

MULTIPLE CHOICE TEST TAKING STRATEGIES

What to Do if More Than One Answer Seems Correct

1. Ask yourself whether the answer you're considering completely addresses the question. If the test answer is only partly true or is true only under certain narrow conditions, then it's probably not the right answer. If you have to make a significant assumption in order for the answer to be true, ask yourself whether this assumption is obvious enough that the instructor would expect everyone to make it. If not, dump the answer overboard.
2. If you think an item is a trick question, think again. Very few instructors would ever write a question intended to be deceptive. If you suspect that a question is a trick item, make sure you're not reading too much into the question, and try to avoid imagining detailed scenarios in which the answer could be true. In most cases, "trick questions" are only tricky because they're not taken at face value.
3. If after your very best effort, you cannot choose between two alternatives, try vividly imagining each one as the correct answer. If you are like most people, you will often "feel" that one of the answers is wrong. Trust this feeling. Research suggests that feelings are frequently accessible even when recall is poor. For example, we can still know how we feel about a person even when we can't remember the person's name!

Look for Clue Words and Numbers

- If two answers are opposite, one is probably correct.
- Answers with the following words are usually incorrect: always, never, all, must
- Answers with the following words are usually correct: seldom, generally, tend to, probably, usually
- Look for grammatical clues between the question and the choices. For example, the question and the correct answer often have verbs of the same tense and have nouns and verbs that agree.
- Underline familiar words or phrases from the lecture or textbook.
- Be aware of degrees of correctness. With numbers one choice is usually too small or too large. These choices may be eliminated.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT ANSWER

General Test-Taking Strategies for Multiple Choice Tests

Make Predictions

- Your mind is typically the most focused immediately after you have read the question and digested its contents. At this point, try to predict what the correct answer will be.
- Scan the answers to see if your prediction is one of the choices. If it is, you can be quite confident that you have the right answer. Check the other answers to be sure, but most of the time, you've got it.

Answer the Question

- This may seem obvious, but test writers create some excellent answer choices that are wrong. Don't pick an answer just because it sounds right or you believe it to be true. It **MUST** answer the question.
- Don't choose an answer that is factually true but is an incorrect choice because it does not answer the question.
- Once you've made your selection, go back and check it against the question and make sure you didn't misread the question, and that your choice does answer the question posed.

Using a Benchmark

- After you read the first answer choice, decide if you think it sounds correct or not. If it doesn't, move to the next choice. But if it does, mentally mark that answer choice. This doesn't mean that you've definitely decided it is the right answer. It just means it is the best one you've seen thus far. This answer becomes your standard by which you measure all other answers.
- All other choices must be benchmarked against that standard. That choice is correct until you find one that is better. When you decide that no other answer is as good as the standard, make sure it really answers the question before making it your final choice.

Valid Information

- Remember that all the information in the question is valid and may be needed to determine the correct answer. This is not true for all the information in the answers. They are designed to distract you and frequently contain superfluous information. If it appears that two unrelated topics are discussed in the question, don't ignore either one. If you first determine the relationship between the topics, then you will be better able to answer the question correctly.

Difficult Words

- Don't choose an answer just because it is the only one with words you recognize. Test-writers don't put 'make believe' words on the test. If you only recognize the words in one answer, make sure it is correct and really answers the question before you choose it. If you can eliminate it, then you increase your chances of getting the right answer even if you have to guess.
- Try dissecting difficult words. Notice prefixes and suffixes for clues.

- Notice words like may, can, will often, rarely, etc. Often an answer choice will be wrong because it doesn't contain these words but has definitive words like 'exactly' and 'always' which leaves no room for exception.
- Be alert for "switchback words such as "but", "although", nevertheless" which indicate a shift in thought and alters the nature of the question.

Difficult Questions

- Don't waste too much time on questions that appear too hard or difficult. Try to identify any obviously incorrect answers and guess at the remaining answer choices before giving up.
- Brainstorm each possible choice independently from the other choices. Ask yourself if it is possible that it could be the correct answer. When you systematically go through each answer you are often able to discover things you might have overlooked by only scanning the answers.

New Information

- Correct answer choices will rarely have new information included. If new information is included that doesn't seem to relate to the topic being asked about, then that choice is likely incorrect, even if the rest of the answer is correct.

Contextual Clues

- Look for and understand the context of the question. More than one answer may look right, but one will fit the context better.

Phrases

- Be aware of answers that repeat word for word a portion of the question. It's usually a wrong answer. Most correct choices paraphrase a point.
- Scientific sounding choices are better than ones using slang language.

Test Taking Skills

Misreading the Question

The single most frequent error students make in a multiple choice examination is to misread, and therefore misinterpret the questions.

Many students read the possible answers to the question before they have checked to insure that they understand the question. Often they find a possible answer to the misunderstood question, and of course, the answer is incorrect. Use the following process to cut down on errors made by misreading.

- Cover the answers with your hand and then read the question.
- Ask, "What is this question asking?"
- Rephrase the question in your own words until you understand it.
- Without looking at the answers ask, "What do I know about that?"
- Ask yourself a question that will start you thinking about the subject of the question and jot down what you can remember in the margin of your paper.
- Now look at the answers and mark out those that you know to be incorrect. You can usually narrow it down to two answers.
- Ask yourself about the two remaining answers, "What do I know about ...?"

This interrogation process will guide your thinking into your long-term memory where the knowledge is stored.