Tutor Program Tip - Taking Multiple Choice Exams

Introduction
Multiple-choice tests are the most common type of objective tests used for large lecture courses. In this format, a question or incomplete sentence is given (called the stem), followed by 4 or 5 option statements. These options (choices) either answer the question or complete the sentence. You must eliminate the incorrect choices and find the correct one, which means you will need to learn many details, understand basic concepts and apply them to given situations.

Here are a few tips in completing multiple-choice questions:

Read the stem and each choice as if it were a separate true-false statement
Many students have lost points because they did not read all of the possible answers before selecting the correct answer.

If you determine a choice to be false, draw a line through it
By physically crossing out answers, you eliminate options that you will not have to read again. (This can be a real time saver!)

Continue to eliminate incorrect choices until you find the correct or best answer
On most multiple-choice tests, students must select the “best” answer. Several choices may be correct or good answers, but only one will be the “best” answer. Sometimes two answers will appear to be correct. If this happens reread the stem to the question. Reread each option. Are there any differences in the wording, which changes the meaning? Look for key words or phrases that will make a difference in selecting the correct answer. You will need to use your best skills in logic and critical reading when you have two choices that appear to be correct.

Watch out for questions and choices that include absolute terms of qualification
Such as: always, never, must, all, none, only, etc. Choices using these terms are frequently incorrect because they need to be true in every case; and few statements are always true.

Look for options that give complete information
Although incomplete answers may not be false, they do not contain specific, detailed information and therefore will probably be the wrong answer!
Be aware of key words used in the stem or in the answers

Such as: *not, except, and, or, but,* etc. These words can completely change the meaning of a sentence. If you skip over these little but significant words, you most likely will choose incorrectly...be careful!

Watch out for answers which state:

“All of the above,” “both (a) and (b),” or “none of the above.” Read carefully. If you can eliminate even one of the alternatives, you can eliminate “all of the above”. In the same vain, if you are positive that at least one option is correct, you can eliminate “none of the above”. Instructors who carefully design multiple-choice questions often make “all of the above” and “both (a) and (b)” the correct answer. “None of the above” is sometimes just to fill in for an answer.

Finally, MAKE AN EDUCATED GUESS!

If you can eliminate two of the four choices, then you have a 50% chance of getting it right!

Here are some tips if you must guess:

- The longest answer is often correct.
- The most complete and inclusive answer is often correct
- An answer in the middle, especially if it is the longest, is often correct.
- If two answers have opposite meanings, one of them is probably correct
- Answers with qualifiers, such as generally, probably, often, sometimes are frequently correct.
- Answers with qualifiers, such as all, always, never, none, and only, are usually incorrect.

True/False Questions:

- Your chance of being correct is always 50%.
- Look carefully at the details of the questions.
- For a statement to be true, each part must be true.
- Qualifiers like *never, all, none, every, no, always, and only* frequently make statements false.
- On the other hand, terms such as; *often, may, many, few, most, can, sometimes, rarely, generally, frequently, and usually* can make the statement true!

Statements, which contain negative words, require careful consideration

Underline or circle negative words like “not” when they appear in a true/false question. If the question includes a double negative, and a negative prefix (*in, il, ir or un*), cross out the word “not” and the negative prefix. Reread the question to determine whether it is true or false.
Reading too much into questions
Underline the word or words that make a statement false. If you know a statement to be false by omission (a key word or phrase has been left out), mark the statement false even though you can’t actually underline the words that make it false. Otherwise, the statement is true! Trust your instincts!

The design of true/false questions
Instructors frequently match terms with inappropriate definitions. Therefore, when preparing for a t/f test or even a multiple-choice test, be sure to know your definitions, important people and events!

If you have time
Correct all false statements on the exam, even if you are not required to do so. This helps you to remember why you thought the item was false and the professor might agree with your correction! You won’t be able to remember what you were thinking when you get the exam back!

OTHER GENERAL TIPS:
- Read directions carefully.
- Plan your time; wear a watch.
- Quickly skim through the exam to get a feel for its difficulty.
- Answer the easiest questions first.
- Make your best guess and move on, spend minimum time on any one question.
- Check your numbering so that the number on your answer sheet corresponds to the number on your exam booklet.
- If possible, leave 5-10 minutes at the end to review your answers.
- Check for carelessness. Only change answers when you are reasonably sure you have made a mistake. Do NOT change a guess; go with your first gut feeling!

Summary
One other important point, to achieve a score of 70, students must thoroughly understand the material 100%. Don’t just study to the point of recognition and rely upon intra-exam cues especially since there may not be any! You will need to understand the: who, what, why, when, where and how something works. A thorough understanding of the material will help you to distinguish between answers that are almost correct and answers that are truly correct.