

MULTIPLE CHOICE TESTS: RECOGNIZING CORRECT ANSWERS

Multiple choice exams are the most frequently used type of exams and are often the most difficult to answer. The following suggestions should improve your success in taking this type of exam.

1. *First read all choices, considering each.* Do not stop with second or third choices, even if you are certain that you have found the correct answer. Remember, on most multiple choice tests your job is to pick the *best* answer, and the last choice may be a better answer than any of the first three.
2. Some multiple choice tests include choices that are combinations of previously listed choices, as in the following item.

The mesodermal tissue layer contains cells that will become

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|---|----------------|
| a. skin and sensory organs and nervous systems. | e. a and c |
| b. skin, sensory organs, and blood vessels. | f. b, c, and d |
| c. bone and muscle. | g. a, c, and d |
| d. stomach, liver, and pancreas. | |

The addition of choices that are combinations of the previous choices tends to make items even more confusing. *Treat each choice, when combined with the stem, as a true or false statement.* As you consider each choice, mark it true or false. If you find more than one true statement, then select the choice that contains the letters of all the true statements you identified.

Use logic and common sense. Even if you are unfamiliar with the subject matter, it is sometimes possible to reason out the correct answer. The following test item is taken from a history exam on Japanese-American relations after World War II.

Prejudice and discrimination are

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|---|
| a. harmful to our society because they waste our economic, political, and social resources. |
| b. helpful because they ensure us against attack from within. |
| c. harmful because they create negative images of the United States in foreign countries. |
| d. helpful because they keep the majority pure and united against minorities. |
3. Through logic and common sense, it is possible to eliminate choices *b* and *d*. Prejudice and discrimination are seldom, if ever, regarded as positive, desirable, or helpful, since they are inconsistent with democratic ideals. Having narrowed your answer to two choices, *a* or *c*, you can see that choice *a* offers a stronger, more substantial reason why prejudice and discrimination are harmful. The attitude of other countries toward the United States is not as serious as a waste of economic, political, and social resources.
 4. *Examine closely items that are very similar.* First, try to express each in your own words, and then analyze how they differ. Often this process will help you recognize the right answer.

5. *Look for the level of qualifying words.* As is true in true/false tests, qualifying words are important. Since many statements, ideas, principles, and rules have exceptions, be careful in selecting items that contain such words as *best, always, all, no, never, none, entirely, completely*, all of which suggest that a condition exists without exception. Items containing words that provide for some level of exception, or qualification, are more likely to be correct. Here are a few examples: *often, usually, less, seldom, few, more, and most*. In the following example notice the use of the italicized qualifying words.

In most societies

- a. values are *highly* consistent.
- b. people *often* believe and act on values that are contradictory.
- c. *all* legitimate organizations support the values of the majority.
- d. values of equality *never* exist alongside prejudice and discrimination.

In this question, items *c* and *d* contain the words "all" and "never," suggesting that those statements are true without exception. Thus, if you did not know the answer to this question based on content, you could eliminate items *c* and *d* on the basis of the level of qualifiers.

6. *Some multiple choice questions require application of knowledge or information.* You may be asked to analyze a hypothetical situation or to use what you have learned to solve a problem. In answering questions of this type, start by crossing out unnecessary information that can distract you. In the following example distracting information has been eliminated.

Carrie is comfortable in her new home in New Orleans. When she gets dressed up and leaves her home and goes to the supermarket to buy the week's groceries, she gets nervous and angry and feels that something is going to happen to her. She feels the same way when walking her four-year-old son Jason in the park or playground. Carrie is suffering from

- a. shyness.
- b. a phobia.
- c. a personality disorder.
- d. hypertension.

7. *Jot down the essence.* If a question concerns steps in a process or order of events or any other information that is easily confused, ignore the choices and use the margin or scrap paper to jot down the information as you can recall it. Then select the choice that matches what you wrote.

8. *Avoid the unfamiliar.* Avoid choosing answers that are unfamiliar or that you do not understand. A choice that looks complicated or uses difficult words is not necessarily correct. If you have studied carefully, a choice that is unfamiliar to you is probably incorrect.

9. *Choose the long answers.* As a last resort, when you do not know the answer and are unable to eliminate any of the choices as wrong, guess by picking the one that seems most complete and contains the most information. This is a good choice because instructors are usually careful to make the best answer completely correct and recognizable. The answer often becomes long or detailed.

10. *Make educated guesses.* In most instances you can eliminate any of the choices as obviously wrong. Even if you can eliminate only one choice, you have increased your odds on a four-choice item from one in four to one in three. If you can eliminate two choices, you have increased your odds to one in two, or 50%. Don't hesitate to play the odds and make a guess - you may gain points.

EXERCISE

Directions: The following multiple choice items appeared on an exam in psychology. Study each item and use your reasoning skills to eliminate items that seem incorrect and then, making an educated guess, select the best answer.

1. Modern psychological researchers maintain that the mind as well as behavior can be scientifically examined primarily by
 - a. observing behavior and making inferences about mental functioning.
 - b. observing mental activity and making inferences about behavior.
 - c. making inferences about behavior.
 - d. direct observation of behavior.

2. Jane Goodall has studied the behavior of gorillas in their own habitat. She exemplifies a school of psychology that is concerned with
 - a. theories.
 - b. mental processes.
 - c. the individual's potential for growth.
 - d. naturalistic behavior.

3. If a psychologist were personally to witness the effects of a tornado upon the residents of a small town, what technique would he or she be using?
 - a. experimentation
 - b. correlational research
 - c. observation
 - d. none of the above

4. A case study is a(n)
 - a. observation of an event.
 - b. comparison of similar events.
 - c. study of changes and their effects.
 - d. intense investigation of a particular occurrence.

5. Events that we are aware of at a given time make up the
 - a. unconscious.
 - b. subconscious.
 - c. consciousness.
 - d. triconscious.

6. Unlocking a combination padlock
 - a. always involves language skills.
 - b. always involves motor skills.
 - c. never involves imaginal skills.
 - d. seldom involves memory skills.