

UNIT

46

HANDLING MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

Use this unit to help you to:

- ▼ score well in exams consisting of multiple-choice questions
- ▼ develop speed as well as accuracy in making your choices.

What is a multiple-choice question?

This is a question where you are given a choice of answers and you have to identify the correct one.

What do you know about multiple-choice papers?



Are these statements true or false?

- | | |
|---|------------|
| 1 You can change an answer once you have filled in your answer sheet. | TRUE/FALSE |
| 2 There is a set pattern as to how many times a, b, c or d come up. | TRUE/FALSE |
| 3 You have to answer all the questions in order. | TRUE/FALSE |
| 4 You don't have marks taken off for wrong answers. | TRUE/FALSE |
| 5 You have to choose only one answer. | TRUE/FALSE |

Response

- 1 True. You can change your answer but read the instructions carefully for doing this. You normally use an HB pencil to fill in your answers so you need to make sure that the computer can read any corrected answer.
- 2 False. There is *no* set pattern; the answers come up in any order, so don't waste time looking for a pattern.
- 3 False. You can answer them in any order; just be careful how you transfer from your question paper to your answer paper. Make sure the number of the question is the same as the number on your answer sheet. You may find a ruler is useful as a guide.
- 4 True. You don't lose any marks for a wrong answer, so always have a go at every question.
- 5 This varies, so you must read the instructions very carefully.

Tackling multiple-choice questions in exams

In exams, multiple-choice questions usually carry equal marks. However, that doesn't mean it will take you the same amount of thinking to 'crack' each one.

If you have a reasonable grasp of your subject, you will probably find three kinds of question: let's call them 'easy', 'hard' and 'maybe'. A question is clearly 'easy' if you know the answer, and 'hard' if you don't. An 'easy' question for you may be 'hard' for someone else. Let's try to define the different kinds:

- 1 'easy': questions where you know that one option is definitely the right (or best) one.
- 2 'hard': questions where you really haven't a clue, and you'll need to make an educated guess.
- 3 'maybe': questions where you think you know the right (best) option, and you think you know why one or two are wrong, but you're not *quite* sure which is the option to pick.

How can you tackle each kind of question in the most productive way?



For each of these three kinds of question choose one of the following four approaches that you feel is most appropriate.

- 1 Look at the questions quickly and choose the option which you know has nothing wrong with it.
- 2 Look carefully at each option in turn and decide which one is correct or best.
- 3 Look carefully at each option in turn and decide which option is right or best, and why each of the others is wrong or not best, then make your final choice.

- 4 Look at the question and mark with a cross the options that are definitely wrong, then look more carefully at all those left to select which is the right (or best) option.

Response

For 'easy' questions approach 1 will be best.

For 'hard' questions approach 4 is best.

For 'maybe' questions probably the best approach is 3.

Getting your act together

As we all know, in exams you have to watch the time. It's not very sensible, if, when the time is up, you are still pondering Question 43, but you haven't reached Questions 49 and 50, which are easy ones for you. How can you make sure you tackle the questions so that you can answer as many as possible?



Here are the three steps for tackling a multiple-choice exam paper, but they are not in any order. What would be the most sensible order to do these steps? Put '1' beside the most logical first step, and so on.

- Look at the more difficult questions, ruling out any obvious distractors, and making an educated guess from what is left.
- Look at your 'maybe' questions, putting a cross beside obvious distractors, then choosing what seems the most sensible of the options remaining.
- Look through all the questions quite quickly, marking in your choice of options for those where you are certain you are right.

Response

You probably chose the best order:

- 1 Look through all the questions quite quickly, marking in your choice of options for those where you are certain you are right.
- 2 Look at your 'maybe' questions, putting a cross beside obvious distractors, then choosing what seems most sensible of the options remaining.
- 3 Look at the more difficult questions, ruling out any obvious distractors, and making an educated guess from what is left.

Tackling multiple-choice questions in learning material

If you aren't in an exam you have more time to answer multiple-choice questions and you have an opportunity to learn from each question.

For example, suppose you're looking at multiple-choice self-assessment questions like some you'll find in others of these units. Don't go to the response as soon as you have the right choice in mind. Think about the others. Try to decide what's wrong with them. Try to work out what the response or comment will be for each one.

Then go to the response, and find out:

- if you were correct in your choice
- if you worked out exactly what was wrong with the others.

If you do this, you'll learn far more from each question than if you'd simply spotted the right answer straight away, and checked that you were right. You will have learned things which people might do by mistake. The more you know about likely mistakes, the less likely you are to make them.

Action plan

Doing well at multiple-choice exams and getting the most out of multiple-choice self-assessment questions depends not only on how much you know, but on how you approach your task.

If you are coming up to a multiple-choice exam, you may want to get hold of past papers and speed yourself up by practising them.

Decide what you can do to improve the way you answer multiple-choice questions, and note what you will do below.

Multiple-choice questions in exams

Approach to use:

How to practise:

When

Multiple-choice questions in learning material

Approach to use:

How to practise:

When

What else?

Other units related to this one are:

- 44 *Exams – watching the clock* – to help you use your time in exams effectively.
- 47 *Putting exams in perspective* – to help you feel better about exams.
- 49 *Reducing exam stress 1 and 2* – to help you identify and overcome exam stress.

