Anxiety and Arousal

1) Arousal
   a) The emotion of fear serves to protect us from an immediate danger, optimal levels of arousal serves as an adaptive function. Anxiety prepares us to prevent, or avoid, dangerous situations in the first place. AROUSAL is how much capacity you have to work with for a given task, at a given time. Tasks require different levels of arousal to be done sufficiently.
   b) The greater the discrepancy between our estimated skills and our PERCEPTION of the difficulty of the challenge (and not necessarily the actual difficulty), the more likely we will experience anxiety that interferes with our performance. These appraisals of the gap between our coping resources and the difficulty of the challenge must be accounted for in order to reduce anxiety.
   c) The greater the gap between our estimated ability and our PERCEPTION of the task's difficulty, the more likely anxiety will negatively impact our performance.
2) Arousal Theory
   a) Based on the idea that different individuals perform better at different levels of arousal and that every individual seeks to find its optimum level of anxiety
   b) This adaptive function is best illustrated when we consider the relationship between anxiety and performance. This is called the Yerkes-Dodson Law.
      i) This Law came about in the early 1900s when researchers would shock mice in a cage. Mild electrical shocks could motivate the mice to take certain actions, but when the shocks increased in intensity/frequency the rats would be chaotic and run around not knowing what to do next.
      ii) Common sense suggests if we encounter a challenge that we estimate outweighs our skills (or coping resources), we will likely experience some anxiety.
      iii) A certain amount of arousal can be a motivator toward change. Too much or too little will work against the individual. Too much arousal can move somebody into panic, "blanking out," freezing, "running away." Too little arousal can make a person miss the task completely, lowers somebody's motivation to do the task, etc
         (1) Glass metaphor: Too much arousal, the glass overflows and cannot contain its function. Too little, the glass is not being used to its full potential.
   c) The GOAL:
      i) To have the balance of alertness and calm (stress and motivation, perception of capability).
   d) Examples
      i) Pilots:
         (1) Safety class without passengers so they get the psychomotor practice, understand where controls are, increase their knowledge, manage if something goes wrong AND the very real simulators also prepare the pilots anxiety response by exposing them to what might happen to their bodies if they were in real danger. They get a feel for "where their optimal level of arousal is"
         (2) Taking a test: what happens if you prepare too much or not enough
         (3) Drivers test: what happens if you prepare too much or not enough
         (4) Presentation at work, etc.