Reducing Test Anxiety

Be Prepared!
There is no substitute for studying and preparing. Begin to study at least a week before your exam. Never go 24-hours without reviewing your notes. Use free moments throughout the day to review the materials. Condense notes and class information to study sheets, note cards, outlines, etc., and go over these repeatedly.

Talk to Your Professor
Schedule an appointment with your professor to clarify material, ask about the test format, etc. The more you know, the less you’ll have to wonder/worry about.

Predict Test Questions
As you study, try to pick out main details that will likely be on the test. For example, if you’ve studied Civil War in your history class, expect questions on causes, politics, duration, resolution, etc. Another tip-off is when the professor has stressed points in class or has “pet interests.”

Be Early
Get to your classroom early so you don’t feel rushed and so you can sit where you want to. Avoid talking to other people who might add to your stress.

Practice Relaxation
Use deep breathing, positive self-talk, visualization, etc. both before and during the test. Helping your mind and body relax will reduce anxiety and allow you to better focus on your exam.

Take Your Time!
Budget the time you have to complete the exam and use it well. Take time to carefully read instructions and questions. Underline key works or phrases; look for words like compare, contrast, list, evaluate, explain, define, etc. to make sure you answer the question appropriately.

Don’t Panic!
If you don’t know an answer, take a moment to relax and think. If you still don’t know it, use common sense and test-taking techniques to try and come up with the answer. Do whatever you can to eliminate incorrect options to improve your chances of picking the right answer. If it’s an essay question, try to remember as much as you can and elaborate on those points.
Take a Break
If you’re feeling anxious, take a moment to get a drink, use the restroom, stretch, etc. If you’re not able to leave the testing room, simply take a moment to lean back, stretch, breathe, and clear your head. Deep breathing and visualization are things you can do quietly in your seat.

Ignore Other People
Don’t focus on what other people say before the test, how soon they are finished, etc. Focus only on you, your work, and your exam.

Be Positive
Don’t “catastrophize” about the test with negative self-talk: Avoid thinking you’re going to fail, that you have to get a certain grade, that your financial aid depends on this test, etc. Those thoughts will only serve to raise the stakes and thus, raise your anxiety. Try to use positive and encouraging self-talk such as “I know the material, I can do this, I studied a lot, I can manage my anxiety.”