

ANSWERING MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Multiple-choice questions are often used in online assignments and exams. It is tempting to think that multiple choice questions are easier than short answer or written questions because the answer is right in front of you.

Like other types of assessment, multiple choice questions require you to understand and apply the content in your study materials or lectures. This requires preparation and knowledge about how best to do multiple choice questions.

GENERAL FORM

Although multiple choice questions come in a range of formats, one type is most frequently used. Its structure is as follows.

A statement or question:

Analyse this very carefully into its key words as it gives you clues to the correct answer. Take care with small words which are qualifiers (e.g. 'not', 'only', 'today') as they place limitations on the situation or problem.

The possible answers

As few as three, but generally four or five possible answers which are made up of the following types:

- 1 or more incorrect answers;
- 1 or more 'distracters';
- at least 2 correct answers, one of which is a more accurate or fuller answer than the other/s.

EXAMPLE

Multiple-choice questions usually:

- test recognition of facts
- are easy to study for, as the answers are given
- cover a great deal of material in a single exam
- require the student to pick the best answer out of up to five possible answers

answer (d)

STEP BY STEP FOR EACH QUESTION

- Read instructions first. Will you lose marks for wrong answers?
- Read the question carefully. Check wording, look for negatives.
- Identify the key words.
- Underline or highlight the qualifiers, e.g., only, always, sometimes, rarely.
- Be cautious when exact words are used, there could be exceptions, e.g. always, must, should, never.
- Identify answers which are definitely *not* correct.
- Identify which answers are correct.
- Identify which of the correct answers an 'expert' in the area would give.
- Remember that answers involving a *selection* of the available answers, e.g. 'a) and b)', or 'All of the above', have a good chance of being correct, but are not always the **best** answer.

Multiple choice myths:

- You don't need to study for multiple choice tests
- Getting these questions correct is just good luck
- C is most likely correct
- You get more correct if you alternate your answers

MULTIPLE CHOICE EXAMS

- Prepare as you do for other types of exams. See QUICK TIPS FOR STUDENTS on EXAM PREPARATION.
- Find past or practice exam papers, and practice doing multiple choice exams.
- Calculate the time allowed for answering the multiple-choice section of the exam. Ideally do this before you get to the exam if you know the details.
- In the exam, do *not* exceed this time for each question.

PROVEN TECHNIQUE FOR MULTIPLE CHOICE EXAM QUESTIONS

FIRST time through:

- read **all** questions and answer those you are confident about;
- place a **tick** beside these and **do not look at them again**;
- place a **?** beside those you are **not** quite **sure of**; and
- place an **X** beside those you know you **don't** know.

SECOND time through:

- work through **only** those questions with a **?** beside them;
- you may find that answering the questions you are sure of first has triggered your memory on these; and
- do **not** spend too much time on **any one** question.

THIRD time through:

- work through those questions with an **X** beside them;
- do **not** spend too much time on **any one** question; and
- if you still don't know the answers, **and there is no penalty for wrong answers**, take an 'educated guess'.

WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER

Do the easiest ones first and come back for the others. Do not go over your time limit for each question. If you won't lose marks for a wrong answer, make a guess. Never leave a question unanswered.

Final tip: Just because questions appear short and are multiple choice you may not be able to complete them quickly. Some questions require thought and further calculations before you know the answer.

RESOURCES

- Other QUICK TIPS FOR STUDENTS <http://www.usq.edu.au/learningcentre/tips.htm>
- Online resources:
<http://www.usq.edu.au/learningcentre/alsonline/assessment/exam/multiplechoice.htm>
<http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/lisu/resources/exams/exam005.html>
- Talk with a tutor at The Learning Centre (tlc@usq.edu.au)

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