Reframing Stress

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Sections follow the student handout. Delete a section here when you delete it from the handout. The handout uses the short (quick) version of the reading.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

1. pounding
2. reframe
3. surge
4. interpret
5. eliminate
6. channel
7. curiosity
8. persuasive
9. efficiently
10. mindset
11. boost
12. overstate
13. chronic
14. burnout / burn-out

Word Partners

Part A. 1 h 2 g 3 a 4 b 5 d 6 c 7 e 8 f

Phrases: a pounding headache; a sudden surge of electricity; interpret a dream; eliminate the risk completely; channel your anger into something useful; out of curiosity; a persuasive argument; a growth mindset.

Part B. 1 persuade 2 efficient 3 elimination 4 interpretations 5 curious 6 overstatement

Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

1. *What do most people tell themselves before a stressful moment, and how well does it work?*
Most people tell themselves to calm down, but the writer says it rarely works.

2. *What happens in the body during the stress response?*
The heart beats faster, breathing speeds up, and a surge of energy reaches the muscles and the brain.

3. *Why can the same racing heart feel like fear or like excitement?*
Very similar body signals appear when we are afraid and when we are looking forward to something. Whether we interpret a racing heart as fear or as excitement depends partly on us.

4. *How does Rebecca Heiss describe stress, and what does she advise people to do with it?*
She describes stress as energy. She advises people to channel that energy toward the task instead of trying to eliminate stress.

5. *What does the question "Is it a tiger?" help people check?*
It helps them check whether the thing will actually harm them in the next few minutes. Usually it will not.

6. *What did people say before the tasks in the Harvard experiments, and what were the results?*
Some said "I am excited" and others said "I am calm." The excited group did better: they sang more accurately, gave more persuasive speeches, and scored higher in math.

7. *What did the short online lesson teach, and what did it lead to?*
It taught a stress-can-help mindset, together with the belief that abilities can grow. It lowered levels of the stress hormone cortisol and led to a boost in academic results.

8. *What did researchers find when they repeated the speech experiment in 2025?*
Saying "I am excited" made people feel more excited, but judges did not rate their speeches any better.

9. *For which problems is reframing not enough, according to the reading? What might help instead?*
Chronic stress, burnout, and anxiety disorders. These may need rest, real changes at work or school, or

professional help.

10. *True, False, or Not Given: "Heiss has written more than one book about stress." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    Not Given. The reading mentions only one book, Springboard, and does not say whether she has written others. (She has also written Instinct, but the reading does not say so.)
11. *Yes, No, or Not Given: "The writer believes that reframing can replace professional help for anxiety disorders." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    No. The writer says reframing is not a cure for an anxiety disorder, which may call for professional help.
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?*
    (b) To show that the evidence for reframing has limits. The writer says reframing is not magic and that it is easy to overstate what it can do.

True or False

1. **F.** The writer says it rarely works.
2. **T.** Similar signals appear before a first date or a cup final.
3. **F.** Very similar signals appear in both cases, and the body does not label them.
4. **F.** She argues that trying to eliminate stress is unrealistic.
5. **T.** She describes stress as energy that can be channeled toward the task.
6. **T.** The excited group sang more accurately, gave more persuasive speeches, and scored higher in math.
7. **F.** They did better on the practice test and on the real exam.
8. **T.** It taught high school and university students a stress-can-help mindset.
9. **F.** Judges did not rate the speeches any better.
10. **T.** Reframing is not a cure for chronic stress, burnout, or an anxiety disorder.

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

Model answers. Accept any answer that uses the form correctly and makes sense.

1. Before an exam, I usually see my nerves as a bad sign.
2. Most of my friends would describe me as calm and funny.
3. I used to view homework as a waste of time, but now I see it as practice.
4. In my family, people tend to treat mistakes as normal.
5. If I am honest, I would rate my public speaking skills as average.
6. I see social media mostly as a help, because it keeps me in touch with friends.
7. I would describe my hometown as small but friendly.
8. I regard nursing as the most stressful job.
9. I usually interpret it as a sign that they are busy.
10. I see a deadline as a challenge, because it helps me focus.

Accept any thinking or describing verb that fits the pattern (see, view, regard, describe, treat, interpret).

Notes on the Evidence

Heiss (paragraph 3): described as a stress physiologist and biologist on speaker-agency pages; author of Springboard (Ideapress, 2 September 2025, per Kirkus) and the earlier Instinct. The "Is it a tiger?" question, curiosity step, and small-steps advice are from her podcast interview on Awesome at Your Job (episode 1092, 11 September 2025) and the Kirkus summary of the book. These are her recommendations, not tested findings. Kirkus criticized the book for sometimes blurring everyday stress with serious trauma; the reading limits her advice to everyday challenges.

Harvard experiments (paragraph 4): Brooks, "Get Excited: Reappraising Pre-Performance Anxiety as Excitement," Journal of Experimental Psychology: General (2014; online December 2013); 441 participants across three experiments. Per the APA

press release, karaoke accuracy averaged 80 percent for "excited," 69 percent for calm, angry, or sad, and 53 percent for "anxious"; math scores were about 8 percent higher in the excited group. A Harvard Business School article gives different karaoke figures (81, 69, 53 with "calm" lowest); the APA release, issued with the paper, was followed. The reading gives no percentages. Replication (paragraph 6): Poynter and Pasqualini (2025) repeated the speech study; "I am excited" increased felt excitement but not rated speech quality, as summarized by Exprea from the published abstract. The original replication paper was not opened in full.

Test and physiology studies (paragraph 5): the graduate admissions test study is Jamieson and colleagues (2010), summarized by the Association for Psychological Science (29 August 2012); the real GRE was taken one to three months later. The heart and blood vessel pattern comes from Jamieson's related speech experiments. A 2022 classroom follow-up with 339 community college math students (Jamieson et al., JEP: General) also found better exam results. The online lesson is Yeager et al., Nature (6 July 2022): six studies, 118 to 2,717 participants each; cortisol fell and achievement improved, with the authors calling for larger, more diverse trials. Crum, Salovey, and Achor (2013) is the origin of the "stress mindset" term but is not described in the reading.

Large US study (paragraph 6): Keller et al., Health Psychology (2012): 28,753 adults from the 1998 National Health Interview Survey, followed to 2006. People reporting high stress who also believed stress affected their health a lot had a 43 percent higher risk of premature death. This is an observational association. Heiss (in the podcast) describes the low-risk group as people who saw stress as energy; the study itself measured whether people believed stress affected their health, not whether they saw it as energy. Health advice in paragraph 6 (reframing is not a treatment for chronic stress, burnout, or anxiety disorders) follows mainstream guidance; teachers should refer students with persistent anxiety to professional support.