

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ) Exams – Managing the exam

Reading the questions:

- 1) Read each question carefully and make sure you have understood what it is asking before you answer it
 - In many instances, the question (before the options are given) will be the stem of an answer. The options to choose from will then be alternative ways of completing the stem. Get an understanding of the stem before looking at and choosing the best answer to complete it.
- 2) Are there any key words in the question? Identify these: "all," "always," "never," "none," "not," "few," "many," "some," and "sometimes". Then...
- 3) Look at whether the question expects a "black-and-white" answer (e.g. would the answer apply in all cases, always, never, none) or whether you should look for exceptions and alternative words (e.g. few, many, some, sometimes).
- 4) Think about which lecture topic the question relates to as this might help you narrow the choice of possible responses. (Remember: questions will not necessarily appear in the same order as the teaching sessions)
- 5) Read all the available answers on each question: don't stop because you think you have found the right one.

Answering the questions:

Try these techniques to see if they help

- Think about the topic area. Sometimes just thinking about the topic overall will help you focus on a specific answer.
- Read the question and formulate the answer in your head – then look for it in the list of answers.
- When you run into vague terminology, rewrite it in your own words.
- Dismiss any answers you know (and are sure) are wrong – you may need to make a note of the question number, and then annotate which answers you are dismissing as options and which you are still considering.
 - If you are able to make notes to help you choose your answer, it can help to write out why you believe certain answers to be more likely options. How do the options left differ from each other?
- Does the answer you want to select totally address the question, or only in some circumstances?

Material adapted from <http://www.academictips.org/acad/multiplechoiceexamstips.html>
<http://www.mondofacto.com/study-skills/exams/how-to-succeed-at-mcqs/01.html>
<http://www.socialpsychology.org/testtips.htm>
<http://bio150.chass.utoronto.ca/tips/testtips.htm>
<http://psychology.about.com/od/psychologystudyguides/a/testtips.htm>

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- "All of the above" and "none of the above" are very inclusive statements, these options, when used, tend to be correct more often than would be predicted by chance alone.
- Are you worried it might be a 'trick' question? Make sure you're not reading too much into the question. Generally, take questions at face value.
- Try to avoid reading things too hastily or selecting answers too quickly, and – if possible – review your answers; BUT don't dismiss an answer just because it appears too obvious. If you have revised well, some answers may seem obvious to you.
- Avoid choosing an answer because it sounds impressive.
- Check: it may be a true statement, but does it answer the question?

What if you're stuck on a question?

- Read one answer at a time and see if applying a 'true' or 'false' label to each one helps you decide.
- Once you have identified which answers you want to label as 'false' (wrong), compare the answers that are left over. How do the remaining answers differ?
- Is one option more believable than the other(s)?
- Use common sense and logic if possible.
 - If you think the answer you want to go for is wrong, it can be tempting to change your mind. Don't make a hasty decision here. Sometimes students who change their answers often change them to the wrong answer.
 - Can you leave the question and come back to it later?
- Make an informed guess – but remember how negative marking may be used in your subject area (see MCQ Exams – Preparation handout). Is it better to guess at the ones you really don't know and risk being wrong, than to leave a blank space and be certain of being wrong?

Timing

How much time do you have per question?

Leave enough time to answer all the questions

Consider how far you should have got in completing your answers by half way through the exam

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<http://www.mondofacto.com/study-skills/exams/how-to-succeed-at-mcqs/01.html>
<http://www.socialpsychology.org/testtips.htm>
<http://bio150.chass.utoronto.ca/tips/testtips.htm>
<http://psychology.about.com/od/psychologystudyguides/a/testtips.htm>