Exam: Multiple Choice Questions

Online or in-person exams

Multiple choice, sometimes known as objective exams, assess your ability to recognise and apply key facts and concepts. These exams can take various forms, including multiple choice questions, true-false items, matching exercises and sentence completion tasks. These exams typically test a **broad understanding** of the unit content rather than in-depth knowledge of a single topic.

Preparing for the exam

- Find out which topics will be covered so you can focus your study on the most relevant content. Ask your lecturer or tutor and pay attention to any hints provided during classes or tutorials.
- If the exam covers all lectures and tutorials, use the unit outline to identify the key themes and concepts.
- Check whether incorrect answers are penalised. If negative marking is used, answer carefully and avoid guessing unless you have a reasonable chance of being correct.
- Practise with past exam papers, if available, to familiarise yourself with the format and types of questions you may encounter.

Answering multiple choice questions

Read each question carefully

Multiple-choice questions can be worded in ways that are designed to test your attention to detail. Read every question and all answer options carefully before making your selection.

Consider all answer options

Even if the first option looks correct, read through all the choices before deciding. Pay close attention to wording such as:

- Negative phrasing (e.g., *Which option does NOT describe...*)
- Comparative wording (e.g., *BEST describes*)
- Judgement-based wording (e.g., *MOST correct*)
- Questions requiring multiple responses (e.g., *Select MORE than one answer*)

Think of your own answer first

Before looking at the options, try to answer the question yourself. This can help you avoid being distracted by incorrect or misleading choices.

Answer every question if possible

Unless incorrect answers are penalised, attempt every question. If you're unsure, use the process of elimination and make your best-informed choice.

Look for grammatical clues

Sometimes an answer option can be ruled out because it does not fit grammatically with the question stem.

Trust your preparation

Your first answer is often correct. Only change it if you have a clear reason, such as recalling new information or identifying an error in your original thinking.

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Answering true or false questions

True or false questions present a statement that you must identify as either correct (true) or incorrect (false). Success often depends on paying close attention to the wording.

Look for key words

Certain words can provide clues about whether a statement is likely to be true or false:

- Absolute words such as *all, none, always,* and *never* often make a statement false because there are usually exceptions.
- Qualifying words such as *most, some, usually, seldom,* and *often* are more likely to appear in true statements because they allow for exceptions.

Check every part of the statement

Many true or false questions contain more than one idea. For a statement to be true, every part of it must be correct. If any part is incorrect, the entire statement is false.

Use your best judgement

If you're unsure, compare the statement with what you know from the unit materials and look for the answer that is most consistent with the evidence and concepts you have studied.

If you are stuck

- 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 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.

Related helpsheets

- Exams: Managing Anxiety
- Exams: Strategies
- Exams: Short Answer Questions

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