

STRATEGIES FOR MULTIPLE CHOICE EXAMS

Before the Test

- As you study, work at understanding the material, not simply memorizing it. The wording of the question may differ from the way you originally learned the material.
- Try to predict test questions. Ask other students what they think will be on the test.
- Be serious about studying the course material – aiming for a deep level of understanding – but approach the test as a game for which you need good test-taking strategies. These strategies will help you get the maximum mileage out of what you know.
- Create your own test questions and encourage your study group to do so as well. Take turns sharing questions and rationale for answers.

At the Beginning

- Jot down on your scratch paper any formulas and memory devices you might forget.
- Survey the test. Note whether some sections are worth more points than others, and plan your time accordingly. If the test includes both multiple choice and essay questions, begin by reading and making a few notes for the essays, along with the time you plan to start that section. Next, answer the multiple-choice questions. Finally, return to write the essays.
- To build your confidence, start with the easiest questions.

Reading the Questions

- Paraphrase the question stem by saying to yourself, “I see, I’m looking for....”
- If the stem provides enough direction, try to anticipate the answer and then look for it.
- Notice any words in the stem which you can relate to words in the answer choice.
- Watch for absolute determiners such as *all*, *none*, *always*, *never*, *only*. Circle these words and realize that they usually indicate a false choice, unless you recall the professor emphasizing an absolute statement during a lecture (i.e. all cells are ____).
- Read very slowly, jot down important information as needed. Re-read the stem when necessary.
- Don’t read into a question qualifications or interpretations not intended by the test maker.

Choosing the Best Answer

- Think of multiple choice as a series of true/false statements.
- Read all of the choices and keep an open mind. Even when the first or second choice looks correct, don't simply read the other choices with the intent of dismissing them. Consider them carefully.
- As you proceed through the choices, use the process of elimination and cross off any choices that are clearly false. Then re-read any choices you are still considering.
- Use caution with questions in which you're looking for a false statement (the question stem may contain words such as *not*, *except*, *false*, etc.) To avoid a careless error with this kind of question, mark each choice with a T or F. Remind yourself that you are looking for a false statement (usually you are looking for a true statement).
- If two choices overlap or mean essentially the same thing, both are probably incorrect (unless there is a choice of *all of the above* or *both B & C*).
- Notice *partner choices* (two choices that are opposites or have a difference of one or two words.) Often, the correct answer will be one of these options.
- Be alert for grammatical inconsistencies between the stem and the choice (read the stem with the choice to see if the two "fit together.")
- Don't worry about the following choices: *all of the above*, *none of the above*, *both B & C*. Use the process of elimination and simply look at what you've already eliminated among the previous choices. Sometimes these final options are correct (especially *all of the above*), but sometimes they are simply *filler* because the person writing the test ran out of ideas.

Final Suggestions

- Answer every question. Even if you forgot some of the material, you will probably be able to eliminate some choices, thereby increasing your odds of getting a correct answer.
- Don't look for tricks. Professors want you to read the questions very carefully, noting each detail and thinking analytically. However, this does not mean they are trying to trick you. Almost all professions require attention to detail and critical thinking, so requiring these skills on exams is not unfair. Students who believe in tricky questions almost always lose points needlessly.
- Be on the lookout for questions that may answer other questions.
- Don't try to be the first to leave. Use all of the available time to look for careless errors and to double check your answers. However, if you find yourself routinely finishing exams much earlier than others, you might try reading the questions more slowly your first time through. This approach usually works better than rushing through the questions once and then going over each question a second time. That approach can lead to either looking right through an error or changing a correct answer to an incorrect one.
- Change your answer only when you have a concrete reason. Never change an answer because of a feeling. This feeling is often simply nervousness.