

Exams: Multiple Choice Questions

Multiple choice or objective exams are based on your ability to recognise facts. Objective exams can be different in style, such as multiple choice, true-false, matching and sentence completion.

Multiple choice exams usually focus on a **broad overview** of the course.

Preparing for the exam

- Determine which areas will be included so you can study the most relevant topics. Ask your lecturer or tutor and listen for clues in tutorials.
- If their answer is 'lectures and tutorials', identify main themes and concepts in the course outline.
- Ask your lecturer: will marks be deducted for an incorrect response? This method of 'negative marking' is best approached with caution – only answer questions you think you have a good chance of getting it right.
- Try past exam papers if they are available, as they can give you some idea of what to expect.
- Refer to the list of FedUni helpsheets following for more tips on preparing for the exam.

Sitting the exam

- Read all directions carefully. Listen for directions from the exam supervisor.
- Read through the entire exam before you write anything. Having an overview of it will allow you to plan your time for each question and to check over your answers.
- When using a separate answer sheet, keep it close to the exam booklet on the same side of the table as the hand with which you write. Check that you are answering a question in its properly numbered space.
- Answer the 'easy' questions first. Go back and do the hard ones later. Try not to get stuck - you'll waste time and feel anxious.

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, when you are instructed to choose the 'best' or 'most correct' answer it is important to consider all options.

Also, 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 whilst covering the choices provided with your hand. Try to answer the question yourself THEN read through the choices. Doing this allows you to make a more accurate choice.

Don't leave any questions unanswered, unless there is a penalty for incorrect answers. If there isn't, 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 instincts are correct. Only change your answer if you have a very strong hunch that it's wrong, you find new evidence, or you suddenly remember otherwise.

Answering true or 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 or often' 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 can't make a perfect match between the question and the answer, choose the alternative that is closest to true compared to the other choices.

If you are stuck...

- Narrow your choice down to whichever answer option is most likely to be true. 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 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.

Source: University of New South Wales (2011)

NB: there are no guarantees with these strategies, but they are worth considering when you really don't know 'the answer'.

Other helpsheets available

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