**November 2023**

*Please share with your faculty:*

**Tips for reducing students’ cognitive loads during highly anxious times**

With the ongoing war in Israel, coupled with the stress of midterm assessments, many YU students are suffering from high states of anxiety. Research has shown that there is a strong, positive correlation between students’ anxiety levels and their academic performance (Hawthorne, et al., 2019). According to cognitive load theory (e.g..Chandler and Sweller, 1991) our working memories can only process a certain amount of information at once. Emotional disturbances like anxiety can be taxing on students’ working memories making it difficult for them to concentrate on their academic tasks. Below are some tips for helping to reduce students’ cognitive loads during these highly anxious times so that they can achieve successful academic outcomes:

* Make sure that assignment instructions are explicit and that students have all of the resources that they need to complete the assignment.
* Provide study sheets for exams.
* Consider making exams open book or open notes.
* Make grading expectations transparent by providing students with a corresponding, analytic, grading rubric ahead of time.
* Break larger assignments into smaller assignments with a series of short-term deadlines instead of one big assignment with a long-term deadline. For example, if students are asked to write a final 15 page paper for a course, ask them to first submit an outline towards the beginning of the semester, then the introduction and/or a rough draft during the middle of the semester, and the final paper at the end of the semester.
* Allow for plenty of opportunities for revision of work.
* Encourage students to work on projects and study for tests with their peers so that they do not feel isolated.

Check out:

Paul Chandler & John Sweller (1991) Cognitive Load Theory and the Format of Instruction, Cognition and Instruction, 8:4, 293-332, DOI: [10.1207/s1532690xci0804\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532690xci0804_2)

Hawthorne et al. (2019). Well-being as cognitive-load reducing agent: A review of literature. *Frontiers Education, 23*(4). Retrieved October 30, 2023 from https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2019.00121/full

Kellher, Ian (2022). How to reduce cognitive load on students during lessons. *Edutopia.* Retrieved October 30, 2023 from <https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-reduce-cognitive-load-students-during-lessons/>

**Reminder:** Please contact me if you have any questions about your Fall assessment plans. Thanks very much.