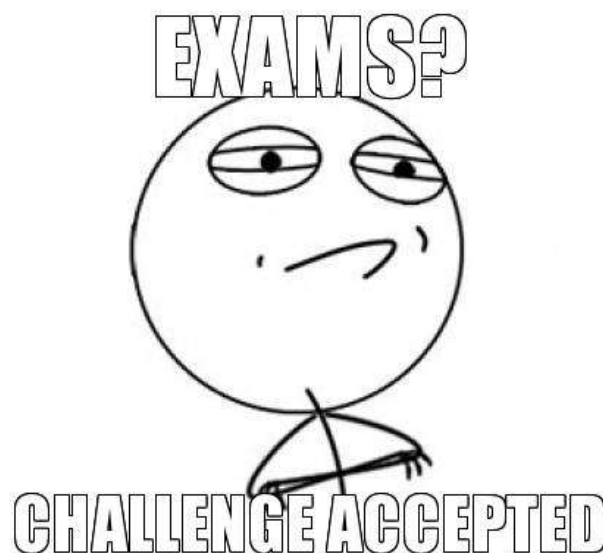


# Exams and revision stress and relaxation

Free resources to help you study, keep your health and wellbeing balanced, tackle stress if it gets too much, and keep calm.

Contents:

- \* 5 ways to wellbeing – to help keep yourself in tip top emotional condition for studying and life!
- \* Guardian TeacherNetwork advice for good exam techniques
- \* 50 ways to take a break
- \* Overcoming test anxiety – actions and thoughts to help you combat anxiety and relax before and during exams
- \* Mindful colouring sheets
- \* What if I have to cram?!
- \* What if it all goes wrong? Where can I go for help?



The 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' are simple actions you can build into your daily life. They can help you to feel better and cope with challenges. They are based on research evidence.

# Connect...

Connect with the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

# Take notice...

Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

# Be active...

Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and one that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

# Keep learning...

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.

# Give...

Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you.

## In the exam

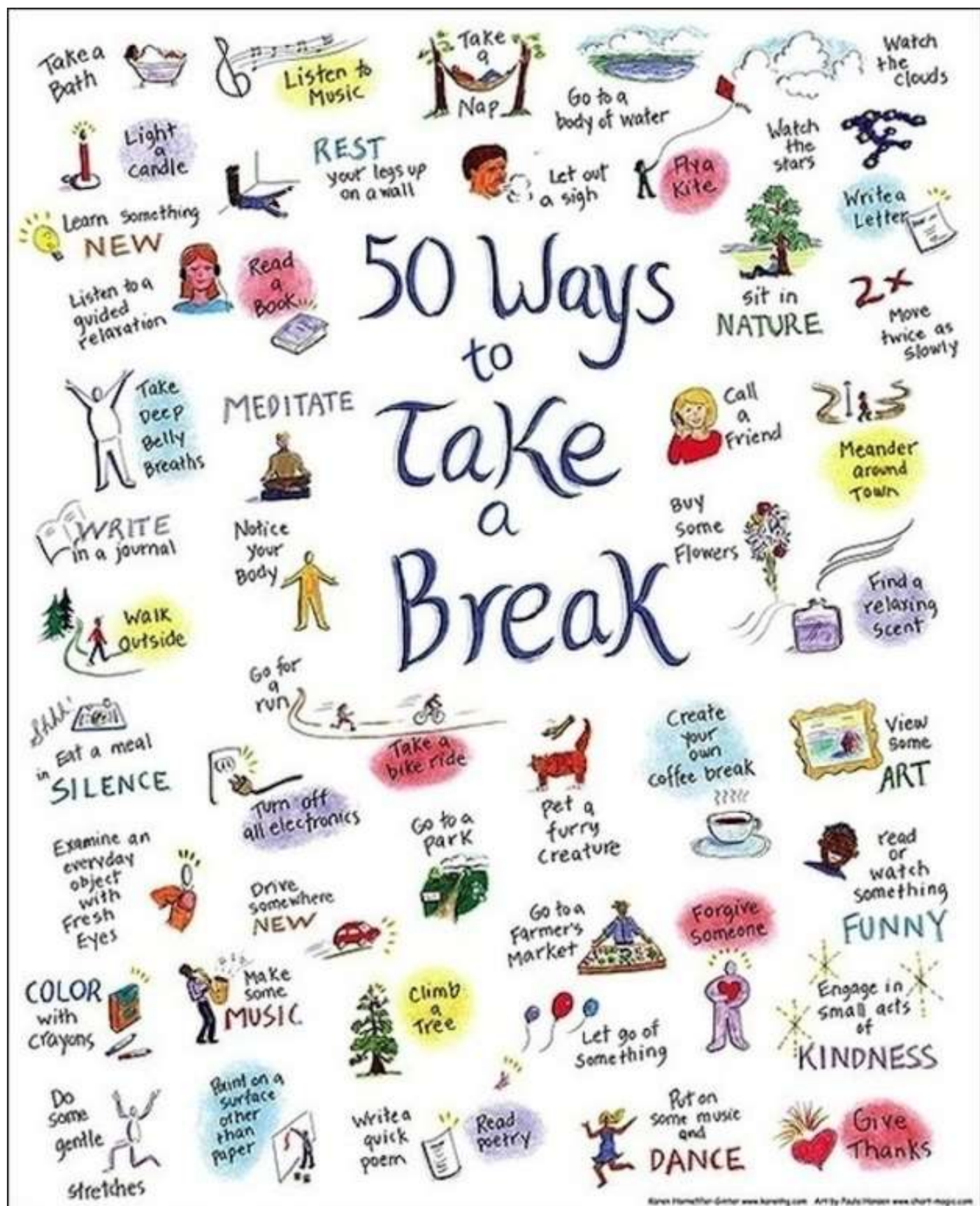
### Before you start the actual exam, be sure that you:

- ⬆ Listen carefully to the instructions of the invigilator (the teacher or other adult in charge of the exam room).
- ⬆ Make sure the exam is at the right tier (level) eg foundation, higher and (for certain subjects) intermediate. If you think you have the wrong paper, tell the invigilator.
- ⬆ Write information into your answer book. Normally, this will be your full name, your centre number and candidate number. If you are not sure how to do this, ask for advice.
- ⬆ Know the number of questions you have to answer and check if there are compulsory questions.
- ⬆ Plan your time carefully. Too many students do not finish some questions or do not answer some of them at all.
- ⬆ Leave time at the end to check for careless mistakes.

### Your answers

1. Read through all of the exam paper, marking those questions you feel confident about. It is best to answer these first.
2. Before you start answering a question, make sure you understand it thoroughly and underline key words and symbols. Unless you have been told otherwise, you may write or make notes on the question paper.
3. Spend a few minutes planning your answer in rough. In maths exams, you should show all your working-out; you can get marks for your working-out, even if the answer is wrong.
4. Write as quickly but as legibly as you can. Take care with your spelling. In exams where marks are awarded for spelling, be more careful and copy the spelling of words used in the question paper.
5. Draw large, clearly labelled diagrams in pencil. Mark graphs with the correct units and always use a ruler to draw straight lines.
6. Set out the stages of experiments in a logical sequence under the appropriate headings.
7. Spend longer answering questions with more marks.
8. If you are unsure about a question which requires a short answer, come back to it later.
9. You may find that some parts of a question are more difficult than others. It will require more than just a list of facts to answer this type of question.
10. Finally, make sure that every sheet added to your exam booklet is completed with details such as your candidate number and the numbers of the questions you have answered. These pages should be securely attached and all pages should be numbered and in order.
11. Do not speak or hand anything to anyone while in the examination hall, even at the end of an exam. A simple misunderstanding could lead to disqualification. If you need to use the toilet, you should put up your hand - a teacher or invigilator will then go with you.





## Overcoming test anxiety

Instructions: Read through each of the strategies below. Check off the strategies for overcoming test anxiety that you use now. Then highlight the ones you would like to start using.

### In the weeks before

- Put exam into perspective
- Determine the value of the text/exam in terms of the course grade
- Calculate your existing grade and determine what grade you need to reach your goal
- Calculate how much work is required to get the grade you really want
- Know your stuff. Don't Cram!
- Manage your time well and organize a study schedule. Stick to it as much as possible.
- Ask for help from T.A., senior students, the prof, your friends – join a study group!
- Self-testing: review, do old exam, take a mock exam
- Try doing a 'mock' exam under strict time limitations.

### Practice relaxation daily

- Do deep breathing and muscle relaxation
- Imagine success and coping

### Use positive self-talk and affirmations

- Tell yourself you can do it!
- Sleep and eat and exercise WELL

### Day/night before

- Review your material. Do NOT add any new information. It's too late to learn it now.
- Continue all the same relaxation and imagery practices as above and add MORE!
- Imagine yourself coping before, during (handling it well and any possible negative effects), and after.

### Just before!

- Do 5-10 minutes deep, abdominal breathing.
- Do 5-10 minutes of stretching and moderate exercise (e.g. walk to your exam venue).
- Drink water. Avoid coffee, cigarettes, drugs, alcohol, unhealthy food (sugars and fats).
- Avoid highly stressed people/situations.
- Listen to calming music.
- Do a guided visualization e.g. a safe place.
- Repeat your positive affirmations.

## During the exam

- Breathe!
- Examine the marking scheme and plan to divide your time evenly among the available marks (i.e. 10 minutes of your time on 10% of the marks). Following timelines gives you a sense of progress and feedback on how you are doing. It's better to write a 75% answer on all questions than having a perfect answer on 50% of the exam.
- Build Confidence: Peruse the whole exam and then do the easiest stuff first.
- Close your eyes for a minute and visualize success.
- Walk yourself through it using calming and coping statements and affirmations.
- Set mini-breaks at specified points e.g. close your eyes, relax your hands, take a deep breath.
- Accept that you are anxious and that some stress is necessary/good.

## After the exam

- Celebrate!
- Affirm your strengths and successes.
- Evaluate what strategies worked the best.

Other things I do to help with my test/exam anxiety:

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ACTION PLAN for overcoming test anxiety

**What things will I try in the future?**

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## Letting go, part 1: Physical sensations of anxiety

### 1. Breathe.

You can calm the body by focusing on breath. Concentrate on the air going in and out of your lungs. Experience air passing through your nose. If your breaths are short and in your chest, imagine a balloon in your stomach and begin to take longer, deeper breaths. Imagine the balloon expanding as you fill your abdomen with air and the balloon deflating as you exhale.

### 2. Scan Your body.

Sit or lie comfortably and close your eyes. Slowly scan your body starting with the top of the head to the tips of your toes. As you focus on each muscle group, notice if they are relaxed or tense. Gently massage tense areas with your mind and tell the muscles to relax.

### 3. Tense and relax.

You can use this before or after a body scan to relax tense muscles. Find a muscle that is tense and increase the tension by contracting the muscle for up to 5 seconds. Then release for 5 seconds. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat up to 3 times. With each repetition, you might notice the tense muscle getting more relaxed. You may wish to tense an individual muscle, e.g. your left hand, or muscle groups, e.g. hands and arms together.

### 4. Use guided imagery

Once you're relaxed, take a quick fantasy trip to a place where you feel totally safe—a place you know or a place created in your imagination. Close your eyes and get comfortable in your chair or on the floor. Spend several minutes imagining yourself in this beautiful, peaceful setting. Use all your senses. Be specific. For example, if you are walking on a beach, hear the waves lapping onto the shore; feel the warm sun on your skin, smell the fresh breeze, etc.

### 5. Describe it.

Instead of placing it aside, focus directly on your anxiety. If you are feeling nauseated, dizzy, etc., concentrate on that feeling. Describe it: size, colour, shape, location, weight/volume, etc.

### 6. Accept and be with it.

As you describe your anxiety in detail, don't resist. Accept that it is there right now and just be with it. If you can completely experience the sensation, often it will disappear. This technique has been used successfully for people suffering from acute and chronic pain.

### 7. Exercise aerobically.

Before your test or exam, do some exercise that gets the heart pumping. You'll need about 15-20 minutes of aerobic exercise. Why don't you consider riding your bike or jogging to the exam venue? This is an excellent way to reduce body tension just before sitting down to write.



## Letting go, part 2: Dealing with thoughts of anxiety

### 1. Visualize success.

Our bodies react to our thoughts. So, if you are having thoughts of failure, you increase your chances of doing poorly. Counteract negative thoughts by seeing yourself succeeding. To create a powerfully positive visualization, engage all your senses. Imagine what you will do, see, hear, and say. Mentally walk yourself through the imagery seeing yourself succeed at each stage. Repeat this visualization daily up to and including the day of the test.

### 2. Praise yourself.

When you talk to yourself positively, your anxiety decreases and increases your chances of success. Build a list of positive but realistic affirmations and repeat them daily. Say, “I am very relaxed. I am doing a great job on this test.” As a reminder, hang them up in a visible place.

### 3. Replace doom with pleasure.

You can't be anxious and relaxed at the same time. So, try replacing thoughts of doom and gloom with pleasant thoughts. When you notice yourself worrying, substitute the thought with images of things you love to do and/or people you like to be with. Prepare a bank: brainstorm a list of 20 ideas then pick several activities that seem especially pleasant and elaborate on them.

### 3. Use humour to overtake catastrophic thinking

Rather than trying to force yourself to stop worrying, have some fun with your fears. Take the fear to the most absurd limits. For example, you might say to yourself, “If I fail this test, I will fail the course. If I fail the course, I will get kicked out of school. If I get kicked out, I'll never get a good job. If I never get a good job, I'll be poor. If I'm poor, I'll be eating out of a dumpster. If I have to eat out of a dumpster, etc.” Continue catastrophizing until it becomes so ridiculous that you find yourself chuckling. Then, go backwards through your list to find a reasonable level of concern.

### 4. Focusing.

This technique helps to discipline your mind and take you away from worries. Focus your attention on a specific object, something you find interesting. Examine each detail of it: its colour, shape, smell, taste, temperature, weight, etc. During the exam, take a few minutes to listen to the soundscape in the exam venue. Perhaps you would like to listen to the hum of the lights overhead. Another focusing practice you can try is the “3 feelings at 5 times” technique where you see, hear, and feel 5 things and name them. In the exam room, you see 5 things (e.g. I see a green sock); then you hear 5 things (e.g. I hear a cough), finally, you feel 5 things (e.g. I feel cool air on my face). You don't judge or evaluate, just name. When you are done, repeat the cycle. Accept and be with it.

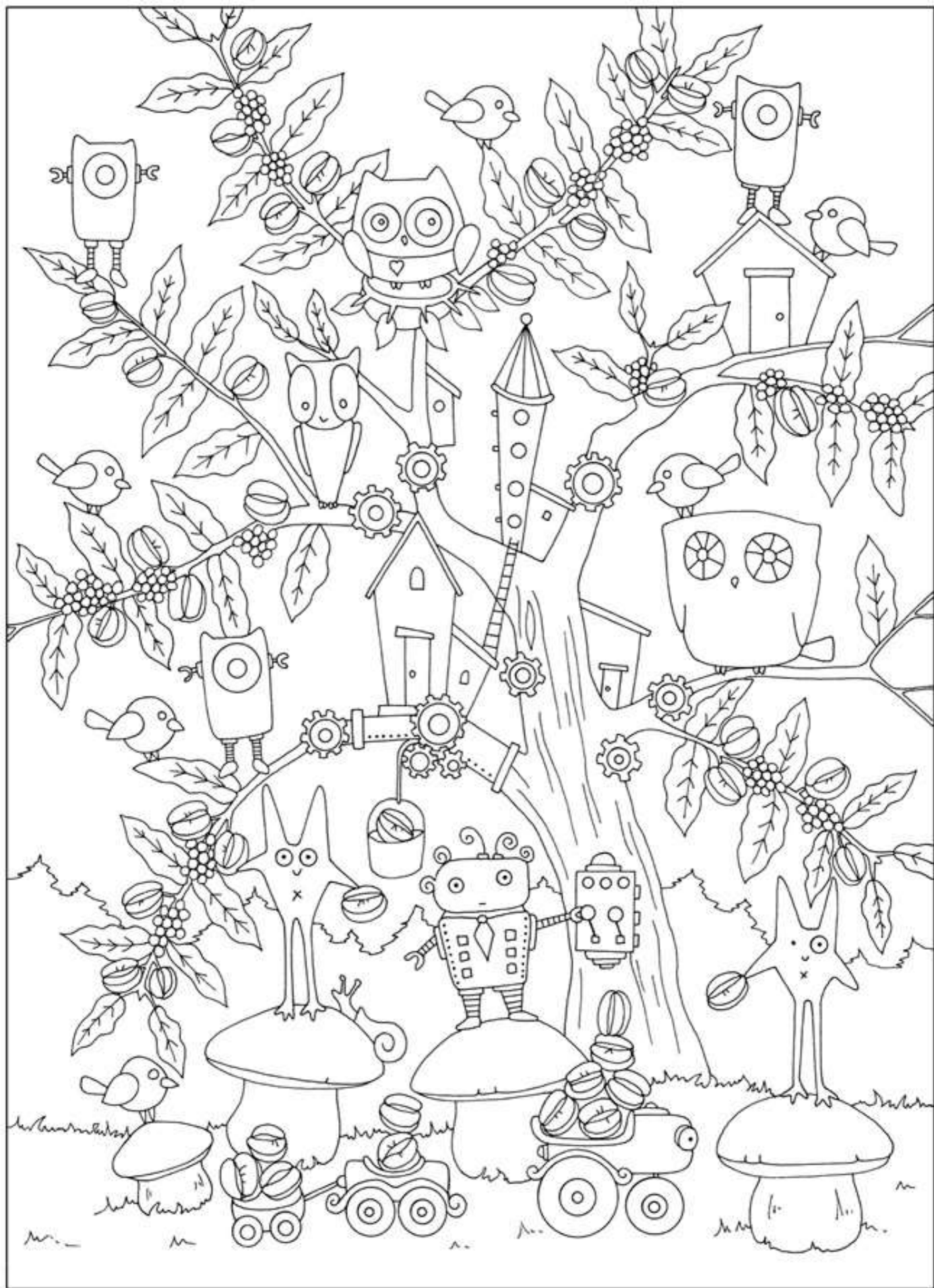
As you describe your anxiety in detail, don't resist. Accept that it is there right now and just be with it. If you can completely experience the sensation, often it will disappear. This technique has been used successfully for people suffering from acute and chronic pain.

#### 5. Zoom out.

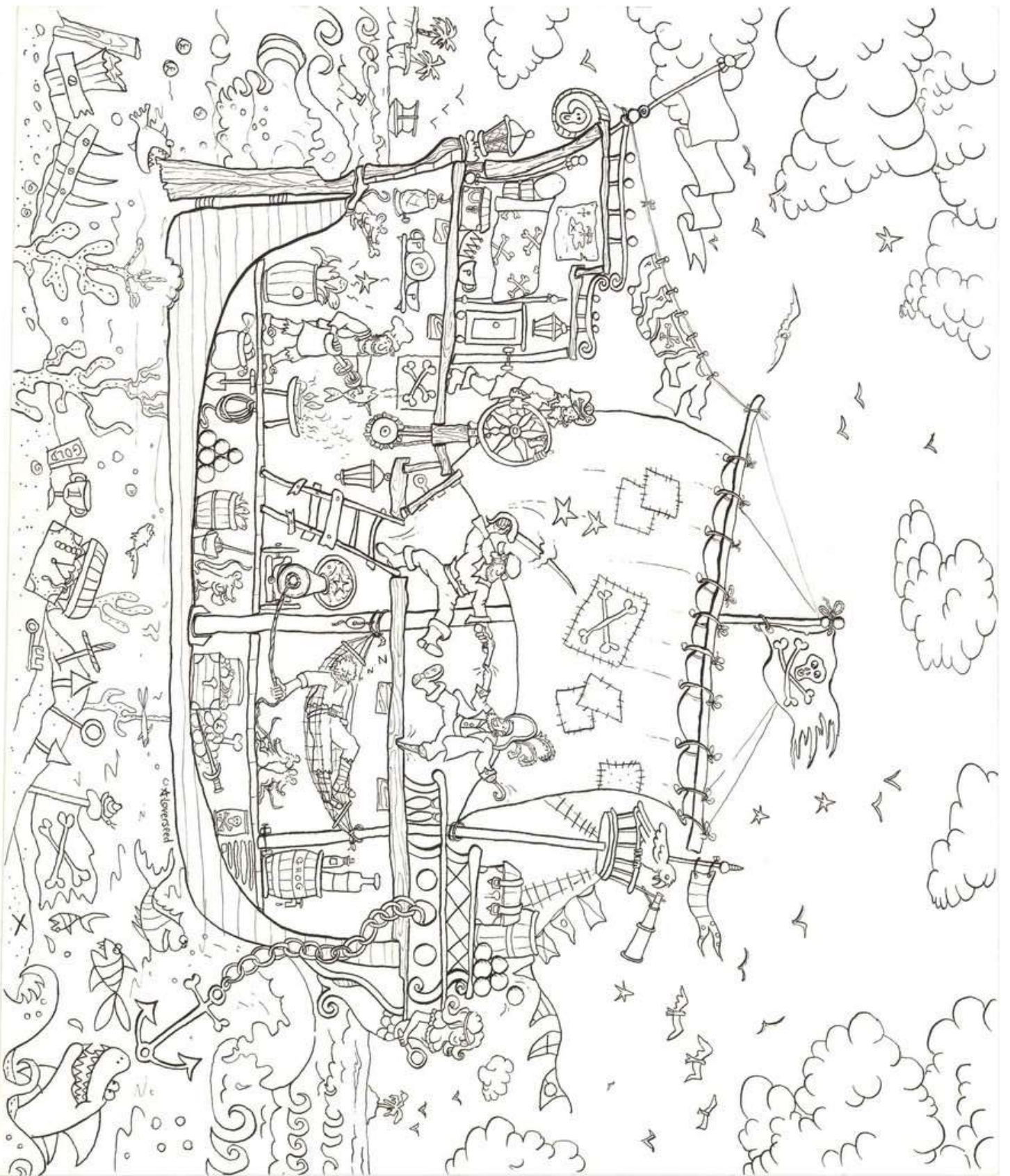
When you are in the middle of the test or exam, zoom out. Imagine you are a film director dollying a camera out and away from the object. The point of this is for you to imagine yourself floating away and viewing your situation as a detached outside observer. If you are extremely distressed, zoom yourself out even further. See yourself rising above and beyond the exam venue to encompass your city, country, the planet, etc. From this big picture vantage point, ask yourself if the test/exam is worth worrying about. An alternative is zooming out in time. Imagine yourself one week, one month, one year, one decade from now. Assess how much the current situation will matter when that time comes.

Adapted from Ellis, D. (2000). *Becoming a Master Student*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. pp 175-177.









## Mindfulness Wordsearch



BALANCE

CALMNESS

COMPOSURE

CONTEMPLATION

CONTENTMENT

HUSH

MEDITATION

PEACEFULNESS

QUIETNESS

REFLECTION

RELAXATION

RESTFULNESS

SERENITY

STILLNESS

TRANQUILLITY

UNDISTURBED

## But what if I have to cram?

Even with good planning, there are times when you have to cram. Here are some helpful hints.

### Make choices

Pick out the most important points and learn them really well. Use 75% of your cramming time to drill key points and 25% on the rest.

### Make a plan

Time is short. Choose what you want to study; determine how much time you have; and set strict timelines.

### Use mind map review sheets and cue cards

Condense the material you have chosen to learn into mind maps. Practice by redrawing the mind maps. Put each separate key point from your mind map onto cue cards and drill yourself regularly.

### Recite, Recite, Recite

No time to move information into long term storage so **repetitive recitation** is the order of the day! Recitation will 'burn' the facts into your brain. One way to do this is to tape-record yourself and then play back the tape before you sleep and again when you awake.

### Relax

When you cram, you are not learning the information well. Therefore, if you experience anxiety during the exam, you may forget what you have studied. Use relaxation techniques to reduce anxiety.

### Don't 'should' yourself

If you start your cramming session beating yourself up with statements like, "I should have studied earlier," by the time you get to studying you might feel too guilty and depressed to continue. Instead, accept the truth, i.e. you would be in a better position if you had started earlier, and then tell yourself you will do so next time. Remind yourself that you are human and will learn from your mistakes.

Source: Ellis, D. (2000). *Becoming a Master Student*. Canadian 3rd Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. p. 185

## What if it all goes wrong?



The likelihood is things haven't really all gone wrong, but sometimes it can feel that way, and sometimes we don't do as well as we would have liked to. Disappointing things happen to everybody during our lives, and though it can seem so in the moment, it really isn't the end of the world. There are always chances to try again, or different ways to get to where you want to go in life. It will all be okay.

## Where can I get help?

On results day there will be BHASVIC staff ready to help you call universities, look into Clearing or Adjustment, and think about what steps to take next, whether you've done worse or better than you expected. There will be some staff in College all the way through the summer, so you can call or email and talk to somebody, or arrange to meet in person if you would prefer.

### **For support outside College:**

**Find Get Give** is an online directory of mental health support services that work with 13-25 year olds. [www.findgetgive.com](http://www.findgetgive.com)

The **Youth Advice Centre** in Brighton offers a range of services including emotional and wellbeing support. You can find out more here: <http://www.ymcadlg.org/support-advice/youth-advice-centre-yac/>

**Samaritans** for 24/7 support and someone to talk to, for anybody who needs to talk. This service is free and confidential. Phone **116 123**

### **The following services offer support to individuals who feel they are a risk to themselves or others, or those in immediate danger:**

- You can call the **NHS 111** service if you urgently need help or advice but it is not a life-threatening situation – if you're unsure whether you need immediate help
- The **Mental Health Rapid Response Service** is a rapid assessment service for people suffering from mental health problems who are at risk and may not be able to keep themselves safe, or are considering attending A&E for help with their mental health. Available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. Call 01273 242220
- For emergency situations always call **999** or visit the local **Accident & Emergency**