

A Systematic Method of Answering Multiple Choice Questions

READ the stem of the question.

- Check for unknown words or words that may have a specific definition for the particular subject area. If a word is unknown ask the instructor or make an intelligent guess at meaning.
- Note key words or key information to be used while answering the questions. Underline these if the stem is long.

Mentally SIMPLIFY and/or CLARIFY the stem to insure understanding.

- Condense the stem; shorten it by using only key words.
- Translate the stem; put it in your own words; ask it in a different way. Good “question” words to keep in mind are: *who? what? when? where? why? how?*

Mentally ANSWER the question posed in the stem.

- Think of the answer(s) in your own words.
- Do this before looking at any of the choices.

SEARCH the choices and ELIMINATE those that don't match your answer from step three.

- Read each choice as if taking a true-false test.
- Put a plus sign [+] by the choice(s) that do match what you thought of in step 3, (true).
- Put a minus sign [-] by the choice(s) that do not match what you thought of in step 3, or simply draw a line through it (false).

CHOOSE the best answer.

- You will be left with 1 or more choices that match what you thought of in step 3. Here is your answer! *or*
- You will have eliminated all but 2 or 3 choices. If left with several matches and you are required to give only one answer, use logical reasoning or guessing rules to pick the best one.

SPECIAL CASES:

1. Questions that require computation (mathematics, chemistry, physics, business, pharmacy).
 - Proceed with steps # 1 and # 2 to determine the formula and/or principle to be applied in computation.

- Complete the computation to arrive at an answer before looking at any of the choices.
 - Search to find the answer; if your answer does not match — check your computations/procedures; check to see which formula or concept applies; check for misreading of the question.
2. Negative questions: These are tricky and confusing because they ask for what is not, rather than what is. Example: “Which of the following is not an example of the executive powers of the President?”
- After you have read the stem, translate the question so that it is positive; “What are the executive powers of the President?” or “Which of the following are executive powers?”
 - ANSWER the new question.
 - ELIMINATE those choices which answer the positive (new) question.
 - CHOOSE from what is left as answer to the original (negative) question.

From Swanson, 1978