

Responding to Multiple Choice Questions

In responding to multiple choice questions, you want to keep in mind the basics of test taking:

- read the directions first and carefully
- read each question carefully
- be systematic in your approach to eliminating options.

These are some specific strategies for eliminating options in multiple choice questions.

1. Identify Qualifiers

Qualifiers are words that alter a statement. Words like **always**, **most**, **equal**, **good**, and **bad**. In a multiple choice question, qualifiers can make an option on a test question be a correct option or an incorrect option. For example, the following two statements are nearly identical:

- Smoking often leads to lung cancer.
- Smoking always leads to lung cancer.

The first statement is true, while the word "always" in the second statement makes it false.

Keep careful track of qualifiers by circling ones that appears in a test question or in the answer options. Qualifiers can be broken into the following groups:

- 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 group is used in an answer option, substitute each of the others qualifiers in that group for it in the answer. Then you can tell which of the qualifiers fits best in the statement. 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 can be eliminated.

2. Notice Negatives

Negatives can be words like **no**, **not**, **none** and **never**, or they can be prefixes like ill-, as in illogical, un-, as in uninterested, imp- as in impatient. It is important to notice negatives because they can reverse the meaning of a sentence. It is also important to be aware that two negatives in a sentence are the same in meaning as if the statement had no negatives.

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 someway better than one that is just good. Be sure to reread the stem (or question) when selecting the best answer.

4. Use Grammatical Clues

Although questions follow different formats, 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:

Which of the following best describes the purpose of the relationship between heart rate and exercise intensity for an individual over time?

- (A) the anaerobic energy system is more efficient*
- (B) To increase the amount of oxygen available to muscles*
- (C) To maintain cardiac output*
- (D) systolic blood pressure is higher than diastolic blood pressure*

Answer option (a) and answer option (d) have no connection to “the relationship between heart rate and exercise intensity.” These options can be eliminated, although the statements may be true, and you are left with options (b) and (c).

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 Pauk, Walter, How to Study in College. Sourced from Center for Learning and Teaching, Cornell University web site.