

Transcript for “Episode 8. Multiple Choice Mayhem”

Student: "I hate multiple choice questions."

Student: "They seem so confusing!"

Student: "Is this a trick question?"

Student: "Do I go with my gut, or do I change?"

Student: "I always second guess myself!"

Student: "Did I pick too many of the same letter in a row?"

Student: "I'm rushed for time..."

Student: "I'm down to 2 choices."

Student: "Do I just guess?"

Narrator: Multiple choice is great because the correct answer is right there in front of you. But how do you find it? And how can you maximize your score? Using a few simple strategies, you can use psychology to help you pass Psychology (and other courses with multiple choice tests). First, a "bird's-eye-view" and some general strategy. Then, tips from students, based on science, that will help you bubble your way to success. Last, some myth-busting - if you have to guess, what works (and what doesn't)?

For multiple choice questions you have to recognize the best answer. And "best" might mean the most accurate, complete, or inclusive. So start by eliminating the losers.

Read the "stem" (the question itself). Underline or circle clues. You might try reading each question twice. On the first read, identify the topic. On the next, identify what the question is specifically asking about that topic. Focus on what's actually present in the question and answer options themselves. Don't overthink things - don't add words, don't add your own thoughts, or go wild with inferences or implications.

Do not compare answers to each other. Judge each choice on its own merit by marking each option with an "X" (if it's wrong), a "check" (if it's right), or a "?" (if you don't know). This narrows down your options and keeps you working without looking back. So cross out those wrong choices right away.

Don't worry about time for the first half of the testing period. Don't spend time dithering back and forth. Just keep moving forward. You are saving half your time to come back to ones you're not sure about. Maybe some other questions in the exam will spark some insight or remind you of something.

When the period is half over, if you do not have half the questions done, now you want to start budgeting time.

Those are some general tips. Here are some tips on test-taking, based on science.

Now, it turns out that what a lot of students actually do works and is supported by science. A survey of students in a large lecture class of the most common major on the IU campus found that there are 2 ways students succeed with multiple choice questions.

Student: "I look for key words and context clues."

Narrator: Instructors have to give you identifying clues to let you know what material the question is referencing. So mark the words that remind you of particular lectures or readings. This might include concepts, technical terms, names/dates/events/historical periods, words from flashcards that you studied, what the teacher or book mentions or spends a lot of time on. Every term or example from class is a potential "retrieval clue" that can help you recall the correct answer.

Having trouble picking key words or confused about what the question is asking? Try putting the question into your own words. Or think about it like this: Most multiple choice questions can be divided into two types: Definition Questions or Relationship Questions. Definitions test your understanding of the meaning or definition of a concept or term. Relationships test your understanding of the relationship between two or more concepts - like cause and effect, chronology, processes, compare and contrast, example or scenario, application; something like that. Read the question and mark the key words that will help you figure out which one it is. Check out the website to look at some examples.

Assuming you recognize some of the key words in the question, what strategies can you use to hone in on the best choice?

Student: "I choose the one that makes the most sense."

Student: "I choose the one that sounds the most familiar for the subject."

Narrator: These are cognitive or thought strategies. They use memory or learning processes to access or associate with things you learned. These are best if you studied. What about when you can eliminate a couple of bad answers, and are down to two? What about when you have no clue? Keep watching!

When you are down to 2 possible answers, there are meta-cognitive strategies, or thinking about thinking strategies, that can help. Focus on each choice separately, again, looking for cues or clues - terms and examples you recognize. Look also for "alarm words." Alarm words include absolutes like "always" and "never" (which make a choice more limited and often incorrect) and qualifiers like "sometimes" or "often" (which makes a choice more inclusive and often correct). Alarm words also include negative words like "no," or "except," and even negative prefixes ("dis-," "non-," "un-"). Check out the big list of alarm words on our website.

When they have no idea, or feel they are doing badly on the exam, students sometimes resort to "psyching out" the test itself. These are called "test-wise strategies" (like "when in doubt, 'C' your way out," pick the longest answer, and stuff like that). This is when you really have to guess.

Do these work? Some do. And some *might*. Let's do some myth busting. I'll just stick with my first instinct."

Student: "I shouldn't change my answer or second-guess myself."

Narrator: Myth! Many people believe this, but research shows that the majority of answer changes are from incorrect to correct. We only doubt this because we usually just notice the times we changed and regretted it. We tend to overlook the instances where re-thinking helped! So if you have a sense that you should change, go with it.

Student: "When in doubt, 'C' your way out."

Student: "'B' smart."

Narrator: Myth! Strategies to guess a consistent letter choice have actually been found to negatively affect test performance. Don't worry about getting too many of the same answers in a row, and don't necessarily guess a middle letter choice.

Student: "The longest answer is probably the right one."

Narrator: Some research says about two times as long and some three. A few words likely doesn't mean much, though.

Student: "If two choices are similar, or complete opposites, one of them might be the right answer."

Narrator: Maybe, according to some studies. If you have to guess, go ahead and guess one of them, if you haven't any other basis for deciding...

Student: "Choose the middle value."

Narrator: Another maybe! Some studies suggest that if all answer options are numbers, avoid the most extreme values and choose the value that is (sequentially, if put in numerical order) in the middle. Now for the recap.

Recap

Student: Don't worry about time until halfway through.

Student: Read the question and mark it up, looking for reminders and key terms.

Student: Take each answer and consider it separately.

Student: Mark those up, too, with a "check," or an "X," or even a "?" if you don't know.

Student: If you're really puzzled, before guessing, think about what type of question it is.

Student: Is it a definition or a relationship question?

Student: Studying early and often can help a lot. Distribute your study weeks and days before the exam, in smaller segments, to help the memory processes and your scores, too.

Narrator: Being a good test-taker comes naturally to some, but you can learn to approach a multiple choice test with confidence. Having some strategies can help you get control A. some of the time, B. most of the time C. all of the time, or D. all of the above???

An SAC Workshop by

Anthony Guest-Scott, Lisa Thomassen, and Amber L. Kendall

Produced By

The Student Academic Center

<http://sac.indiana.edu>

Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

Narrator

Amber L. Kendall

The Students

Taylor Ballinger

Dylan Barras

Tory Cheek

Jamie Dilk

John Grady

Amber L. Kendall

Robert May

Gregory Smith

Cassandra Taylor

Special thanks to

The Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences

And all the other students in Lisa Thomassen's "Introductory Psychology" P101 and P102 classes, Fall 2014

Cameras

DJ Boits

Destiny Bush

Music

"Under Pressure" by Queen (feat. David Bowie) from *Hot Space*, Released 1982 © 2014 Hollywood Records, Inc.

"You Enjoy Myself" by Phish from *Junta*, Released 1988 © 1992 Elektra Entertainment Company

"Nomad" by Strunz and Farah from *Mosaico*, Released 1982 © Selva, Inc

"Mountain Dance" by Dave Grusin from *Mountain Dance*, Released 1979 © 1980 UMG Recordings, Inc.

"Right Start (Unfinished Outtake)" by Talking Heads, Released 1980, from *Remain in Light* (Remastered) © Sire Records

"Where We Belong" by Passion Pit from *Gossamer* © 2012 Columbia Records, a Division of Sony Music Entertainment

Other Media

Sample gates courtesy of Indiana University

StockPhotosforFree.com

Free AE Templates

Envato

Vecteezy contributors: pauldizonr (brain), freevector (head and "100%"), josephellen (alarm), belial90 (iPhone)

© Copyright 2015 The Trustees of Indiana University. All Rights Reserved

The Student Academic Center
Great Teachers. Small Classes. Real Help.