Psych Up:
Strategies for Dealing with Test Anxiety

Tim Gaiser, MS  SWE Conference - August 12, 2015
Today’s objectives
Strategies to help decrease, minimalize, and eliminate test anxiety
Strategies to help build self-confidence
Strategies that will help bring your “A Game” on command
Strategies for your students - And for you!
Examine how we think -- and hopefully gain more control of our thought processes
Ultimately: to provide your nervous system with a choice...
Avoid this
Do this
The project:

Working with over two dozen MS Advanced and Master’s students
My definition of stress/anxiety
An imbalance of energy in one’s system(s) caused by either external or internal stimulus
The source...
The amygdala: our reptilian brain at work

- Flight, fight, or freeze syndrome
- We are naturally wired for fear/anxiety in order to survive
- The problem with generalization...
Today’s strategies

- EFT – Emotional Freedom Technique
- Spin dynamics
- Submodalities: visual & auditory
- Circle of Excellence
Strategy I:
EFT – Emotional Freedom Technique
What is EFT?

- Emotional Freedom Technique

- Tapping on acupressure points to resolve imbalances in the body’s energy systems

- Based on the Chinese practice of acupuncture
Who developed EFT?

- First developed by Dr. Roger Callahan

- Gary Craig developed a single sequence of tapping called EFT or Emotional Freedom Techniques
EFT Today

- Has reached critical mass

- Eric Leskowitz, M.D. of the Harvard Medical Center

- Study using EFT to treat Iraq and Afghanistan vets with PTSD
How does EFT work?
There are four steps:

1. Calibrate the issue
2. The set up and set up phrase
3. Tapping on acupressure points
4. Recalibrate the issue
Calibrating the issue: how big is the fish?

- Get a sense of the anxiety/fear connected to an exam or other challenge
- Rate the intensity on a scale of 1-10
- It’s important to measure the intensity before doing EFT
Formatting the set up phrase

- Set up phrase accomplishes two things:
  - Acknowledges the challenge you want to deal with
  - Follows with an unconditional affirmation of accepting yourself as a person
The set up phrase: examples

- “Even though I feel this anxiety, I completely accept myself.”
- “Even though I’m anxious about my tasting exam, I completely accept myself.”
- “Even though I panic when I think about doing the service exam, I deeply and completely accept myself.”
Formatting your set up phrase

- The set up phrase is NOT set in stone

- Put together a phrase that works for you

- You can change it in any number of ways so that it works best for you
Doing the set up with the phrase

- With two fingers on one hand tap the Karate Chop point on the other hand

- On the outer edge of the hand on the opposite side from the thumb

- Repeat the set up statement three times out loud while tapping on the Karate Chop point
Tapping on the eight acupressure points

- Tap 7-10 times on each of the eight acupressure points in the sequence
- Use a firm but gentle pressure when you tap
- Tap with your fingertips and not your fingernails
- While tapping say a word or phrase connected to the challenge
The Tapping Sequence

1. Karate chop point
2. Eyebrow (EB)
3. Side of eye (SE)
4. Under eye (UE)
5. Under nose (UN)
6. Chin (CP)
7. Collarbone (CB)
8. Underarm (UA)
9. Head (TH)
Recalibrate the issue

- Take a deep breath
- Focus on the issue—test anxiety—again
- How intense is it now compared to before tapping?
- Give it a numerical rating on the same scale you used in the beginning
- Note any changes
Lather, Rinse, Repeat

- If your anxiety is higher than 3-4 do another round of tapping—or several.
- Keep tapping until the anxiety is as low as you can get it in the moment.
- You can change your set up statement as needed:
  - “Even though I have some remaining anxiety about the exam, I completely accept myself.”
  - “Even though I’m still worried about the tasting exam, I deeply and completely accept myself.”
To Review:

1. Calibrate the issue
2. Say the set up phrase three times while tapping on the karate chop point
3. Tap on the eight acupressure points 7-10 times each saying a word or phrase connected to the challenge
4. Recalibrate the issue
Strategy II: Spin Dynamics
Presupposition:
Everything in the universe spins
The planet earth spins at 1,040 M.P.H. while revolving around the sun at 67,000 m.p.h.

The sun moves through a part of a star cluster at 45,000 M.P.H. on the outer spiral arm of the Milky Way which is rotating at another 500,000 m.p.h.

That local arm of the galaxy is moving through the universe at an estimated 540,000 m.p.h.
Everything in the universe spins all the way down to sub-atomic particles like quarks and mesons—and that includes our feelings.
*Feelings are evaluative in that they are a response to something we have seen, heard, felt, tasted or smelled
Spin dynamics: developed by Richard Bandler (reverse spin) and Tim & Kris Hallbom (dynamic spin release)
Phase I: dealing with a nervous feeling
Needed: your favorite nervous memory
Find the starting point

- Pinpoint exactly **where the feeling starts in your body**
- Head? Stomach? Chest? Hands?
- Really focus and **find out exactly where it starts**
Movement

- Pay attention to **how the feeling moves**
- Does it move **up** into your head or **down** into your feet?
Next...

- Find out which way it spins

- Only four possibilities: **forward, backward, clockwise, and counterclockwise**

- Take a free hand and move it in a spinning motion

- One of the directions is going to make the feeling stronger
Taking control

1. **Spin it faster** in the **SAME** direction
2. **Slow it back down**
3. Spin the feeling in **super slow motion**
4. **Practice**: now speed up and slow down the feeling of being nervous several times until you can do it quickly and easily
Reverse the spin

1. Now **spin the feeling in the opposite direction**

2. **Slowly at first** then **speed it up gradually** until it's **really fast**

3. **Expand** the reverse spin so you can feel it in your **head** and **toes** at the same time

4. **Dissolve the spin completely**
Phase II: confidence
Needed: a confident memory
Once again with feeling ...

1. **Where** the feeling of confidence starts in your body. Stomach? Chest? Head? Hands?

2. **Which direction** does it move? Up? Down?

3. **Which way** does it spin?
Play!

- **Crank up** the confidence spin

- **Try to** double the feeling!

- Don’t be surprised if the feeling of confidence spins in the same **direction** as the nervous feeling

- Like everything else, **feelings are contextual** and each one has its own specific movement and direction of spin
Review...

- When you first feel nervous...
- Slow the nervous spin down and stop it all together
- Spin it backwards and then dissolve it
- Change locations – take a step forward/back, etc.
- Start confidence spin and go faster
- Add triggers!
Strategy III: Submodalities
Submodalities: the structure of thought; the fabric of experience
Consider the following:

“The future seems dim.”

“I just can’t get any distance from it.”

“He’s blowing it all out of proportion.”

“She has a bright future.”

“My mind went blank.”
Submodalities defined:

The structural qualities of our internal images, sounds, and feelings
Visual submodalities

- Black & white or color*
- Proximity: near or far*
- Location*
- Brightness*
- Size of image*
- Three dimensional or flat image*

- Associated / Dissociated
- Focused or Defocused
- Framed or Unframed
- Movie or still image
- If a Movie-Fast/Normal/Slow

*Driver Submodality
Auditory submodalities

- Volume: loud or soft
- Distance: near or far
- Internal or external
- Location
- Stereo or mono
- Fast or slow
- Pitch: high or low
- Verbal or tonal
- Rhythm
- Clarity
- Pauses
Kinesthetic submodalities

- Intensity: strong or weak
- Area: large vs. small
- Weight: heavy or light
- Location
- Texture: smooth, rough, or other

- Constant or intermittent
- Temperature: hot or cold
- Size
- Shape
- Pressure
- Vibration
Using visual submodalities for test anxiety
Needed

- An unpleasant or irritating memory associated with exams

- Memory = internal picture or movie

- Both will have submodalities to them as described
Next

- One you’ve chosen your memory it’s time change **HOW** you experience it

- We’re giving your nervous system a choice in terms of how to respond to the memory:
  - To either to freak out to some degree
  - Or respond in another way

- The easiest thing to do with submodalities is what I call “whiteout”
Whiteout: instructions

1. Bring up the image of the memory

2. As quickly as you can turn up the brightness to bright white so you can’t see the image or what’s left of the movie

3. **Disassociate** by looking around at the things in the room

4. **Do it again**

5. **Disassociate again**

6. Do it again—at least a dozen times and do it **quickly** every time

7. Test! Try to bring up the memory
Strategy IV: auditory submodalities - dealing with a critical inner voice
Are the voices in my head bothering you?
The voices in my head...

- It’s OK to have voices in your head
- It’s part of being conscious and alive
- However, not all sounds--in this case voices--are pleasant
- Sometimes inner voices can be critical even to the point of detriment and can cause stress
Location

- If the voice is inside you move it outside and play with different locations:
  - First, move it at least 20 feet away
  - Then move the voice behind you
- The simple act of pulling the voice outside of you often decreases any emotional charge immediately
Pitch

- Take the pitch of the voice and make it completely opposite

- If it’s a high-pitched voice make it a basso—extremely low

- If it’s a low-pitched voice make it as high as possible—as in chipmunk-like

- Use extremes!
Tonality & inflection

- **Tonality**: if it’s an obnoxious nasal voice make it smooth and warm like a FM jazz DJ’s voice

- **Inflection**: make the voice a monotone and robotic
Volume & tempo

- Volume: turn the voice down until you can barely hear it

- Tempo: slow the voice down to a crawl until you can barely understand it – make it garbled
Change the Identity

- This is too good to pass up
- Make the voice that of a cartoon character—Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck come to mind—or Spongebob
- Something completely ridiculous
- Or—go in the completely opposite direction by making the voice Barry White
Strategy IV: the Circle of Excellence
Question: How can we tap into our most powerful resource states when we need them?
Enter: the Circle of Excellence
Powerful resource states

- Confidence
- Focus
- Trust
- Creativity
- Clarity

- Flexibility
- Memory
- Gratitude
- Compassion
- Patience
Needed: a really confident memory
Creating your Circle of Excellence

- **Standing** comfortably with your hands free

- Imagine a circle on the floor in front of you large enough to stand in

- Make your circle unique in terms of its color and design

- My own personal circle...
Next...

- What resource do you need? Confidence
- My definition of confidence is a combination of the feelings of “I know what I know” and “I can”
- Get into your confident memory
Then...

- Step into the confident memory as completely as you can
- Really feel that sense of confidence throughout your mind and entire body—head to toe
- **Amp it up!** – **EYES!**
Step into your circle

- As step into your Circle associate those confident feelings with being inside it.
- While inside your Circle really amp up the feelings of confidence.
- Stay there for 10-15 seconds.
- When the feeling starts to get less step out!
Repeat

- Go back into the confident memory and amp it up even more and when you’re at the peak of the confident feeling step back into your circle.

- When you feel the confidence starting to wane step back out.

- Repeat this sequence 3-4 more times.

- Double the feeling of confidence every time!

- Don’t mess around!!!
Completely disassociate!

Look around at everything - think about what you had for breakfast - think about how you got to the class

Now step into your circle again

The confident feelings should be there immediately

If not—more repetition! This is completely Pavlovian!
Adding more resources to your circle

- Choose another powerful resource such as clarity, focus or compassion

- Repeat previous steps and use your Circle to create a powerful connection or an “anchor” for each resource
Other potential resources

- Confidence
- Focus
- Trust
- Creativity
- Clarity
- Flexibility
- Memory
- Gratitude
- Compassion
- Patience
Create a trigger

- As you stand outside your Circle, think about something that could remind you of your Circle.
- Something that could trigger you to step into your Circle.
- Could be a phrase, a situation, a time of day — anything that will automatically cause you to “step” into your Circle.
- Simplest trigger: clench one of your hands into a fist.
Make your circle portable

- Look at your circle
- “Pick” it up and put it into your “pocket”
- Practice putting it on the floor in front of you
- Put it on a chair before you sit down
Thank you!