

Taking Multiple Choice Exams

Learning Support

Multiple Choice Exams

- Multiple choice exams ask students to recognize a correct answer from among a set of options that include 3 or 4 wrong answers (called *distracters*).
- **Students commonly consider multiple choice exams easier than essay exams** for the following reasons:
 - The correct answer is *guaranteed* to be among the possible responses, so the student can score points with a lucky guess.
 - Many multiple choice exams tend to emphasize basic definitions or simple comparisons, rather than asking students to analyse new information or apply theories to new situations.
 - Because multiple choice exams usually contain many more questions than essay exams, each question has a lower point value and thus offers less risk.

Multiple Choice Exams

- However, **multiple choice exams can actually be very difficult.**
- As multiple choice exams contain many questions, they force students to be familiar with a much broader range of material than essay exams do:
- Multiple choice exams expect students to have a greater familiarity with details such as specific dates, names, or vocabulary than most essay exams do. Students cannot easily "bluff" on a multiple choice exam.
- Students often face higher risks due to unintended ambiguity as it is much more difficult for a teacher to write good multiple choice questions than to design essay questions,.

Preparing for Multiple Choice Exams

1. **Begin studying early**

Multiple choice exams tend to focus on details. If you learn a little bit each day and allow plenty of time for repeated reviews, you will remember more effectively.

2. **Identify and understand thoroughly everything that your lecturer emphasized in class.**

Pay particular attention to fundamental terms and concepts that describe important events or features, or that tie related ideas and observations together. These are items that commonly appear in multiple choice exams.

3. **As you study your class notes and your assigned readings, make lists and tables.**

Concentrate on understanding multi-step processes, ideas, events, or objects that form natural sequences or groupings. Look for similarities and differences that might be used to distinguish correct choices from distracters in an exam.

4. Ensure you understand new vocabulary or key definitions.

Sometimes new words and concepts are collected at the end of a chapter. Check to be sure that you have not left any out by mistake.

5. Do not simply memorize the book's definitions.

Most lecturers will rephrase in their own words as they write exam questions, so you must be sure that you really know what the definitions mean.

6. Brainstorm possible questions with several other students who are also taking the course.

7. Practice sample questions, if you have access to a study guide or old exams.

Tips for Multiple Choice Exams

Tips of paper-based Multiple Choice Exams

- Before you begin taking the exam, enter all necessary personal information on your answer sheet.
- Always cover up the possible responses with a piece of paper or with your hand while you read the question.
- Try to anticipate the correct response before you are distracted by the options provided. Then, uncover the responses.
- If you see the response that you anticipated, circle it, then check against the other responses.

General tips for answering Multiple Choice Questions

1. 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".
2. Odd responses are usually wrong.
3. "All of the above" is often a correct response. If you can verify that more than one of the responses is probably correct, then choose "all of the above."
4. "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.
5. The longest response is often the correct one, because the instructor tends to load it with qualifying adjectives or phrases.

General tips for answering Multiple Choice Questions

6. Look for verbal associations. A response that repeats key words that are in the question is likely to be correct.
7. 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 one.
8. If you cannot answer a question within a minute or less, skip it and plan to come back later. T
9. Transfer all responses to the answer sheet at the same time when you have marked all questions on your question paper.
10. Be sure that you have filled the appropriate bubbles carefully.

General tips for answering Multiple Choice Questions

11. Your answer sheet will be marked by a computer scanner. So if you fail to fill in bubbles completely or if you make stray marks, only the computer will notice, and you will be penalized. Erase any accidental marks completely.
12. Take the time to check your work before you hand in the answer sheet.

References

UWEC. (n.d.) Taking multiple choice exams. *A student's guide to multiple choice exams*. Retrieved from <https://people.uwec.edu/ivogeler/multiple.htm>