Teacher's Key

Cognitive Reappraisal: Can Rethinking Nerves Help You? (Level B2)

Vocabulary Matching

1 pounding = **N**
2 cognitive reappraisal = **A**
3 gearing up = **H**
4 standardized = **L**
5 contrary to popular belief = **G**
6 arousal = **M**
7 follow-up = **I**
8 caveats = **E**
9 tentative = **D**
10 marker = **O**
11 nonverbal = **J**
12 simulated = **K**
13 overwhelming = **B**
14 remedy = **C**
15 nuisance = **F**

Fill in the Blank

1 pounding
2 cognitive reappraisal
3 gearing up
4 arousal
5 standardized
6 contrary to popular belief
7 follow-up
8 caveats
9 tentative
10 marker
11 nonverbal
12 simulated
13 overwhelming
14 remedy

True or False

1 **True.** Paragraph 1 asks whether the meaning matters as much as the signals themselves.
2 **False.** The feeling stays. What changes is the story attached to it.
3 **False.** Some students read it. The others heard only the standard instructions.
4 **True.** They scored about 55 points higher on math.
5 **False.** There was no difference on the verbal section.
6 **True.** Fewer than half of the volunteers took the real test in time.
7 **False.** The reading says they could not say exactly how the effect worked.
8 **False.** A marker of arousal rose in that group.
9 **True.** The video improved posture and eye contact.
10 **True.** Paragraph 7 describes the benefit as small.

Language Focus: Second Conditional

Example answer: If I could change one thing about how I feel before exams, I **would** stop worrying about my heartbeat.

Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

1 A pounding heart, damp palms, and a stomach that feels tied in knots. Most people call this anxiety and assume it will ruin their performance.

2 Reappraisal leaves the feeling in place and changes the story attached to it. Telling yourself to calm down tries to remove the feeling.

3 Some students read an extra paragraph saying that the arousal that comes with anxiety does not harm test performance and may even help. The other students heard only the standard instructions.

4 On the practice test, the paragraph group scored about 55 points higher on math, with no difference on verbal. On the real GRE, they scored about 64 points higher on math. The effect appeared on math only.

5 Two caveats: fewer than half of the volunteers took the real test in time, so fewer than thirty students were compared; and the researchers could not say how the effect worked (for example, changed preparation, or remembering the message on test day).

6 If the paragraph had worked by calming students down, the saliva samples would show less arousal. They showed more in the paragraph group, and bigger rises tended to go with better math scores. So the benefit did not come from lowering arousal.

7 Anxiety and excitement are both high-energy states, so changing the label may be easier than switching the energy off. Accept a reasoned answer about keeping the energy and changing its meaning.

8 It adds evidence from outside the United States and from a real skill, giving bad news to a patient. The video improved nonverbal communication, such as posture and eye contact, but not the choice of words, so the benefit had limits.

9 Encouraging: a review found a small average benefit, and the Swiss trial and the excitement experiments point the same way. Not overwhelming: the average benefit is small, and the 2026 study across 12 science courses found no effect. Accept reasoned answers.

10 Not Given. The reading does not say how the students felt during the real GRE.

11 No. The writer says reappraisal does not replace preparation, and that a doctor or counselor can offer more help if anxiety regularly interferes with sleeping, studying, or sitting exams.

12 Best answer: to invite the reader to try the idea and think about it, since the evidence is mixed. Accept an argument for proving the technique works only if it notices that the writer states the limits and never claims proof.

Notes on the Evidence

- Main experiment: Jamieson, Mendes, Blackstock, and Schmader, 2010, Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 46(1):208-212 (read in the Harvard DASH author copy). Sixty students planning to take the GRE were recruited, and 28 returned with real score reports one to three months later, so about half were lost. The paper says those who did not take the test differed on GPA and preparation, but not by condition. Practice math means were 738.57 (paragraph group) and 683.57 (control), about 55 points. Real GRE math means were 770.00 and 705.71, about 64 points. Verbal showed no effect in either test. Scores are on the 200 to 800 scale per section used in the paper. The paragraph in the screenshot supplied with the request matches the paper's wording.
- Corrections to the reel: (a) The reel says the paragraph was read right before a high-stakes test. In the paper it was read before a practice test in the laboratory, one to three months before the real exam. (b) The reel says the researchers expected the paragraph to calm students down. The paper predicted an increase in a measure of sympathetic activity, so the reading does not say this. (c) The reel says Harvard students. The paper says only that 60 students planning to take the GRE were recruited. The authors were at Harvard (Jamieson, Mendes, Blackstock) and the University of British Columbia (Schmader), so the reading says researchers at Harvard University. (d) The reel says that the more arousal rose, the better students did. In the paper this link (r = .57) holds for math scores in the paragraph group only, about 14 students, and not for the control group or the verbal section, so the reading says tended to go with. The reel itself could not be watched; the transcript and screenshot supplied were used.
- Saliva marker: salivary alpha-amylase (sAA), a measure of sympathetic nervous system activity. Change from baseline was +24.86 in the paragraph group and -10.66 in the control group ($t(26) = 2.57$, $p = .016$); the control change was not significant. sAA is a marker of arousal, not a direct measure of anxiety. The mechanism is unproven: the authors suggest the effect may have come through changed preparation or through students remembering the message on test day, and the reading says so.
- Other studies: Brooks, 2014, Journal of Experimental Psychology: General 143(3):1144-1158 (Harvard Business School), covering karaoke singing, public speaking, and math; the abstract compares reappraising anxiety as excitement with trying to calm down. An American Psychological Association summary reports 188 participants in the math study, with the excited group scoring about 8 percent higher than the calm and no-message groups. The reading simplifies the conditions. The abstract and press summaries were read, not the full paper. Swiss trial: Bosshard and colleagues, 2025, Medical Education 59(8):853-861. It analyzed 221 third-year medical students from four Swiss universities, used a 7-minute video, and a simulated disclosure of a prenatal diagnosis to an actor. Reappraisal improved nonverbal ratings ($p = .039$) but not verbal ones. A worked-example video improved both, and combining the two gave no extra gain.
- Limits of the evidence: Bosshard and Gomez, 2024, Scientific Reports 14:7923. It pooled 44 effect sizes from 35 studies ($d = 0.23$, 95% CI 0.14 to 0.33) and covers both stress arousal reappraisal and stress-is-enhancing mindset interventions; the authors call the overall effect small and say these interventions are not silver bullets. Only the abstract and search excerpts were read. Thormodsaeter and colleagues, 2026, CBE Life Sciences Education 25(1):ar9, tested a reappraisal intervention in 12 courses at seven institutions; the abstract reports no effect on self-reported test anxiety or performance. The full text could not be fetched (the site blocked the request), so details of the intervention and sample come from the abstract and search excerpts only. Newer studies may have appeared since.
- Guidance basis: the advice to look for help when anxiety regularly interferes with sleep, study, or exams follows NHS guidance on exam stress, which says to get help when anxiety or low mood is severe, persists, and interferes with everyday life (nhs.uk, coping with exam stress, written for parents of children and young people; seen in search results in October 2026, not opened). Noticing and naming sensations and saying that the body is getting ready are general reappraisal practices used in the studies above, not a treatment. No dosages or diagnoses are given.