

# Strategies for Objective Tests

## *Test Taking*

On objective tests, teachers provide answers from which you choose the correct one. One part of the question, the **stem**, gives basic information. You pick your answer from among **distractors**, or possible answers. Test-wise principles help you make educated guesses among distractors when you are not sure of the right answer. The following information contains such tips for objective tests.

1. **If you don't know an answer, skip it and go on.** Cross out obviously wrong choices. This saves you time later. Don't waste time mulling over an answer. Answer the questions you know first. This builds confidence and maximizes the use of test time.
2. **When you return to questions you skipped, try to figure out what the answer is not.** If you can eliminate one or two distractors, you increase your chances of guessing the correct answer.
3. **Eliminate grammatically incorrect distractors.** If you use grammar to help you make a choice, you find the correct answer more easily.
4. **Read all choices before answering a multiple-choice question.** Sometimes an instructor asks for the best answer in the directions of an exam. If you jump at the first seemingly correct response, you often find you've landed in mud.
5. **Responses that look like the word to be defined are usually incorrect.** *Allusion*, *elusive*, and *illustration* all resemble the word *illusion*. These are called "**attractive distractors**" because they look appealing. Attractive distractors are almost always poor choices.
6. **Watch for distractors that mean the same thing.** Careful reading sometimes shows that some distractors say the same thing. None of these, then, can be correct.
7. **Use what you know to analyze and make decisions about information.** See if you can relate information and eliminate several of the choices.
8. **If the test contains a true-false section, read each question thoroughly.** Watch for key words such as *always*, *never*, *seldom*, and *frequently*. Statements with such words as *always* and *never* are often false. These words are called absolutes. That means they leave no room for other possibilities. This is why they are frequently false. Statements with *seldom* and *frequently* allow for exceptions. These statements are almost but not quite true. Thus, you need to make sure a statement is completely true before answering true.
9. **If the test concerns math or science, watch your time closely.** Don't spend so much time on harder problems that you cannot finish the test. When you're stumped, move to the next question.

10. **Watch for double negatives.** What is  $-2 \times -2$ ? The answer is  $+4$ . Negative times negative equals positive. The same is true in writing. That means two negative terms make the presented idea positive. For example, consider the phrase *not unimportant*. Something that is *not unimportant* is *important*.
11. **The longest choice is often the right one.** An instructor often includes a lot of information to make the correct answer clear.
12. **A middle choice (b or c) is often the correct one.** Instructors sometimes feel that putting a right answer either first or last makes it too obvious. Thus, they tend to place distractors before and after the correct answer. When unable to determine the answer any other way, pick a middle answer.
13. **Read carefully and look for give-away clues.** Sometimes instructors provide information about one question when asking another.
14. **Watch for trick questions.** Test-makers are creatures of habit. If you find one trick question, there's a good chance you will find others.
15. **If a multiple-choice question confuses you, consider the stem and each distractor as a true-false question.** This helps you think about each piece of information separately.
16. **Use the side with the longest responses as the stem on matching tests.** Since you normally read from left to right, you may automatically use the left column as the stem questions. Thus, you spend time rereading the longer responses as you look for answers.
17. **Try to determine the relationships between the columns on matching exams.** Sometimes a matching exam is a hodgepodge of terms and information. Other times, it focuses more on dates, locations, events, people, causes, effects, and so forth. Identifying the relationships helps you focus your thoughts in an organized manner.
18. **Cross out choices that you know are incorrect.** Choose from the distractors that remain.
19. **When all else fails, guess.** When you have answered all the questions you know, return to those you skipped. Reread them carefully. Try to devise an answer in your own words. Then look for a matching response. If none exists, make an educated guess based on test-wise principles. If you cannot make an educated guess, pick an answer. Decide now what your "lucky" letter is going to be. In the future, when you need to guess, pick it. Since few instructor-made exams penalize for guessing, never leave answers blank.
20. **Review your exam before turning it in.** Did you consistently mark the letter of the selection you intended?

Source: *Study Methods and Reading Techniques*, Rhonda Atkinson and Debbie Longman, West Publishing.