



By The content team Students

How to overcome exam anxiety and succeed

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Charlie Atkins AAT Affiliate overcame his struggles with exams and assessments to begin a successful accounting career.

Norwich-based Charlie Atkins, assistant management accountant at Right For Success Trust and finalist for last year's 2018 PQ Magazine Awards, runs revision sessions for accountancy apprentices in his spare time. He's gained 95% in his Level 3 synoptic and achieved 82% in his Level 4 qualification. In the last academic year, he saved the Trust (his employer) a total of £120,000 by putting his learning with AAT into practice.

But despite these successes, 21-year-old Atkins hasn't had an easy journey. He initially struggled with exams and assessments throughout his school career, mainly because of confidence.

Overthinking the questions

"I tended to overthink the questions, so I'd start off with the right answer but I'd panic and change my mind," he recalls. "My colleagues at AAT were all passing assessments their first time and I failed my first two. People started questioning my ability and asked if I'd made the wrong career choice. I started wondering if I was even smart enough to continue."

Most people would have given up at this point, but for Atkins, the negativity had the opposite effect. "It actually gave me the drive to prove people wrong," he explains.

Atkins made sure he was always the first person in college every day and the last to leave. He made use of AAT forums, study groups and the AAT online chat, as well as going through all AAT material – completing every green light test, tutorial, step-by-step guide, and mock assessment available.

"I just didn't give up," he says. "I worked so hard to get where I am now. I invested an endless amount of hours into my studies and worked long hours."

Making things click

Things didn't start to really click for Atkins until he started working at the Right for Success Trust three years ago, where he was given a lot more responsibility. His employer at the Trust, which runs 10 schools and academies across Norfolk, took the time to give him specific projects that were linked with what Atkins was studying with AAT.

Now, he is responsible for producing and presenting financial reports for several academies, budget setting, settling finances between organisations and taking a lead role in the general ledger system – where he has currently trained the central office (including the executive team) and is projected to train over 700 employees on how to use the new system. He also volunteers outside of work hours to train and support apprentices with their AAT journey and runs mini revision sessions.

The confidence to succeed

Atkins says AAT gave him the confidence to succeed. He says the course material and support is relevant and “to the point”. In fact, it was having completed the AAT costing paper that he was then able to use his knowledge to negotiate prices with his employer’s main suppliers, saving them £120,000 over a three-year period.

“Anyone can study with AAT and complete their accountancy qualification,” Atkins says. “Focus on just completing the qualification rather than how quickly you can do it. If you don’t get through an assessment first time around, download your statement of achievement report and focus on the areas you’ve struggled with. Take your time and make sure you are ready to smash it, most importantly, never give up!”

Key takeaways

- Everyone learns at a different pace. Take your time and focus on finishing rather than how quickly you can complete your qualification.
- When preparing for assessments, make use of AAT’s forums, study groups and the AAT online chat, as well as going through all AAT material – green light tests, tutorials, step-by-step guides, and mock assessments.
- If you don’t pass an assessment the first time, download your statement of achievement report and focus on the areas you struggled with.

Further reading:

- **Coping with stress when studying for your AAT qualifications**
(<https://www.aatcomment.org.uk/audience/students/coping-with-stress-when-studying-for-your-aat-qualifications/>)
- **How I overcame anxiety whilst studying AAT**
(<https://www.aatcomment.org.uk/aatpowerup/social-mobility/how-i-overcame-anxiety-whilst-studying-aat/>)
- **What not to do to pass your exams** (<https://www.aatcomment.org.uk/learning/study-tips/what-not-to-do-to-pass-your-exams/>)

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