

Dear York Prep Families,

With the end of the academic year fast approaching, the Wellness Team has compiled a Testing Toolkit for parents to review with their children as they prepare for final exams. The following list contains a variety of strategies that can improve performance and relieve test anxiety.



- **Early studying.** Cramming leaves you stressed and exhausted, which only contributes to more test anxiety and poorer performance. Reviewing a little each day. Practice good time management by utilizing study hall and Jump Start periods to review with a peer or teacher.
- **Consistency of routine.** Following the same steps in each review session to establish a routine.
- **Spatial familiarity.** Context is incredibly beneficial, so create opportunities to study in the space designated for learning (a classroom or exam room, for example).
- **Meaningful connection.** Schedule time with teachers to ask specific questions, go over material, and work together to see where you might be missing steps/concepts. Practice material with a peer. If you can teach it to someone else, you have a stronger concept of the knowledge.



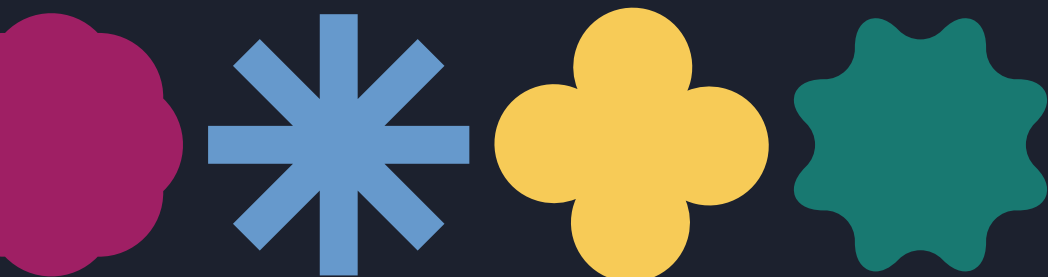
Testing Toolkit

- **Baseline self-care.** Get regular exercise, adequate sleep, balanced meals, and proper hydration in the days leading up to a big assessment
- **Anxiety management.** Identify other concerns and sources of anxiety and create a plan to manage them so they don't exacerbate anxiety related to testing.
- **Utilize relaxation techniques on the exam day.** Breathing (4-7-8 breathing), grounding (5-4-3-2-1 technique), guided meditation (you can find examples on YouTube, Spotify, or Apple Music to practice), and progressive muscle relaxation (tensing then relaxing different muscle groups) to keep yourself in the present moment and not worrying about the past or future. Reach out to the wellness counselors for guidance on how to practice these techniques.
- **Positive mindset.** Create a calming worksheet with affirmations and motivational quotes to read while waiting in the exam space prior to the test, Practice positive self-talk through affirmations or "I statements" ("I am smart, I am capable, I can persevere").
- **Come prepared.** Have pens, pencils, water, books, notes, study guides, calculators, or any other items you will need at the time of the exam; double check this list the morning of the test.
- **Impact of posture.** Research shows that good posture yields feelings of confidence, assertiveness, persistence to continue through challenging tasks, and creativity more than slouching.
- **Mood boosters.** Laughter and social connection (in person) are a great way to take a break from stress, but be sure to keep it brief enough to reset and return to task.



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- **Use the SMART framework for setting goals.** Goals should be kept: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, and **T**ime-relevant.
- **Cognitive-behavioral strategies.**
 - (1) *Avoid thinking traps.* Use techniques to stay in the present moment and practice thought stopping when negative ideas about the past (“I’m always a bad test taker”, “I always fail History tests”) or future arise (“I’m never going to pass this class”, “I’m going to forget everything I studied”). Replace those thoughts with positive ones, such as “I prepared well for this exam” or “If I work hard, I am capable of anything.”
 - (2) *Avoid perfectionist traps.* Quiet your thoughts about needing to get perfect scores or be the best at everything. Focus on your own progress, rather than comparing yourself to others.
- **Efficient review.** Engage in active studying tasks, such as creating your own quiz and testing your knowledge, connecting concepts to real-world scenarios, explaining the steps of an equation/math problem, rehearsing information from memory and filling in gaps (i.e., listing what you are certain you know offhand and reviewing what’s missing to further to commit material to memory), or building concept maps (visual representations of the material, such as charts, graphic organizers, tables, flowcharts, timelines, venn diagrams).
- **Built-in breaks.** As soon as you feel yourself losing focus, take a 10-15 minute break and then come back to the work. Try the Pomodoro technique for studying. Set a 25 minute timer to study through, then take a 5 minute break. Repeat this 3 or 4 times.



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- **Limit distractions.** Put your phone in another room, be away from a TV or other people talking. Headphones are helpful to many students, assuming the source of distraction has been removed. Create a dedicated, consistent workspace, but preferably not the bedroom, since it is a place associated with sleeping, socializing, or technology use, rather than doing work. If a bedroom is the only space available, use a desk or table, and avoid studying in bed.
- **Task prioritization.** When deciding what work to complete on a given night, think about it in terms of:
 - A. Urgent (due tomorrow) **and** important (large point assignment)
 - B. Not urgent **but** important (worth many points and may take days to complete effectively)
 - C. Urgent **but** not important (due tomorrow but worth few points)
 - D. Not urgent **and** not important.

Prioritize A & B.
- **Recommended reading.** *Atomic Habits* by James Clear is a practical guide to changing habits for measurable success.

A Final Note

Final exams are naturally a stressful time for many students of all ages. We encourage you to remind your students to continue to utilize their support people at school (teachers, counselors, and learning specialists). We wish our students success in this final stretch.

Warmly,
The York Prep Wellness Team