

3.6: STRESS AND ANXIETY

It is not unusual to feel worried and anxious about your performance in the organic chemistry labs. Your concerns might range from anticipated difficulties in the lab (handling of chemicals, dangerous substances) or just your desire to do a good job.

Here are a few strategies that can help mitigate any feelings of anxiety and stress:

1. **Plan ahead.** It sounds simple, but as we have seen from the first chapter, planning is the most important step before undertaking an experiment. Remember to visualize the experiment prior to the lab so you are mentally prepared. This will prepare you for the things you need to do and the decisions you will need to make.
2. **Calm yourself down.** If you feel overwhelmed or anxious, a very effective trick is to make sure your apparatus and chemicals are taken care of, and then simply taking a step back and taking five slow, deep breaths. This calming exercise can mitigate any imminent feelings of discomfort, and help you reassert yourself before moving on.
3. **Communicate with your TA.** If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed or deeply uncomfortable while in the lab, communicate this to your TA. Your TA will help secure your apparatus and material, and potentially have a quick chat about your current state of mind. If necessary, the TA, student and professor will work together to find a plan to assist the student.
4. **Take a break.** If the experience simply gets overwhelming, tell your TA, and take a short break. Leave your lab coat and goggles behind, and go out in the hall, or take a bathroom break.

Remember, lab should be a positive, engaging and interactive learning experience. Although it is natural (and sometimes even helpful) to compare yourself to peers, experiments by their very nature have a variety of outcomes, and you can learn something from all of them. The primary objective in the lab is to focus on what you are doing.¹²

¹² It is also worth mentioning that we have seen incorrect advice spread in the lab through this interaction. This happens because of discussion, when one individual presents an idea or concept to his or her peers, and the other students accepts it. Although someone is free to give their opinion, it is always worth taking it with a grain of salt, and ask your TA if you are unsure.

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