

## Exam stress (2)

# Exam stress: Micro pigs, screaming and ball pools

By Sean Coughlan  
Education correspondent

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**It's the exam season, with students facing the angst of revision and pre-exam nerves. But in a growing tradition, universities and student unions are making increasingly elaborate efforts to tackle stress. Here are some of the de-stressing tactics.**

**Bouncy castle:** Maybe it should be a bouncy ivory tower, but students at the University of Leicester can shake off their exam anxiety with an inflatable castle. There is also a soothing menagerie of ponies, sheep, goats, chickens and ducks for “students to pet and hold”. The university seems to have turned de-stressing into a specialist subject, last year students were popping bubble wrap at organised “bubble wrap stations”.

**Micro pigs:** Students at the University of Exeter are being offered small pigs to help ease their exam fears. More pre-ham, than exam perhaps, but how does a miniature pig really help with a lack of academic confidence? The student newspaper promises they are more exciting than puppies, not least because they can “wear little hats”.

**Knitting:** Who says students don't know how to live life in the fast lane? “Make

sure you don't miss Knitter Natter's 'de-stressing' knitting session." That's the message for devil-may-care students at the University of Huddersfield. Instead of getting the needle over exams, they could run up a sweater in a knitting club. It's a good cause, supporting Age UK, but it's not exactly Paris 1968.

**Shetland pony:** Is there a theme emerging? Small pigs, small horses? Bath Spa University is backing a Shetland pony as the best way of cutting stress. But there are no short measures, with a calf, ducklings, chicks, goats, sheep and a dog all available. Is this the exam season or an episode of All Creatures Great and Small?

**Adult ball pool:** It's not just children in shopping centres who can loll around in pits filled with brightly coloured plastic balls. Students at the University of Plymouth want something similar during the exam season, in a Stress Less Ball Pool. They want to raise funds for a ball pool big enough for 50 students at a time.

**Meditation:** It almost seems old-fashioned in comparison, but Queen Mary University of London is offering an introduction to meditation to tackle exam stress. Leeds Beckett is offering skipping and a "reiki taster session" in its Stress Less Fest.

**Primal screaming:** This is a tradition for students in the United States. Harvard, Northwestern, and Columbia all have sessions of stress-busting primal screaming. At Northwestern in Illinois students howl on the Sunday evening before finals week. At Wisconsin, the university chancellor took part in the screaming and there was even an invitation to join in by social media.

**Puppies:** The University of Central Lancashire, known as Uclan (where Preston is only one consonant away from California), has a "puppy room" for stressed students to spend time winding down with cute puppies. And in case the puppies get stressed, they have their own "breakout room". There is also puppy therapy at Bristol University. It's not just random puppy handling. "About 20 dogs and puppies will be rotated throughout the day on 18 May, with students offered 15-minute slots." And it's a very scientific process. "Cuddling a puppy is a perfect way to release some endorphins," said a students' union representative.

**Bearded dragons:** It's not some kind of drinking game, but a type of reptile. Students at Reading University have opted out of fur and feathers and gone for reptiles and creepy crawlies. Bearded dragons, monitor lizards and boa constrictors have been deployed to help stressed students. How is a snake relaxing? If that doesn't seem very calming, there is a "mobile farm, meditation and t'ai chi sessions".

**Sleep contest:** Even sleeping has to be competitive in South Korea. At Duksung Women's University in Seoul, students are tackling exam stress by a competition to see which students can fall into the deepest sleep. They have blankets, pillows and eye masks, in an event sending the message that getting a good night's sleep is an important part of relaxing. Winning will be a very good Korea opportunity for them.

### Source

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## Reading

1. Sean Coughlan's tone of voice in this article is best described as ...

- a. single minded ☐
- b. serious ☐
- c. mocking ☐
- d. sympathetic ☐

*This is an inference question which asks you to think about what is suggested by the vocabulary used.*

2. What is the meaning of the word 'elaborate' as used in the following sentence?

'But in a growing tradition, universities and student unions are making increasingly elaborate efforts to tackle stress.'

- a. creative ☐
- b. ridiculous ☐
- c. thoughtful ☐
- d. simple ☐

*This is a context question. You can identify the correct meaning of a word by reading and understanding the surrounding text.*

3. Sean Coughlan's purpose in this article is to ...

- a. inform readers about what he considers to be the most effective stress busting techniques. ☐
- b. persuade students to try some of the techniques to combat their stress. ☐
- c. draw attention to the problem of stress by poking fun at the stress busting techniques. ☐
- d. suggest that students are not stressed at all. ☐

*This question tests your ability to identify the purpose of the text.*

4. Show how your chosen answer in question 3 is displayed in the language choices made by the writer of the text.

*This is an analysis question which asks you to look at the language writers use to convey their meaning effectively.*

You need to comment on:

- the writer's choice of words;
- the details the writer has chosen to include;
- the types of sentences and paragraphs used.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines, typical of notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

5. Evaluate the stress busting techniques described in the text. Using your own words, which tactics do you think would be effective/ineffective? Give clear reasons for your opinions.

*You are asked to evaluate the texts by comparing and contrasting styles of writing/information given.*

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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## Oracy

6. In a small group draw up a list of what you think would be effective ways to tackle exam stress.

*Ensure that everyone has a chance to give his/her opinion and that you listen carefully to everyone.*

7. Year 9 at your school are about to begin a revision period for school and Pisa exams. You have been asked to give a talk to year 9 pupils about exam stress at their assembly. Your talk should last 4-5 minutes.

*Ensure that you use the correct tone and register for your address.*

Make your talk convincing by using features such as:

- rhetoric
- irony
- contrast
- repetition
- surprise

Link your points using appropriate discourse markers such as:

- In addition ...
- Of course, we can also add ...
- Furthermore ...
- What is more ...
- Most worrying is ...
- The best thing about this is ...

Think carefully about the ending of your talk. You might like to end by:

- inviting the audience to think about their own interpretation of the topic;
- creating a climax to the talk using repetition or rhetoric.

## Writing

8. A friend who has moved to another school is suffering from exam stress. Write a letter to him/her, outlining effective ways to help.

- Ensure that you use the correct format for an informal letter – this is a letter to a friend.
- Use paragraphs to structure your ideas for effective ways to help.
- Ensure that you use the correct register for an informal letter to your friend.
- Aim to persuade the reader that your ideas will help to alleviate his/her stress.