

A GUIDE TO TAKING OBJECTIVE TESTS



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TAKING OBJECTIVE TESTS

Objective tests require you to do little or no writing. They are generally based on factual (literal) information from textbooks and lectured. At times, however, they may require you to join pieces of information, relate to applications, or draw conclusions about what you have studied.

There are four basic forms of objective tests.

Multiple-Choice True/False Matching Completion

Each form has its own characteristics. The following sections describe those characteristics, offer appropriate strategies for approaching each type and provide general test-taking suggestions.

MULTIPLE CHOICE TESTS

This is the most popular form of objective testing. Not only are multiple-choice tests relatively easy to correct, but they can also be designed so that they measure a variety of learning tasks.

These tests are characterized by items containing a “stem” (incomplete statement) and choices for completing the stem. Your task is to select the one correct answer to complete the stem.

For example:

Stem: daydreaming is caused by:

- Choices: a. brain damage
 b. laziness
 c. wandering thoughts
 d. apathy

Note: As you read this packet, try your hand at completing the sample test items throughout.

HINTS FOR TAKING MULTIPLE-CHOICE TESTS

1. Read all choices first, considering each. Do this even if you feel sure that you have found the right answer. On most multiple-choice tests, your job is to find the best answer. The last choice may be better than preceding ones that were partially correct.
2. Read the stem and each choice as if it were a true-false statement. This will allow you to begin eliminating incorrect choices.
3. If a choice is false, draw a line through it so that you will not become confused about which options you have already eliminated.
4. If two choices seem correct, reread the stem to pick up any implications. Then read the two choices again in light of “hidden” meanings in the stem.
The best example of short-term memory is:
 - a. Storing information for a brief time.
 - b. Remembering an answer to a test item.
 - c. Recalling the name of an old friend.
 - d. Repeating an address some one has just given you.
5. Usually, choices that include absolute terms such as “always”, “never”, “only”, “every” are incorrect. Few things in the world have no exceptions. For example, students often do poorly on tests because:
 - a. They never review their notes.
 - b. They are always too anxious during tests.
 - c. They stop reviewing before over-learning has occurred.
 - d. They only study the night before the test.
6. Look for the best answer. Often this is the answer that is most complete. The other answers may be technically correct, so look for the one that incorporated the most. For example:
Note taking provides:
 - a. A good means of review.
 - b. Assistance in concentrating.
 - c. A rehearsal process.
 - d. A means of involving all of the senses in order to place information into long-term memory.

7. Be sure to notice words like “not”, “except”, and “but” in the stem. These words totally change the meaning of the sentence.
The main idea can be anything except:
 - a. A definition.
 - b. A detail.
 - c. A generalization
 - d. The point
8. Sometimes more than one answer is correct. In these instances, the instructor will usually devise multiple-choice items that allow you to choose answers that combine choices. For example:
Among the types of objective tests is/are:
 - a. Matching
 - b. True/False
 - c. Multiple –choice
 - d. Completion
 - e. Both a and c
 - f. a, b, and c
 - g. a, b, c, and d

It can often be confusing to answer an item that contains choices that are combinations of the above. It will seem easier if you consider each choice as a true/false item when added to the stem. If you find more than one true statement, select the choice that offers the letters of all the “trues” you identified.

9. Use logic and common sense. If you are unfamiliar with the subject or cannot recall it, eliminate choices that do not make good sense. By doing this, you increase your chances of arriving at correct answers. It beats guessing.
10. Spend extra time studying two similar options. Express each in your own words, and then analyze how they differ. This may lead you toward recognizing the correct answer.
11. If an item asks you to choose the proper order of steps in a process or order of events, ignore the choices if you begin to get confused. Instead, write the steps or events in the margin as you recall them. Then find the choice that matches.
12. A choice that is unfamiliar to you or that you do not understand is probably incorrect. If you have studied thoroughly, eliminate those items.
13. If you do not know the answer and cannot eliminate choices, choose the one that seems most complete.

14. If all else fails, make an educated guess. Even if you can eliminate two out of four choices, you have a 50% chance of getting the answer right. Go for it!

TRUE/FALSE TESTS

True/false items are also popular on objective examinations. Unlike multiple-choice questions, there are only two options, so you have a fifty-fifty chance of answering correctly. Details tend to be emphasized on this type of test, so you need to note details carefully while studying.

HINTS FOR TAKING TRUE/FALSE TESTS

1. For a statement to be true, all parts of it must be true. If even one word is untrue, mark the statement “false”.
2. You need to watch for words like “never”, “always”, “only”. Absolute statements are often false. The words “often”, “may”, “most”, “frequently”, and “usually” tend to be used in true statements.
For example:
_____ The memory technique of association is always used when learning new words.
_____ The memory technique of association is often used when learning new words.
3. Watch for “double-negative” statements. These items can be very confusing. Underline negatives as you read items so that you know how many of them you are dealing with. Two negatives cancel each other out. “Not dissimilar” means “similar”. “Never irregular” means “always regular”.
4. If you have to guess, guess true. True statements are generally easier for instructors to write; so most exams have more true items.
5. Items that include a reason are usually false. This is because only one reason is being offered when there are usually many.
6. Avoid over interpreting words in true/false statements. Overanalyzing items often results in making errors when you really knew the answer. Be sensitive toward intuition, and trust your memory.
7. True/false items are frequently constructed by mismatching terms with definitions or names with descriptions. Look for these kinds of differences to identify false statements.

Try these true/false items.

- ___ 1. It's always best to study in a quiet environment.
- ___ 2. The four steps in the SQ3R study system are survey, question, read, recite, review.
- ___ 3. Once you have taken a test from an instructor, the type of test you can predict for future exams is not unknown.
- ___ 4. People daydream because they are bored.

MATCHING TESTS

In this kind of test, you are given a list of words in one column and descriptions or explanations of these words in a second column. The items in the second column are scrambled, and you must match the term or name with its descriptor.

HINTS FOR TAKING MATCHING TESTS

1. Determine the relationship between the two columns.
2. Begin by reading information from the lengthy column first. You will save time by doing this since you will not have to keep rereading the longer statements.
3. Do the easy items first. These will generally be the shorter statements from the lengthier column.
4. Cross out options you have used as you use them. This will save you from rereading statements that you have already selected.
5. Look beyond the first answer that seems correct. Later choices may be better.

Try these matching items.

___ 1. mnemonic device

a. fit new information with previous knowledge

___ 2. elaboration

b. incorporating ideas into memory

___ 3. association

c. memory trick

___ 4. memorization

d. thinking about and reacting to content

___ 5. consolidation

e. recalling exact words rather than meaning

SENTENCE COMPLETION TESTS

This is often called a “fill-in-the-blank” test. Here you are asked to complete a statement by adding a missing word or phrase. This test is different from other objective tests because it asks you to recall very specific information rather than to just recognize the correct answer. It is important to look for clues to trigger your recall.

HINTS FOR TAKING COMPLETION TESTS

1. Look for key words in the sentence and decide what the subject matter is.
2. Use the sentence structure to decide what kind of word is missing – the name of something, an action word, a date, etc.
3. If there is an “a” before the blank, the missing word starts with a consonant. An “an” before the blank signals that it starts with a vowel (a,e,i,o,u).
4. If it is a long blank, you are probably expected to supply a phrase rather than a single word.
5. If the line breaks, supply a word for each segment.

Here are some completion items for practice.

1. Each field has its own _____ vocabulary.
2. If a word is not defined by the author of a textbook, meaning may be provided through _____, _____, and _____.
3. _____ words usually make a true/false or multiple-choice option false.
4. After studying for 45 minutes to an hour, you should take a _____.
5. Note-taking styles include _____, _____, and _____.

GENERAL TIPS FOR TAKING TESTS

1. Go over the material you are being tested on before the test—either the night before or right before the exam. This will put the information on the tip of your mind.
2. Get to the room early—but not too early. Five minutes early gives you a chance to get ready and relax yourself. Fifteen minutes early may cause anxiety to set in, especially as you listen to other students "compare notes" at the last minute.
3. Read all directions before writing anything. This is necessary in order to do many of the steps suggested below.
4. Take all necessary resources with you to the test, including calculator, dictionary, conversion charts (if you have been allowed to use these all along). If you are unsure about whether to take these resources to the test, ask your instructor.
5. Sit at the front of the classroom. Here you will be less distracted by other students. You can also see messages written on the board more easily from this vantage point.
6. Pay attention to verbal directions before and during the test.
7. Jot down memory aids, formulas, facts, etc., that you have stored in memory and fear forgetting. Write these on a piece of scratch paper or on the back of the test right away.

8. Do not change your answers unless you have good reason for doing so. On objective tests, your first intuition is usually right.
9. Answer easier items first. Get them out of the way so you can spend the majority of your time on challenging questions.
10. Do not spend too much time on any one item. If you start to get "hung-up" on a certain question, leave it and return to it later if you have time. If you start to get stumped on a majority of items, your test preparation was probably not intensive enough.
11. Answer each question unless there is a penalty for guessing.
12. Look for questions that help answer other questions.
13. If you are using a machine-scored form, be sure to check your numbering. If you get "off" on one number, it will throw all your answers off.
14. Plan your time carefully. Estimate the time you will spend on each part of the test. Use the number of points each section is worth as your guide. Allow a minute or two to quickly skim through the test before answering items. Allow 4 or 5 minutes at the end to review your answers and to answer items you skipped and intend to come back to later. For example: If you have 50 minutes to take the following exam, how would you budget your time?

Type of Question	Number of Questions	Total Points
Multiple-choice	25	25
True/False	20	20
Essay	2	50

An efficient way to divide your time follows:

Prereading	2 minutes
Multiple-choice	12 minutes
True/False	8 minutes
Essay	25 minutes
Review	3 minutes

15. Reread your paper before turning it in. Make sure that it makes sense and catch as many mechanical and spelling errors as possible.

16. If you have to guess, consider these suggestions:
- If two answers are similar, choose one of them.
 - If two answers have similar words in them (eg. “valuable” and “viable”; “perceptive” and “perseverant”), choose one of them.
 - If two quantities (numbers) are almost the same, choose one of them.
 - If answers cover a wide range (1825, 1856, 1902, 1937, 1971), choose one in the middle.

Assignment #1 – Planning Your Time

For each of the exam situations listed below, decide how you would divide your time.

Time Limit: 50 minutes

Type of Question	Number of Questions	Total Points
TEST 1		
Multiple-choice	30	30
Completion	10	10
True/False	20	20
TEST 2		
Matching	15	15
True/False	20	20
Multiple-choice	25	25
TEST 3		
True/False	10	10
Completion	10	10
Essay	3	30

Type of Task or Item	Time Allowed For Each Task		
	Test 1	Test 2	Test 3
Prereading			
Multiple-choice			X
True/False			
Matching	X		X
Completion		X	
Essay	X	X	
Review			
Total Time			

Assignment #2 – Inventory of Objective Tests

Use the following chart to record information about classes you are taking this quarter.

Course	Types of Objective Test Items Used	Type I Do Best	Type I Have Trouble With