



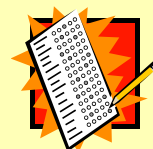
Mastering Multiple-Choice Exams

To master multiple choice questions, understand how professors create them.

First, they select an important concept to test your understanding

Next, they generate the correct answer

Finally, they generate **distractors** to test *how well* you understand concept



Distractors are choices that can look, sound or mean about the same thing as the correct answer, but are incorrect because they are either:

- too specific (include extreme modifiers such as *always*, *never*)
- too general (they leave out a piece, make answer vague)

Try these strategies when faced with multiple choice exams:

1. Cover up the answer and read only the **stem** (the question or statement). Underline or circle key words.
2. **Analyze the stem**, noting how the meaning changes with:
 - Qualifiers (i.e. usually, sometimes)
 - Modifiers (i.e. always, never)
 - Negatives (i.e. not, none, un__, dis__, etc.)
3. Try to answer the question before reading choices
4. **Identify and eliminate distractors** to help narrow your choices:
 - Note similar answers
 - Note grammatically incorrect choices
 - Can an answer be correct with extreme modifiers (i.e. *always*, *never*)?
5. Re-read remaining choices as **true/false statements**
6. Stuck?
 - Scan test questions for clues** and information that might help
 - Make notes in the margin** to help you recall content
 - If all else fails, guess!

Sample:

The following question stem has a **qualifier** that suggests one choice is the best answer among several plausible alternatives.

What is **chiefly** responsible for the increase in the average length of life in the USA during the last fifty years?

- a. Compulsory health and physical education courses in public schools. (**Distractor**)
- b. ****The reduced death rate among infants and young children. **(Correct Answer)**
- c. The safety movement, which has greatly reduced the number of deaths from accidents. (**Distractor**)
- d. The substitution of machines for human labor. (**Distractor**)

From: How to Better Prepare Multiple Choice Test Items: Guidelines for University Faculty.
<http://testing.byu.edu/info/handbooks/betteritems.pdf>

For further reading
[Click Here!](#)

Like This Handout?
[Here's More!](#)

