

ONLINE MULTIPLE CHOICE EXAMS

What is a multiple choice exam?

Multiple choice questionnaires (MCQs) are a common form of assessment. Each question in an MCQ has a stem and a number of alternative options, one of which is correct.

Revising for MCQs

Prepare as for other tests. MCQs test factual knowledge and discipline-specific terms so, when revising, pay special attention to learning and understanding:

- definitions;
- new vocabulary and technical terms;
- fundamental concepts, models and frameworks discussed in the unit; and
- multi-step processes.

TIP

Revise regularly. The kind of detailed knowledge that MCQs assess can't be easily learned in a short time frame. Start revising early in the semester and re-visit information routinely.

MCQ exam strategies

In an exam, when confronted with multiple choice, try the following steps:

- 1) Carefully read the stem without looking at the options.
- 2) Underline key terms and clue words in the stem.

TIP

Accept the questions at face value. Your lecturer wants to test you, not "trick" you. That said, it is very important that you read the stems and options closely to ensure you are responding correctly.

- 3) Decide what you think is the answer **before** looking at the options.
- 4) Closely read all the answer options.
- 5) Eliminate those that are obviously wrong.
- 6) Choose the one you think is correct.
- 7) If you can't choose between two alternatives, trust your intuition. Sometimes our feelings are more accurate than our recall.

Note: The above strategies are not fail safe. The best guarantee of success is to comprehensively learn the material being tested.

Additional tips for success

- Don't underestimate the difficulty of a multiple choice exam. A well-designed MCQ will be very challenging and will require in-depth knowledge of the subject being tested.
- Look out for words like *always* and *never*. If there is so much as one counterexample, these options won't be correct. Consequently, answers using more tentative, contextual language are more often correct.
- Similarly, with phrases like *all of the above* and *none of the above*, if any one of the answers is true/false, this option will be incorrect.
- It is recommended that you work through the exam from the beginning to the end. That way you lessen the risk of accidentally filling in the wrong bubble for the wrong question.

TIP

Manage your time carefully in the exam.

If you are unsure about how to answer a question, try moving on and returning to it later if you have time.

TIP

If you really don't know an answer, and can't confidently eliminate any options, go ahead and guess.

You still have a 25 per cent chance of getting it right in a four-option multiple choice test question.

Another perspective on changing your answers

Conventional wisdom suggests sticking with your first instinct is best in MCQs. However, you need not be afraid to change your original answer if, upon careful reflection, it seems wrong. Research has shown that changing answers can be beneficial.

A study of 1,561 introductory psychology mid-term exams found that when students changed their answers, they went from

- wrong to right 51% of the time;
- right to wrong 25% of the time; and
- wrong to a different wrong answer 23% of the time .

Kruger, J. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2005, vol. 88, no. 5, pp. 725-735.

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