10 Common Types of Multiple Choice Questions and How to Solve Them

Is the answer B, C, or all of the above? Multiple choice? Sometimes it seems more like multiple guess!

When multiple choice tests are more like guessing games, it's time to figure out how they're designed. Let's look at the 10 common types of multiple choice questions and how to decode them. Use each of strategies we recommend to help you succeed.

1. The look-alike set of options

Definition	All the options look very similar.

Example	The highest correlation of IQ scores between family members has been found for
	    A. identical twins reared apart
	    B. identical twins reared together
	    C. fraternal twins reared together
	    D. fraternal twins reared apart

Strategy	Identify the differences between each of the options and eliminate the incorrect ones.
	
	Each of the options is set up in the same format:
	          [type of twin] [how the twins were reared]
	
	You can eliminate options by looking at each part.
	• What type of twins should have the highest correlation in IQ scores?
	  You may not know the answer to this if you haven't taken any Psychology courses. If you think the answer is "identical twins", get rid of options C and D. If you think the answer is "fraternal twins", get rid of options A and B.
	
	• How should the twins be reared to have the highest correlation in IQ scores?
	  From the remaining options, decide between "reared apart" and "reared together". This makes the multiple choice question easier to solve.

2. Flipping the text of the definition with the term

Definition	Identify the key term based on a definition.

Example	A(n) _____ variable can be any factor, other than the variable being manipulated, in the experiment that might affect the dependent variable.
	
	    A. interval
	    B. correlational
	    C. independent
	    D. confounding

Strategy	Define the terms in each of the options.

3. The negative option

Definition	Look for the wrong answers instead of looking for the matching answers. These questions often use these words: not, except, never.

Example	Anxiety disorders are characterized by all of these symptoms except
	    A. panic attacks
	    B. free-floating anxiety
	    C. a split between affect and cognition
	    D. inconvenience in living

Strategy	Turn the question into a true or false prompt and eliminate options
	
	True or false, anxiety disorders are characterized by:
	    A. panic attacks
	    B. free-floating anxiety
	    C. a split between affect and cognition
	    D. inconvenience in living
	
	Based on this new question, the false answer is the correct option.

4. The multiple option

Definition	More than one option could be correct. Watch out for: [option] and [option], some but not all of the above, all of the above.

Example	One limitation of the dispositional approach to personality is that
	    A. people behave in very similar ways in different situations
	    B. the approach is better at describing than at explaining personality
	    C. A and D
	    D. it overemphasizes environmental factors

Strategy	Read each of the options and check if they are correct. If more than one option is correct, the answer could be a combination of options. In this example, if option A is correct, remember to check if option D is also correct.

5. Two columns of options

Definition	Fill in the blanks in the form of multiple choice.

Example	Troia has a _____ identity (her unique characteristics) and a _____ identity (characteristics that make her part of a larger whole).
	    A. personal; group
	    B. social; personal
	    C. group; social
	    D. group; personal

Strategy	Answer the question as if it were two separate multiple choice questions. Pick one of the columns to answer first and then eliminate the wrong options. This will give you less options to pick from for the rest of the question.

6. Statistics from a study

Definition	Identify the key facts and figures from your class readings.

Example	According to the results of one study, the correlation between estimates of European ancestry and various measures of IQ among African-Americans was
	  A. virtually zero
	  B. around 0.50
	  C. around -0.75
	  D. near a perfect 1.00

Strategies	Anticipate these questions before the test. When you're studying:
	1. Summarize the key findings from your readings and lecture notes:
	  • What was the purpose of the study?
	  • What did the researchers do?
	  • What were the results?
	  • What do the results mean?
	2. Read the abstract and summary of the research paper.

7. Degrees of change from a study

Definition	Apply concepts in different situations and predict the outcomes. Often includes a focus on organs, biological systems, diseases, processes, etc. All of these can be turned into this type of multiple choice question. The topics are taken out of their usual context and you have to predict what will happen.

Example	Mandy has no rods in her retina. Cliff has both cones and rods in his retina. Mandy and Cliff both go into a dark movie theatre after walking in the bright sunshine. While in the dark, Mandy will
	  A. increase her sensitivity to light faster than Cliff
	  B. increase her sensitivity to light more slowly than Cliff
	  C. eventually develop greater sensitivity to light than Cliff will
	  D. eventually develop less sensitivity to light than Cliff will

Strategy	Identify how a concept is applied in different contexts Answer: What happens if…?

8. Sequence of events

Definition	Select the correct order.

Example	In vision, sensory information takes which of the following routes
	    A. receptors, sensory nerves, medulla, cerebral cortex
	    B. sensory nerves, receptors, cerebrum, cerebral cortex
	    C. receptors, sensory nerves, thalamus, cerebral cortex
	    D. sensory nerves, receptors, hippocampus, cerebral cortex

Strategy	Draw flowcharts to remember the order of events. Watch out for: processes, timelines, pathways

9. Rephrased as a scenario

Definition	Recognize a key term described in an example.

Example	Indiana Jones looks at the ground near his feet. He hears a hissing sound and sees a long thin shape with scales. From this information only, he determines the object is a snake. He is using _____ processing.
	    A. ecological
	    B. top-down
	    C. sequential
	    D. bottom-up

Strategy	Create examples for every key term in your readings and lecture notes Applying the definitions will improve your understanding and prepare you for these multiple choice questions

10. Degree of applicability

Definition	Pick the best option based on the scenario. These questions often use words like most, major, main, least, least likely, best, probably

Example	Dr. Johnson studies how juries make decisions as a group. She is most likely a _____ psychologist.
	    A. quantitative
	    B. social
	    C. clinical
	    D. biological

Strategy	Compare and contrast key terms A lot of terms can be similar, but you want to know how they are different. These differences will help you identify why the terms are unique and how they can be applied.

Ready for the next step?

A great way to practice for multiple choice tests and exams is to create your own multiple choice questions. This strategy will help you identify the key ideas from your notes and readings.

Create a multiple choice question based on one of the sample readings. After creating your question, answer each of following:

1. What type of multiple choice question did you create?
2. What strategies will you use to answer the multiple choice question?

Sample Reading – Ebonics[1]

Although there are many stigmatized variants of American English, including Appalachian English, Dutchified Pennsylvania English, Hawaiian Creole, Gullah, and emergent Hispanic Englishes, the most stigmatized is African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), also called Ebonics. As we noted earlier, AAVE is simply a variant of Standard English, neither better nor worse than any other. Further, from Mark Twain and William Faulkner to Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou, from George Gershwin to Public Enemy and Run DMC, Ebonics has had deep influences on American art, speech, fiction and music.

Since the 1970's, controversy over Ebonics has frequently been politicized. For example, in the mid-1990's, the Oakland School Board in California encouraged its teachers to make use of Ebonics in teaching Standard English (Monaghan 1997). Many Americans misunderstood the Oakland School Board as encouraging the teaching of Ebonics, and this misunderstanding ignited a national furor. A North Carolina legislator denounced Ebonics as "absurd," an Atlanta Constitution editorial referred to "the Ebonic plague," and laws banning the teaching of Ebonics were introduced in several state legislatures (Matthew 1997; Sanchez 1997)

Sample Reading – Perception[2]

Perception is the process through which sensations are interpreted, using knowledge and understanding of the world, so that they become meaningful experiences. Thus, perception is not a passive process of simply absorbing and decoding incoming sensations. If it were, people's understanding of the environment would be a constantly changing and confusing mosaic of light and colour. Instead, our brains take sensations and create a coherent world, often by filling in missing information and using past experience to give meaning to what we see, hear, or touch. For example, the raw sensations coming from the stimuli in Figure 5.1 convey only the information that there is a series of intersecting lines. But your perceptual system automatically interprets this image as a rectangle (or window frame) lying on its side.

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[1] This passage is taken from Nanda, S., & Warms, R. L. (2009). *Culture counts: a concise introduction to cultural anthropology*. Boston: Cengage Learning. It is being used for educational purposes only.

[2] This passage is taken from page 160 of Bernstein, D., Penner, L. A., Clarke-Stewart, A., & Roy, E. (2012). *Psychology* (9th ed.). Toronto, ON: Nelson. It is being used for educational purposes only.

More resources for multiple choice questions
Do you want to practice and discuss your multiple choice exams? Book an appointment with an Instructor: http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/appointments-undergraduate.

Check out these resources to get more help and information on multiple choice exam strategies:
Multiple Choice Tests – Cornell University
http://lsc.cornell.edu/multiple-choice-tests-2/

Multiple Choice Exams – University of Guelph
https://guides.lib.uoguelph.ca/MultipleChoice

Multiple choice exams – The University of Queensland Australia
http://www.uq.edu.au/student-services/learning/multiple-choice-exams

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