**Tips to Ensure Success under Stress\***

**Write about your worries –** Take ten minutes to write about your fears and worries before taking an exam, giving a presentation, or sitting for an interview. This will help counter the anxieties and self-doubt which commonly emerge in high-stress situations and use part of your working memory. Writing helps to take the pressure off. Research has shown that students can perform between 5 and 17% better on an exam if they have done a short writing exercise (Ramirez and Beilock, 2011)

**Practice under pressure** – For an exam, study under conditions that are similar to those that you will be tested under (i.e. a timed situation without study aids). Research suggests that testing yourself on material, rather than just studying, will help you retain it longer (Beilock, 2010). For a presentation or interview, you will also perform better if you practice under conditions similar to those that you will encounter in the high-stakes situation.

**Outsource your cognitive load** – Rather than trying to hold everything in your head when you are taking a test, write down information before composing an essay and, when you are working on a problem, write down the intermediate steps. This will free up working memory, help you recall important information, and make it less likely that you will mix up details.

**Reinterpret your reactions** – If your heart begins racing or your palms start sweating before an exam, presentation or interview, remember that these reactions are temporary and are similar to the ones that you can experience when you meet someone whom you are attracted to. Learn to reinterpret your reaction as “I am really amped up for this,” instead of “I’m really freaking out.”

**Reaffirm your self-worth** – Before a test, presentation or interview, spend several minutes writing about your strengths and your many interests and abilities. This exercise can promote feelings of self-worth, and boost your confidence and performance.

**Organize your knowledge** – In preparing for a test, presentation, or interview, come up with ways to summarize the information that you will need, either in writing or with a diagram. Doing this will take some of the burden off of your working memory and actually help you to remember more.

**Map out your complexities** – Before a high-stakes exam, speech, or interview, spend about five minutes drawing a diagram of everything that makes you a multifaceted individual. This exercise will remind you that this one exam, presentation or interview does not define you, and will help relieve some of the pressure that you are experiencing.

**Pause your “choke”**- If circumstances allow, walk away from a challenging problem that is demanding working memory. Taking a break for a few minutes allows you to let go of irrelevant problem details so that when you return you can look at the problem in a new way.

\*Adapted from Sian Beilock’s 2010 book *Choke; What the secrets of the brain reveal about getting it right when you have to*: New York, Free Press, 294 p.

Ramirez, Gerardo, and Beilock, Sian L., 2011, Writing about testing worries boosts exam performance in the classroom: Science, v. 331, p. 211-213.