Multiple choice exams

Multiple choice or objective exams are based on your ability to recognise facts. Objective exams can be different in style. For example, multiple choice, true-false, matching and sentence completion are all objective exams.

Preparing for the exam

- Multiple choice exams usually focus on a **broad overview** of the course.
- Find out which areas will be included so you can **study the most relevant topics**. Ask your lecturer or tutor and listen for clues in tutes.
- If the answer is 'lectures and tutorials', **use the course outline as a framework for study**. Look for main themes and concepts.
- **Ask your lecturer if marks will be deducted for an incorrect response** (sometimes known as 'negative marking'). If so, only guess an answer if you think you have a good chance of getting it right.
- If **past exam papers** are available, they can give you some idea of what to expect.

See further **tips on studying for exams**.

Sitting the exam

Before you pick up a pen, read all directions carefully. Be sure of exactly what you have to do. Listen for any verbal directions or corrections from the exam supervisor.

Read quickly through the entire exam before you attempt any answer. Doing this allows you to gain an overview, plan your time (how long to spend on each section or question) and to check that your exam is complete and correctly collated.

When using a separate answer sheet, keep it close to the exam booklet on the same side as the hand with which you write. Check frequently that you are answering a question in its properly numbered space.

Answer the 'easy' questions first. Go back and do the hard ones later. Try not to get stuck - you'll waste time and feel anxious.

Answering multiple choice questions

Read each question carefully.

In objective tests the wording of the question and potential answers can be tricky. Each word is important so it's vital to read and thoroughly understand each question and the various responses to it.

Consider all the options before choosing your answer, even if the first option seems correct. This is important when you are instructed to choose the 'best' or 'most correct' answer in some exams.

Take special note of phrasing, such as:

- Negative phrases (e.g. Choose the answer which DOESN'T describe)
- Subjective questions (e.g. Choose the option that BEST describes)
- Judgement questions (e.g. Choose the MOST CORRECT answer)

- Multiple answers (e.g. Choose MORE than one)

Try to supply your own answer before reading the options provided

Read the question whilst covering the choices provided with your hand. Try to answer the question yourself THEN read through the choices. Doing this allows you to make a more accurate choice.

Accept the questions at face value

Read the questions (and the language used) carefully, but don't assume they contain any 'tricks'. Reading too much into a question usually results in a wrong answer.

Don't leave any questions unanswered unless there is a marks penalty for incorrect answers. If not, at least make a calculated guess.

Be alert for grammatical inconsistencies between the question and the potential answers

A choice is nearly always wrong if the question and the answer don't combine to make a grammatically correct sentence.

Do not change your original answer

In most cases your instincts are correct. Only change your answer if you have a very strong hunch that it's wrong, you find new evidence, or you suddenly remember otherwise.

Answering true or false questions

'True-false' questions usually consist of a statement which is either correct or incorrect. You then answer true (if you think a statement is correct) or false (if you think a statement is incorrect).

In true-false questions, be alert for absolute or qualifying words

- Absolute words like *all, none, always, never* generally make a statement false
- Qualifying words like *most, some, usually, seldom* or *often* are more likely to make a statement correct

In true-false tests, be alert for multiple ideas or concepts within the question

All parts of the statement must be true or the entire statement is false. If you really can't make a perfect match between the question and the answer, choose the alternative that is closest to true compared to the other choices.

If you are really stuck ...

- **Narrow your choice** down to which of the answer options is most likely to be correct. This helps you take your 'best guess'.
- Use a **process of elimination.** Multiple choice questions usually contain one or two answer options that are obviously incorrect. Eliminate these first. If you still need to guess the correct answer from the remaining options, you'll have a better chance of getting it right.
- Rule out options that are **completely unfamiliar** to you, especially if they use unfamiliar vocabulary terminology or concepts.
- **Humorous** or **absurd** answer options are usually incorrect.
- Eliminate options that contain **exact or absolute words**. Words like always, every, never mean that there is no exception. Therefore, if you can think of one exception, statements that include these words are incorrect or false. Favour options that contain qualifiers (mostly, sometimes, rarely, seldom).
- If you know **more than one option is correct,** an 'all of the above' option may be a good choice.
- For **number answers**, avoid extremes and favour options in the middle-range.
- Consider **look-alike options** carefully. If two of the alternatives are similar, one is likely to be correct; choose the best but eliminate choices that mean basically the same thing, and thus cancel each other out.

Please note: there are no guarantees with these strategies, but they are worth considering when you really don't know 'the answer'.