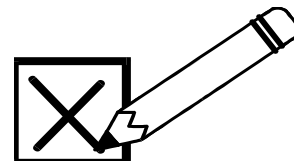


Test Taking: Objective Tests

Academic Success Center
Iowa State University



Objective tests measure both your ability to remember facts and figures and your understanding of course materials. These tests are often designed to make you think independently, so don't count on recognizing the right answer. Instead, prepare yourself for high level critical reasoning and making fine discriminations to determine the best answer. The most common objective test questions are multiple-choice, true-false, and matching items. Doing well on these questions requires that you not only master the information but also interpret the testmaker's intentions.

You know you have mastered the information if you can:

1. **Recall** specific terms, facts, names, and other key words; become proficient in the language of the course.
2. **Distinguish** the ways in which ideas, facts, theories, or other observations differ from each other and categorize ideas, facts, theories, or other observations according to the ways these are similar.
3. **Answer** the questions and solve the problems in the text and create your own questions or problems.

Preparing for Objective Tests

1. Review notes and text(s) - list the major concepts that have been covered.
2. Highlight topics that were stressed. Note why they were stressed.
3. Think vocabulary. Every field of study has its own vocabulary, so identify words and terms used to represent specific concepts (i.e., the word "paradigm" in a social science course), and treat them as you would a foreign language. Make flash cards for frequent drills, and try to use these words whenever you work with course-related materials.
4. Compare and contrast. Sometimes objective questions can be used to test your ability to distinguish concepts, ideas, theories, events, facts from each other. Construct diagrams, charts, tables or lists to summarize relationships.
5. Recite for precision. Review your retention of the information by recalling it often. Use odd moments, in addition to 15-20 minute review sessions, to say or write out complete ideas and facts. It is very important to verbalize the recalled information completely and in a detailed manner so that you will have a precise idea of your mastery of the material.

Taking Objective Tests

General Tips:

- ◆ Plan your time. Allow more time for high point value questions; reserve time at the end to review your work, and for emergencies.
- ◆ Check with your instructor whether or not you can write on the test.
- ◆ Before starting the test, turn it over and jot down all the facts and details you are trying to keep current in memory. Look the whole test over, skimming the questions and developing a general plan for your work. If any immediate thoughts come to you, jot them down in the margin.
- ◆ Read the directions very carefully. Look for time limits, specific answering procedures (i.e., answer 3 out of the 4 questions below), how questions will be graded.
- ◆ Start with the section of the test that will yield the most points, but begin working with the easiest questions to gain time for the more difficult ones and to warm up.

- ◆ Work quickly, check your timing regularly and adjust your speed when necessary. Do not get stuck on one question at the cost of losing time for another one.
- ◆ Avoid reading into the questions. When you find yourself thinking along the lines of "this is too easy; there must be a trick..." mark the question and move on to another. When you begin modifying the question, the answer you will come up with will be different from the one on the teacher's key. Interpret questions literally.
- ◆ Choose the answer the testmaker intended—stay within the scope of the course. If you know facts that are beyond the level of sophistication of the test, 1) record the intended answer, and 2) point out the possible ambiguity and make a case for a different answer either in the margin of the test or during the next regular class.
- ◆ Mark key words in every question. To help find the key words, ask yourself WHAT, WHO, WHERE, WHEN, and HOW?

Multiple Choice Questions:

Probably the most commonly used objective question, the multiple choice question, consists of two parts:

- 1) The stem - the statement or question
- 2) The choices - also known as the distracters

Tips:

- ◆ There are usually 3 to 5 options that will complete the stem statement or question. You are to select the correct choice, the option that completes the thought expressed in the stem. There is a 20% chance that you will guess the correct choice if there are 5 choices listed. Although multiple choice questions are most often used to test your memory of details, facts, and relationships, they are also used to test your comprehension and your ability to solve problems. Reasoning ability is a very important skill for doing well on multiple choice tests.
- ◆ Read the stem as if it were an independent, free-standing statement. Anticipate the phrase that would complete the thought expressed, then compare each answer choice to your anticipated answer. It is important to read each choice, even if the first choice matches the answer you expected, because there may be a better answer listed.
- ◆ Another evaluation technique is to read the stem together with each answer choice as if it were a true-false statement. If the answer makes the statement a false one, cross it out. Check all the choices that complete the stem as a true statement. Try to suspend judgment about the choices you think are true until you have read all the choices.
- ◆ Beware of words like not, but, except. Mark these words because they specify the direction and limits of the answer.
- ◆ Also watch out for words like always, never, and only. These must be interpreted as meaning all of the time, not just 99% of the time. These choices are frequently incorrect because there are few statements that have no exceptions (but there are a few).
- ◆ If there are two or more options that could be the correct answer, compare them to each other to determine the differences between them, and then relate these differences with the stem to deduce which of the choices is the better one. (Hint: select the option that gives the most complete information.)
- ◆ If there is an encompassing answer choice, for example "all of the above," and you are able to determine that there are at least two correct choices, select the encompassing choice.
- ◆ Use hints from questions you know to answer questions you do not.
- ◆ If you do not find an answer, try to relate each answer to the stem to evaluate which one logically completes the thought.
- ◆ Make educated guesses—eliminate options any way you can.

True-False Questions:

Also a popular question type, the true-false question has only two options. Your odds are always 50-50 with this type of item. Typically, testmakers tend to focus on details in true-false questions.

- ◆ Testmakers often mismatch items or names with inappropriate events or definitions.
- ◆ In order for a statement to be true, it must be so 100% of the time. This means each part of the question. Thus you must evaluate the trueness of WHO, WHAT, WHY, WHERE, WHEN, and HOW for each statement.
- ◆ Beware of words that qualify and give specific meanings. Words like some, usually, not, usually denote true statements, but be sure to interpret each statement as a special case.
- ◆ Another type of word, such as always and never, should be interpreted as meaning without exception. If you can think of an exception, the statement is false.

Matching Questions:

Matching questions give you some opportunity for guessing. You must know the information well in that you are presented with two columns of items for which you must establish relationships. If only one match is allowed per item then once items become eliminated, a few of the latter ones may be guessed.

- ◆ The relationship is the crucial factor in a set of matching items. Usually the relationship is common to all included items. For example, all the items in Column B define the terms in Column A, or the individuals named in Column A wrote the books listed in Column B.
- ◆ For every match you make, cross out the items in both columns (unless there is more than one match possible).
- ◆ Begin with the lengthier column containing the information, evaluating the items in the column with shorter descriptions for a match. This way you save time by not constantly having to re-read the lengthy statements.

Analyzing Returned Objective Tests

After you get your graded test back, analyze the questions. If you do not get your test back, visit your professor in his/her office where the test will be kept on file and ask for your graded answer sheet to analyze your performance on the test.

- ◆ Read all comments and suggestions.
- ◆ Look for the origin of the questions. Did they come from the notes or the book(s)? Class? Lab?
- ◆ Look at the questions you missed. Verbalize the rationale for the correct answer—figure out why the correct answer was better than your answer.
- ◆ Did you really know the answer to a question but you failed to read it carefully enough to recognize it?
- ◆ Were there any areas tested you failed to prepare for? Why didn't you?
- ◆ Did you misread any questions?
- ◆ Check the level of difficulty, or the level of detail of the test questions. Were most of the questions over precise details, or were they over main ideas and principles? Did most of the questions come straight from the material covered or did the testmaker expect you to be able to analyze and/or evaluate the information?
- ◆ Were you able to finish the test within the time given?
- ◆ Did you have a difficult time during the test because you were too anxious to focus on the questions?