



# SLU CALM Resources

## Exams

### Understanding Multiple Choice Tests

#### Introduction

While many students enjoy the intellectual challenge of multiple-choice tests, others find them confusing and particularly difficult. This page describes the general characteristics of multiple-choice tests, then suggests some activities that will help you to prepare for this style of assessment. Following is some advice on what to do on the day of the test.

#### Basic characteristics of multiple-choice tests

Usually there are four or five choices. You are required to select the option which provides the correct or the best response. Each test item often consists of a sentence or two to start you thinking about a specific aspect of the subject. This initial material may be in written form only or a combination of text and illustrations. The text may be in the form of a question, or an incomplete statement.

Rarely is the correct answer immediately obvious. This means that those who believe that multiple-choice tests are an easy or straightforward form of assessment are mistaken. Remember that, although an option might be correct, it may not be the best response, and in multiple-choice tests you are looking for the best answer from several alternatives where the wording is typically fairly similar. Incorrect options are designed to distract you from the correct option and encourage you to think carefully about why a particular option is or is not the appropriate response. Your choice of the answer usually cannot be made without your comparing the various options. Often the difference between options lies in a single word or phrase. For example:

... pays a higher rate of interest and ... pays a lower rate of interest

## Things to do to prepare for the test

Prior to the test you can revise in a number of ways:

- Know what has been covered in the subject very thoroughly because as noted above there may be very subtle differences between the options from which you are choosing.
- Be alert for clues and discuss your observations of what you believe is important with other students. Find out from friends what is being said in other classes besides those that you attend.
- Practise answering multiple-choice style questions. Sample multiple-choice exercises are available.
- Quiz each other. This will help you in three ways, it will:
  - give you practice answering such questions,
  - help you to become familiar with the subject content and
  - help you to gain a deeper understanding of how multiple-choice questions are formulated.
- Analyse strategies which you and others use when making your selection. Talking to others about various approaches will mean that you will be more conscious of ways of thinking about making choices in test situations. Being conscious of ways of thinking can increase both your sense of control over what you are doing and your confidence in making an appropriate choice.