

## Multiple Choice Exams

Multiple choice exams-amazingly-give you all the answers! To prevent too many high marks, exam makers try to confuse you. One secret to answering multiple choice questions is to have a systematic approach which fights confusion.

**Step 1. Cover the answers.** After all, they are there to confuse you and tempt you to a hasty and erroneous decision.

**Step 2. Read each question or stem carefully.** It often takes more than one reading. To help decode the question:

- underline key words
- put the question in your own words
- name the concept from which the question is derived (see example at the end of this paper)

**Step 3. Try to answer each question in your head before looking at the choices.** If you determine the answer before you look at the choices, you lessen the possibility of becoming confused.

**Step 4. Uncover the answers one at a time. Use a systematic process of elimination by putting a/an:**

- check mark beside the answer if you think it is correct
- "X" if you feel it is not the right one
- question mark if you are unsure

Generally, the choices given for multiple choice questions are:

- a distractor-an answer similar to the right answer, but wrong (see the example at the end of this paper)
- the right answer, if certain conditions apply
- the right answer
- a "clearly" wrong answer

Do not get trapped by:

- jargon-words that sound impressive are not the right answer
- familiar phrases-statements from the course, but not the right answer



**Step 5. If you are unsure, go with your hunch.** Stay with your hunch unless something later in the exam leads you to a better answer. If you do not even have a hunch, **guess**, unless penalized for doing so. Becoming a Master Student suggests the following guidelines for guessing:

- if two answers are similar except for one or two words, choose one of these answers.
- if two answers have similar sounding or looking words (e.g., intermediate – intermittent), choose one of these answers.
- if the answer calls for a sentence completion, eliminate the answers that do not form grammatically correct sentences.
- if two quantities are the same, choose one.
- if answers cover a wide range (e.g., 4.5, 66.7, 88.7, 90.8), choose the one in the middle.
- if none of the above techniques fit for you, close your eyes and go for it.

### Sample Multiple Choice Question 1

If a wolf or dog rolls onto its back like a puppy, we are witnessing:

- a) a threat display
- b) a sexual display
- c) ritualized combat
- d) an appeasement display

Sample answering strategy:

If a wolf or dog rolls onto its back like a puppy, we are witnessing:

"I'm not sure of the term, but the animal is either being playful or giving in to a threat of some kind."

- |                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| a) a threat display       | x "would be right except the threat is coming from something else, not the wolf/dog" |
| b) a sexual display       | x "I know this is wrong"   |
| c) ritualized combat      | ? "could be"   |
| d) an appeasement display | ? "could be"   |

"We took 'ritualized combat' to mean with other animals, and it didn't seem like this. The animals acted equal until one backed down. So this example could only be *part of* ritualized combat. We also took 'appeasement' as a type of dominance/submissive behavior, and this seems the better, more complete answer."



The question is referring to the concept of dominant/submissive behavior. Here this concept is translated as d) an appeasement display. Note that in this example, the concept is in the choices and the question is an example of that concept.

## Sample Multiple Choice Question 2

Which of the following study skills is most likely to result in success:

- a) Determining which chapters will be on the test
- b) Reading the headings and subheadings in your textbook while reading it
- c) Putting the textbook under your pillow the night before the exam
- d) Using the headings and subheadings in your textbook while reading it

Sample answering strategy:

Which of the following study skills is most likely to result in success?

"I can't really answer this one until I see the choices of study skills, but I know the course has constantly emphasized two principles: be active rather than passive, and choose what works for you."

- a)  "this would help, but not much, because knowing what chapters will be on the test does not mean that you necessarily learned anything in those chapters
- b)  "could be"
- c)  "I know nobody learns by osmosis"
- d)  "could be"

"B and D are very similar; simply "reading" the headings is not as active or as powerful as "using" the headings, so D is "most likely" to lead to success."

Sources: Becoming a Master Student, Canadian Edition, by David Ellis; Strategies for Canadian Students by Joan Fleet, Fiona Good Child, and Richard Zajachawski.

