

Tips on answering multiple choice questions

“It is not enough to be a good chess player,
you must also play well.”

-Savielly G. Tartakower



Here is a 4-step method that works, whether you know the topic or not. You always know what your next step should be. In a long multiple choice exam, the key to success is training yourself to MAKE CHOICES.

Having a plan helps you feel in control. Having a plan decreases anxiety when you hit the INEVITABLE questions you don't know.

If the first 3 steps don't give you the answer, admit you don't know it. Make your best guess and MOVE ON.

STEP 1. Read the question FIRST

Read the question ONCE, thoroughly (rereading takes too much valuable time).

Pick out key words like age, breed, presentation, diagnostic information, lab values, etc.

Don't look at the answers yet.

STEP 2. Prediction pass

Before looking at the answer choices, try to think of an answer on your own.

With a self-generated answer in your mind, you are less likely to be seduced by the wrong answers, which are called "distracters".

Distracters sound plausible, but they are wrong.

Step 3. Selection pass

Look for the answer you predicted in step 2, and check the other answers to be sure that your choice is still the best.

If the answer you predicted is the best, pick it and move on.

Step 4. Elimination pass

Still not sure of the answer ? Admit you don't know. Stop trying for a correct answer.

Start eliminating wrong answers.

Narrow your choices down to as few as possible.

The best action now is to PICK an answer and MOVE ON to the next question.

Even if you are unsure, you have still improved your odds of getting the right answer from 20% (1 out of 5) to as much as 50% (1 out of 2). Make a choice, and MOVE ON. NOT choosing at this point is a WASTE of time.

Rereading the question at this late date usually means you are trying to find evidence there to help you feel better about a particular choice. You may make assumptions or mentally re-write the question in your head to support the answer you suspect. This will not help you get the answer right.

Make a choice. Move on.

Remember, the key to doing well on this exam is to train yourself to make choices.

FAQs

“What if I don't think this system will work for me ?”

If this system doesn't fit your test-taking style, then by all means do what works for you. The key to success, regardless of how you approach a question, is training yourself to MAKE CHOICES and then moving on.

“How do I know when I should I change an answer ?”

Stick with your first answer unless you recognize that it is clearly not correct - studies show that changed answers are more frequently wrong.

“I am clueless about chickens/cardiology/Box turtle halitosis, what do I do?”

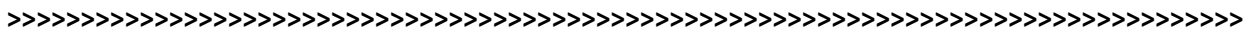
Read, Predict, Eliminate, Select -The correct answer is **guaranteed** to be among the choices. Whittle the choices down to as few as possible and guess.

A common test taking mistake is spending most of your time trying to answer the questions about which you know the LEAST. It's a time-waster. Avoid it.

Don't waste your energy stressing out, either. You still have 199 more questions to go. Take them one at a time.



“No student knows his subject: the most he knows is where and how to find out the things he does not know.”
–Woodrow Wilson



This summary of multiple choice strategies comes principally from:

“What Smart Students Know” by Adam Robinson, co-founder of [The Princeton Review](#) test preparation company

George Washington University Academic Success Center- [“Strategies for Multiple Choice Questions”](#)

[Kaplan Test Prep](#) US Medical Licensure Exam (USMLE) Strategy Sessions



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