

The Test – Otherwise Known as “T-Day”

Rapid heartbeat, palms sweating and stomach fluttering. No it's not the flu, it's test day or commonly known as T-Day. The only parallel to this dreaded experience is having a policeman pull you over or receiving a letter from the I.R.S. about an upcoming audit of last year's tax return. What is it about the gymnastics testing process that makes intelligent, highly professional judges cringe in fear and doubt? Unfortunately, everyone goes through this anxiety but there are many ways to minimize the stress and remain focused during your examination. In the April newsletter, we discussed the importance of studying properly and enhancing your memory muscle. By now after weeks of preparation, your memory muscle should be pumped and ready to take on the rigors of T-Day. The goal is treating the examination as if it was just another study session. Regardless of the exam you are taking, here are some tips to help you remain calm and focused.

- Depending on when the exam is given, morning or evening, maintain your normal daily ritual as you would at work or home. If you have coffee at 9:15 am you should bring a thermos with you into the exam. If you have a small snack during the time the exam is held, make sure you bring food with you. Maintaining a normal routine is crucial and will help your body and mind react accordingly.
- Do not stand outside the exam room conversing with anyone who is hyper and overly nervous. Silly statements they make will confuse you and increase your willingness to doubt yourself.
- Once inside, after filling out the obligatory paperwork and computer answer sheets, close your eyes and take five slow, deep breaths before turning over the examination booklet. [I always add a quick prayer here too!]
- If you are taking a compulsory exam, on your scrap paper immediately list out the elements and their values, casting angles with deductions and any specific rules such as deliberate omission of a major element. If taking the optional exam, write down the special requirements for bars, beam and floor, and list the connection value formulas for bonus. It's also helpful to jot down turns and leaps if they have differing values on beam and floor. This simple five-minute process will calm you down and reassure you of the core knowledge you are very familiar with. I also find it much easier to write my answers on scrap paper first and then transpose them to the computer sheet. If you are not convinced of your choice on a question, [for example A or C], just put a question mark next to your answer and review it later.
- The next important step is go immediately to the event or section of the exam you are most confident about. Never start with an event you historically struggle with because if you are unsure about any of the first few questions, anxiety and frustration are sure to follow. Familiarity instills confidence.
- If you are unsure about any answer after reading the question a second time, leave the question immediately and go on. You will be amazed when you return to that particular question twenty minutes later how easily you recognize the correct answer. Excessive pondering will only frustrate you and possibly cause more errors.
- Laughter helps. If you determine an answer and it does not appear as one of the four options, don't panic, just chuckle to yourself and admit that you either added improperly or read the question too quickly. Read it again slowly and find your error.
- A key point regarding compulsories - look for key words in the question such as total maximum deduction. Unless you recognize a specific element deduction, the authors of these exams are usually asking for deductions from the general execution table.
- If taking the film, bring many pens with you just in case one runs out in the middle of an exercise. Do not be alarmed if you are .30-.40 away from the Base Score because the USAG range is very generous. The key is to listen to the breakdown of total execution taken, composition/artistry and what bonus credit was given. If you did not give a questionable bonus connection and they did, it's a simple adjustment for the remainder of the event.
- Always, I repeat always, trust yourself and your instincts. If you feel in your head that your score is too high or low on your paper, adjust it accordingly. The computer only cares about the score you enter on the answer sheet, not how you achieved it.

It is important to reiterate that you are simply trying to pass the exam. Take pride in every judging exam you pass realizing how much work and preparation was involved. Your true knowledge, abilities and professionalism will shine every time you walk out on the floor as a rated gymnastics official.