Reframing Stress

How Nerves Can Become Fuel for Performance | Level B2 | EnglishBridges.com

Before You Read

Discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Think of the last time you felt very nervous before something important. What happened in your body?
2. What do you usually do or say to yourself to feel less nervous? Does it work?
3. How might people feel about stress differently depending on their age, job, or culture?

Reading: Reframing Stress

Before an interview or an exam, your heart starts **pounding**. Most people tell themselves to calm down, but it rarely works. Some researchers suggest a different idea. They say we should **reframe** the feeling and tell ourselves we are excited.

When we face a challenge, the stress response sends a **surge** of energy to the muscles and the brain. Very similar signals appear when we look forward to something. Whether we **interpret** a racing heart as fear or as excitement depends partly on us.

Rebecca Heiss, an American stress physiologist, wrote a 2025 book called Springboard. She argues that trying to **eliminate** stress is unrealistic. She describes stress as energy and advises people to **channel** it toward the task. Her first step is a question: is it a tiger? In other words, will this harm you in the next few minutes? Next, she suggests turning fear into **curiosity**. Finally, take one small step toward the problem.

Some studies support the idea. At Harvard, people sang, gave speeches, or did math problems. Those who first said "I am excited" did better than those who said "I am calm." Judges rated their speeches as more **persuasive**. In another study, students who were told a racing heart helps did better on tests. Their hearts also pumped more **efficiently**. A 30-minute online lesson for high school and university students taught a stress-can-help **mindset**. It lowered the stress hormone cortisol and led to a **boost** in academic results.

Still, it is easy to **overstate** what reframing can do. When researchers repeated the speech experiment in 2025, people felt more excited, but their speeches were not rated any better. These ideas are for short challenges, not **chronic** stress, **burnout**, or anxiety disorders, which may need rest or professional help. Next time you feel nervous before a big moment, **acknowledge** the feeling, say "I'm excited," and take one small step.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

Complete each sentence with a word or phrase from the box. Use each one once.

persuasive **interpret** **curiosity** **channel** **reframe** **overstate** **burnout** **surge** **boost** **chronic** **pounding** **eliminate** **mindset** **efficiently**

1. After running up the stairs, I could feel my heart _____ in my chest.
2. A good coach helps players _____ a defeat as useful practice for the next game.
3. A sudden _____ of electricity damaged the computer.
4. Doctors need special training to _____ the results of a brain scan.
5. The company wants to _____ all paper forms by next year.
6. After the argument, she tried to _____ her anger into her painting.
7. Babies explore everything with great _____.
8. The lawyer made a _____ case, and the jury agreed with her.
9. Good managers use their team's time _____.
10. Successful athletes often talk about having a winning _____.
11. The new park has given a _____ to local businesses.
12. Newspapers sometimes _____ the danger of a storm to attract readers.
13. He has suffered from _____ headaches since he was a teenager.
14. After months of working every weekend, the nurse was suffering from _____.

Word Partners: Collocations and Word Families

Part A. Collocations

Match the two halves to make common phrases. Write the letter on the line.

1. a pounding	_____	**a.** a dream
2. a sudden surge	_____	**b.** the risk completely
3. interpret	_____	**c.** curiosity
4. eliminate	_____	**d.** into something useful
5. channel your anger	_____	**e.** argument
6. out of	_____	**f.** mindset
7. a persuasive	_____	**g.** of electricity
8. a growth	_____	**h.** headache

Now choose three of the phrases and write your own sentences.

Part B. Word families

Complete each sentence with the correct form of the word in brackets.

1. She tried to _____ her parents to let her travel alone. (*persuasive*)
2. The new machine is much more _____ than the old one. (*efficiently*)
3. The _____ of plastic bags from shops has reduced waste. (*eliminate*)
4. There are many possible _____ of the poem. (*interpret*)
5. He is a _____ person who asks questions about everything. (*curiosity*)
6. The report was an _____ of how serious the problem is. (*overstate*)

Comprehension Questions

Answer in full sentences.

1. What do most people tell themselves before a stressful moment, and how well does it work?

2. What happens in the body during the stress response?
3. Why can the same racing heart feel like fear or like excitement?
4. How does Rebecca Heiss describe stress, and what does she advise people to do with it?
5. What does the question "Is it a tiger?" help people check?
6. What did people say before the tasks in the Harvard experiments, and what were the results?
7. What did the short online lesson teach, and what did it lead to?
8. What did researchers find when they repeated the speech experiment in 2025?
9. For which problems is reframing not enough, according to the reading? What might help instead?
10. **True, False, or Not Given:** *"Heiss has written more than one book about stress."* Explain your answer using the reading.
11. **Yes, No, or Not Given:** *"The writer believes that reframing can replace professional help for anxiety disorders."* Explain your answer using the reading.
12. **Author's purpose:** Why does the writer mention the 2025 repeat of the speech experiment? Is it (a) to prove that reframing never works, (b) to show that the evidence for reframing has limits, or (c) to explain how to give a better speech?

True or False

Circle T (true) or F (false). Be ready to correct the false sentences.

1. The writer says that telling yourself to calm down usually works well. **T / F**
2. Very similar body signals appear when we look forward to something. **T / F**
3. The body gives fear and excitement completely different physical signals. **T / F**
4. Heiss believes it is realistic to eliminate stress completely. **T / F**
5. Heiss describes stress as energy. **T / F**
6. In the Harvard experiments, people who said "I am excited" did better than people who said "I am calm." **T / F**
7. Students who saw a racing heart as helpful did worse on their tests. **T / F**
8. The online lesson was taken by high school and university students. **T / F**
9. The 2025 repeat of the speech study found that the speeches were rated better. **T / F**
10. The writer says reframing is not a cure for burnout. **T / F**

Language Focus: Verb + Object + As: How We See Things

Verb + object + as + noun or adjective tells us how someone sees or describes something.
Common verbs: *see*, *view*, *describe*, *interpret*, *treat*, *regard*, *rate*, *reframe*.
With a noun: *She describes stress as energy.*
With an adjective: *Judges rated their speeches as more persuasive.*
From the reading:
"Whether we interpret a racing heart as fear or as excitement depends partly on us."
"She describes stress as energy and advises people to channel it toward the task."
Tip: Use *as*, not *like*, in this pattern: *see stress as energy*. Do not add *to be* after *see* or *describe*.

Part A. Sentence starters

Finish each sentence so that it is true for you. Use as + a noun or adjective.

1. Before an exam, I usually see my nerves as _____
2. Most of my friends would describe me as _____
3. I used to view homework as _____
4. In my family, people tend to treat mistakes as _____
5. If I am honest, I would rate my public speaking skills as

_____

Part B. Questions

Answer each question in a full sentence. Try to use verb + object + as. *Then ask a partner.*

6. How do you see social media: mostly as a help or as a problem?
7. How would you describe your hometown to a visitor?
8. Which job do you regard as the most stressful?
9. How do you interpret it when a friend does not reply to a message for a day?
10. Do you see a deadline as a threat or as a challenge?

Discussion Questions

Discuss with a partner or in a small group. Give reasons and examples.

1. What situations make you most nervous: exams, interviews, speaking in public, or something else?
2. Have you ever noticed that nerves helped you perform better? What happened?
3. Would you feel comfortable saying "I'm excited" out loud before an exam or a speech? Why or why not?
4. Think of something that stresses you this week. Is it a tiger? How would Heiss's question change how you see it?
5. How do athletes or performers you admire seem to deal with pressure?
6. Which do you find harder to manage: short moments of stress or stress that lasts for weeks? Why?
7. Do you agree with Heiss that trying to eliminate stress is unrealistic? Give an example.
8. Why do you think the 2025 repeat of the speech study did not find better speeches?
9. Is it possible that telling people to see stress as positive could make some of them feel worse? How?
10. Should schools teach students how to reframe stress, as the online lesson did? What might be the benefits and the risks?
11. Who is responsible for reducing stress at work or school: individuals or the organization? Explain.
12. Popular speakers often present research in a simple way. Why might this be useful, and why might it be a problem?
13. How do you know when stress has become burnout, and what should a person do then?
14. Do you think attitudes to stress differ between generations or cultures? Give examples you have noticed.

Online Practice

Scan the code or visit **englishbridges.com/lessons/reframing-stress** for the full reading, vocabulary activities, the Speed Challenge, typing practice, and AI conversation prompts.