

TWU Counseling Center

Hints for Objective Tests

Objective tests are meant to measure your knowledge of a subject by giving you the correct answer but hiding it among distracting incorrect answers. You must be able to recognize the correct and/or best answer, and you can give only one response which is either right or wrong. This procedure makes scoring the test an objective procedure since there is no credit given for "sort of right" or "almost correct" responses. Objective tests may also ask you to arrange material (Matching) or to give a very short answer such as in Fill-in-the-blank items. However, with any objective test all or nearly all of the material you will work with is provided for you. The following are hints which can help you do your best on objective tests:

KNOW YOUR INSTRUCTOR

1. Harmonize with his/her style of organization (if there is any), interpretation, synthesis, and specification of details.
2. Indicate in your notes the points stressed.
3. Study more thoroughly the areas in which you are weak.
4. Based upon the instructor's style, try to predict questions that might be asked.
5. Ask what type of questions to expect and the content areas she/he feels are important.
6. If possible, find old tests which can familiarize you with the types of questions, wording, and content areas which might be used the next time. For national standardized tests, use the "How to prepare for..." books available in bookstores.

LEARN THE MATERIAL

These hints work only if you have studied and learned the content.

GENERAL RULES

1. Briefly look over the entire test to see what is ahead of you.
2. Read the directions and make sure you understand them. If in doubt, ask.
3. Know the scoring policy! Are you penalized for guessing? If not, answer every question.
4. Determine how you will use your time. Have a watch or clock and pace yourself. Shoot for the most points in the time you have. Allow time for:
 - a. Reading directions; previewing test.
 - b. Answering items in reverse difficulty – answer the ones you are most sure of first, then the next easiest, etc. until the hardest remain.
 - c. Break Time (If a test is more than 1 hour in length, give yourself 5 or so minutes to clear your mind, stretch, and go to the restroom).
 - d. Go back over difficult or skipped items.
 - e. Check to see that your responses were marked in the correct places on the answer sheet.

5. Sincerely attempt every question. Avoiding it completely because it looks hard is self-defeating. However, hard questions can be left until last unless they carry a great deal of value and you need more time to ensure answering them.
6. Do not read things into the questions. Take them at face value.
7. If you think you know an item but are not sure, mark your response and come back to the question. However, first impressions or intuitions tend to be correct, so if you do change your answer, be sure you have a good reason for doing so.
8. Answer questions you know first. This relieves tension and gives you confidence, thus loosening up material from your memory as you proceed. Go back to the ones you skipped later, of course.
9. If the question seems unintelligible, reword it or break it down into parts.
10. Beware of mandatory words such as "never" or "must" or "always." The obvious answer might not be correct if there are exceptions to the statement.
11. Words such as "seldom," "normally," and "generally" or "usually" allow exceptions, however.
12. Use information from other test items. Often the answer to a question is found in another.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. In multiple choice questions, anticipate the correct answer before looking at the options.
2. Relate response options to the question one at a time. And be sure to read all of the options! Often people stop with the 1st option that looks right.
3. Balance options against each other.
4. Have good reasons for eliminating options.
5. Familiarity of a response option does not necessarily make it the correct choice and vice versa.

MATCHING QUESTIONS

1. These questions are multiple questions with multiple answers. Following directions here is critical!
2. Work with one column at a time, matching each item of that column to all of the options in the second column.
3. Only work tentative lines (light pencil) until you have completed the task, then mark them heavily.
4. Mark certain choices first, then work on the more difficult matches.
5. Balance options against each other.

FILL-IN-THE BLANK QUESTIONS AND SENTENCE COMPLETION

1. Guess! Usually there is no penalty with this type of question, so if you do not know the answer, it is best to write something at least.
2. Give general answers if you do not know specifics.
e.g., correct and specific answer = 1904
general and possibly correct answers = early 1900s.

3. When you're torn between 2 alternative responses you could fill in, commit to one but mention the other. This shows that you do know something. e.g., "Pegasus (or possibly Poseidon)"
4. Use grammar of the question to help determine your answer.
5. Avoid flippant answers.
6. Consider the number and length of the blanks to be filled in as possible clues.

TRUE-FALSE QUESTIONS

1. Watch for qualifiers or mandatory words such as "always," "never," or "must." If they are present, chances are the statement is "False," since few things are "always," "never," or "must."
2. If a question contains words such as "seldom," "normally," or "generally," where an exception would not alter the answer, chances are the answer is "True."
3. If a statement is more specific than most, chances are it is "True."

POORLY CONSTRUCTED TESTS

Often the tests we take are made up by professors or graduate assistants who have little or no training in test construction. The following hints are based upon common errors made in constructing a test and they are to be used as last resorts, i.e., if you do not know the answer or if you are very uncertain.

On poorly constructed tests, then, the correct answer will generally have these characteristics.

1. Length - they are longer than the other options.
2. More precise.
3. Usually not an extreme answer.
4. Will be one of two opposite alternatives.
5. Will be one of two similar alternatives unless the alternatives are exactly the same.
6. Will use familiar language.
7. Will be a grammatically perfect extension of the question.
8. Will not have extreme emotional words such as "harebrained" or "foolhardy."
9. Will not be flippant or silly.
10. Will more often be the middle option. e.g., b or c if the options go from a through d.
11. If options are numerical, the correct answer is more often a middle value.

- e.g.,
- a. 4
 - b. 8 - more likely to be the correct answer.
 - c. 10