Multiple Choice Test Tips

In multiple test questions, there is the stem of the question and many distractors. It is the job of the student to read the stem and select from the list of distractors the appropriate answer, a daunting task. Try some tips to help you choose the best answers for this kind of test question:

- **Read the stem of the question and try to answer it without looking at the distractors**; then read the list of distractors and choose the one closest to the answer you predicted. *This technique is good for students with low self-confidence, who often know the material but have little faith in their own knowledge base. The task builds self-confidence, too.*

- **Read all the possible answers and choose the most inclusive answer.** Often there are several correct answers, but it is your job to choose the best answer, the one that includes the most information that is correct information.

- **Avoid unfamiliar terms.** Often a professor will include words in the choices that have nothing to do with the course to see if you are truly familiar with terms related to the topic or if you are simply guessing at answers. If you have attended all lectures and have read the course materials, you will know when a word hasn’t been covered in class, and avoid choosing this term.

- **When two possible answers are very similar, the correct answer is usually one of these two choices.** In seeing whether or not students know subtle details of a concept or theory, the professor will likely create two correct answers, but one answer has more correct information than another. Choose this response.

- **Write down the criteria in the margins when you must evaluate statements based on set criteria.** The most difficult multiple-choice questions require students to evaluate possible answers based on set criteria.

Example: *Choose the long-term goals that meet all the criteria for goals:*

a. *Buy a Honda Accord.*
b. Buy a new house with two bedrooms, a garage, and a yard for the kids.

c. Earn a degree in nursing and work at a hospital by the end of the summer semester two years from now.

d. Earn an Associate of Liberal Arts with a 3.5 GPA by the end of next year, fall semester.

e. All of the above

f. Both c and d.

If a student jots down the three criteria for long-term goals (a single item that is measurable and has a completion date), the student can rate each statement based on the criteria. For example, in the question above, “a” doesn’t have a completion date; “b” doesn’t have a completion date; “c” is measurable and has a completion date but it is two goals; and “d” is the only one that meets all the criteria. Taking a few seconds to record the criteria in the margins reduces the stress caused by higher-level critical thinking questions.

**True-False Test Tips**

- Always answer the T/F questions even if you must guess because there is at least a 50% chance of guessing correctly.
- Pay attention to absolute qualifiers, such as never, only, always, and none. These words allow for no exceptions to the rule; therefore the words usually make a statement false. Words such as usually, sometimes, and often are qualifiers, too, but these words allow for exceptions.
- Watch for negative statements. Also, when a question contains a double-negative, cross through the two negatives and read the statement as a positive one because two negatives equal a positive.

Example:

*It is not unrealistic to plan the majority of study time for an exam the night before the test.*

Now cross out the two negatives and read the statement as a positive one:

*It is realistic to plan the majority of study time for an exam the night before the test.*

**Short Answer Questions**

Short answer questions on an exam should be written in formal sentences using correct grammar and mechanics that supply overviews as well as examples and concrete details. A good rule of thumb is to write at least a couple of sentences for each point; therefore, a five-point question should contain 8 – 10 sentences. (Note: Always include an example even if not asked to do so. Be sure to use the stem of the question in the response so that the sentence makes sense without If the description or definition you provided is vague or unclear, a precise example illustrates to the professor that you understand the process or theory and can use it in a situation.)
**Tips for Short Answer Questions**

- **Circle the direction words and answer according to each one; answer all parts of the question.** If the question asks to define a word and provide examples of it, as well as explaining the example, don’t simply write down what the word means. Short answer questions worth 5 – 10 points each often contain 2 – 3 parts. Be sure to answer each part even if you have to guess at it.

- **Never leave a short answer question blank.** If you don’t know the answer to a question, look over the exam and see if you can find information on the test to help you answer the question. It is difficult to create a test without giving students some of the information covered in the course, and you can use that information as an advantage. Also, try to reason and use logic to answer a question. For instance, if asked to describe the SQ3R reading process, and you don’t know the exact word that each letter represents, write your own reading strategy that is likely part of this reading strategy; you may receive at least partial credit for the response.

- **Be sure to use the stem of the question as part of the response in short answer.** The professor should be able to understand your answer without rereading the question. For example, in a question that asks students to **Define and exemplify the three phases of a self-regulated learner as defined by Barry Zimmerman**, the first sentence of the student response will likely be: *The three phases of a self-regulated learner as defined by Barry Zimmerman are forethought phase, performance phase, and self-reflective phase.*

**When Students Don’t Know the Correct Answers**

Guessing is something everyone has to do on an exam at some point in a college career, but the trick is to guess using logic and common sense. Here are tips that may help students make better choices when they have to guess:

- **Go with your first instinct** (unless you know you misread the question or you found the correct answer somewhere on the exam). Research indicates that over 70% of the time when students change an answer, they change from the correct response to a wrong one. Remember that the subconscious helps us when we get stuck and can’t remember information or recall something because we’re under stress. Trust your instincts.

- **When two choices are similar on a multiple choice, choose one of these as your response.** As mentioned in the multiple-choice section, professors are often measuring whether or not you know the fine details of a concept or theory, so two answers will be very close in meaning, and the correct one is usually one of these choices.
• **When there are ranges listed on an exam and you have to guess, choose one in the middle range.** For example, if asked how many hours should a student plan to study for every one hour in class and the range is 1, 3, 5, or 6, choose either 3 or 5.

• **When you don’t know the answer to a question, mark it in the margin and return to it later.** You may find the answer to it on some other part of the exam.

• **Try to reason out the response using logic.** If you are asked on a psychology test to describe three strategies for conflict resolution and you don’t know the response, think about the techniques that you used recently to resolve a problem with a friend, spouse, or parent, and write those as the steps.