Multiple choice questionnaires (MCQs) are a common form of assessment in some units.

Each question in an MCQ has a stem and a number of alternative answers, one of which is correct.

Like all exams, if you want to do well in an MCQ you need to know the content of your unit thoroughly.

Revising for MCQs
Prepare as for other tests.

Remember that MCQs test factual knowledge and discipline-specific terms so when revising, pay special attention to learning and understanding:
- definitions
- new vocabulary and technical terms
- fundamental concepts, models and frameworks discussed in the unit
- multi-step processes.

Revision that is spaced into three, two hour blocks is usually more effective that one six hour block.

It’s important to first study alone.
When you feel you have learnt as much as you can on your own, you may find it useful to set up a study group.

Become familiar with the types of questions used in past exams. In the study group, make up questions for each other. This is a more testing technique that making up your own questions. Practise answering the questions in a group.

Be aware
Study group techniques will only work if everyone has done their initial individual study. If not, the group could waste a lot of time.

MCQ exam strategies
In an exam, when confronted with a bank of multiple choice questions, try the following:
- Get an understanding of the stem before looking at the options.
- Underline key terms and clue words in the stem.
- Read the stem.
- Decide what you think is the correct answer before looking at the options. then
- Read all the options.
- Eliminate those that are obviously wrong.
- Choose the one you think is correct.
- Accept the questions at face value. Your lecturer wants to test you, not “trick” you.

If you can’t choose between two alternatives, trust your intuition. Go with the answer that “feels” right.

Sometimes our feelings are more accurate than our recall.

Note: The above strategies are suggestions, not rules. They are not fail safe.

The best guarantee of success is to overlearn the material being tested.
More tips

- If you can’t answer a question at first, place a question mark beside it. **Remember to return to it** and supply some answer before you hand in your paper.

- If you really don’t know an answer, guess. You have a 25 percent chance of getting it right in a four-option multiple-choice test question.

- Options containing qualifying words or phrases such as “sometimes”, “can occasionally” are **more likely** to be correct than options containing words like “always”, “never”.

- Watch out for extra long or overcomplicated options. The most complex answer will not necessarily be the correct one.

- If one option is only partly true or is true only under certain narrow conditions, then it’s probably not the right answer.

- If an option has grammatical inconsistencies, it will be wrong.

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A perspective on changing your answers

Perhaps you need not be afraid to change your original answer if, upon reflection, it seems wrong. Over the years, research has shown that changing answers can be beneficial.

A study of 1,561 introductory psychology mid-term exams found that when students changed their answers, they went from:
- wrong to right 51% of the time
- right to wrong 25% of the time
- wrong to a different wrong answer 23% of the time