

# Got a test coming up? This mantra will improve your performance



Next time you've got a public speaking engagement or exam coming up, psych yourself up by telling yourself how excited you are rather than trying to calm down and you may actually perform better.

That's according to a new Harvard study published by the American Psychological Association, which found that affirmative statements like "I'm excited" helped people improve their performance compared to self-pep talks that urged relaxation such as "I am calm."

"People have a very strong intuition that trying to calm down is the best way to cope with their anxiety, but that can be very difficult and ineffective," said study author Alison Wood Brooks in a statement.

"When people feel anxious and try to calm down, they are thinking about all the things that could go badly. When they are excited, they are thinking about how things could go well."

The results of the study are based on several different experiments. In one experiment, 140 participants were instructed to prepare a public speech on why they would be good work partners. Researchers videotaped the speeches and participants were told they would be judged by a committee to increase anxiety levels.

Before delivering their spiel, subjects were instructed to say either "I am excited" or "I am calm." Judges found that those who made the first statement were more persuasive, competent and relaxed, the study says.

Similar results were observed during a math exam, with those who psyched themselves up with the mantra "I am excited" scoring an impressive eight percent higher on average compared to the "I am calm" and control groups.

In a karaoke experiment in which participants' heart rates were monitored with a pulse meter, again singers who repeated the mantra "I am excited" scored an average of 80% on the karaoke machine which measures pitch, rhythm and volume. Those instructed to tell themselves they were calm, angry or sad scored 69%.

The moral of the study:

"It really does pay to be positive, and people should say they are excited. Even if they don't believe it at first, saying 'I'm excited' out loud increases authentic feelings of excitement," Brooks said.

A 2012 study out of the University of Chicago also found that performing math equations under anxiety prompts responses in the brain similar to physical pain.