

How to Analyze a Multiple Choice Test

(so you can do better next time)

Get a copy of a test you've taken or one that has been given in the class before. Also get a copy of the answer key. Complete the following steps for every question you missed — and other questions if you have time. The more questions you analyze, the better you'll understand what's expected of you on the tests being given in the course. To keep track of your answers to the questions below, you may want to make up a tally sheet. And you may want to do this with a friend.

Read the question stem:

What is the subject or topic of the question stem?

What is the basic question implied by the question stem?

A basic question begins, usually, (with who, what, when, where, why, or how). For instance, in the question appearing below the question stem implies the basic question, “What can cause delayed speech in children?” The question stem may already be in the form of a direct question, but many stems are not.

Question Stem:

Delayed speech in children can be a symptom of:

Choices:

1. mental retardation
2. neurological problems
3. hearing loss
4. emotional problems

1. a, b, and c

2. a, c, and d

3. b, c, and d

4. All of the above.

Locate the place in the textbook where the subject or topic is covered.

1. Is the information about this topic covered in the text?
2. How does it appear? (main or sub-heading, italics, underlined, different color, etc.)
3. Have you underlined that information or included it in your notes?
4. Is your underlining or marginal notes information complete and accurate?
5. How is the information phrased? (Is it the same as or different from the test phrasing?)

Locate the place in your lecture notes where the topic is covered.

1. Was the information covered in the lecture?
2. Did you include the information on this topic in your notes?
3. Did you include enough accurate information?
4. Did you mark the information in some way to indicate its importance? (Underline, number, asterisk, circle, etc.)
5. How is it phrased in the notes? (Is it the same as or different from the way the question stem is phrased?)

Look at the choices in the question.

1. What is the correct answer?
2. Where do the choices come from? (text or notes?)
3. How are they phrased? (Lecture talk, textbook talk, phrasing different from both?)
4. In what ways were any of the choices confusing?
5. Why is one choice the “best” answer?

Begin a list of the basic questions implied by the stems.

1. Decide what kinds of questions are most typical.
2. What do they ask for? (definitions, processes, names-dates-places, general concepts, specific details, formulas, rules, applications, examples, causes and effects, problems and solutions, theories, reasons why, general trends, processes, sequences, others....)

With a list of basic questions most typical for this course, you are ready to study more effectively for the next test by:

1. Effectively applying the Question step of the Study Chunk Reading process as you read the textbook. (see online handout)
2. Using the recall column in the Cornell System of notetaking to record the basic questions you predict will come on the next test. (see online handout)
3. Preparing for the next test by posing questions and answering them to yourself outloud or in small study groups.