

Multiple Choice Tests

We want a society in which we are free to make choices, to make mistakes, and be generous and compassionate.

Margaret Thatcher, English
1925 -

Multiple choice questions usually include a phrase or stem followed by three to five options:

Test strategies:

- Read the directions carefully
 - Know if each question has one or more correct option
 - Know if you are penalized for guessing
 - Know how much time is allowed (this governs your strategy)
- Preview the test
 - Read through the test quickly and answer the easiest questions first
 - Mark those you think you know in some way that is appropriate
- Read through the test a second time and answer more difficult questions
 - You may pick up cues for answers from the first reading, or become more comfortable in the testing situation
- If time allows, review both questions and answers
 - It is possible you mis-read questions the first time

Answering options

Improve your odds, think critically:

Cover the options, read the stem, and try to answer

Select the option that most closely matches your answer

Read the stem with each option

Treat each option as a true-false question, and choose the "most true"

Strategies to answer difficult questions:

- **Eliminate options you know to be incorrect**
 - If allowed, mark words or alternatives in questions that eliminate the option
- **Give each option of a question the "true-false test:"**
 - This may reduce your selection to the best answer
- **Question options that grammatically don't fit with the stem**
- **Question options that are totally unfamiliar to you**
- **Question options that contain negative or absolute words.**
 - Try substituting a qualified term for the absolute one, like *frequently* for *always*; or *typical* for *every* to see if you can eliminate it
- **"All of the above:"**
 - If you know two of three options seem correct, "all of the above" is a strong possibility
- **Number answers:**
 - toss out the high and low and consider the middle range numbers
- **"Look alike options"**
 - probably one is correct; choose the best but eliminate choices that mean basically the same thing, and thus cancel each other out
- **Double negatives:**
 - Create the equivalent positive statement and consider
- **Echo options:**
 - If two options are opposite each other, chances are one of them is correct

- **Favor options that contain qualifiers**
The result is longer, more inclusive items that better fill the role of the answer
- **If two alternatives seem correct,**
compare them for differences,
then refer to the stem to find your best answer

Guessing:

- **Always guess when there is no penalty**
for guessing or you can eliminate options
- **Don't guess if you are penalized for guessing**
and if you have no basis for your choice
- **Use hints from questions you know**
to answer questions you do not.
- **Change your first answers**
when you are sure of the correction, or other cues in the test cue you to change.

Remember that you are looking for the best answer,
not only a correct one, and not one which must be true all of the time, in all cases, and
without exception.