MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Most multiple choice questions are incomplete statements. A partial statement (called the STEM) leads to several sentence endings. One of the endings is correct. The other choices are called “distracters” or “decoys.” For example:

STEM: The almost perfect wall of granite boulders surrounding some lakes in Iowa was formed by:

a. American Indians - decoy
b. prehistoric men - decoy
c. huge meteors - decoy
d. thick ice - correct answer

Before you look at a question on a multiple choice test, you must read the directions carefully. Some directions will say “Mark the one best answer,” or “Mark all the correct answers,” and even “Mark the answer that does not belong.” You will lose credit if you don’t follow directions. If the directions are not clear ASK!

Begin each question by reading the STEM all the way through. Then read all the CHOICES all the way through. Don’t rush to mark the first choice that sounds good. In some questions, all the choices may be correct, and you have to choose the BEST one. You won’t find it unless you read all the choices.

After you read the stem and all the choices, spend just a few seconds thinking about them. If you don’t know the answer, cross out any choices you have decided don’t fit. Then mark the question so you can easily find it later and go on to the next question. You should try to answer the easiest questions first to get as many correct (and points) as you can. Then go back to the questions you skipped.

When you go back to these questions, try to eliminate more choices. The more you get rid of, the better your chances of finding the correct answer. If you can eliminate all the “decoys,” then you will be left with the correct answer. If you can only eliminate 1 or 2 choices, you should GUESS at the correct one.

USING THE TRUE-FALSE TECHNIQUE

You can use the True-False technique to help in solving multiple choice questions. In this technique, you make a complete statement using the stem and each choice in turn. If the choice makes a false statement, you cross it out. (It’s a decoy). If it results in a true statement, it is probably correct. For example:

Because of its lack of lumber, Syria has many “beehive” homes built of:

a. metal       b. concrete       c. marble       d. mud brick
Try the first choice. “Because of its lack of lumber, Syria has many “beehive” homes built of METAL.” Since Syria is a hot, dry, and poor country, you might decide that is false. When you replace METAL with MARBLE or CONCRETE, you should know that both these materials are expensive and not available. The last choice, MUD BRICK, probably made locally, would be inexpensive, available, and would hold up in a dry climate.

Don’t rush through this method. Think carefully about each choice.

STICK TO THE SUBJECT OF THE COURSE

When a multiple choice question includes choices that you don’t recognize or that seem out of place, don’t panic. Chances are that these choices are decoys. For example:

Which of the following does not have any moons?


You might think, “I’ve heard of Cassiopeia but we didn’t study it. I’ve never even heard of Perseus! I bet both are decoys.” Then you would cross them off. That would leave a 50-50 chance of guessing correctly. Both of the remaining choices are planets. You should mark the question and come back later. Later you might remember that Mars has moons. So that would leave Venus as the choice, since it’s the only answer left.

WATCH OUT FOR NEGATIVES AND EXTREME WORDS

Whenever you find negative words (such as NOT or EXCEPT), circle them so that they stand out. Then make sure you don’t forget them when you read the questions. For example:

Which materials are NOT used in making saddles?

a. linen, canvas, serge  b. wood and leather  c. rubber and cork  d. iron and steel

The correct answer is “d.”

Always circle 100% words such as NEVER, NO, NONE, BEST, WORST, ALL, and EVERY. You should be very suspicious of any choice using these words. If you have to guess, you cross out any choices that use these words. For example:

The author suggests that the desert:

a. climate is unpredictable.

b. heat is ALWAYS unbearable

c. is TOTALLY empty of rain.

d. earthquakes pose CONSTANT danger.
If you don’t know the answer, cross out the choices with the 100% words (b, c, d.). That leaves “a.”

**FOOLISH CHOICES**

Any silly choice should be crossed off. For example:

In the sentence, “When the boy won the prize, he was WALKING on air,” what do the capitalized words mean?

a. The air pollution was especially thick that day.
b. The boy was happy about winning.
c. The boy was wearing very comfortable shoes.
d. The boy was worried.

The foolish choice is “a.” Choice “d” isn’t logical (why be worried for winning??), and choice “c” has nothing to do with winning a prize. That leaves choice “b.”

**“ALL OF THE ABOVE” QUESTIONS**

Frequently when you are given the choice of “all of the above,” that would be the correct answer. Sometimes you can see this fairly easily. If you know that many choices are correct, then all may be correct. For example:

Which of the following cities are capitals?

e. Freetown  f. La Paz  g. all of the choices.

If you recognize two or more of the choices as capitals, then chances increase that they all may be capitals.

**NUMBERS**

When all the choices are numbers, the answer is easy if you have memorized the correct one. If not, then you’ll have to guess. If you have no idea of the correct answer, your chances of guessing correctly are increased if you cross off the highest and lowest numbers. For some reason, test writers usually include one number lower and one number higher than the correct answer. This “rule” allows us to cross off several choices. For example:

The “Great Pyramid” originally stood how many feet high?

a. 281 ft.  b. 381 ft.  c. 481 ft.  d. 981 ft.
You would cross out 181 ft. and 981 ft., leaving the 2 middle numbers. You now have a 50-50 chance of guessing correctly. (Oh, 481 ft. is the correct answer.)

LOOK ALIKE-CHOICES

Test makers occasionally include in one question, two choices that are alike except for one word. Then this happens, you should assume that one of those two choices is correct. This is because the test maker’s interest seems to be FOCUSED on those choices. For example:

The author considers himself an authority on:

a. touring the Middle East.
b. Middle East rug dealers.
c. Middle East rug Bargains.
d. behavior patterns of tourists.

If you had no idea what the author considered himself an authority on, you should cross out choice “a” and choice “d.” Then you should guess between the similar pair of “b” and “c.”

LONGER CHOICES

In multiple choice questions, the correct choice is often the longer one that includes the most information. For example:

Why are the climates of Europe generally warmer than North America’s, when they both are at about the same latitude?

a. There are less mountains in Europe.
b. The waters surrounding Europe moderate the climate, helping to keep the winters warmer and the summers cooler.
c. There are less trees in Europe.

If you don’t know the answer, you should guess that “b” is the correct answer because it is the longest and gives the most information.