

MASTERING MULTIPLE CHOICE



**The definitive guide to better grades
on multiple choice exams**

Stephen Merritt

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on Multiple Choice Exams

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INTRODUCTION

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THE LAST FEW DECADES have shown an massive increase in the use of multiple choice as the primary method of measuring student success. Increasingly, students are discovering that their final grade is determined by as few as one or two multiple choice exams.

In fact, in many programs, your academic success is being determined *entirely* by multiple choice exams. Period. Regardless of your topic of study, if you haven't mastered the art of taking multiple choice exams, you're at risk of doing more poorly than you should.

As of this writing, it's been estimated that **students in North America complete a staggering *half a billion* multiple choice tests per year.** What's even more staggering is how many students will do more poorly than they should – or crash and burn altogether – because they lack proper test-taking skills.

Tests like the SAT, MCAT, or LSAT, which allow entrance to graduate and post-graduate schooling are almost entirely multiple choice. From exam halls to distance education, from weekend certificate courses to doctorate degrees, multiple choice exams are determining the course of your future.

If you're in any kind of educational environment, multiple choice exams are determining the course of your future.

Sound scary? It should.

What can you do about it? Well, you could protest at your school, write your government representatives, and stage exam boycotts on campus.

Or you can, like many other smart students, learn to *use these tests to your advantage*. Yes, that's right. From here on, multiple choice tests are your best friend come exam time.

Research shows that students can perform significantly better on objective tests simply by improving their test-taking skills. In plain English, *you can get better grades without studying more*.

Let me repeat that, because it's the essence of this book: **you can get better grades without studying more**. Learn it, believe it. This book will give you some tips to study more effectively, but more importantly, it will teach you *how* to write tests better. As a matter of fact, I believe you can get better grades and study *less* than you currently are. Really.

It's likely you know someone who never seems to study, but does well on an exam. Or, to add insult to injury, they borrow your notes the night before the exam and then beat you on the test? This is often chalked up to luck or IQ. "That guy's just naturally smart. He can get away without doing much work."

Don't believe it. The people who can do much with little often share surprising traits. They don't like to study. Or they're lazy. Or they have many other interests or obligations that prevent them from dedicating much time to studying. The difference between these people and the people who study a LOT and do poorly is this: *they have a system*.

These “lucky” people who don’t have to study are not smarter. They simply have systems for learning material, and writing exams. The difference between them and you is nothing more than a system.

This book is that system, and you can start putting the system to work for you in just a few hours. Don’t be scared by the word “system” – this is neither complicated nor time-consuming. In fact, it’s the opposite: easy and time *creating*. This is a simple method to prepare for and write multiple choice exams that anyone can master.

Why Multiple Choice?

Good question. There are many different types of tests and exams – essay, short answer and true/false, to name a few. What’s so special about multiple choice?

- Multiple choice exams require a unique way of organizing, learning, and recalling your material.
- Multiple choice exams require you to approach your exam in a specific way for best results.
- Multiple choice questions require a specific, learnable type of thinking that is independent of the subject material and how well you know it.

In other words, your success at multiple choice exams depends not just on how well you know your material, **but how well you can write the test.**

What This Book Is

- A proven system for getting more from every bit of studying you do.

- A specific way of preparing for and writing multiple choice exams.
- A set of very focused techniques for dealing with the challenges unique to multiple choice style questions.
- A way of looking at how you learn and recall information that works best for multiple choice exams.

What This Book Isn't

- A “memory system”
- A vague “study tips” guide
- Difficult
- Time consuming

Who This Book Is For

- College and university students
- Adult learners
- High school students
- Professionals pursuing licensing
- Grad school applicants
- Anyone who suffers from test anxiety

Why Are Multiple Choice Tests So Common?

The invention of the multiple choice test format is attributed to Frederick J. Kelly at the University of Kansas in 1914. The great need at the time was to find an efficient way to assess the different talents of World War I military recruits. Multiple choice offered a quick way to test and score ability *en masse*, and was quickly adopted for other purposes, such as educational testing, which is likely what led you to this book. And while the First World War may be long over, multiple choice testing is increasing with each passing day.

Believe it or not, teachers and professors are just like us – they're short on time, under pressure, and more or less just want to lead a happy life.

Multiple choice tests offer these overworked academics an easier, faster way to get the numbers they need to create your grades. If you've got 2000 students in a course, using a computer to mark all the multiple choice tests in a few seconds is definitely easier than wading through pages of essay-type responses.

And, supposedly, they're *objective*. So your results shouldn't be affected by a tired TA, or an instructor who doesn't like you. And they shouldn't be affected whether your paper is marked by a 10 year old or a computer.

So they should be fair to everyone, right? No teacher's pet marks, no marks for eloquence.

Wrong. For many people, multiple choice tests are hard by virtue of their format. And that makes them anything but objective.

When you write a multiple choice exam, you're not just being tested on history, welding, truck driving, physics, or math. You're being tested on your ability to read (and how fast you can do it), and your ability to apply rules of logic to written statements. In addition to chemistry you're being tested on *how well you write tests*.

And if you don't write them well, you're at a disadvantage.

When you write a multiple choice exam, you're not just being tested on the subject matter. You're being tested on how well you write tests.

Why Are Multiple Choice Tests Hard?

The fact is they can be very hard. Here are just a few reasons why multiple choice tests may be giving you grief:

- *Overconfidence* – you think multiple choice tests are easy, so you study less.
- *Trickery* – your professor thinks that multiple choice tests are easy, so they create tricky, confusing questions.
- *Time Pressures* – multiple choice tests are often intentionally lengthened. We've all felt this one.
- *Broader range* – the questions are short and fast, so a LOT of ground can be covered in one exam.
- *Specific data* – Since the answers are right there on the page (yup, it's true), specifics like dates, names and places become fair game.
- *Can't bluff* – No BS on these suckers. No part marks. No bonuses for writing an eloquent sentence to disguise the fact that you have absolutely no idea what the answer is.
- *Difficult for teacher to write* – That's right. Creating a good multiple choice test is a skill. And not all professors have it.
- *Content is shuffled* – many multiple choice tests have no structure whatsoever. You could be answering a physics question and a history question back to back. That's hard on the noggin.

Why Should They Be Easy?

Sound bleak so far? Here's the good news: from here on in, it's all about how to beat the multiple choice test format. To start our new optimistic outlook, here are a few reasons why the phrase "multiple choice" should be music to your ears:

- *The Answer Is Given To You* – That's right. Somewhere in the list of responses is the right answer. What could be easier?
- *You Can Guess* – You may hear that you shouldn't guess. I'm telling you right now it's not true. This book will teach you how to guess *properly*.
- *Basic Brainwork* – Many multiple choice exams tend to emphasize basic definitions or simple comparisons, rather than asking students to analyze new information or apply theories to new situations. In other words, they're often easier.
- *More Questions* – *What! I thought more questions made it harder!* That may be true, but more questions means each question is worth less overall. That lowers your risk on each question.
- *Grammar Don't Count* – You don't have to be Shakespeare to write multiple choice. At the most you just have to neatly color in circles. So you don't have to be Picasso either.

MMC Success

Here are some benefits you can expect almost *immediately* after putting the system to work:

- *Less Study Time* –I don’t know how much studying you’re doing now, but I do know that the average person studies more than they need to. What you’re going to learn is how to study *smarter* so you can spend more time doing the things you really enjoy.
- *Increased Confidence* – Research shows that this is the key factor in...well, pretty much everything. Confidence is the single largest factor in effective memory!
- *Reduce or Eliminate Test Anxiety* – The better you control this, the better off you’ll be. If you suffer from test anxiety, this book will help you get that beast under control, and raise your grades in the process.
- *Finish on Time* – These tests can be long, and hard. Mismanaging your time can kill you on objective tests. How’d you like to finish every exam with time to spare?
- *Reduced Confusion*– Multiple choice tests are all about logic. Understanding what something like “never not unnecessary” means can change your grades. Trick questions, confusing wording and more – they’re all covered.
- *Knowing How and When to Guess* – Guessing does have a place in multiple choice exams. The secret is to know when to guess, and how to do it properly.
- *Better Grades!* In the end, that’s what we’re really after, and what this book’s all about.

The Answers To YOUR Questions

If you're reading this book, I'll bet you're looking for answers. And I'll bet the questions to those answers look something like this:

- “I’m busy. I don’t have time to study more. How can I get better grades without studying more than I already am?”
- “I’m so frustrated. I feel like I know the material, but every time I write a multiple choice exam I do worse than I should. I do fine on written exams, like essays. How can I do better at multiple choice?”
- “I just keep studying more and more, but my grades aren’t improving. How can I find a way do better without burning out?”
- “There’s a guy in my course who never seems to study. I don’t even think he goes to class. I don’t know whether I want to kill him, or be just like him. How does he do it?”
- “As soon as I start a multiple choice exam, I go blank. I read a few questions, and start to panic. How can I keep it together?”
- “I’m an adult. I’ve got a career, a family, and a mortgage. Plus it’s been years since I was a student. I’m taking a course to advance my career, but the exams are killing me. How can I study quickly and effectively, and figure out how to deal with these crazy multiple choice exams?”

Any of these sound familiar? *Mastering Multiple Choice* will help with all of these, and many more. Let’s get started.

GETTING STARTED

How To Use This Guide

This book is built on three *Mastery Principles*. Each Mastery Principle is a piece of your overall strategy for complete exam success. Within each Mastery Principle are a series of core strategies. By learning and applying these core strategies, you'll become successful in each of the Mastery Principles.

The Mastery Principles are, in order:

1. Principle One: Master Your Material

This is the “before the exam” section. It deals with how to organize and learn your subject matter. Textbooks, notes, lectures – whatever makes up the content that you'll be tested on. The objective here is to learn more quickly and effectively, in a way particularly suited to multiple choice exams.

2. Principle Two: Master Test-Taking

How you “take the test” is critical. In this section, you'll learn how to write exams more quickly, recall more of what you studied, and ensure that you never run out of time on an exam again.

3. Principle Three: Master The Questions

In this section you'll learn how to analyze the actual questions themselves, avoiding word traps, and finding the right answer *even when you haven't studied enough*.

What's the most important thing about this list? *It's in priority sequence*. In other words, the Mastery Principles at the top will have greater impact on your outcome than the ones on the bottom. So, if you have an exam tomorrow you can skip to the last section, but you'll be missing out on the best stuff.

Each of the Mastery Principles is like a position on a long lever. The farther out the lever you move, the more leverage you get, and the easier it is to do more work with the same effort. So you'll get more mileage out of Mastering Test-Taking, if you've already Mastered Your Material.

Remember: *most people fail exams before they get there.*

Most people fail exams before they get there.

You can dramatically improve your exam results simply by changing how you prepare, and how you take the test. Even if you don't change how you study, you'll notice a significant difference in your results simply by following the techniques in Principle II: Master Test-Taking. A small shift in your approach can generate enormous return.

Focus on Mastering Your Material and Mastering Test-Taking. These are the areas where you'll learn to work smarter not harder, and they'll determine your success in later areas. Then use the specific techniques in Mastering The Questions to crank up your grades even further.

Through all of this, remember that multiple choice test-taking is a *skill*. It improves with practice and knowledge.

Good luck!

You've been reading an excerpt from

Mastering Multiple Choice

*The Definitive Guide to Better Grades on
Multiple Choice Exams*

Put the *Mastering Multiple Choice* system to work immediately by downloading the complete book at:

www.masteringmultiplechoice.com/get-mmc.html

Good luck with your studies!

Stephen Merritt,
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