



## MCQ Test Taking Strategies

### Positive Approach to Test-Taking

If you approach tests with fear and trepidation or other negative attitudes, you may be conditioning yourself for defeat. It's time to change your mindset. First, remember that tests are useful tools for instructors to measure your mastery of content and skills, but they also are beneficial to students. Tests motivate you to learn, allow you to see both the extent and the shortcomings of your progress so you can adjust your preparation as needed, and allow you the opportunity to demonstrate your ability to analyze, synthesize, and apply large volumes of information. Next, don't think of tests as a personal battle with the instructor or as something to be feared. Instead, think of an exam as a challenge and an opportunity to show the instructor the extent of your knowledge and abilities. Then you will be motivated to approach your preparation and test-taking with energy and self-confidence rather than fear and tension. And last, remember that stress is normal and can even be helpful—it is your body's way of preparing you for a challenge. But if stress is interfering with your performance on tests or in other aspects of your life, see the document *Managing Test Anxiety*.

### The Day Before the Test

- Take a practice test with conditions as much like the test as possible.
- Avoid anxious fellow students who are talking about the exam.
- Practice deep breathing and other relaxation techniques
- Eat well and get enough sleep. Avoid too much caffeine, which increases anxiety.

### During the Test

- Walk into the test knowing you have studied the material well and are ready.
- Quickly note the number of questions and calculate the time available for each question or divide the allotted time into quarters or halves and determine which number question should be reached when. That will help you pace yourself and increase your chance of answering all or at least most of the questions.
- Read the question and options carefully. If allowed, underline the critical words in the stem to help you focus precisely on what is being asked and reduce the chance of making a careless mistake.
- Answer the question in your head first without looking at the list of options.
- Always read all answer options. Don't stop at the first one that seems right; another one may be more correct.

- Read the stem along with each of the options, one at a time, as if the combination of stem and option is a true/false statement. If doing so makes the statement false, reject the option. If it seems to be true, consider the option as a possible correct answer.
- If you are not sure of the answer, you may be able to eliminate clearly wrong answers and hence make an educated guess. Statistically, it is advantageous to guess when at least one option can be eliminated.
- Don't get delayed by a single question. Instead, answer the question using your first impression and mark so you can return to it.
- When you're finished answering all questions, go back to questions you've marked and give further consideration as time allows.
- If time remains, review the entire test **BUT DO NOT CHANGE ANY ANSWERS WITHOUT A REALLY, REALLY GOOD REASON**, such as you determine that you have misread the question or some of the options. Your first answer is generally the most reliable.
- Focus your attention on the test. Don't waste mental energy worrying about the results of the test or wondering how others are doing.
- If you start to feel anxious, close your eyes, take three deep breaths, and return to the test.

### **After the Test**

Reward yourself for doing your best on the test.