



## Handling Multiple Choice Questions Effectively

by Dr. Henry Khat, UniSIM

In UniSIM, you may have to do formative or graded assessments in the form of multiple choice questions (MCQs). Each multiple choice question consists of the stem and a number of choices - one correct answer and the others as distracters. Multiple choice questions test you on recalling and analyzing facts. An example would be:

The psychologist who studied classical conditioning was **(Stem)**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| a. Mary Calkins. <b>(Distracter)</b>    | c. Theodore Simon. <b>(Distracter)</b> |
| b. Ivan Pavlov. <b>(Correct Answer)</b> | d. B. F. Skinner. <b>(Distracter)</b>  |

When preparing for and taking multiple choice question assessments, you can take note of the following:

Before the test,

- i) Review and revise the concerned topic sufficiently.
- ii) Do a trial test if there is any, under test condition. This is to allow you to gauge how well you can score for the coming test.
- iii) If you have doubts about the topic and trial tests, seek clarification from your instructor before the coming test.

During the test,

- i) Distribute your time evenly for all the questions. Do not spend too much time on a question you cannot answer. You can always come back to it after you have done the other questions.
- ii) Read the question or stem sentence carefully. Understand the stem in parts if it is too lengthy or complex.
- iii) Consciously relate the questions asked with what you have learnt in the tested topics.



iv) If you do not know the right answer, eliminate

- The obvious wrong answer immediately.
- Choices where the stem sentence does not agree grammatically with them.
- Any two choices that seem to have the same meaning.

v) Do not leave any question unanswered. Guess the answer strategically if you still cannot decide on an answer after doing iv). However, it should be noted that no guesswork is foolproof and it is still important that you prepare well for the MCQ assessments. Your guesswork could be based on the general characteristics of MCQs below.

- Choices that use absolutes such as "always", "in no way", "never", "none" etc. are generally incorrect.
- If at least two of the choices seem right to you, the choice "All of the above" is probably correct. Likewise, the choice "None of the above" is most likely to be wrong if at least one of choices seems right to you.
- The choice with the most information has a higher probability of being right.
- Choices with familiar phrases you have seen in the lecture notes and required readings are likely to be correct.
- Statements in choices that might repeat any key word found in the stem is likely to be right.
- If the choices involve numbers, the middle ones have good chances of being right.
- There is usually nearly equal numbers of correct options (A, B, C, or D) in a test.
- A similar correct option seldom comes out in three consecutive questions.
- When you cannot recall the required information, trust your gut feeling about which choice is correct.

After the test,

- i) Find out the correct choices for the answers which you had guessed and which were wrong. Learn why they are correct with the help of your notes, peers or instructors.
- ii) Learn from your mistakes and use them to prepare for other subsequent tests.