

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ) Exams – Preparation

What are MCQs?

- In an MCQ you will usually have to select the correct answer(s) to a given question from a small number of options
- Problem-solving can be required to distinguish between potential answers so you may need to practice certain calculations
- Many MCQ exams are now online rather than paper-based

• Common types of question include:

- Questions that start with 'what', 'why', 'where' etc.. They offer several possible answers for you to choose from.

e.g. Which of the following alienated the most French Catholic clerics and believers?

 - a. The provision of freedom of religion in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.
 - b. The seizure of the church lands.
 - c. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy.
 - d. The abolition of the monasteries.
- Questions that start with an incomplete positive or negative statement. They offer several possible endings for you to choose from.

e.g. A ball released in positive gravity will:

a) fall down	b) retain its mass	c) rise
d) change its shape	e) explode	
- Questions that give an instruction and start with 'state', 'calculate' 'give' etc. They offer several possible results or outcomes for you to choose from.

e.g. State the chemical formula for sulphurous acid?

a) $\text{H}_2\text{S}_2\text{O}_7$	b) H_2SO_3	c) H_2SO_4
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- Sometimes, especially when testing knowledge of technical terminology or concepts, the options available will include similar-sounding or related terminology.

*eg. Which statement about chemical bonds is **CORRECT**?*

 - a) A covalent bond forms between a sodium ion and a chloride ion.
 - b) A hydrophobic interaction links an oxygen atom to the hydrogen atoms in a water molecule.
 - c) A covalent bond links an iron atom to the protein haemoglobin.
 - d) A hydrogen bond forms between water molecules.

Before the exam:

If you are certain that the MCQ exam you will be taking is identical to the ones you can practise on, spend some time getting an overview of the number of questions you will have to complete and the time allowed for the exam as a whole. Make sure you are familiar with the instructions for doing the exam.

Academic Support, Student Services

Check your School website or Moodle online learning environment for information on the specific MCQ format used in your modules, including whether negative marking is used and, if so, how it is applied.

MCQ examinations often test factual knowledge and application of problem-solving processes. Such knowledge and skills tend to remain consistent within many disciplines, and questions that have been proven to work well may often be reused. Consequently, MCQ answer sheets and past papers are often not available. However, tutors may have a small number of sample MCQs (including answers) for you to look at. These may be paper based or online and can help you see what an MCQ paper looks like in practice.

Check whether you will be able to have access to an answer booklet so that you can make notes or work out problem-solving questions before choosing your answer. You should be able to cross these pages out (so they are not assessed), but you must check whether you still need to hand the answer booklet in at the end of the exam.

What you need to focus on learning:

- How to find the right learning strategies for you – check our Revision & Examinations Handbook.
- How to identify similarities, differences and consequences / connections to other topics and examples etc..
- Core knowledge and processes for your subject.

Practising writing your own MCQs can be helpful – think carefully about WHAT makes a correct answer and how certain wrong answers can initially look convincing. Do also think about any previous experience you have in answering MCQs and how to build on your skills for preparing for these.

What to answer first:

Some websites suggest you go through the MCQ paper and answer all the questions you are sure about first; others suggest you would be better to work through the paper systemically in order.

What works for you? Think about these suggestions

It is better that you correctly answer all the questions you know rather than spend too long on a question you don't know and run out of time for easier questions.



It can be confusing to move from question to question across the whole exam paper; make sure you select the answer you intend and that it corresponds to the question you're answering.

If you do leave out a question, make a clear note somewhere (perhaps in an answer booklet you are using for your workings-out and notes) of which question it is. Think about how you will remind yourself to come back to answer a question later.