

# Becoming 'testwise' is the key to mastering objective tests

## Counselor's CORNER

Dear Counselor: I don't do well on multiple-choice tests. Unfortunately, this semester three of my instructors give tests with multiple-choice or true-false questions. I study hard for the tests, but I really get nervous and confused on these kinds of questions. Do you have any suggestions? Tammy, sophomore.

Dear Tammy: Many students have difficulty taking objective tests: multiple-choice, true-false, fill-in and matching questions. However, there are several strategies that will make a difference in your performance on these tests.

First, think about the way you are preparing for the test. Studying for an objective test may require more memorization of details, such as definitions, lists, formulas, dates and vocabulary, and this memorization component should be part of an active study process.

The process involves the construction of a framework for the placement of these details. The best way to do this is by identifying the major ideas on a test.

Organizing information to answer these questions allows you to practice thinking about the material in various contexts. With this active study and review, there will be less confusion in choosing the correct answer from among unfamiliar alternatives on a multiple-choice test.

Second, use strategies that will maximize your performance in any testing situation. Begin reviews for major tests approximately one week before the test.

The day before the test should be used for a final relaxed review of the material, followed by adequate sleep. Plan to arrive at the exam in plenty of time and select a seat in the front of the classroom.

After you receive your test, take a few minutes to read the directions carefully and to skim the test. It is

important to budget your time in terms of the point value of each section of the test.

Write the number of minutes you can allow for each section in the margin of your test paper. Smart test-takers know that any test can be improved with additional work, and they use all of the time allotted for the test.

Also, be sure to leave an extra five minutes or so for review after you complete the exam. Then, stick to your plan!

Begin by answering all the easier questions first. This strategy will give you momentum and confidence and will allow your unconscious mind to work on the more difficult questions.

This strategy also may provide just the extra bit of information you need to answer a difficult question. When trying to choose the best alternative as an answer on a multiple-choice test, remember to give preference to information given by your instructor rather than from a textbook.

Third, learn to be testwise on objective tests:

- When you change answers, the odds are only three out of ten that you will change to a correct answer. Be certain!

- On a multiple-choice test, read the stem (question) carefully. Try to predict the answer before you look at the alternatives. Eliminate those choices which are false and code the alternatives. (For example, a system of T, F, \*, ?, will enable you to save time when you return to the question after completing the test.

- When you must guess, always choose the same alternative consistently. For example, always choose "a," "b" or "c," etc.

The general characteristics of the most correct answer on multiple-choice tests are that they statement is the most general and qualified, the most encompassing and inclusive, and often the longest response.

Other cues for making educated guesses on multiple-choice tests:

- If an alternative does not grammatically follow the question, it is probably incorrect.

- Answers with absolute words, such as all, always, everyone, never, no one and only are usually incorrect.

- Answers with qualifiers, such as generally, probably, most, often, some, sometimes and usually, are frequently correct.

- Correct items sometimes repeat some of the terms in the question.

- Partly true and partly false statements are false.

- If there are two alternatives which seem to be opposites, one of them is probably correct.

- Alternatives with unfamiliar terms tend to be incorrect.

- If two alternatives overlap or mean essentially the same thing, both are probably incorrect if there is only one correct alternative.

- If two items are correct and there is only one possible answer, "all of the above" must be correct.

- Simplify questions with double negatives by crossing out both negatives and then determining the correct answer.

- Even a well-prepared student may sometimes have to make a few educated guesses on objective tests. Never try to make the guessing strategy "fit." It is always better to go with what you know and what your intuition tells you is the correct answer.

Remember, however, that no test-taking strategy can replace thorough understanding of the material and good test preparation.

Try to get copies of old tests and practice using these strategies so you feel comfortable with them before the real test.

*For more information on test-taking strategies and other study skills come to the Learning Skills Program in Frazer Hall.*

*Students who wish to address these issues can come by the UK Counseling and Testing Center, 301 Frazer Hall, or call 257-8701.*