

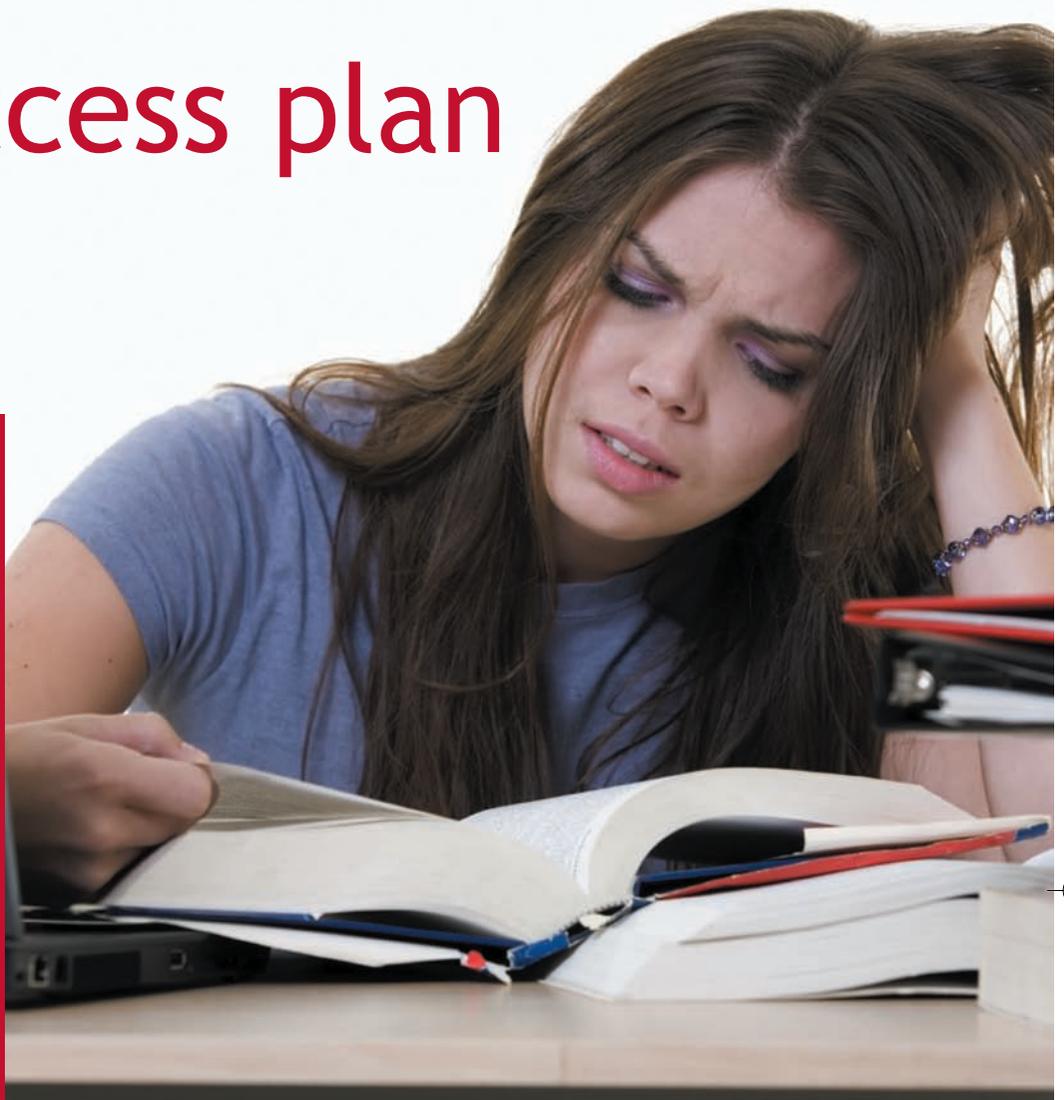
The success plan

Does the thought of sitting for an exam:

Make you feel excited?
Make you feel energised?
Encourage you to perform at your best?
Make you think of success?

Probably not, but it could.

Mark Shields looks into what can be done to create exam success.....



During May and June thousands of students of all ages are entering into that stressful time of year that filled many of us with dread when we were younger. Some of us still quiver inside at the thought of sitting exams.

A small amount of anxiety together with confidence in relation to sitting exams is the key. Research indicates that optimum performance in exams is obtained when students experience medium or manageable levels of anxiety. Mild levels of anxiety can improve alertness and provide the burst of energy needed to get through demanding situations. However, excessive levels of anxiety in relation to exams can be debilitating, inhibiting concentration and memory, contributing to memory blocks and, in its most severe form, causing panic attacks.

These days some students still get into a state of panic over these tests but a few simple coaching techniques put into

practice daily could make the whole episode pass far more easily. I call this the **SUCCESS PLAN**.

Study Plan

Nothing can replace being well prepared. Make a study timetable and stick to it. Include treats out to reward your hard work at different intervals throughout the timetable. This way you will still manage to enjoy some socialising plus it will create a long term sense of achievement which will keep you motivated. Remember you are only really effective for periods of study no more than 2 hours. Allow for this in your study plan.

Undo your negative perception of the exam itself. Don't enter into group conversations about how bad you might feel about exams. If you think you are going to do well this will create confidence. Embrace the challenge. Positively visualise

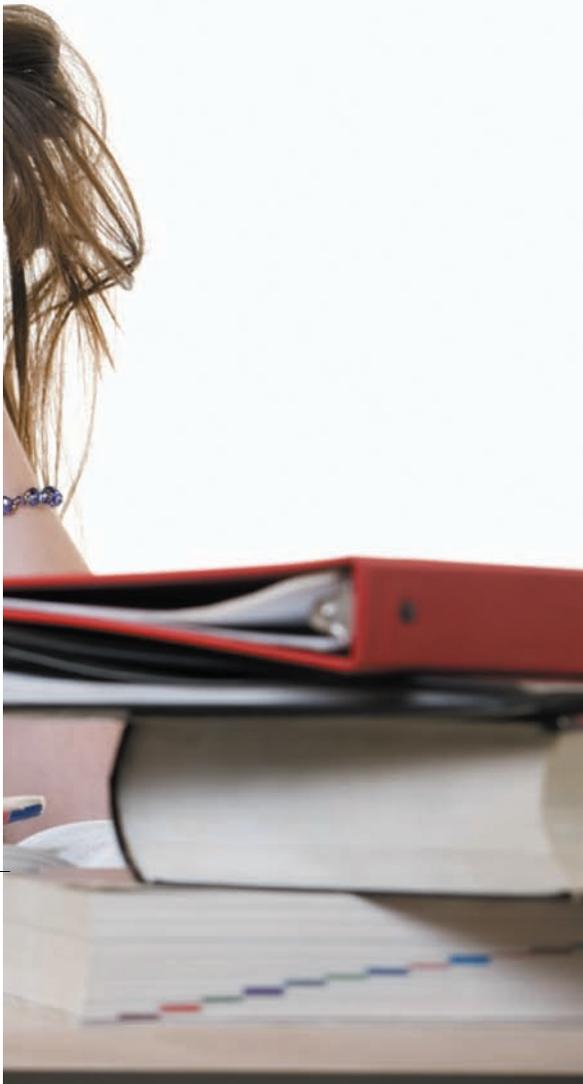
yourself in the exam, relaxed, confident, and prepared to pass. Go as far as stepping into this positive version of you, see what you would see, hear what you would hear and allow those positive feelings to sink deep into your subconscious mind.

Care for your body

Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables and drink lots of water (6-8 cups per day). All the nutrients from these foods well enhance your state of mind and enable you to think clearly. Watch your diet and avoid lots of carbohydrates to avoid the sugar highs and lows.

Calm yourself down

The following two exercises can help the body relax within a few minutes.



Breathing exercise:

Breathe in through the nose and hold for 3 seconds. When you get to three, breathe out through your mouth and say the word 'relax' to yourself in a soothing manner. Breathe in and out slowly in a six second cycle. Breathe in for three seconds and breathe out for three seconds.

Muscle tensing and relaxing exercises:

To be practised daily whilst listening to soothing music. Find a quiet place and choose a comfortable chair.

Clear your mind of all worrying or disturbing thoughts. Let your mind be clear and calm.

Practise slow breathing. Imagine the tension flowing out of your body every time you breathe out.

Relax your muscles in the following order – hands, arms, shoulders, neck, forehead and scalp, eyes, jaws, chest, stomach, back, bottom, thighs, calves and feet. For each muscle group tense the muscle for 7-10 seconds then slowly release. Every time you release a muscle imagine the tension flowing from your body.

Exercise

Physical activity is beneficial to your wellbeing and will aid your concentration levels and increase those friendly endorphins which make you feel great. Don't just say you'll do it but commit to a daily plan that involves at least 60 minutes of cardio vascular exercise at least three times a week. This is essential in battling those pre exam anxieties and nerves.

Stop negative self talk

This is detrimental to your outlook and by constantly telling yourself "you are going to fail" embeds into your subconscious mind these ideas.

Change it and make your self talk positive. " I will succeed". Positively visualise yourself at the end of the exam holding your results after all that preparation has produced the results you require. Really focus on this, and allow yourself to capture and use all of these great feelings of success to re enforce your feelings of confidence.

HEALTH AND FITNESS

And again step into this version of you, see what you would see, hear what you would hear, and embrace and allow all those great feelings to sink deep into your unconscious mind.

Sleep

Get adequate sleep each night as this will improve your performance no end. Establish a bedtime routine and make sure you go to bed at the same time every night. Don't eat or drink anything in the four hours preceding bedtime. Avoid alcohol and caffeine as its remanence can stay in the body for up to 40 hours. Have a pad for notes at your bedside so you can write anything down that's worrying you, so you don't worry about things throughout the night. Invest in a relaxation CD and listen to help you relax before you go to sleep. If the inner voice persists imagine a bright red stop sign in your mind and tell the inner voice to stop.

Anxiety can fool you and convince you that you cannot function when you really can. Don't let it beat. If you persist with the SUCCESS plan you will discover that you can perform effectively and you will become increasingly confident. Most people experience some degree of anxiety when faced with an exam. The students who perform better tend to cope with anxiety in more productive ways. You can too – give it a try!

Good luck.

I am always happy to answer any questions with regards to my monthly articles and can be contacted by email channelislandslifecentre@hotmail.com or telephone 01462 451473.

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