I read an article titled “Researcher Finds Easy Solution For Test Anxiety” from the website for the KPRC channel 2 news station. The article is about an associate professor in psychology at the University of Chicago that, with the help of a graduate student, has discovered a way for students that experience test anxiety to relax before an exam and have a better chance of performing well. Sian L. Beilock found that allowing students to write down their thoughts and feelings for 10 minutes before taking a test improves by nearly one grade point the scores of students that usually experience test anxiety and do poorly. She derived this theory from the idea of expressive writing by people experiencing depression. She says that, when a student is experiencing test anxiety, his or her short-term memory is occupied by the worry and thoughts of failure so that the material he or she learned cannot be recalled for the test. Beilock has tested her theory out in high school classrooms and college lab settings and plans to continue her study by examining what physically happens in the brain when a person becomes anxious.

I believe that this article could be very useful. Test anxiety in students is quite common but students, teachers, nor parents know how to handle it. The article gives an example of test anxiety being so severe for one woman that she had to leave a study session for fear that she was having a heart attack. If some students are impacted this greatly by just the thought of taking a test, it should be expected that they would do poorly when actually given a test to take, no matter the amount that they have studied. The article offers a simple way for teachers and parents to help their students perform better and, if teachers would apply the idea Beilock offers into their own classrooms, they might see dramatic improvement in schools that regularly have low test scores. This could be for multiple reasons; this method of writing before an exam could actually relieve test anxiety for students that have those anxious or nervous feelings or, in schools in which the students don’t feel that they are cared about, the students might view this technique as
the teacher showing interest in them so their social capital would increase and allow them to do better.

I think it would beneficial to implement this strategy in schools, especially for students about to take the TAKS test. Teachers have to focus so much attention on preparing their students for the TAKS test that it might frighten some students and defeat the purpose of the endless preparation. The article states, “Psychologists, educators, and parents have known for a long time that the way students perform on a test does not necessarily indicate what knowledge they bring to the table.” This statement would bring the discussion to an entirely different topic, whether state testing should be such a critical part of the education system, but, because schools do have to administer the TAKS test to students from third grade to eleventh grade, it might be a good idea to use Beilock’s pre-test-writing idea. Beilock also suggests applying her writing for relief idea to other situations that might induce stress. She believes that this technique could help with situations like interviewing for a job to giving a speech. If something as simple as a person writing down his or her thoughts and feelings can calm him or her down before addressing a large crowd or speaking to a future employer, then teachers and school administrators should take full advantage of the idea too.

I plan on teaching Kindergarten, where testing is not such a big deal, but I think this idea could still be beneficial in the testing I would do, if for nothing more than to teach my students that they don’t have to fear tests. Teachers should try to help their students achieve the highest level they are capable of and if it takes strategies like these to do so, then I think they should be taken full advantage of.