



THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

IN Focus

THE LAST LEG OF THE JOURNEY

While January heralds in a new year in the Gregorian Calendar, it also announces the **"last leg of the journey"** for all realms of society : financial year end for businesses and enterprises, last individual performance period before review & the year end for academics. The time when we look ahead towards the *finish line*; like entering the *last lap* in the race, in which one needs to give the best, consistent, most powerful and focussed *push* for full goal-attainment.

In the **Education-fraternity**, the *countdown* to the finish has already begun:

- **Students** - have to dig deep, stay calm, focussed, and finish well in their Summative or Board exams
- **Teachers** - have to be extra vigilant to identify gaps, frequent mistakes and wavering confidence. They need to keep motivating the students to keep 'at it' with sincerity and proper study schedules.

- **Schools** - have to ensure that their resources are made available for teachers and students who may need access to varied knowledge & revision sources. They must keep an eye on overall performance at the institutional level and provide that extra boost of morale to promising students who can get cream ranks.

- **Parents** - the '*partners in education*', need to avoid anxiety, undue pressure on children and lend a supporting hand where necessary.

- **Education Departments & Boards** - need to review current content, pedagogical and assessment methods in light of NEP 2020 and the new NCF-Foundational Stage. It is imperative for Policy makers and the Government to provide funds, meaningful & futuristic syllabi and support, to shape the largest youth-count in the world.

Countdown to the forthcoming Indian Board Exams :

CBSE Grade 10 and Grade 12 Board exams begin on 15/02 /2023.

CISCE - Grade 10 exams begin on 27/02/2023 & Grade 12 exams begin on 13/02/2023

WONDER WORDS

* **COUNTDOWN**

Singular Noun

A **countdown** is the counting aloud of numbers in reverse order before something happens, especially before a something is launched. *Examples :*

- *The countdown has begun for the launch of the space shuttle.*
- *There were three checks to do before the concert countdown.*

Countable Noun

The **countdown** to an event is the period of time leading up to the event. *Example:*

...the countdown to the year-end exams.

* **RUN-UP TO**

Singular Noun

The **run-up to** an event is the time just prior to / before the event.

Example :

The Teacher believes the students will put in at least 10 hours a day in the run-up to the Board exams.

“You've got what it takes,
but the last lap will take everything you've got!”

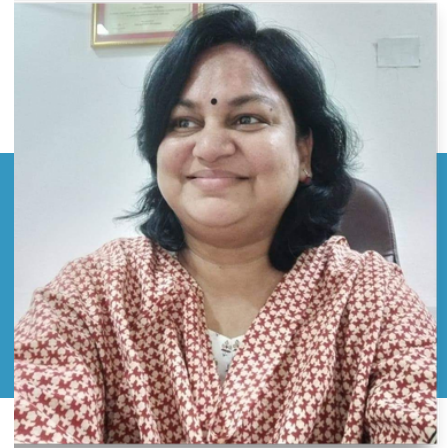
—Anonymous

QED Talk

NEP 2020's focus on COUNTDOWN TO EXAMS WITH CALMNESS

MS. PURNIMA GUPTA

Psychotherapist & Special Educator
Faculty of Psychology at Karnavati University, Ahmedabad
Founder of 'ANAHATA' Mental Health Clinic, Ahmedabad



■ As a psychologist / psychotherapist how would you explain 'exam / test anxiety' ?

Exam Anxiety is a common form of anxiety that erupts when the individual has experienced pressure in terms of his/ her performance in every aspect of their academic life. One can also refer to exam anxiety as '*performance anxiety*'. Our society operates through judgments about others. Our position in the society or family is usually decided *in comparison with others'* performance or position. So there is a constant pressure building over those who are doing anything, like a job or studying. The student can feel unworthy of his parents/ teacher's, friend's love and acceptance, due to poor academic performance.

■ During the countdown to exams, children get very stressed. What are some of the 'stressors' in school-students' lives?

A lot of focus and resources have been placed on the *mental health crisis* among the youth, in recent years. Yet, the crisis appears to be getting worse, not better. The media and word of mouth often carry tales of young ones running away from home or relying on chemical stimulants / brain-foggers, or in the worst case scenario. . .snuffing their lives out well before their time. Today's youth have a *resilience deficit* and the so-called *stressors* in their lives can result from a number of reasons, like - peer pressure, parents' expectations, piled up assignments from coaching centers as well as schools, absence of rigorous physical activity, imbalanced and irregular diet that upsets the circadian rhythm of the body and imbalances the metabolism, not having enough friends, or not being in the same class as their friends, inter-personal conflicts, constant comparison by the parents and teachers, social media following, no '*me*' time, inter alia.

■ Do diet and sleep have any effect on a student's mental health? What is your recommendation?

Diet and Sleep are the basic drives for all human beings. Inadequate food and sleep create disruptions in the optimum physiological functions of the body as well as in the mind, creating imbalances in the functioning of an individual. Ironically, despite having in-depth texts on the science of food, sleep, body and mind in the form of Ayurveda, we have not taught our children about the basics of healthy life. We have failed to share the ancient wisdom with our children. In lieu of such important guidance missing from us adults, our children are mostly looking at food as an *emotional compensation* or a *pleasurable act*. Our relation to food, our reverence to food and body are missing from our daily practices. The same goes with sleep. . .the basic science behind proper sleep is not a part of our interaction with our children. There are hardly any bedtime rituals in terms of preparing oneself for a restful time. We sleep with our mobiles and wake up with a thought of being online. Digital devices are a known cause of stress, for any age group.

■ Do you feel the new examination pattern and reforms proposed by NEP 2020 will have any role to play in reducing stress and anxiety in students?

Unless we change the approach our kids have towards education and exam; external changes can help us achieve only limited targets. The changes brought in through NEP may bring in some relaxation in the way students approach their exams, but the major onus lies on how students are *conditioned* by their parents and teachers, to view their exam performance or outcome. We need to reiterate the fact to our children that they are loved *irrespective* of how they perform in any exam- academics or sports or for that matter any high stake event. Exam performances do *not* determine the students' self-worth. The entire focus of NEP 2020 is to nullify any element of stress in education - be it reducing the curriculum, aiming for competency based education, choice of subjects and re-attempts to improve performance.



Your talent is
God's gift to
you.

What you do
with it,
is your
gift to God.

■ **What would you advise Schools, Teachers, Parents to bear in mind to help students face exams with calmness and confidence?**

We must understand that every child is unique. The global panorama of success is changing rapidly, so defining success only in terms of academic performance is myopic. Each child has a right to blossom at his/her own pace. Schools need to get out of their mindset to reap benefits from students' successes in exams. Please understand, if students are healthy and happy even after 6-7 hours of schooling, that is the biggest achievement as a school. Putting undue pressure upon the students, running after 100% result in exams, is an unhealthy practice. Parents must also learn to set the children free from chasing or accomplishing their own unfulfilled-dreams. Encouraging a child to live true to one's potential is necessary for creating a healthy future. Only when children feel reassured of their parents and teachers' love, will they be able to perform without any pressure and realize their potential.

■ **"I don't know anything." OR "My mind is blank!" are comments we hear from some students while attempting high stake exams. What may be the reason for their mind to freeze in this way?**

Freezing happens in a state of extreme fear. *Flight, Fight, Freeze* or *Fawn*- are the 4 ways in which our mind reacts when faced with extreme challenges leading to fear. Freezing and Brain-fog occur when the individual struggles to have a clear perception of his/her situation. Extreme stress and anxiety about the exam performance leads to a state of being numb or not being able to recall what has been learned. The students jump to conclusions in their minds about their exam performance. As educators, we need to incorporate practices in our education system that support the students in focusing upon enjoying the process of learning instead of worrying about the results.



Each child has a right to grow and
develop at their own pace.

■ **Your final word...**

Finally, I wish to highlight some aspects that I hope reflect in education :

- Instilling the *love for learning* in students instead of fear of exams or results.
- *Some amount of stress is necessary* in life, to wake up and work towards our goals. In the absence of any stress, we tend to become lazy and complacent. So always tell children the importance of having *optimum stress*. Needless to say, this must be balanced with the proper information about negative stress or distress and the ways to avoid it.
- Parents need to *create an environment of discipline* at home. Discipline in every aspect- discipline of lifestyle, discipline in speech, discipline in thought etc. All the family members must follow the discipline. There can't be different rules for children and adults.
- There should be a *balanced routine ALWAYS* - not just 2 months before exams. A *synergistic* balance of Academics, Diet, Sleep, Exercise/ sports etc.
- Every individual's body has its own *adaptability*. Know how your child's body reacts / responds to the cycles of time; e.g. some children may be more comfortable reading in the late evening hours while some may find it easier to wake up early morning. There is *no "one size fits all" approach*.
- *Be watchful* of any signs of anxiety or depression in your children. Mental health is an equally important aspect of a child's holistic wellbeing.

Our role is to make young people aware that they *do NOT have* a 'resilience deficit.' Rather, we must empower them with the confidence that they *CAN* uncover their *built-in mental health, wellbeing* and *resilience* to overcome their challenges and realise their extraordinary potential in life.



REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

-A growth mindset for self-improvement during Countdown

Reflective Practice is a modern term and an evolving framework, for an ancient method of self-improvement. **Reflection** allows one to identify and appreciate positive experiences, identify gaps, and better identify ways to improve one's practices, processes and performance. It can also be useful when one has had more challenging experiences and made mistakes; thereby helping one to process and learn from them. **Reflective Practice** can be used in every facet of one's life, but when used to review an exam experience, "...it can improve one's performance, enhance engagement, and boost motivation", explains *Edel Walsh*.

In this article we shall focus on how **Reflective Practice** is vital for self-improvement while *counting-down to the finish!* Teachers can use the insights and tips herein, to help students dig deep into the final and most focused preparation required.

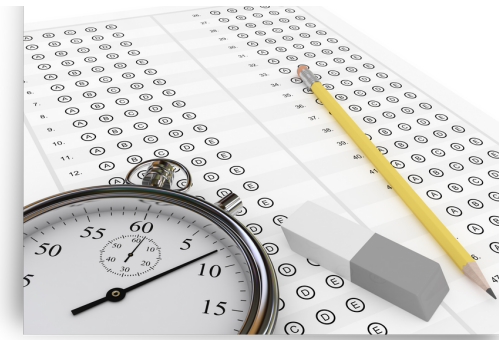
1. Effective Qs for Reflection

Here are some useful questions to help students in their reflective practice on - exam preparation, performance during past exams and what they might do differently for forthcoming ultimate exams. Writing answers to these can have a greater impact and can be read again later:

Exam preparation	Exam performance	Future exams
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What learning strategies were most/least helpful? • How do you learn best? • Were you deep learning or surface learning? • Did you use all the resources available to you? • How realistic was your study schedule? • When do you know you have really learned a topic? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you have enough time to answer all the questions in the exam? • Which topics or subjects were you least/most confident answering? • How did you feel during the exam? • Did you use any stress management techniques? • What did you learn from this exam? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What study strategies will you continue using in the future? • What changes do you need to make? • What have you learned from this experience? • Who can support you going forward?

2. Addressing Common Reflections

There are often common themes that come up for students, after they have reflected on their exam preparation and performance. As their teacher, use the countdown period to address *common reflection indicators* and also draw their attention to what *needs to be done* to avoid the pitfalls. Where possible, assign 'study buddies'.



3. Time Management

Exams are designed to be completed within a *given time frame*. Finishing an exam too early can be as big a red flag as not completing it in time. A student might accidentally skip a question or mis-read a requirement. A more common mistake students make is *spending too much time on one question*. They might have been confident about the subject matter and written too much. It is important for students to remember that, no matter how much information one can give on a topic, note the marks. Once time is up, it's up! Move on to the next Qs.

Even as they attempt mock papers, tell students that a good solution for time management is to *answer the easy questions first*. This will build confidence in time management. They can always go back to the difficult questions later in the exam. When time starts running out, students tend to get flustered and make mistakes. Guide them to slow down, deep breathe and use positive self-talk. Tell them to whisper to themselves, "*You can do this!*" — and then do it!

RELATED TERMS:

Reflexivity - *Reflexivity is the process of 'stepping back' from a situation we are involved in, for a 'helicopter view' of ourselves. Here we examine ourselves to gauge our values, assumptions, behaviour and relationships, and thereby monitor our learning and develop our intra-personal and inter-personal skills (equating to self-management, and external relationships).*

Critical Reflection - *Critical Reflection is the adoption of a questioning stance to solve problems, challenge the 'status quo' and examine our own assumptions. Apart from reflection of academics, this extends to consideration of wider socio-political perspectives and other relevant diverse contexts, theory and professional activity.*

Critical self-reflection - *"To know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, rather than legitimating what is already known ... a test of the limits that we may go beyond" .*

Reflector, critical reflector, non-reflector - *Terms derived from the above, referring to the 'people' and the type/extent of reflection they use. For example:*

- *'the reflector'* refers to a person who uses reflection of some sort.
- *'the critical reflector'* specifically refers to someone who uses Reflective Practice as a learning tool to question and evaluate themselves, others and situations.
- *'the non-reflector'* is a person who rarely or never uses reflection.

4. Stress and Anxiety

It is very natural and very common for students to feel a little stressed or anxious in the *run-up to* or *during* an exam. Because of this, students often say their "*mind went blank*" during the exam. Working on one's inner calm is important in the countdown period.

For their next exam, you can help students to learn how to *calm their nerves*. Help them to practice *breathwork* before their practice tests (which, most of them must be attempting) and it will come naturally to them during the final exam.

You can teach them a simple method - *breathe in deeply for four seconds, hold for four seconds, breath out for four seconds and hold for four seconds*. By doing this simple exercise, it will calm their nerves and help them to focus (closed eyes improve this experience). Even the *Yogic Anulom Vilom* controlled breathing technique helps (in which breathwork is with one closed nostril).

For students whose stress levels tend to be very high, be sure to talk to them (or ask your school Counsellor to do so), and help them to see that you there to help; teach them some relaxation techniques or give some sound advice to ease their anxiety.

“ If you are ready to *be more*,
you have *more and more to do*.

5. Final Note

After reflecting on their exam performance and experience, ask students to *make an action plan* for the forthcoming test! Ask them to consider the following questions.

- What is your goal for your next exam?
- What study/learning strategies are you going to put in place?
- What study/learning strategies need to be changed or abandoned to achieve your goal?

Self-reflection can come easily to some and not so easily to others. However, even if some of the students are in the latter category, it is still worth their while to try out the suggested techniques, as they really can improve their preparation, engagement, motivation and performance. ***

SCIENCE RIB TICKLERS:

- 'Geology Rocks!'
- What does the thermometer say to the cylinder? "*You may have graduated, but I sure have more degrees than you.*"
- Why do geographers find mountains so funny? *Because they're hill areas.*
- A photon walks into a hotel and is asked if he needs any help with his luggage. *The photon replies: "No thanks, I'm traveling light."*
- Never trust an atom.. *they make up everything.*
- Chemists are always great at solving problems because *they have all the solutions.*
- Reading a book on antigravity at the moment... *I just can't put it down.*
- Since light travels faster than sound, people may appear smart *until you hear them speak.*

REVISION TIPS:

Making a realistic revision schedule - Guide students to work out how much they have to do and the time left to do it in. Then break it down into manageable chunks and help them to develop a time-bound schedule. Ask them to aim to do a few hours of revision each day, and mix up 2/3 subjects, so as not get bored.

Find a revision style that suits them - Studying alone in a quiet room suits some kids, but not everyone likes working in silence. For some, playing music quietly in the background, or revising with a friend can help (but not if buddy-study distracts them).

Customising to personalise notes - Students can try colour coding, notes on postcards, diagrams or whatever helps them to learn a topic. Using a word-wall, mnemonics can help.

Understanding everything is vital - If students come across something they do not understand, guide them try to find a new source of information that will help *understand* it. Just memorising it will not help for the exam. They can ask you or a friend for help if they need it.

Past exam papers - Students can familiarise themselves with the layout and type of questions they'll be asked. Practising *completing exam papers in the set time limit* can improve their exam technique and performance.

Take regular short breaks - Studying for hours and hours will only make kids tired and ruin their concentration, which may make them even more anxious. A break every 45- 60 minutes is about right, so give them this tip.

Chilling! - Students can be told to be *kind* to themselves and find time to just chill! They can enjoy a long bath / watch a good short movie once revision session is finished as per plan.

Doing something physical - Students can use their spare time (when not studying), to get away from books and do something active. Exercise is good for taking the mind off stress and keeping kids positive, and helping them to sleep better.

Asking for help - When stressed, it's important for kids to talk to someone they trust - a family member, teacher or a friend. Many kids find exams difficult to deal with, so they must not be embarrassed to seek help.



MADDIE'S SCARY EXAM

- by **Tosh Cole**

This book narrates the story of Maddie, a school-going girl child. Maddie's big exams are near, but she feels she isn't ready for them even after months of preparation. That's when her mother steps in and motivates her to develop inner strength and confidence to face this and other challenges. She also helps Maddie develop other virtues such as empathy and community spirit.

EXAM WARRIORS

-by **Narendra Modi**

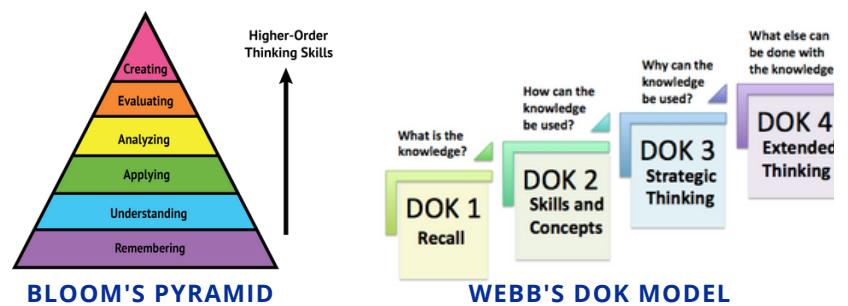
Be warriors, not worriers, advises PM Modi in this book specially written to motivate students preparing to write school and college exams. *Exam Warriors* is replete with winning mantras, including yoga, for all in education to overcome exam stress.

WEBB'S DEPTH OF KNOWLEDGE

With NEP 2020 promoting **Competency Based Education**, teachers, parents and students need to make a *major shift* in their mindset about *moving away* from textbook based, rote memorisation to developing *competencies*. Teaching Learning Designs, Plans and Activities, as well as Evidences of Learning will now move from plain facts at lower order thinking skills to applied knowledge and skills, with depth of knowledge.

Two names that educators may be familiar with respect to 'depth of knowledge' are :

- (1) **Benjamin Bloom** (his famous Bloom's Pyramid), and
- (2) **Norman Webb's** (DoK level-wise model)



Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DoK) may be familiar to many from a *theoretical* perspective, but it can be challenging to apply practically and consistently in teaching strategies. It demands creativity and calculated preparation to deliver engaging *tasks that range in complexity*; all while providing *scaffolding*.

As you can see from above, there are **4 levels of thinking**.

DoK1 : Recall

DoK2 : Skills & Concepts (also known a *Application*)

DoK3 : Strategic Thinking

DoK4 : Extended Thinking

Here are some ideas for activities you can use to implement *DoK*.

Activity for Level 1 DoK: Depending on the *Q's purpose*, kids can:

- Paraphrase a passage or chapter of a book
- Outline and re-iterate the main points of a recent lesson
- Take a quiz / set of questions that requires fact recall or fluency
- Make a timeline that maps historical or storybook events in relation to each other
- Deliver a short presentation to classmates that doesn't require independent research

Activity for Level 2 DoK: Using *Qs as starting points*, kids can:

- Write blog, diary or journal entries
- Review texts in pairs or small groups
- Complete isolated, multi-step calculations
- Synthesize an explanation of a complex concept
- Create mind maps that show relationships between topics
- Design a physical model to demonstrate a scientific concept or historical event

These activities are *time-flexible*, lending themselves to many kinds of lessons and assignments.



FOR STUDENTS

MATHSKETBALL: A STORY OF TEST ANXIETY

- by **Erainna Winnett**

Recommended for Ages 12-17 : Ethan excels in almost every subject, except math. When it comes to test time, the numbers turn into some kind of alien language. His best friend, Jack helps him to relax by playing a quick game of *Mathsketball*. With each shot Jack asks Ethan a math question, the one with the most correct answers wins! With help from his teacher, Mrs. Alexander, who gives Ethan tips on how to relax before and during a test, can Ethan take his mad mathsketball skills into the classroom and learn to overcome his test anxiety? This book offers children a range of strategies and eight printable activity pages they can use to help ease test anxiety. *Printables available at : CounselingwithHEART.com*

Activity for Level 3 DoK: Activities and products associated with the above questions shouldn't inherently involve long-term research or drawing ideas from different subjects. That would extend into the final Depth of Knowledge level. Keeping this in mind, third-level activities could include:

- Writing an essay
- Composing Venn diagrams
- Exploring a research question
- Delivering a persuasive speech
- Preparing and participating in a debate
- Completing complex equations related to real-world problems

These may all seem like *solo* assignments, but some (such as preparing debate points), can involve cooperative learning. Keep this in mind if you feel classroom engagements dwindle due to lack of group work.

Activity for Level 4 DoK: Activities that require these longer periods of critical thought lend themselves to high school or older elementary students. But, with a few changes, you can offer similar activities to younger pupils. For example, students can work in small groups to form and test hypotheses under in-class supervision. They can also:

- Debate on one side of a contentious issue (you can use the
- Partner or group with other students to complete a cross-subject research report and presentation
- Apply lessons from different subjects to pinpoint a problem's underlying issues, subsequently solving it

As they finish products, you'll gain clear insight into each student's distinct thought processes.

Finally, whether you see it as basic or complex, effectively applying the **DoK** theory in your classroom takes practice. Using the questions, examples, activities and strategies in this guide should help you to begin. Try to craft engaging lessons that vary in cognitive effort, push for holistic development and world-readiness competencies. ***

QED News

Counting down to AY 2023-24!

The countdown for schools and teachers has also begun, which is why they are super busy over the next 2 months!

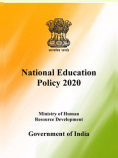

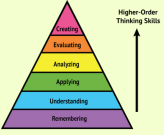











? Are YOU ready for AY '23-'24?

? Do you have the required training, skills, systems, formats, activities, plans and designs in place to prepare for NEP 2020 implementation?

If yes, congratulations!

If NO, we can help you with Training Offerings 🙌 (popular topics).

We at **QEDRAK** too are in a *reflective practice* mode - taking stock of where we are, what we accomplished, what we need to do further, to offer our best and the latest in *meaningful educational services* for the coming year.

						
Understanding NEP 2020	Moving ahead with NCF-FNDL	Bloom's Taxonomy	Competency Based Education	Goal Setting & Measuring Achievement	Mastering MCQs for Meaningful Assessments	Assessments - the Need, Types, CBA
						
Circle Time	Integrated Learning	21st Century Skills & 6Cs	Design Thinking	Netiquette for Netizens	Building Empathy in the classroom	Collaborative Learning

For other Training Topics please write to us at: team@qedrak.com

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The March 2023 issue will focus on "New Beginnings".

Please send your contributions of an effective classroom strategy / class humour / vocab word / a featured article / book titles, to - team@qedrak.com



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ENRICH



EMPOWER



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ELEVATE