

PREPARING TO READ

Thinking about the topic

Thinking about a topic before you read helps provide a context for the reading and can make it easier to understand.

According to a famous study conducted by psychologists Holmes and Rahe, different life events can be rated according to the amount of stress they are likely to cause. Holmes and Rahe worked out a system in which the most stressful event (the death of a husband or wife) was given a value of 100 points; less stressful events were given values ranging from 99 to 1 points.

1▶ Look at the events listed. In the left-hand column, rank the events from most stressful (1) to least stressful (8). Compare answers with a classmate and explain why you rated one event to be more stressful than another.

Rank		Value
_____	getting married	_____
_____	changing to a new school	_____
_____	the death of a family member	_____
_____	going on vacation	_____
_____	being fired from work	_____
_____	getting divorced	_____
_____	getting a parking ticket	_____
_____	gaining a new family member	_____

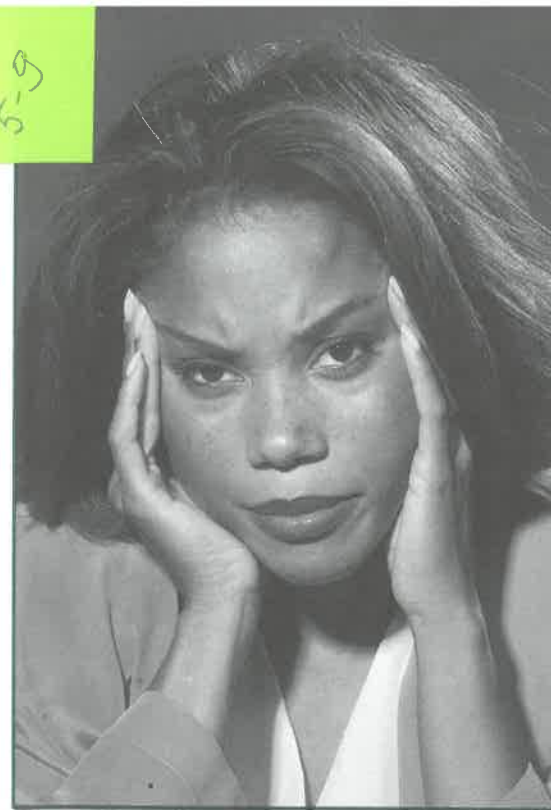
2▶ Now, with your partner, agree on a value for each stressful event, using the Holmes and Rahe 100-point scale. Write this value in the column on the right.

3▶ Turn to Figure A, on page 9, where you will see the values that Holmes and Rahe gave to different events. Compare your values with theirs and discuss what surprises you in their list.

4▶ Discuss to what extent you think that if the same research were done in your country, instead of the United States, the results would be different.

NOW READ

Now read the text "What Is Stress?" When you finish, turn to the tasks that begin on page 7.



CHAPTER 1

The Influence of Mind Over Body

1 WHAT IS STRESS?

The term **stress** has been defined in several different ways. Sometimes the term is applied to stimuli or events in our environment that make physical and emotional demands on us, and sometimes it is applied to our emotional and physical reactions to such stimuli. In this discussion, we will refer to the environmental stimuli or events as **stressors** and to emotional and physical reactions as stress.

Many sorts of events can be stressors, including disasters such as hurricanes or tornadoes, major life events such as divorce or the loss of a job, and daily hassles such as having to wait in line at the supermarket when you need to be somewhere else in ten minutes. What all these events have in common is that they interfere with or threaten our accustomed way of life. When we encounter such stressors, we must pull together our mental and physical resources in order to deal with the challenge. How well we succeed in doing so will determine how serious a toll the stress will take on our mental and physical well-being.

REACTING TO STRESSORS

The Canadian physiologist Hans Selye has been the most influential researcher and writer on stress. Selye has proposed that both humans and other animals react to any stressor in three stages, collectively known as the *general adaptation syndrome*. The first stage, when the person or animal first becomes aware of the stressor, is the *alarm reaction*. In this stage, the organism becomes highly alert and aroused, energized by

stress
an emotional or physical reaction to demanding events or stimuli

stressor
an event or stimulus that causes stress



Any event – negative or positive – that causes a significant change in your everyday life may be stressful.

a burst of epinephrine. After the alarm reaction comes the stage of *resistance*, as the organism tries to adapt to the stressful stimulus or to escape from it. If these efforts are successful, the state of the organism returns to normal. If the organism cannot adapt to continuing stress, however, it enters a stage of *exhaustion* or collapse.

Selye developed his model of the general adaptation syndrome as a result of research with rats and other animals. In rats, certain stressors, such as painful tail-pulling, consistently lead to the same sorts of stress reactions. In humans, however, it is harder to predict what will be stressful to a particular person at a particular time. Whether a particular stimulus will be stressful depends on the person's subjective appraisal of that stimulus. How threatening is it? How well have I handled this sort of thing in the past? How well will I be able to handle it this time? For one person, being called upon to give a talk in front of a class is a highly stressful stimulus that will immediately produce such elements of an alarm reaction as a pounding heart and a dry mouth. For another person, being called on to give a talk is not threatening at all, but facing a deadline to complete a term paper is extremely stressful. In humans, moreover, the specific stress reaction is likely to vary widely; some stressful situations give rise predominantly to emotions of fear, some to anger, some to helplessness and depression.

AFTER YOU READ

Task 1 Highlighting

Highlighting makes important information stand out so that you can find it easily when you go back to the text to study for a test. Systematically using different-colored highlighter pens can make the review process even easier. For example, you can use one color for key terms, another for definitions, another for names and dates, and so on.

1> Find the following words and phrases and highlight them.

- stress
- stressor
- the general adaptation syndrome
- alarm reaction
- resistance
- exhaustion

2> Use a different-colored highlighter and highlight the following:

- a definition of stress and stressors
- a statement about what all stressors have in common
- a description of stage 1 of the general adaptation syndrome
- a description of stage 2 of the general adaptation syndrome
- the sentence containing the main idea of the last paragraph

3> Compare your answers with a classmate's answers to see whether you have highlighted the same portions of text.

Task 2 Building vocabulary: Guessing meaning from context

Although there may be many words in a text that you do not know, you do not want to continually stop and look up words in the dictionary. It is often possible to get a general idea of the meaning of a word or phrase (and that is all you really need in order to continue reading) by looking at its full context. This means that your eyes may have to travel back to the sentences that come before the word/phrase or forward to the sentence or sentences that follow it.

Read the following passages from the text and use the context to work out what the words in bold probably mean.

Many sorts of events can be stressors, including disasters such as **hurricanes or tornadoes**, major life events such as divorce or the loss of a job, and **daily hassles** such as having to wait in line at the supermarket when you need to be somewhere else in ten minutes. What all these events **have in common** is that they interfere with or threaten our accustomed way of life.

hurricanes or tornadoes _____
 daily hassles _____
 to have something in common _____

Seyle has proposed that both human and other animals react to any stressor in three stages, **collectively** known as the *general adaptation syndrome*. The first stage, when the person or animal first becomes aware of the stressor, is the *alarm reaction*. In this stage, the organism becomes highly **alert and aroused**, energized by a **burst of epinephrine**.

collectively _____
 alert and aroused _____
 a burst of epinephrine _____

Whether a particular stimulus will be stressful depends on the person's **subjective appraisal** of that stimulus. How **threatening** is it? How well have I **handled** this sort of thing in the past? How well will I be able to handle it this time? For one person, **being called upon** to give a talk in front of a class is a highly stressful stimulus that will immediately produce such elements of an alarm reaction as a pounding heart and a dry mouth.

subjective appraisal _____
 threatening _____
 to handle _____
 to be called upon _____

Task 3 Test-taking: Preparing for a short-answer quiz

One of the best ways to prepare for a short-answer quiz is to write down questions you think the professor will ask. Remember that your professor will probably ask different types of questions, not just questions that ask you to recall information (Type 1 questions).

Some short-answer question types

Type 1: Questions about data

These are what, when, how, where, and who questions. They ask you to define, list, locate, identify, recall, describe, and so on.

Type 2: Questions that develop concepts from the data

These questions ask you to discuss the data, point to relationships between different parts of the data, compare and contrast, analyze, predict, and so on.

Type 3: Questions that call for critical judgment

These questions ask you to evaluate, rank, rate, or assess aspects of the data, and to justify your answer.

1> Write four questions that you think a professor might ask about this text on a short-answer quiz. Try to use all three question types.

2> Exchange questions with a partner. Answer each other's questions orally and then discuss with your partner whether the answers were satisfactory or not.

Task 4 Test-taking: Writing short answers to test questions

In addition to practicing guessing which questions will be on a test, it is useful to practice writing the answers to them under time pressure.

1> With your partner, choose the two best questions that you and your partner thought of in Task 3. Give yourselves a reasonable time limit and write answers to the questions.

2> Read each other's answers and decide how complete the answers are.

Refer to "Thinking About the Topic" on page 4 for discussion relating to the figure below.

Life Event	Mean Value
Death of a spouse	100
Divorce	73
Death of a close family member	63
Major personal injury or illness	53
Marriage	50
Being fired from work	47
Retiring from work	45
Major change in health of a family member	44
Pregnancy	40
Gaining a new family member (e.g., through birth, adoption, etc.)	39
Major change in financial state (e.g., having a lot more or less money)	38
Death of a close friend	37
Taking out a mortgage or loan for a major purchase (e.g., a home or business)	31
Major change in responsibilities at work (e.g., promotion, demotion)	29
Son or daughter leaving home (e.g., marriage, attending college)	29
Beginning or ceasing formal schooling	26
Major changes in living conditions (e.g., building a home, remodeling a home)	25
Trouble with the boss	23
Major change in working hours or conditions	20
Change in residence	20
Changing to a new school	20
Taking out a small loan (e.g., for a car, TV, freezer, etc.)	17
Vacation	13
Christmas	12
Minor violations of the law (e.g., traffic tickets, jaywalking)	11

Figure A The Holmes and Rahe social readjustment rating scale (adapted from Holmes and Rahe, 1970)