Tackling Multiple Choice Questions
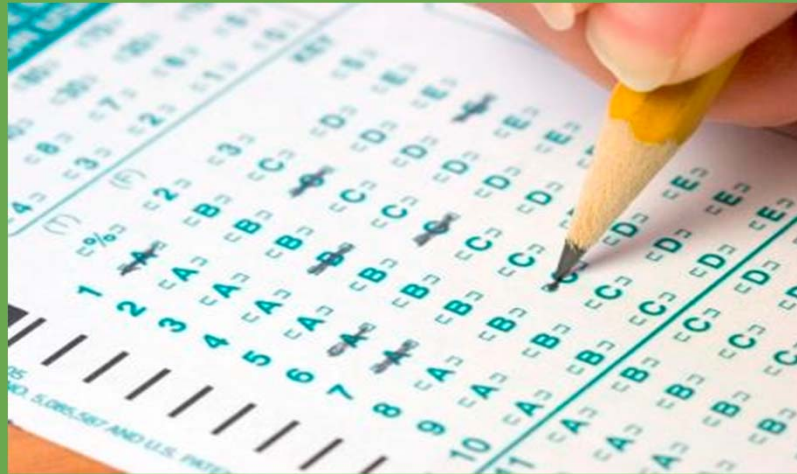
Another step toward successful tests and exams!

Tackling Multiple Choice Questions

Multiple choice exams ask you to recognize a correct answer among a set of options that include 3 or 4 wrong answers (called *distractors*), rather than asking you to produce a correct answer entirely from your own mind.

Students commonly consider multiple choice questions easier than essay questions. Perhaps the most obvious reasons are that:

- The correct answer is guaranteed to be among the possible responses.
- Many multiple choice questions tend to emphasize basic definitions or simple comparisons, rather than asking students to analyze new information or apply theories to new situations.

- Because multiple choice tests/exams usually contain many more questions than essay exams, each question has a lower point value and thus offers less risk.

Despite these factors, multiple choice tests/exams can actually be very difficult. Consider that:

- Because multiple choice tests/exams contain many questions, they force you to be familiar with a much broader range of material than essay exams do.
- Multiple choice tests/exams usually expect you to have a greater familiarity with details such as specific dates, names, or vocabulary than most essay exams do. You cannot easily "bluff" on a multiple choice exam.

Preparation

To prepare for a multiple choice tests/exam, consider the steps we discussed at the last workshop:

- Begin studying early. Multiple choice exams tend to focus on a broad range of 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 review, you will build a much more reliable long-term memory.

- Make sure that you identify and understand everything that your teacher emphasized in class. If you have questions, ask!
- Pay particular attention to fundamental terms and concepts that describe important events or features.

- Focus on new vocabulary or key definitions
  - Be sure that you understand the terms. Do not simply memorize the book's definitions. Most teachers will rephrase things as they write exam questions, so you must be sure that you really know what the definitions mean.
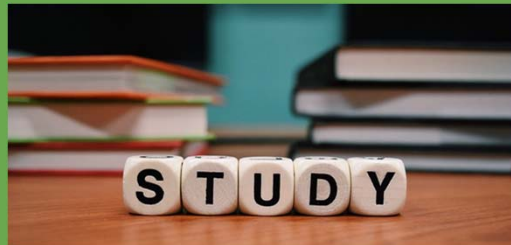
- Brainstorm possible questions with several other students who are also taking the course.
- Practice sample questions on a study guide or quizzes/tests you wrote earlier in the course.

Answering M.C. Questions:

There are many strategies for maximizing your success on multiple choice exams, but the best way to improve your chances is to study carefully before the exam.

There is no substitute for knowing the right answer!

But here are a few tips in case you get stuck:

- Before you begin taking the exam, enter all required information on your Scantron sheet. If you are so eager to start that you forget to enter your name, your results may never be scored. Remember: your teacher will not be able to identify you by handwriting.

- Read each question carefully. Multiple-choice tests examine your ability to read carefully and thoughtfully, as much as they test your ability to recall and reason.

- Always cover up the possible responses with a piece of paper or with your hand while you read the *stem,* or body of the question.
- Try to anticipate the correct response before you are distracted by seeing the possible answers.
- Then, uncover the responses. If you see the response that you anticipated, circle it and then check to be sure that none of the other responses is better.

The King City Secondary School mascot is a:

A. Bear

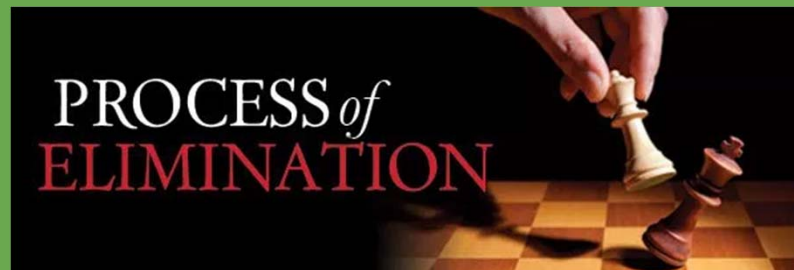A. Lightning bolt

A. Poodle

A. Lion

- Identify the subject area. Identifying what lesson, reading, or lab the question is from might help you narrow the choice of possible responses.
- Read each of the responses. Don't just stop when you come to one that <u>seems</u> likely.
- Don't dismiss a response because it seems too obvious. When you are prepared for the test, some of the questions may appear very straight forward.
- Don't be persuaded by fancy terms in the answers. Just because it sounds impressive doesn't mean it is correct.

Troubleshooting Tips

<u>Process of Elimination</u>: *If you do not see a response that you expected, then consider some of the following strategies to eliminate responses that are probably wrong. None of these strategies are fool-proof, but using them together can increase your chances of success.*

Tip #1

- Eliminate options you know to be incorrect. Underline or highlight the words in questions that eliminate the option.

Jane is taller than Danny. Danny is 148cm. Jane is shorter than Jonathan. Jonathan is 196cm. How tall is Jane?

A. 136 cm

A. 172 cm

A. 202 cm

Tip #2

- Question options that are totally unfamiliar to you. When you have studied well, the correct answer should be familiar.
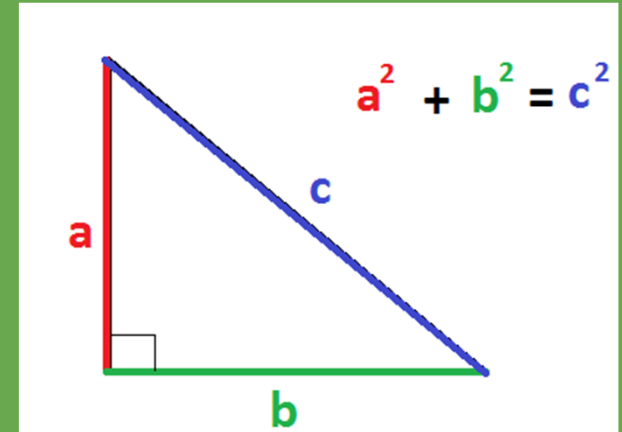
$A^2+B^2=C^2$ is known as the:

A. Theorem of Riemannian geometry

A. Holland's schema theorem

A. Pythagorean Theorem

A. Theorem of finitely generated abelian groups

Tip #3

- Identify key words. Circle or underline key words such as *"all"*, *"always"*, *"never"*, *"none"*, *"not"*, *"few"*, *"many"*, *"some"*, and *"sometimes"*.
- 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"*.

Select the most correct statement:

A. April showers <u>always</u> bring May flowers.

A. April showers <u>usually</u> bring May flowers.

A. April showers <u>rarely</u> bring May flowers.

A. April showers <u>never</u> bring May flowers.

Tip #4

- *"All of the above"* is often a correct response. If you can verify that more than one of the responses is probably 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.

1. The word tale is synonymous with:

A. lyric
B. fable
C. legend

D. both B and C are correct
E. none of the above is correct

The following activities promote a healthy lifestyle:

A. Hiking

A. Yoga

A. Zumba

A. All of the above

Tip #5

- Be careful not to be trapped by double negatives.
- E.g. "Toronto is *not unlike* Chicago."
    - Two 'negatives' equal a 'positive', so this means Toronto and Chicago <u>are alike</u>.

A maple tree is *not unlike*

A. An oak tree

A. A bicycle

A. A red rose

A. A pine tree

Tip #6

- Look for grammatical clues.
  - If the stem ends with the indefinite article "an," for example, then the correct response probably begins with a vowel.
  - A response that repeats keywords that are in the stem is likely to be correct.
  - Question options that grammatically don't fit with the stem. E.g. the question indicates a singular answer, but the answer is in the plural form

Harpal's favourite fruit is an:

A. cherries

A. apples

A. orange

A. banana

Tip #7

- The longest response is often the correct one, because of the need to load it with qualifying adjectives or phrases. This makes the answer either more specific or more inclusive.

This character shares in the responsibility for Romeo's and Juliet's deaths because...

A. Benvolio, because he is was jealous of their love

A. Friar Laurence, because he secretly wed the couple, devised the plan for Juliet to fake her death, did not find a reliable way to get to a letter to Romeo explaining the plan, and he ran from the crypt when the Watch was approaching

A. Paris, because he killed them

A. Capulet, because he locked them in the crypt.

Tip #8

- Give each option the "true-false test". If you are asked to determine the "best" answer, you will be able to eliminate some potential answers by asking yourself whether the statement is true or false.
- If it is true, it is a candidate for the being the "best" answer.
- If it is false, eliminate it.

The best city in which to live in Canada is:

A. Toronto

A. King City

A. Oak Ridges

A. New York

Tip #9

- Beware of "look alike options".
  - Sometimes answers look very similar. Probably one of them is correct.
  - If two alternatives seem correct, compare them for differences, and then refer to the stem to find your best answer.

In the treacherous ice storm, Toronto lost _____ of its urban forest due to ice damage. _____ people were without power for up to a week.

A. much, several

A. some, several

A. much, few

A. little, few

Time Management

- If you cannot answer a question within a minute or less, skip it and plan to come back later.
- Either bubble all the answers as you go, OR bubble them all at the end after circling them on the test. This reduces the possibility of a bubbling error on the Scantron card. If you bubble at the end, you must be mindful to leave time to complete this task.
- Take the time to check your work before you hand in the answer sheet.

Reminders:

- You can write on, or highlight your test sheet. It's yours - go ahead and underline, circle, highlight, cross out the answers as you go.
- Only pencil shows up when a Scantron card is scanned. You can highlight questions you haven't answered, as a reminder to go back. The colour will not affect the scanning.

Bubble Wisely

Be sure that you have filled the appropriate bubbles carefully IN PENCIL. The Scantron machine cannot recognize ink.

Colour the entire bubble. Do not simply 'X' or check-mark the circle.

Thoroughly erase any accidental marks or changed answers.

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