

Name: Natasha

GBC ID#: 100123456

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Multiple Choice Exams



You're right, studying for a multiple choice exam is different and requires a special method of preparation. Rather than asking the student to produce a correct answer entirely from their own mind, multiple choice exams ask a student to recognize a correct answer among a set of options that include 3 or 4 wrong answers (called distractors).

The good news:

- a. The correct answer is guaranteed to be among the possible responses.
- b. Because multiple choice exams usually contain many more questions than essay exams, each question has a lower point value and thus offers less risk.
- c. All of the above.

The not so good news:

- a. Because multiple choice exams contain many questions, they force students to be familiar with a much broader range of material than essay exams do.
- b. Multiple choice exams also usually expect students to have a greater familiarity with details such as specific dates, names, or vocabulary than other kinds of exams. Students cannot easily "bluff" on a multiple choice exam.
- c. All of the above.

To prepare for a multiple choice exam, consider the following steps:

- a. Begin studying early. Multiple choice exams tend to focus on details, and you cannot retain many details effectively in short-term memory. If you learn a little bit each day and allow plenty of time for repeated reviews, you will build a much more reliable long-term memory.
- b. Make sure that you identify and understand thoroughly everything that your instructor emphasized in class.
- c. Pay particular attention to fundamental terms and concepts that describe important events or features, or that tie related ideas and observations together. These are the items that most commonly appear on multiple choice exams.
- d. As you study your class notes and your assigned readings, make lists, charts, posters, audio tapes – whatever works for you to reinforce your learning.
- e. Look for similarities and differences that might be used to distinguish correct choices from distractors on an exam.
- f. Do not simply memorize definitions. Most instructors will rephrase things in their own words as they write exam questions, so you must be sure that you really know what the definitions mean. Creating your own examples will help.
- g. Brainstorm possible questions with other students. Practice on sample questions, from a study guide or make up your own test questions.
- h. All of the above



Answering Multiple Choice Questions

There is no good substitute for knowing the right answer. Even a well-prepared student fall prey to distractors that look very similar to the correct answer.

Starting out, try the following steps:

1. Cover up the possible responses with a piece of paper or your hand while you read the stem (body) of the question.
2. Try to anticipate the correct response before you are "distracted" by seeing the options that your instructor has provided. Then, uncover the responses.
3. If you see the response that you anticipated, circle it and then check to be sure that none of the other responses is better.
4. Only if you do not see a response that you expected, consider some of the following multiple choice strategies to eliminate responses that are probably wrong and **REMEMBER...THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIES ARE NOT 100% DEPENDABLE AND ARE TO BE USED AS A LAST RESORT!**
 - * Responses that use absolute words, such as always or never are less likely to be correct than ones that use conditional words like usually or probably.
 - * "Funny" responses are usually wrong.
 - * All of the above is often a correct response. If you can verify that more than one of the other responses is correct, then choose all of the above.
 - * None of the above is usually an incorrect response, but this is less reliable than the all of the above rule. Be very careful not to be trapped by double negatives.
 - * Look for grammatical clues. For example, if the stem ends with the indefinite article an, then the correct response probably begins with a vowel.
 - * The longest response is often the correct one because the instructor tends to load it with qualifying adjectives or phrases.
 - * Look for verbal associations. A response that repeats key words that are in the stem is likely to be correct.
 - * If all else fails, choose response (b) or (c). Many instructors subconsciously feel that the correct answer is "hidden" better if it is surrounded by distractors. Response (a) is usually least likely to be the correct one.

Final Tips

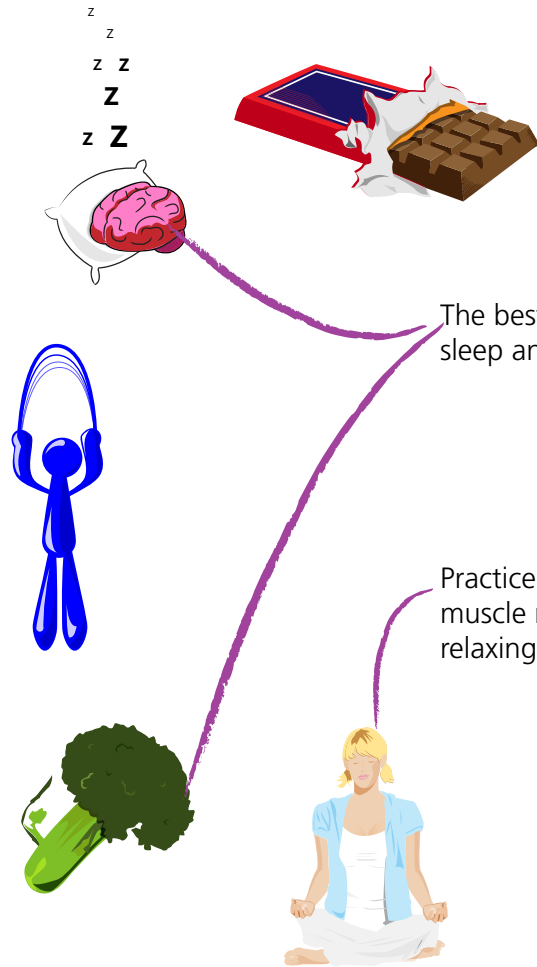
--If you cannot answer a question within a minute or less, skip it and plan to come back later. You may actually find the answer within another question.

--Be sure that you have answered all questions carefully and clearly. Stray or accidental marks may be misread and therefore you may be penalized.

--If you fill the wrong bubble or circle the wrong letter mistakenly, your answer is 100% wrong - there is no appeal.

Take the time to check your work before you hand in the answer sheet.

And Remember...



The best preparation for an exam of any kind is a good night's sleep and a healthy meal.

Practice Relaxation techniques – practice deep breathing and muscle relaxation in a quiet place, alternatively tightening and relaxing muscles from head to toes.

If you want to talk about study strategies with other students,

visit the **PAL** Centre

St. James - B121 (opposite the cafeteria)

Casa Loma - E139 (inside the life Works Centre)

If you need help, are feeling overwhelmed visit the Counselling Office

St. James - Room 582C, A Bldg.

Casa Loma - Room C317