do the best I can....

# Intentional Relaxation

- Anxiety, stress, and over-arousal are *learned* behaviors that have become habits.
- Intentional relaxation helps develop a *new* habit of calm, confidence, and focus.
- As with any habit, you must *practice it* repeatedly in order for it to take hold.
- The following should be practiced at least once a day (but twice is better).

# Intentional Relaxation – How To #1

- Best practiced in the morning and in late afternoon or early evening – but not just after you have eaten.
- Find a comfortable, straight-back chair that will support your body in a relaxed, upright posture.
- Sit with both feet on the floor, hands in your lap, comfortable, neutral posture.

# Intentional Relaxation – How To #2

- Begin by taking a slow, deep breath, imagining your lungs filling from the bottom up – all the way to the top.
- Hold the breath for a moment and then exhale slowly, imagining the air draining out from the bottom of your lungs – like water drains out of a bathtub.
- Repeat several times and when you are ready, allow your eyes to gently close.

# Intentional Relaxation – How To #3

- After several deep breaths, allow your breathing to fall into a slow, relaxed state.
- You may find many thoughts and/or feelings running through your mind; there are several ways to address this:
  - Attempt to be fully aware of your breathing – what the air feels like coming in, how it feels to fill your lungs, what the air feels like going out...

# Intentional Relaxation – How To #4

- Coping with thoughts/feelings continued:
  - Use a centering word or phrase with each breath in and each breath out, for example: Say to yourself “Calm” as you breath in and “Focus” as you breath out. Different words work for different people, just keep it simple and non-distracting.
  - When thoughts or feelings arise, notice them and then return your focus to where it belongs.

# Intentional Relaxation – How To #5

- Coping with thoughts/feelings continued:
  - Other people like to imagine they are sitting in front of a pond that has been stirred up by their thoughts and feelings so that the water is cloudy. As you breathe, imagine yourself watching everything settle to the bottom of the pond until the water becomes crystal clear. Anytime a thought or feeling rises, allow it to sink back to the bottom of the pond.

# Intentional Relaxation – How To #6

- Coping with thoughts/feelings continued:
  - Finally, some people like to imagine they are sitting by a river watching a series of boats float by. Distracting thoughts or feelings are the boats on the river. Simply notice them and watch how they – without any help from you – float down the river and out of your awareness, allowing you to become more focused and present.

# Intentional Relaxation – How To #7

- The point of all of these techniques is to help you enter a deeply relaxed state – the antithesis of stress and anxiety.
- The first few days of your practice, just work on entering this state of deep relaxation and allow yourself to stay there for several minutes – at least 10 minutes.
- You might want to try doing it before studying.

# Intentional Relaxation – How To #8

- Once you know how to enter a relaxed state, you may want to begin to imagine yourself taking the HESI.
  - Make the image as detailed as possible (sights, sounds, smells, physical sensations).
  - Start with the night before the test, go through getting ready, getting to campus, going to the testing room, taking the test, taking breaks, etc.

# Intentional Relaxation – How To #9

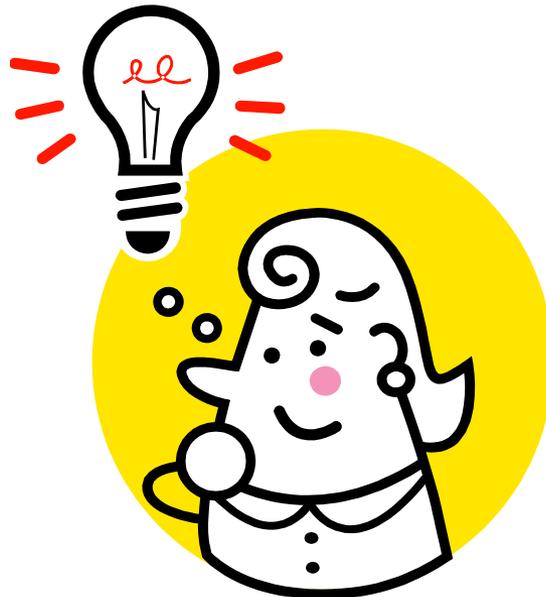
- Make sure in your imagination you see yourself being confident, calm, and successful – rehearse what you want to be!
- If at any time you begin to feel anxious or stressed, or cannot imagine yourself being successful and confident, return to one of the initial relaxation techniques until you are again deeply relaxed then pick-up your rehearsal where you left off.

# Intentional Relaxation – How To #10

- At the end of your relaxation session give yourself positive, reassuring messages. For example: I am calm, confident, and focused. I am prepared. I can return to this place of calm and focus whenever I need to, etc.
- When you are ready, gently open your eyes and give yourself a moment to reorient to your surroundings before getting up and moving around.

# The Day of the HESI

Some tips on test-taking



# Test-Taking Strategies #1

- The night before:
  - Get things ready that you will need the next day:
    - Clothing (a “feel good” outfit with layers is best)
    - Snacks (a balance of protein and carbs)
    - Anything else you might need
  - Focus on relaxation and positive self-talk.
  - Go to bed early – no late-night cramming!

# Test-Taking Strategies #2

- The morning of the test:
  - Get up early so you don't have to rush.
  - Eat a good breakfast with long-lasting energy food (protein and complex carbs).
  - Don't consume too much caffeine or simple sugars (these can cause physiological reactions that are similar to anxiety).
  - If you are used to caffeine and sugar, don't go cold-turkey either – balance is key!

# Test-Taking Strategies #3

- The morning of the test (cont.):
  - Take time for a short intentional relaxation session with the focus on developing that sense of calm, confidence, and focus.
  - Leave for campus allowing time for traffic problems so you don't have to rush.
  - Practice your positive self-talk from the moment you get up.

# Test-Taking Strategies #4

- The morning of the test (cont.):
  - When you arrive at campus, stay away from people who are overly anxious and avoid last minute cramming. Do surfacing reviewing if you must, but it is better to focus on staying calm and allowing what you know to rise to the surface.
  - Keep up your positive self-talk and do some deep breathing.

# Test-Taking Strategies #5

- Taking the HESI:
  - Expect that you will not know all the answers and do not let it throw you when you don't know something.
  - At times, students have been able to use a dry-erase marker to underline or mark on the computer screen to help them track elements of the question. Bring a pen and ask if you may do this.

# Test-Taking Strategies #6

- Taking the HESI continued:
  - Treat each item as a separate event; just because you didn't know one thing, doesn't mean that you won't know the next item.
  - Keep up the positive self-talk.
  - Don't answer questions too quickly. Take time to think things through, narrow down your choices, and double check your answer.

# Test-Taking Strategies #7

- Taking the HESI continued:
  - Don't over-think questions either. Identify the main elements of the question (what is really being asked?) and answer what is being asked.
  - You may want to rate each possible answer on a scale of 0-100, 0 being absolutely wrong, 100 being the perfect answer. This can help you choose between 2 "close" answers.

# Test-Taking Strategies #8

- Taking the HESI continued:
  - Look for the best answer, not the perfect answer.
  - Your first response is usually your best one. Don't change your responses unless you have a really good reason.
  - Remember to evaluate both factual and conceptual elements of the question.

# Test-Taking Strategies #9

- Taking the HESI continued:
  - Take a short break after the first 40 items. Use this break to stand up, stretch, breathe deeply, give yourself a pep talk. Meditate on the positive!
  - Take a short break after 80 questions. Again, stretch, breathe, think positive, have a small snack and use the restroom if need be.

# Test-Taking Strategies #10

- Taking the HESI continued:
  - Take your last break after 120 questions. Again, stand up, stretch, give yourself a pep talk, breathe deeply and relax.
  - The end of the test is when people allow themselves to become distracted and anxiety increases. Stay focused on the task in front of you (that's why you practiced letting go of distracting thoughts while relaxing!).

# Test-Taking Strategies #11

- Taking the HESI continued:
  - Do not allow yourself to be distracted by:
    - Others finishing the test before you (it doesn't matter who finishes when; there is no time limit)
    - Being physically or mentally tired (that's why it is important to take breaks)
    - Wanting the test to be over (don't allow yourself to mentally "quit" before you have made it to the finish line). Give yourself that pep talk!

# Test-Taking Strategies #12

- After the HESI:
  - Focus on what you did well and give yourself lots of praise for this.
  - No matter what the outcome, do something special for yourself. You deserve it for how hard you have worked.
  - Remember, if you don't pass, you will have that much more preparation for the next exam.

# Test-Taking Strategies #13

- After the HESI:
  - When you pass, celebrate!
  - Congratulations!!



# TWU Counseling Center Resources

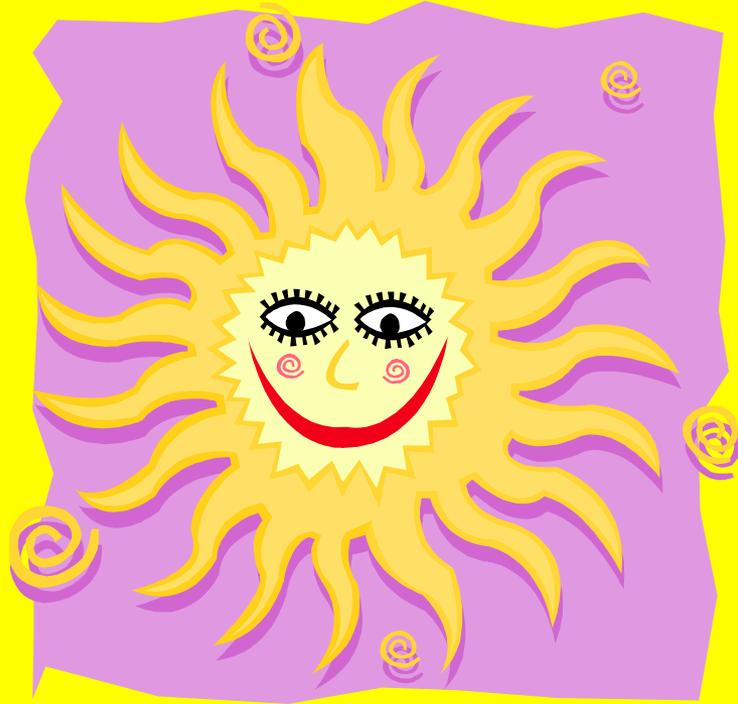
- Visit any of the TWU Counseling Center waiting areas to pick up handouts about test anxiety, test taking, and other topics of interest.
- Denton: West Jones Hall
- Dallas: Parkland Room 120  
Presbyterian Room 16
- Houston: 6700 Fannin, Suite 2250
- Some handouts are also available on our web site at:  
<http://www.twu.edu/counseling/self-help-library.asp>.
- Other materials may be accessed through the Counseling Center website at: <http://www.twu.edu/counseling>.

# Credits and Disclaimers

- This presentation was created by Cindy M. Bruns, Ph.D., Licensed Psychologist
- This presentation was created for educational purposes only. The TWU Counseling Center does not provide on-going counseling via the internet, telephone or email.

# Thanks!

Thank you for stopping by to visit this site. We hope you found it useful.



TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY  
DENTON DALLAS HOUSTON

*Simply the*  
**BEST**

