Multiple Choice Strategies

Why are multiple choice strategies important?

At some point, everyone has taken a multiple choice test, and most will take another. Like all test types, different strategies will allow you to more efficiently tackle this type of question and score even higher on your next exam.

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**Tackling Multiple Choice Questions**

Not all multiple choice questions are identical, but many can be analyze using the same techniques. Review these strategies and try them on your next multiple choice assignment.

**Process of Elimination**

The process of elimination involves eliminating answers that you know are incorrect before selecting the answer you believe to be correct.

**Tips for using the Process of Elimination**

- Using the Process of Elimination is the most effective way to improve your chances of selecting a correct answer.
- Details are important to eliminating incorrect answers—watch subtle differences in answer choices.
- Use the question stem to find key text that reappears in answer choices.
- Answer choices must be logical; if the reasoning behind the answer choice is not correct, it is not the correct answer.
- Faulty reasoning is often a reason answers are incorrect. This includes answers that:
  - Contain contradictions
  - Go beyond the facts
  - Assumes one side of an academic opinion is true
- Sometimes “right” answers are wrong. This occurs when there is an option that is “more correct” or contain aspects that more closely relate to the question stem.

**Intelligent Deduction**

Intelligent deduction involves using all the information you have to make a guess, even when you are not certain of the answer.

**Tips for using Intelligent Deduction**

- Do not guess until you have eliminated all known wrong answers
- Look at the facts in the question stem. What issues stand out? THEN look for answers that address issues presented in the question.
- Beware of the following:
  - Distractors or Foils (incorrect answers that are intentionally meant to look like correct answers)
  - Absolute certainties (always, never, cannot, must)
  - If two answers are opposites, one is probably correct
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Consider these techniques to improve your multiple choice abilities

1. Read the stem and anticipate the answer before you look at the multiple choices.
2. Read the stem with every choice.
3. Eliminate answers that are grammatically incorrect.
4. Use the process of elimination.
5. Note qualifying words. Words like usually, often, generally could indicate a true statement.
6. If a word like not, never or none is in the stem, the correct answer must be a fact or absolute. Other alternatives could be true, but incorrect.
7. Note superlatives. Every, all, none, and always indicate answers must be undisputed fact. This is rare in social sciences.
8. The longest response is often the correct one.
9. Look for verbal associations. A response that repeats key words from the stem is likely to be correct.
10. “All of the above” is often the correct response.
11. “None of the above” is often an incorrect response. (This is not as reliable as the all of the above rule—avoid double negatives.)
12. “Funny” responses are usually wrong.
13. When the choices are numbers (dates, times, etc.) the highest and lowest are usually incorrect.
14. If all else fails, choose (b) or (c). Response (a) is typically least likely to be correct.
15. Skip the questions that you are unsure of, and return to them at the end.
16. The most effective approach to studying is to write a multiple choice study guide. (Usually with a study group).
17. Don’t “read into” the question—take everything at face value.
18. If you have a good reason to change your answer—change it—otherwise leave it alone.
19. Multiple choice exams require greater familiarity with details, such as specific dates, names and vocabulary.
20. If, after all else, you cannot decide between two choices, choose what “feels” right.

For two of your courses, identify two strategies you will focus on while taking an exam.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Strategy #1</th>
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RESOURCES

University Counseling Service
3223 Westlawn South
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ucs@uiowa.edu
http://counseling.studentlife.uiowa.edu/

Academic Support & Retention
310 Calvin Hall
319-335-1733
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http://uc.uiowa.edu/student-success/swat

Works Cited:
http://www.xula.edu/cop/docs/taking%20multiple%20choice%20tests.pptx
http://www.unc.edu/~willingh/TOP%20TIPS%20FOR%20TAKING%20MULTIPLE%20CHOICE%20EXAMS.doc