

# Changing Negative Self-Talk

A little self-criticism isn't necessarily a bad thing. It helps us maintain a balanced perspective on our lives, and encourages us to improve. However, there is a significant difference between saying, "I should have spent more time preparing for that test" and "I am a total failure".

It is important to change your negative self-talk in positive statements and to encourage yourself.

Say "**Stop**" to your negative thinking. Take control. Change your self-talk from "I cannot do it" to "I can do it"; from "I am going to fail again" to "I am going to do well this time". Remember, "This is just an exam, not the end of the world".

Situation	Negative Self-talk	Positive Self-talk
Walking into the room to take a test.	I cannot stop shaking... I forgot everything. I cannot do this."	<i>Take a deep-breath and exhale.</i> "I feel tense. I need to relax. This is just another test... I'll do the best I can."
Going "blank" on a difficult test question"	"I studied, but I cannot remember. I am going to fail."	<i>Relax and re-focus.</i> "I will guess if I don't know an answer right now, I will flag the question and move on. I will probably remember it if I keep focused on the material"
Trying to write a paper.	"I am just not good in writing. How do I get started?"	<i>Focus on the process.</i> "I will do this one step at a time. I can brainstorm my ideas and outline the paper. I can write the introduction later."
Oral presentation, walking toward the audience in a large room	"I will forget everything. They will think I am a bad presenter."	<i>Take a minute to relax.</i> "It will be alright. I will take a deep breath and start remembering. I prepared well for this speech."

Negative self-talk reinforces itself and becomes a habit, and eventually a self-fulfilling prophecy. It increases your stress and anxiety levels at a time when you most need to relax. So remember, you are in control!

## Practice Changing Negative Self-talk

Turning your self-talk from negative to positive is a discipline that requires practice, patience, and perseverance. Use the chart below to practice changing self-talk from negative to positive. Follow these guidelines:

Use positive language rather than negative language.

Keep it realistic. Don't set yourself up for failure by having unachievable and unnecessary expectations. What would be an acceptable improvement over your previous efforts? Keep your goals manageable.

Keep yourself focused on the task at hand. Avoid *always* and *never* statements that are sweeping in nature. Direct your focus on the task before you, and not on generalities.

Situation	Negative Self-talk	Positive Self-talk
Waiting for a test to begin	"I always do poorly on tests, and the competition in this course is so high. There's no way I will pass this class."	<i>Take a deep-breath and exhale.</i>
Reviewing the night before the test	"There is so much material to know for this test. I tried to study for it, but I can't remember everything. I'm not going to know enough to answer the questions."	<i>Relax and re-focus.</i>
Answering an essay question	"I never write good answers to essay questions. I am no good at writing and I can't find the right words. I never have the right answer anyway. I will forget important information and it won't make sense."	<i>Focus on the process.</i>
Standing before a large group to give a presentation	"I am going to look like an idiot. Everybody will laugh at me and think I don't know what I'm talking about. I'm a terrible presenter. I can't think of what I'm supposed to say."	<i>Take a minute to relax.</i>

Adapted from Reducing Test Anxiety, The Praxis Series [http://www.ets.org/s/praxis/pdf/reducing\\_test\\_anxiety.pdf](http://www.ets.org/s/praxis/pdf/reducing_test_anxiety.pdf)