



Step-by-Step Approach to Writing Multiple Choice Tests

The studying is over and the test is in front of you. No matter how well you studied, you can still do poorly on the test, mainly from not reading the questions and alternatives **carefully** and **thoroughly**. Reading questions and alternatives too fast can cause you to make connections that aren't really there (have you ever gone to look at a test afterward and say, *why did I circle B? I know that's wrong!...?*)

Follow these tips to help avoid some common multiple choice test taking pitfalls!

First steps: look over the entire test and exam. If you knew logistics ahead of time, chances are, you know how many questions you will have, and how long you have to do them. Do a rough time management estimate to see how long you should be spending on each question, on average.

Now, to the questions:

1. Cover up the alternatives:

- You're more likely to choose the correct answer if you've thought through the question without the interference of information presented in alternatives.
- Begin by covering the alternatives. Then carefully read the question before looking at the alternatives.
- Circle or underline key words. Pay special attention to words that narrow response options such as "principal" function, "primary" criticism, and "major".

2. Read and process:

- Ask yourself "what is this question really asking?"
- You can underline key words, and keep track of absolute and qualifying words such as: "every", "all", "usually", "often", etc.
- Rephrase the question in your own words to make sure you know what it's asking.

3. Predict an answer:

- While not all questions are written so that an answer can be predicted without looking at the alternatives, many are.
- By predicting the answer before you look at the alternatives you're less likely to be swayed by an alternative with closely related but incorrect concepts or applications.
- Even if you can't predict an answer, you may be able to identify closely related concepts that are likely to surface in alternatives.

4. Process each statement:

- Uncover the alternatives.
- Do the options allow for only one correct alternative, or does a response allow for two or more alternatives to be correct? (*e.g.*, the response (d) indicates that both a and b are correct.)
- Read each alternative for meaning, not just to recognize familiar terms or phrases.

5. Identify the correct response:

- Now you're ready to mark the correct alternative on your answer sheet. Choose the correct answer and move on to the next question!





Still stuck? Don't get discouraged!

Bonus tip! Take advantage of test-viewing sessions. That way, you can look at your errors and avoid making the same mistake a second time.

6. Reread the question:

a. If you do not know the answer, reread the question – now that you have seen the options, rereading and thinking about the question may help clarify what the question is really asking.

7. Eliminate wrong answers:

a. If two options still look equally appealing, compare each to the question making sure that the one you eventually choose answers what is asked, or is the "neatest" fit (*i.e.*, doesn't require additional information to be correct).

b. Another way to think about this is to think about the question backwards --- *which of these two (or three, etc) options that I am left with are more likely to be wrong?*

8. Guess:

a. If you're still unsure, guess (if there's no penalty for wrong answers).

b. With all of the question processing you've done, at least you'll be making an educated guess!

Extra tips:

Many times, all the distractors (*i.e.* alternative answers) can be correct statements, in and of themselves. In order to pick the correct response, you have to make sure you are answering the question. Don't select a response simply because you remember seeing it on a lecture slide. It may be a true statement, but it has to correctly answer the question to be the correct response.

Sometimes, over thinking the question can cause you to make connections that aren't there. If you have to make more assumptions or exceptions (than is expected of you for the question) in order for the alternative to be the correct response, chances are, it isn't the correct response!

Don't dismiss a response because it seems too obvious or simple. If you are well-prepared for the test, some of the questions may appear very straight forward! On the other hand, don't select a response because it sounds the "most smart" or has a bunch of fancy terms in it – they may simply be distractors!

If you aren't sure that you made the correct choice, put a big question mark beside the question and move on to the next question. Avoid getting bogged down on one question, as it will take valuable time away from other questions. You don't want to end up carelessly rushing through half of the test (remember how important thorough reading and processing of the question If time permits, return to any problematic questions you've flagged after completing the test, and try them again.

