

## Multiple Choice Tests

In taking multiple choice tests, you want to keep in mind the basics of test taking: read the directions first and carefully, read each question carefully, and have a systematic approach to the whole exam. There are also some very specific strategies for approaching multiple choice questions.

**1. Cope with Qualifiers** - Qualifiers are words that alter a statement. Words like *always*, *most*, *equal*, *good*, and *bad*. In a multiple choice test, qualifiers can make an option on a test question be a correct option or an incorrect option.

For example, the following 2 statements are nearly identical:

It *often* rains in Seattle.

It *always* rains in Seattle.

The first statement is true, while the word "always" in the second statement makes it false. Keep careful track of qualifiers by circling one that appears in a test question or in the answer options.

To beat qualifiers you need to know the qualifier families:

- All, most, some, none (no)
- Always, usually, sometimes, never
- Great, much, little, no
- More, equal, less
- Good, bad
- Is, is not

Whenever one qualifier from a family is used in an answer option, substitute each of the others for it in turn. Then you can tell which of the qualifiers fits best. If the best qualifier is the one in the answer option, then the option is true, if the best qualifier is another one from the family, then the answer option is false.

**2. Notice Negatives** - Negatives can be words like *no*, *not*, *none* and *never*, or they can be prefixes like *il-*, as in *illogical*, *un-*, as in *uninterested*, *im-* as in *impatient*. Notice negatives because they can reverse the meaning of a sentence.

For example, in this answer option, the prefix *in-* in *indistinguishable* causes the statement to be false:

Because it is a liquid at room temperature, mercury is indistinguishable from other metals.

Each negative reverses the meaning of a sentence. With two negatives, the question's meaning should be the same as it was without. For example, the first statement below has no negatives. It is obviously true. The second statement has two negatives. Since each negative reverses the meaning of the sentence, it is also true, but it is harder to identify as true.

It is logical to assume that Thomas Edison's fame was due to his many practical inventions.

It is illogical to assume that Thomas Edison's fame was not due to his many practical inventions.

When you find negatives in a question, circle them. Try to gain the meaning of the question or statement without the negative. This will help you determine if the answer option is true or false.

3. **Choose the Best Response** - Many options in a multiple choice answer may have some truth to them. You want to identify the *best* response from the *good* responses. If you have eliminated other answer options and have narrowed it down to two, and both seem true, try to pick the answer option that is in some way better than one that is just good. Be sure to reread the stem (or question) over when selecting the *best* answer.

4. **Use Grammatical Clues** - Although questions follow different format, all must follow the rules of grammar. You can eliminate answer options that do not make sense grammatically even if they contain correct information. Consider this example:

The people of Iceland

- a. a country located just outside the Arctic Circle
- b. are the world's most avid readers
- c. claim to be descendents of the Aztecs
- d. the capital, Reykjavik, where arms talks have been held

Answer option (a) is missing the verb, and answer option (d) has no connection to "the people of Iceland." These options can be eliminated, even though both are true, and you are left with options (b) and (c).

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5. **Mark Only "Sure Things" First, Make 3 "Passes" Through the Test** - Go through the test first and answer all the questions for which the answers come easily. For the questions that seem more difficult, mark the qualifiers and negatives, and eliminate as many options as you can. This will give you a head start for your second pass. You may come across another question that gives you a clue to the one that stumped you. On your second pass spend extra time to figure out the "best" of the rest of the answer options. On your third pass, take an educated guess at the ones that are still elusive because any answer is better than no answer.

\*Adapted from Walter Pauk, *How to Study in College*.