Stress-Buster Strategies: Talk Back to Academic Anxiety!

What is Anxiety?
- Natural human response to threat
- Invokes physiological “fight “or flight” response
  - increased heart rate; adrenaline flow; rapid, shallow breathing
  - decreased access to cognitive
- Survival value, if threat is real (e.g. a predator) and life-threatening

The Problem of Anxiety
- Most of what we perceive as threatening in modern life is not a life-or-death threat requiring “fight” or “flight”
- In these cases, the anxiety response is not helpful in coping with the perceived threat. Instead, the anxiety itself adds to, or even becomes, the problem
- This happens when:  
  1. We overestimate the threat  
  2. We underestimate our resources to deal with it

How to Talk Back to Academic Anxiety
- “Talk down” the threat! Look it squarely in the face. Is it really as terrifying as you think it is? Assess the situation realistically and rationally. A test is just a test. Your whole future is never at stake
- Breathe! Practice simple, deep breathing exercises regularly so when anxiety hits, you can regain control over your body’s automatic stress response. (See www.yorku.ca/cds/pcs/resources.html for relaxation exercises)
- Practice good self-care no matter how stressed you are, with proper rest and food, regular exercise and/or a stress-reducing routine like yoga or meditation
- Recognize and strengthen your resources to deal with the perceived threat
  - You are not helpless! You are more resourceful than you think!
  - Use positive self-talk. Shift focus away from “worst-case” thinking into more realistic thoughts (“It’s just a test. I’ve passed lots of tests before. I can do it again.”)
  - Access your resources (eg Learning Skills Services; The Writing Department). Build your academic skills. Learn from everything—both good experiences and bad
    - Remind yourself of past successes and identify the skills and strengths you can bring forward from those accomplishments, to help you now
- If stress-reducing strategies don’t help and your anxiety interferes with your ability to function, get help: see your doctor and/or seek counselling