HOW TO BE A GOOD TEST TAKER

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YOU CAN BE A GOOD TEST TAKER. LIKE SERIOUSLY.

Almost 100% of my students say the same thing to me within moments of starting tutoring: "I'm just not a good test taker."

Why have so many people so pervasively adopted this moniker? Because every human being is affected by pressure. And standardized tests tend to be high-pressure situations, especially when you know the stakes and have spent significant time preparing.

How to Be a Good Test Taker is here to help you cope with that pressure. Your pressure management skills are the only thing holding you back from performing at your best on test day.`

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What Does Pressure Do to Us?

People are like computers. We have varying levels of mental power at our disposal, and we need that power for tasks, exciting tasks like taking arguments apart. On your computer, you need that power to waste time on the internet.

Have you ever had a virus on your computer? Viruses take up a bunch of the computer's power to execute malicious tasks under the radar. All you can see is that your computer is suddenly really slow. Your internet time wasting becomes way less efficient and it's basically the worst thing that has ever happened. It's taking like 30 whole seconds to load a Buzzfeed article.

Test anxiety is essentially a computer virus. It proliferates under the radar and monopolizes the mental power you need to perform your normal routine. You don't have the power you need to take the test the way you've practiced and you don't know why. Once one thing goes wrong, one of the panic reactions can start (cold sweat, racing heartbeat, shaky hands, nausea), which takes you even farther from your normal practice routine. Suddenly, it's like you've never done this before. Which is correct. You have never done ***this*** before. **This is why everything feels harder on the day of the test.**

BUT SOME PEOPLE ARE GOOD TEST TAKERS. DOES PRESSURE NOT AFFECT THEM?

Pressure negatively affects everyone. Really. **There is no such thing as someone who gets better under pressure.**

Statistically, no major league hitter is better when the game hangs in the balance. No NBA basketball player makes more foul shots when the championship is on the line. It just doesn't happen, and having the expectation that there are these mythical, elect people out there will just make you feel bad about yourself.

If you know someone who insists they did better on test day than any practice test, know that they got lucky on the makeup of their exact test; it was suited to their strengths. They managed the pressure well enough to still capitalize on their strengths. That's what being a good test taker is, and it's something you can do as well.

WHY DOES PRESSURE NEGATIVELY AFFECT US?

The human body undergoes a specific physical reaction to feeling like it *needs* something. This reaction is good for emergency fight-or-flight scenarios, but it isn't well suited to taking standardized tests. It interferes with your attempts to access memory.

What would you guess is the hardest part of helping people become good test takers?

It's that the student doesn't believe it's possible to become one, so they think the steps I'm recommending are a waste of time. Many students have just internalized being "not a good test taker" as part of their identity, as if it's their eye color or height. This is false.

Your test taking ability is not a static part of who you are. You can become a good test taker.

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Pressure and Memory Are Not Friends

There are two types of memory relevant to pressure.

Working memory

Working memory is your mental notepad. You keep information here to intentionally call it up for later use. You perform a ton of important tasks using working memory during the test. It's what you use to keep the translation of the stimulus in your head as you design a CLIR. Any time you're *intentionally* thinking something through, you're using your working memory capacity to do it.

Automatic memory

Automatic memory is what you use to brush your teeth. You learned how to brush your teeth at some point, but I hope it's been automatic for a while now. You don't think about the skills you're calling up with automatic memory. You don't focus on fundamentals. You just do it.

After all of your practice with LR, you use automatic memory to sense holes in arguments, unconsciously matching patterns from previous errors you've seen. **The point of all your practice was to push those argument-critiquing impulses into automatic memory.** Automatic memory is mystery magic.

Learning starts in working memory. This is where you build new skills. It takes effort and intention, the hallmark of working memory. After you've practiced a ton, skills are transferred into automatic memory. Your knowledge of how to brush your teeth started in working memory, but you've done it enough times that it's automatic now, so the skill has moved to a different part of the brain.

HOW PRESSURE INTERFERES WITH AUTOMATIC MEMORY

Imagine this scenario. You're brushing your teeth in a high-stakes situation and have the following internal monologue:

> *"Wait, do I bring the brush forward again now? Do I need to go back over this tooth again? Oh my god! I need to do it right. I just need to focus. Is the right molar clean enough? I think I left some plaque on the top a minute ago. What's the point of doing the right molar now? Come on! GET IT TOGETHER! I need to do well on this teeth brushing! My whole life depends on this stupid thing. I can't be one of those failures that brushes their teeth twice. My family is going to be so disappointed. Ellen is going to be so disappointed."*

Do you think you would do a good job brushing your teeth with this mindset? Try it tonight and find out.

I love brushing my teeth (really), and I don't think I would be able to do it in that kind of mental hornet's nest. You could be the best teeth brusher in the world, but if you apply all that pressure and don't control your reaction, you'll probably just give up halfway through. The funny thing is that monologue is exactly how many people approach the LSAT on test day. For real.

All of the impulses in that monologue make you consciously think through the fundamentals of skills in automatic memory. **Applying intention and micromanagement to automatic memory just doesn't work.** It's understandable why the impulse to apply intention to automatic memory exists: You really want to do well, so you try to make sure you're doing every single thing right. However, this intentional memory grabbing is suited to working memory, not automatic memory. You're using the wrong tool, so the brain starts to glitch.

* I had a former student proofread this teeth-brushing paragraph. She left this comment verbatim in Track Changes: "This happened to me on the December test after I had my RC freak out. Brain went into panic mode and I threw out what I knew for LR. I did so badly on LR for nothing since I only got 2 wrong in the whole RC section."

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You can't get to automatic memory skills when you over-think. Attempting to do so will lead to blanking. You'll know the knowledge is in your head, but you won't be able to get to it. Blanking leads to panic, which occupies a ton of space in working memory. You need that space for remembering what you read, so your performance suffers, which only makes you panic more. With all this neurological havoc, it's no wonder so many people do worse than they did on their practice tests.

This is what happens when people "choke." It's not a character flaw or a weakness. It's a physiological reaction that you can avoid if you put in the work.

It's going to take work on your part to build the confidence, resilience, and focus that will allow you to avoid falling into this memory trap. **The good news is that the skills you build here are applicable to every test you face for the rest of your life, including 1L finals and the bar exam.** If you actually do the things I recommend in this supplement, you will be a good test taker for the rest of your life.

There's a ton of science in How to Be a Good Test Taker! Six weeks of research to be exact. Check out the reference page at the back to dive deeper into my source material.

SO HOW CAN I BECOME A GOOD TEST TAKER?

You need to do two things:

1. Learn to control your actions
2. Learn to control your thoughts

And that's exactly what we're going to do.

First, we'll go through the steps you can take in your preparation to inoculate yourself against pressure. Next, we'll talk through five quick panic fixes, just in case you need them. Finally, we'll learn to control our thoughts to create a more pleasant, less crazy test-taking experience.

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4 Quick Tips to Optimize Your Prep for Test Day

1. Make practice conditions harder than test day

Don't give yourself advantages on your practice tests. Advantages include: giving yourself extra time, taking breaks, checking answers after every question, and looking at your phone during the test. **Do not do any of these things.**

I know this seems harsh, but trust me, I'm looking out for you here. Anything you can't do during the real test should not be part of your practice test routine. I have seen so many students crash and burn on test day because they were too lax. Their practice performance became reliant on these advantages, and when there were no advantages on test day, the student suffered. Please be kind to your test-day self, not your practice-test self.

Practice in different environments with varying levels of noise, discomfort, and distraction. Take tests with the TV on in the background to account for the side conversations proctors tend to have. Integrate cafés with small tables into your practice. This is ideal preparation for the possibility of a noisy test center with small desks. You probably won't get one of those, but you want to know that you can handle those conditions, just in case they crop up.

2. Write out LSAT thoughts the night before the test

Studies have shown that **students who write out their thoughts and feelings about a test do substantially better than those who don't** (Ramirez & Beilock, 2011). This occurs because writing down the anxiety takes it out of the equation. You don't need to write a lot or spend a huge amount of time on this. Just sit down with a pen and paper (do not type this) the night before the test and get all your thoughts out. You can even tear up the paper afterwards, if that sounds fun to you.

3. Remember success instead of failure

When you remember something, you strengthen the neural connection to that event. The more you call up the event, the more available it is to you to call up again. **When you focus on negative experiences, you are more likely to call them up in moments of crisis** because they will be what's most easily available to you. If you make a conscious effort to remember your successful LSAT moments, they will be the easiest things for your mind to access.

4. Identify and update your personal LSAT bests

Personal bests are what you want to emulate, so it's worth keeping them at the forefront of your mind. Devote a page in the back of your LSAT notebook to tracking these personal bests:

1. **The best LR question you've ever done**
2. **The best RC passage you've ever done**

Tracking these personal bests strengthens your neural connections to them, which enables you to replicate them more easily.

If you absolutely have to give yourself one of the advantages listed because of something outside of your control, penalize yourself one minute (or more) on your time. Now, you'll only have 34 minutes to complete the section.

I stole this penalization idea from Nira, one of my students who used this strategy to great success. She was unflinchingly strict in her preparation, even more so than I recommended. When she had to sit with three people to a desk at her actual LSAT (with test takers repeatedly banging up against her chair to leave the room), her score did not substantially drop. **Nira is a good test taker because of her preparation, not because that's just part of her identity.**

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Strengthen Your Focus Muscles

Focus is the key to LSAT performance on test day. It is what allows you to keep errant catastrophe thoughts out of your mind, so you can complete the task in front of you.

Focus is a muscle; you can strengthen it the same way you strengthen a bicep. Start at a low weight and do reps consistently until the low weight is no longer a challenge. Up the weight and continue until you meet your goals. Ask any gym rat you know and they will confirm that this works. Your focus workout is the Three Phase Focus Challenge.

Never, ever use headphones during your Focus Drills or during any LSAT practice.

THREE PHASE FOCUS CHALLENGE

PHASE ONE

1. **Go to a quiet place with no one else around. Put your phone on airplane mode.**

2. **Pick a random spot a few feet away from you.**
   This could be the corner of the chair next to you, a leaf on some indoor fern, or the crumbs from what's left of a muffin.

3. **Focus on that spot for two full minutes.**
   Set a two minute timer and lock your eyes on that spot. Don't think about anything except that spot. I understand that there isn't a ton to think about; that's the point. You want to show yourself that you can put both your eyes and your thoughts on lock. Nothing exists except that spot. If you can force your mind to lock in on that spot and not let random thoughts invade, you'll be able to lock in on an LR stimulus too.

   When your eyes shift away or your thoughts wander, snap your focus back. Don't get mean with yourself, just push the focus back to your spot. Be honest with yourself about whether your thoughts wandered away; if they did, you should not move on to the next phase.

You don't have to stop at two minutes! Feel free to up the time for more of a challenge.

Repeat Phase One every day until it becomes easy. After that, try Phase Two.

PHASE TWO

1. **Go to a familiar noisy place. You could turn on the TV or go to a room in your house where your family is hanging out. Do not put on headphones.**

2. **Pick a stationary spot near where all the activity is going on.**
   This could be the corner of the TV stand or a glass next to your mom.

3. **Focus on that spot for two full minutes, repeating Phase One.**
   Warn your family about what you'll be doing beforehand so they don't think you've had a psychotic break.

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Repeat Phase Two every day until it becomes easy. After that, try Phase Three.

PHASE THREE

1. **Go to a busy public place. There should be a lot of movement around you. Do not put on headphones.**
2. **Pick a stationary spot a few feet away from you.**
   This should be in the middle of all the activity.
3. **Focus on that spot for two full minutes, repeating Phase One.**

When Phase Three is easy, you are ready to take the LSAT. If Phase Three sounds like it would be impossible, you're at risk of losing points between your practice test and real LSAT performance due to focus issues.

You can avoid losing these points though! Work your way up to Phase Three and you will master it.

If I had to name the one thing responsible for my ability to be a good test taker, it would be my focus. My focus is so intense it's a personal problem. I write in cafés, so "friends" have made a game of finding me when I'm focusing and tapping me on the shoulder so I shriek. This works because, even when they're standing right next to me, I do not know they're there. That writing focus is maybe half as intense as my focus when I'm sitting for the real LSAT. It's legit weird.

I wasn't just born like this. I've been a good test taker since I was a kid because I practiced focus constantly, blocking out everything that was going on around me. You can build focus too, and by developing your focus, you will become a good test taker. Focus is not a fixed quality; you can build it like any other muscle. But building focus requires exercise, and exercising is always difficult at first. **The more you push yourself in your Focus Challenges, the easier they will become and the more your work will pay off on test day.**

A great way to build focus is to consistently read things that don't immediately interest you.

You are not guaranteed to be entertained by everything on your LSAT, and you can't afford to lose points due to a loss of focus. If you zone out on science passages, buy a copy of Scientific American and translate every paragraph as you read. If you aren't interested in the humanities, go to ALdaily.com (Arts & Letters Daily) and translate articles there as well. If you aren't interested in legal articles… hey, wait.

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Expect Things to Go Weird

Fortune favors the prepared. By going into the test expecting things to be weird, you inoculate yourself against the surprise most people feel when things inevitably feel different than they did during practice.

We're going to play the what if game to anticipate exactly how weird the LSAT could get. After I take on the most popular what ifs, you're going to use your Loophole-finding skills to poke holes in the ideal testing experience you're hoping for. The what if game is your opportunity to really go deep on the catastrophizing. Together, we're going to mentally explore all the different ways test day could go wrong and answer ourselves with what we'll do.

TOP 10 LSAT WHAT IFS

Q. *What if I hit a passage I immediately can't make sense of?*

A. You will complete the rest of the section before returning to the passage that's stumping you. The test is not over because one passage is bad. You have plenty of other questions to do outside of this passage. That is where the battle will be won. Once you've finished all the other questions, give the passage your best effort. **Movement is life; freezing is death.**

* I once had a student totally bomb a passage she couldn't crack. She was sure it had ruined her test. She still got a 176. After the test, she laid down on my couch, almost in tears, saying she wanted to cancel. She wanted to cancel a 176 that eventually got her into Stanford Law School. Let this be a lesson: **Bad Section ≠ Bad Score**

Q. *What if the test center desks aren't big enough?*

A. You will make your setup work and just roll with it. Scratch paper under the elbow, whatever it takes. You've practiced with small café tables to prepare for this.

Q. *What if the proctor doesn't call five minutes?*

A. This is a pretty common occurrence. Practice a bunch of tests without the five-minute warning so this doesn't bother you. Don't expect them to call five minutes on later sections even if they do it on the early sections.

Q. *What if I'm way behind where I normally am on time?*

A. Don't stop doing your normal routine, but make sure you aren't lingering on questions more than normal because you "want to be sure." You have to do the exact same thing you always do. You could just be slower because the difficulty was tilted into a different area of the section than normal. You'll involuntarily keep in mind that time is an issue — I can't stop you from doing that. But temper the obsession impulse with the knowledge that it's better to Powerful-Provable guess on some questions than get the ones you actually attempt wrong. If you speed through and change your routine, you will likely miss doable questions.

Q. *What if I check the timer and panic at the number?*

A. Note the time once, make your call, and get back to the question in front of you. Do your normal routine and don't focus on the time. Kindly reframe when you catch yourself thinking about it.

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Q. *What if I bomb one of the sections?*

A. **You will not give up on the rest of the test.** You don't know which section is experimental while you're doing it. The section you bombed might not count. I have seen too many phenomenal students tank an entire test because they bombed the experimental, but thought it was real in the moment. They gave up on the rest of the test because of this experimental failure. Promise that you won't do this to yourself. If thoughts of "I've already screwed up beyond repair" enter your head, respond with, "Only if I give up now. And I'll never give up."

Q. *What if I catch myself not consistently CLIR-ing the stimuli?*

A. You will start CLIR-ing immediately. Don't worry about the questions that have already passed. Focus on what's in front of you.

Q. *What if I have three LR sections in a row? (or whatever section order scenario sounds the worst for you)*

A. You will do the sections and play your game! Hopefully, you've been practicing your worst-case section order, so this won't be the first time you've had to slay this beast.

Q. *What if the curve is bad?*

A. There's no way you can know the curve on the day of the test, so don't even consider it. Stick to the game plan! Focus on the challenge before you and what you can control.

Q. *What if it's way harder than any test I did before?*

A. You will reframe the difficulty level by reminding yourself that this is the exact same test you've practiced countless times before. If it was hard for you, it was likely hard for everyone else too. You've met this challenge before. You can do it again.

Ask and answer three more what ifs of your own design. This is your chance to expect the unexpected. Write the what ifs down in your LSAT notebook and answer them yourself.

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5 Quick Panic Fixes

1. Nothing exists except right now

Pressure intensifies the desire to critique past performance and fear what's next. This impulse hurts your performance. The LSAT is a series of consecutive present moments, and your success on the test is determined by your success in each of these consecutive moments. Anything that takes you out of the present is bad for your performance on the test.

To bring yourself back to the present, say this to yourself:

> *me:* "What question am I doing right now?"
>
> *other me:* "[the number of whatever question you're on]"
>
> *me:* "That's all there is."

If you do this every time your mind wanders, you will learn where your attention belongs and the wandering will occur less frequently. Have this trick ready when you go in to take the test, even if you haven't had to use it much in practice.

2. "But it'll be OK"

Tack "but it'll be OK" on the end of every catastrophe thought. It actually will be OK. Assuming it will be OK allows you to keep your head out of the panic spiral.

3. Don't look at anything or anyone around you

Keep your eyes and your focus on your test. While you're taking the test, the test is all that exists. Most importantly, do not look at anyone else's screen. Remember, your focus belongs only on the question you're doing.

4. Cool it about the time

Only check the timer at natural breaks, like when you get to the end of your first pass through the questions. Don't check more than that. The five-minute warning will let you know when time is low.

Don't over-obsess about time on test day. Yes, it's important to meet your time goals, but being a minute slower than your normal practice speed is not a reason to radically change your strategy in the middle of the test. Some of my students have made this exact mistake and scored 10+ points below their practice test scores. They didn't give difficult questions the time they require because their minds were dominated with the "I NEED TO SPEED UP" ethos. Don't let rushing tank your score. It's normal for time to vary.

5. 3-6 breathing

Pressure speeds up your breathing and heart rate. Our goal is to slow them down so your mind can do its normal thing. **Inhale to a count of 3 seconds and exhale to a count of 6 seconds.** You don't need to be exact on the seconds. You should feel an immediate calming effect at the end of the exhalation. This rhythm is a simplified version of the rhythm taught to PTSD patients to combat their anxiety.

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Control Your Mind With Kind Reframing

Being a good test taker means not sabotaging yourself during the test. In order to do this, you have to control your thoughts.

Whenever you catch yourself thinking in a way that isn't going to help you achieve your goal, kindly reframe the thought for yourself. Don't judge yourself when you have catastrophe thoughts. You're not a bad person for having them. Reframing the thought is just a more active way of telling yourself to chill.

A catastrophe thought is any thought that inflates the pressure of the situation and disempowers you in your response to it. Here are a few of the most popular LSAT catastrophe thought patterns, along with the kindly reframed alternative. The kind reframes are how good test takers cope with the pressure of test day.

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Needs → Wants

Need-based thinking is the root cause of most test day sabotage.

When you say you need something ("I need to get this question right"), it lights up the most primal parts of your brain. Your body now thinks your survival is on the line, like you're going to be eaten by a tiger if you don't act fast. Your body starts circulating chemicals suited to taking on the imminent tiger threat. These chemicals are not at all suited to taking a 101 question standardized test. They produce the racing thoughts, increased heart beat, and the inability to sustain focus. These are essentially the opposite of an optimal response to standardized testing.

These chemicals lead you to panic, which is logical if you're actually about to be eaten by a tiger. But you're not about to be eaten by a tiger. Even getting a 120 on the LSAT is not equivalent to being eaten by a tiger. **The LSAT does not put your bodily survival is not on the line, so don't trick your body into thinking it could die. If you do this, it will undermine your hard work.**

SERIOUSLY. YOU ARE NOT ABOUT TO BE EATEN BY A TIGER.

You *want* to do well. You don't *need* to do well. Need means you'll die if you don't have it. Want means you it would be super great. You're going to grad school, not competing in the Hunger Games.

Reality Distortion Thought	"I need to do well."
Kind Reframe	"But I will survive even if I don't do well. I really want to do well though."

This seems like a small thing, but it really does work to temper your bodily investment in the test.

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Outcome Obsession —> Personal Best Focus

Outcome obsession is a symptom of need-based thinking.

Outcome obsession means worrying about:	whether you're on track to get that 170/160/150 whether you're going to get a high enough score to get into law school X whether your performance will disappoint someone
Personal best focus means worrying about:	being you on your best day

On my first day of LSAT studying, when I had zero idea what I was doing, I wrote "175" on the cover of my notebook in silver Sharpie. That's what I wanted. My best friend Paul got a 175 years before I took the test, so my focus on that number probably came from matching Paul, one of the smartest people I've ever met. I was outcome-focused. But when I sat down to take the test, Paul and the 175 were the furthest things from my mind. I had scored above and below that number many times leading up to test day, and I trusted that if I just went in there and did my thing, I'd be fine. **I trusted myself.** That trust contained the anxiety enough for me to do well. I had switched to a personal best focus. That's what good test takers do.

I found out my LSAT score when someone looked at the LSAC email and said, "Well, Paul's going to be happy." I got a 174. But I didn't really care about doing better than Paul at that point. A 174 is basically as good as a 175, just like a 161 is basically as good as a 162. We focus way too much on arbitrary cutoffs for success, and way too little on the one universal truth that will guide us toward actually achieving anything:

YOU GOTTA DO YOU.

I was going to be happy as long as I went in there and played my game my way. I'm never going to be the best Paul there is. I can definitely be the best Ellen though. Screw all those other Ellens. I went in saying, "I'm going to rock out." I did not say, "I'm going to get a 175." **If I had said, "I'm going to get a 175," every single difficult question would have made me feel like my fate was in jeopardy**.

If RC isn't your specialty, don't start lamenting that on the day of the test with an "If only I were better at reading comp!" thought spiral. You're only as good at RC as you were the day before the test. It's your job to be the best version of you on test day, not somebody else.

Reality Distortion Thought	"I'm not going to get a 160 if I don't finish this."	"This is not going well enough to get me into NYU."	"My dad is going to be so mad if things keep going this way."
Kind Reframe	"OK, 160 is whatever. I just gotta do me. I'm taking this test my way."	"I don't control NYU. I control me on this test right now and I gotta do me."	"Well, dad doesn't have to wake up every day and be me. I do, and this test is about me being me."

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Fear of Failure → Memories of Success

Thinking about how you might fail is counterproductive to your goals. These thoughts only intensify the pressure and consequently, the damaging physiological reactions we have to pressure. So every time you start thinking about how you're failing, reframe it in a memory of a past success.

Remembering the times you've succeeded is a powerful tool against pressure. This is where you deploy the personal bests you identified in the Preparation section. You should have your best LR question and best passage ready. These personal bests are powerful evidence of your ability to do the LSAT. Your memories are your best weapon to prove to yourself that you actually can succeed.

After substantial practice, the LSAT is like riding a bike. **Your capabilities are just sitting there in automatic memory waiting for you to access them. When automatic memory locks up, remembering the past success in detail will unlock it and start your system back up.** Instead of thinking about process ("Wait, what exactly do I need to do after I figure out it's a Debate? I want to be sure."), re-experience a moment.

Put yourself right back in those best moments of all time. Feel the click of the best LR question you've ever done. Remember exactly how your mind felt while you read that reading comp passage that totally made sense. You want to experience all those sensations again as you remember them.

It doesn't matter if your personal best is exactly the same as the question you're on when your automatic memory feels stuck. You just want to momentarily experience the flow you felt when you were unimpeded, at your best.

Reality Distortion Thought	"I can't focus. Oh my god. This can't be happening."
Kind Reframe	"I have done this before."

Your personal bests show you that you can do this. You did do it. So you *will* do it.

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Threats → Challenges

Threats are another facet of the need mindset. Our physiological response to a threat is more appropriate for an actual life-threatening situation than it is for a standardized test. Your brain has a predetermined response to threats — all those fight-or-flight hormones flood your system and interfere with memory.

WHAT A THREAT SOUNDS LIKE	This is going to destroy me. This is ruining my life. This section is going to kill my chances. It's all over already.

Even writing out these threats right now is making me anxious and sad. My experience with the test has always been so different from this, and I'm heartbroken that, for so many people, threats are the through-line of their LSAT experience. My only hope is that my work can share even a fraction of the joy that I feel about the LSAT with you. That's been my sole motivation for the past six years.

Good test takers don't view the test as a threat. That's how they succeed at it so reliably. **Good test takers view the test as a challenge. No pressure, no stakes.** I felt this way even when I was taking the LSAT for admission to law school. At the time, LSAT was my favorite thing to do because it was the only thing in my life that made me feel like I was using my mind. I'd dropped out of an MFA creative writing program, and I had no idea what I was going to do next. The LSAT was my perfect challenge. It still is.

A challenge is the opposite of a threat for the brain. This makes sense from an evolutionary standpoint. It's the difference between early humans running from a bear and early humans trying to make a spear for the first time. The spear is a challenge, and meeting that challenge is going to require a different neurological response than outrunning a threat. The spear-making mindset is much better suited to the LSAT.

Reality Distortion Thought	"This is going to destroy my life."
Kind Reframe	"This is just a challenge. I'm challenged right now and that's cool. Now I have the opportunity to meet the challenge."

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Once in a Lifetime → Multiple Opportunities

Nobody goes into this test wanting to take it more than once, but if you want to be a one-and-done test taker, you cannot enter the test with the "this is my one shot" mindset. When you believe that you're in a once-in-a-lifetime situation, the fear of losing that opportunity becomes overwhelming. Pressure intensifies, general mayhem, etc.

If you mentally allow yourself to have the possibility of taking the test again, you can avoid this. Seriously.

I knew Andrew, my former student, did well on his LSAT because he sent me the following text after he got out of the test center: "I focused on the one thing I knew for sure. I'M GOING TO ENJOY MYSELF TONIGHT. During the test, I knew if I have to take it again, it's fine. I know I can do it." Then he sent me a picture of a beer. He did not have to take the test again.

Walk into your LSAT willing to sit for the next test date. I know. You don't want to. You want to apply right now. You want to never think about the LSAT again. I want that for you too. That's why I'm telling you to be open to the possibility of taking it again. If you aren't open to that possibility, you majorly increase the chances that you will have to take it again.

Reality Distortion Thought	"This is it. This is my chance."
Kind Reframe	"Well, this is one opportunity, but there will be other opportunities if I need them. I can take this again if something weird happens."

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Things You Can't Control → Things You Can Control

THINGS YOU CAN CONTROL ABOUT THE LSAT	Your preparation Your focus Your mindset The amount of time you spend on each question The amount of effort you put into each question
THINGS YOU CAN'T CONTROL ABOUT THE LSAT	Which section you get when What the questions will be Whether you get a crazy passage How hard the questions will be What the curve will be Where you will sit (at most test centers) The proctor's actions What's going on outside the test center

People tend to fixate on things they cannot control during the LSAT. They think things like, "But why did there have to be construction noise outside today!? It's not fair!" This is counterproductive because, by definition, there is nothing you can do about the things you can't control. Pursuing this thought chain will make you feel disempowered and hurt your performance on the test.

I took the test back when we had Logic Games and paper tests. The proctor did not call the five-minute warning during my game section when I took the LSAT. They realized their mistake and announced a late warning with like 4:00 remaining. Do you know how long I spent complaining in my head about how terrible it was that this happened? ZERO SECONDS. Because it wouldn't have helped me to complain. I was still on game 3. I needed that energy to finish the game section, which I did. I still have no clue how I did it, but I did. I could control my focus on the game I needed to do — so that's where my attention went.

All the energy you put into lamenting things you can't control is wasted, so it's in your best interest to learn to abandon those thoughts as quickly as possible. **Every time you catch yourself lamenting something you can't control, kindly reframe the thought into a reflection on something you can control.**

Reality Distortion Thought	"Why did I have to get experimental RC?! This isn't fair!"
Kind Reframe	"Yeah, this could have been better, but I knew there would be curveballs on test day because I prepared well. I'm ready for this."

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Unprecedented Difficulty → Pressure Is Changing Your Perception

Pressure changes your perception. You may think that your perception is always constant, but it's not. When you're under pressure, things look a lot more difficult and intimidating than they actually are. You have to trust me on this.

My students usually report that at least one section every test is a candidate for "the hardest of all time." Reddit almost always does the same. I've gone over many of these "hardest sections of all time" with my students once they get their scores back. Literally none of them have thought the section was particularly hard when we look at it casually in my living room. Suddenly, as if by magic, the hardest section of all time is transformed into just another section from some random PT. The pressure of the test center tricked them into seeing something that wasn't there.

Don't trust your perception that the questions you get on the day of the test are unprecedented. They're not. The pressure is playing tricks on your perception. It magnifies your reaction through the lens of the test-day intimidation you feel. Remember, the test you're taking will become a practice test just like all the other ones. It's not special.

Reality Distortion Thought	"This LR is way harder than any section I've ever done."
Kind Reframe	"OK, it may seem that way right now, but it's probably just the pressure making it seem that way. Let me approach this like I approach normal LR and see what happens."

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Exaggerated Importance → Dose of Reality

In the LSAT echo chamber, we have a tendency to inflate the importance of this test. And why wouldn't we? A big important monster that holds THE REST OF YOUR LIFE in its talons is a big motivator to sell classes. It also sells books — I'm not exonerating myself here. But here's the thing: The LSAT doesn't really control the rest of your life. It's one of the factors used to determine admission to one type of graduate school. That's it. You can always get an MBA if all else fails. **MBA shade**

Chances are you're exaggerating the importance of this test. The more important you think something is, the greater the pressure and the worse you're going to do. This is why we have to throw the cold hard light of day on our perception of how important the LSAT is. It's not a monster. It's not ruining your life. The day you take the test is not the most important day of your life.

Good test takers forget about the stakes of the test and focus on the test itself. That stimulus in front of you is all that exists. All that stuff about the score and schools and curves is just window dressing.

Reality Distortion Thought	"This is the biggest day of my life."
Kind Reframe	"This is a big opportunity to do my best, but there will be plenty of bigger days."

HOW TO BE A GOOD TEST TAKER GAME PLAN

- Don't just read this supplement; do what it effing says.
- Start the Focus Challenge today. Don't stop practicing until Phase Three is easy.
- Use the Panic Fixes during your practice tests, so you're prepared to use them on test day.
- When you walk in on test day, know that you're going to be OK no matter what. You don't *need* to well; you *want* to do well.

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