

# Tips for Multiple Choice Exams

## Preparing for Multiple Choice Exams

Studying for a multiple choice exam requires a special method of preparation distinctly different from preparing for an essay exam.

- **Begin Studying Early**
  - If you learn a little bit each day and allow plenty of time for repeated reviews, you will build a much more reliable long-term memory.
- **Identify and Understand What the Instructor Emphasizes**
  - Pay particular attention to fundamental terms and concepts that describe important events, concepts, and feature or tie related ideas and observations together.
- **Make Lists and Tables**
  - Concentrate on understanding multi-step processes, and on ideas, events, or objects that form natural sequences or groupings. Look for similarities and differences used to distinguish correct choices from distracters on an exam.
- **Use Your Textbook's Tools**
  - New words, concepts, and summary questions are usually at the beginning or end of a chapter (sometimes both!). Be sure to understand and review these.
  - Do not simply memorize the book's definitions or explanations. Most instructors will rephrase things in their own words as they write exam questions, so you must be sure that you really know what the definitions mean.
- **Know Your Learning Style and Study Technique Preferences**
  - How is the course material delivered during class? Does this match your learning style? If not, find ways to study the material in the way that best matches your learning style.
- **Simulate Required Behavior**
  - If you are taking a closed book test, practice answering questions without your text or notes.
  - Answer questions that someone else has chosen.
    - Use a two-tiered approach to studying: Study alone first and with others second. This kind of studying is highly efficient because it allows others to pick the material, thereby exposing gaps in your knowledge--just as an exam does!

## Taking Multiple Choice Exams

Even a well-prepared student can fall prey to distracters that look very similar to the correct answer. Here are a few tips to help reduce these perils:

- **Before You Begin the Exam**
  - Enter all pieces of required information on your answer sheet.
  - Upload: flip the test over, write down key words, concepts, and ideas that are in your mind, especially if you just studied them and think you may forget.
  - Give yourself a time budget for each section of the test.

- **Make Three Passes Through the Exam**
  - **PASS ONE:**
    - Go through the test and answer all the questions for which the answers come easily. For the questions that seem more difficult, mark the qualifiers and negatives, underline key words and concepts, and eliminate as many options as you can. During your first pass, be on the lookout for questions throughout the test that may give you a clue to prior questions that may have stumped you.
  - **PASS TWO:**
    - Cover up the possible responses with your hand while you read the stem of the question. Try to anticipate the correct response before seeing the options provided. Then, uncover the responses.
      - If you see the response that you anticipated, circle it and check to be sure that none of the other responses are better.
      - If you do not see a response that you expected, consider some of the following strategies to eliminate responses that are likely wrong:
        - Spend extra time to figure out the “best” of the rest of the answer options.
        - Run each possible response through a true/false test.
        - Look for answer choices that contain language used by your teacher or found in your textbook. An answer choice that contains such language is usually correct.
  - **PASS THREE:**
    - Take an educated guess on questions that are still elusive - any answer is better than no answer.
    - Be sure that you have filled the appropriate bubbles carefully.
    - Check your work before you hand in the answer sheet.
- **When All Else Fails, Remember:**
  - Responses that use absolute words, such as “always” or “never” are less likely to be correct than ones that use conditional words like “usually” or “probably.”
  - “All of the above” is often a correct response. If you can verify that more than one of the other responses is probably correct, then choose “all of the above.”
  - “None of the above” is usually an incorrect response, but this is less reliable than the “all of the above” rule. Be very careful not to be trapped by double negatives.
  - Look for grammatical clues. If the stem ends with the indefinite article “an,” for example, then the correct response probably begins with a vowel.
  - The longest response is often the correct one, because the instructor tends to load it with qualifying adjectives or phrases.
  - Look for verbal associations. A response that repeats key words that are in the stem is likely to be correct.
  - If all else fails, choose response (b) or (c). Many instructors subconsciously feel that the correct answer is “hidden” better if it is surrounded by distracters. Response (a) is usually least likely to be the correct answer.