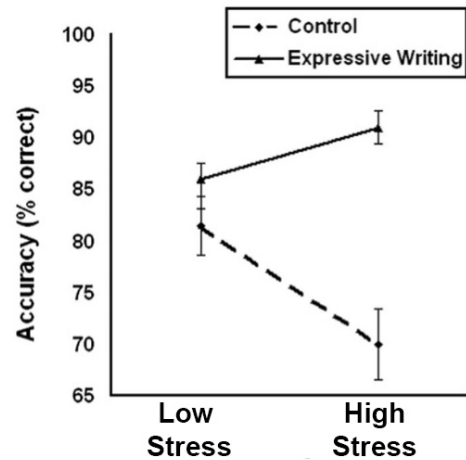


## Improving Math Test Performance

To perform well on exams, preparation is key. Go to class, study, do the homework, practice exams, go to office hours, collaborative learning workshops, etc. However, performing well also requires minimizing interference and distractions. Surprisingly, some of the major sources of interference are in our own heads.

Many students become anxious when faced with a math exam, even those who are very good at math. Dr. Gerardo Ramirez, a professor at UCLA in Psychology did his Ph.D. research on the effects of testing anxiety on performance on math test. His Ph.D. thesis is that the simple act of writing for 10 minutes about your test anxiety helped students perform better—a LOT better. Students that wrote about their anxieties in a short expressive writing assignment received scores that were 15-20 percentage points higher than students that didn't. Yes, from a 70% to a 90%, just by writing about your anxiety. By writing about your stress, you reduce the interference in your head, allowing you to perform better. You can read about it in Ramirez & Beilock (2011).



Your assignment is to do a 10-15 minutes expressive writing assignment, using the prompt below to guide your writing. Ideally, you will do this 1-2 hours before your exam, and no more than 24 hours before. This assignment is ONLY FOR YOU. No one but you will ever read this. The only thing you will hand in is on the following page.

Go on. Give it a shot. It's only an investment of 10-15 minutes. You have nothing to lose but your testing anxiety. As a result, you might find you perform much better.

*“Please take the next 10 minutes to write as openly as possible about your thoughts and feelings regarding the math test you are about to take. In your writing, really let yourself go and explore your emotions and thoughts as you are getting ready to start your test. You might relate your current thoughts to the way you have felt during other similar situations at school or in other situations in your life. Please try to be as open and honest as possible as you write about your thoughts at this time. Remember, no one will read this except you, so don't hold back. Please start writing.”*

### References:

Ramirez, G., & Beilock, S. L. (2011). Writing About Testing Worries Boosts Exam Performance in the Classroom. *Science*, 331, 211-213.

# Math Essay

*\*\*Due: in-class on Tuesday, December 9<sup>th</sup> (Week 10)*

**Purpose:** With this writing exercise, you should experience a reduction in anxiety when you take a math test

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**UID:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATH CLASS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE OF MIDTERM** \_\_\_\_\_

**Did you write an essay within 1-2 hours before taking your midterm?**

**YES** \_\_\_\_\_

**By signing here I attest that I did indeed write an essay summarizing my anxieties before taking the above listed math midterm:**

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**Please write any comments you have about this assignment in the space below.**