
Preface

In terms of test anxiety we, the authors of this book, are probably not much different from any of our readers. We are not clinical or experimental psychologists who have devoted a lifetime to the study of anxiety, although we have devoted some study and attention to trying to understand the phenomenon and its effects and have worked to reduce the harmful effects of test anxiety (we describe these later in the book) on students, teachers, test scores, etc. The breadth of our experience and expertise includes developing our own classroom assessments as teachers, assisting in the development and analysis of statewide achievement tests for elementary and secondary school students, and managing large-scale testing programs for professional licensure and certification. We think it is important that we have been teachers in elementary and secondary schools, having taught all subjects in second and fourth grade (GJC) and high school mathematics (SSB). Thus, we think we have much in common with fellow educators who might read this book.

Although we believe that we have a lot in common with readers, we recognize that one characteristic the two of us as authors share distinguishes us somewhat from most readers. The truth is that we consider ourselves to be specialists in educational assessment.

As testing specialists we might formally be labeled as a specific kind of social scientist known as a psychometrician. A psychometrician is a person whose specialty is **psychometrics**, which is the study of the development, administration, and interpretation of assessments. In short, we like **tests**. We will confess a position that might differentiate us from some other educators (and many students): we think that, by and large, testing is a good thing.

That said, we also think we have enough of a grasp on life in classrooms—both as students and as fellow teachers—to know that our affections for the area of educational testing are somewhat rare. We

recognize that our interest in testing and an enjoyment of working with data, formulas, and so on are not characteristics that are widely shared or, perhaps, even much valued, at least in the hierarchy that makes one socially desirable. To be sure, we have heard all the jokes about testing specialists. For example:

Question: "Why did the person become a psychometrician?"

Answer: "Because he didn't have enough personality to be an accountant."

In short, we are aware that our interest in testing is something that distinguishes us from a lot of other social scientists, educators, and just plain folk. However, while we may be different from many educators in that we have some special expertise and advanced training in the field of testing, we believe that, overall, our experiences with testing and anxiety are more similar to than different from those of our readers. We still take tests. We get nervous when we are faced with a test. And we are aware that, increasingly, more and more of us are faced with more and more tests.

In this book, we try to combine our common personal experiences with testing and our professional understanding of testing and test anxiety. We think that testing and test anxiety are generally misunderstood. We think the case for the benefits of testing has too often gone unarticulated. We think, too, that the potential for test anxiety to militate against realizing those benefits is real and, to a large extent, preventable. Although test anxiety and its effects are real, we believe that we can offer some hope for educators, parents, and students by addressing test anxiety and the problems it causes.

Based on our conversations with other professionals, we believe that our readers—teachers, school counselors, school psychologists, administrators, school board members, parents, and others—share our concern. We hope to provide straightforward explanations, practical suggestions, and reasonable recommendations for addressing test anxiety in an educational environment in which tests are more prevalent and the consequences associated with testing are more important.

However, although we have attempted to write a helpful, practical book, we also did not want to underestimate the professional knowledge that our audience already possesses. Educators (and others) today are more savvy and informed about testing than ever before. Educational practice increasingly requires professionals to be familiar with research and to make data-based decisions. Thus, we have decided to try to write a book that is somewhere between a

how-to checklist and a more formal academic work. We believe that our readers not only will want to know what to do about test anxiety but also will want to really *understand* the phenomenon and to grasp its underlying features, concepts, and so on.

Along those lines, we recognize that at some points we have elaborated at length on certain key concepts related to testing. We are convinced that, like many phenomena, test anxiety can exert its effects most insidiously when accurate information is unavailable or when inaccurate beliefs are widely held. It certainly is understandable that many parents, educators, and students would be apprehensive about testing to the extent that the tests they face are not well understood in terms of their purpose, their quality, or the information they provide. To that end, we believe that one of the most effective steps that educators can take to reduce test anxiety is to themselves become more informed about testing and to assist others in doing so.

The remainder of this book is organized into seven chapters. In Chapter 1, we provide some context and rationale for a book on test anxiety; we briefly define the concept of test anxiety; and we explain why we believe that our treatment of the topic is timely and important. In Chapter 2, we elaborate on what test anxiety is (and isn't) and why it should not be ignored. In Chapters 3 and 4, we provide some background information on what is known about the prevalence, correlates, and effects of test anxiety, drawing most heavily on the accumulated research knowledge on these topics. Chapter 5 provides a (very) light introduction for those who are interested in measuring test anxiety (yes, there are *tests* for test anxiety!). A companion appendix to Chapter 5 provides considerably more detail on this topic for the reader who wishes to find out more about tests that can be used to measure students' levels of test anxiety.

Chapter 6 presents some practical information about what can be done about test anxiety. Because everyone involved can play a role, this chapter presents suggestions for students, parents, teachers, educational administrators, and school systems. Chapter 7 gives brief, final words, conclusions, and recommendations.

As you may have noticed already, certain key words appear in **bold face** type. Each of these specialized terms is defined in a glossary that is included as Appendix A. An annotated compilation of some potentially helpful resources related to test anxiety is included as Appendix B. The companion material linked to Chapter 5, which provides additional information on tests that are useful for measuring levels of test anxiety, is found in Appendix C. Finally, throughout the book, important facts, definitions, or concepts are set apart and highlighted as Key Ideas.

Regarding our role in preparing this book, we must be quick to admit that the two listed authors of this book are only a minority of those who have contributed greatly to its production. We must acknowledge the many generous colleagues in the fields of education, psychology, and school counseling who have provided personal assistance or who have contributed to the theoretical or research literatures upon which we have heavily leaned. We appreciate the support for this work provided by Paula Hinton, reference librarian, and by the University Research Council at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. We are grateful for the encouragement to produce this book and the helpful suggestions along the way provided by Rachel Livsey at Corwin Press, which has a long and successful history of publishing practical, helpful works in the field of education. We also appreciate the helpful editorial assistance of Phyllis Cappello, Todd Manza, and Sanford Robinson.

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*GJC SSB
Chapel Hill, NC*

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