

# Multiple Choice Exams



The Learning Centre • <http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au>

*Multiple Choice or Objective exams are based on your ability to recognise the right answer from a range of options. Objective exams can be different in style. For example, multiple choice, true-false, matching and sentence completion are all objective exams.*

## Preparation

- Multiple choice exams often focus on a broad overview of the course, so make sure you know which areas will be included in the test. This allows you to study the most relevant sections. Ask your lecturer/ tutor for advice.
- Ask your lecturer/ tutor if marks will be deducted for an incorrect response (sometimes known as 'negative marking). If so, only guess an answer if you feel there is a good chance of getting it right.
- If past exam papers are available in the library, they can give you some idea of what to expect.

See The Learning Centre resource 'Studying for Exams: Some Basic Guidelines' for study tips.

## Before the exam

- Make sure you know the time, place and materials required for the exam. Pack your bag the night before.
- Get a good night's sleep the night before the exam.
- Make sure you eat something beforehand. This help you to concentrate and remain calm.
- Arrive with enough time to find your seat and get comfortable.
- Avoid conversations with other students about how little study you/ they have done, or how panicky you may be feeling. This only adds to existing exam stress.

## Sitting the Exam

### Before you pick up a pen, read all directions carefully

Be sure exactly what you have to do and listen for any verbal directions or corrections from the exam supervisor.

### Read quickly through the exam

Before you attempt any answers, skim quickly through the entire exam. Doing this allows you to gain an overview of the exam, 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 whichever hand you write with. Check frequently that you are answering a question in its properly numbered space.

### Answer the 'easy' questions first

Try not to get stuck on any hard questions. You will waste time and feel anxious. Go back and do the hard ones later.

## 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 have to choose the 'best' or 'most correct' answer in some multiple choice 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 and cover the choices provided with your hand. Try to answer the question yourself. Then read through the choices. Doing this allows you to make a clearer and 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, always 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 intuition is correct. Only change your answer if you have a very strong hunch that it's wrong, you find new evidence, or suddenly remember otherwise.

## Answering True - 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* 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 more nearly true than the other choices.

### Be aware of the wording used

The following words are commonly used in true-false questions:

- All-most-some-no
- Always-usually-sometimes-never
- Great-much-either-no
- More-equal-less
- Bad-good, Is-is not

### 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'.

### Further Reading

Cadogan, J 1995, *Survive Exams: Study Effectively and Succeed*, New Hobson Press, NSW.

Northedge, A 1990, *The Good Study Guide*, Open University, Milton Keynes.

Prepared by The Learning Centre, The University of New South Wales © 2010. This guide may be distributed for educational purposes and adapted with proper acknowledgement. Email: [learningcentre@unsw.edu.au](mailto:learningcentre@unsw.edu.au)