

Rules for Intelligent Guessing on Multiple-Choice Exams¹

1. Alternatives with absolute or universal qualifiers are usually wrong (all, every, never, in no case, in every case, etc.)
2. Alternatives that seem impossible or that seem completely unrelated to the question are usually wrong (watch out for alternatives that are true, but have nothing to do with the question).
3. If two or more alternatives say the same thing, each is probably wrong (you can have two that are wrong, but not two that are right on m/c tests).
4. The answer to one question is sometimes given away in another question (tests contain a lot of information - use it).
5. When 3 or more alternatives deal in different ways with one concept, one of them is usually right. The instructor usually doesn't waste 3 alternatives on single incorrect concept. In this case, he or she most likely wants to have you discriminate knowledge.
6. If two answers contain a similar sounding word, such as "subordination" and "subrogation," choose one of these.
7. If two answers are almost identical except for a few words, choose one of these.
8. If two answers seem extreme, they should be eliminated, and a guess made as to the remaining answers. As an example, if the answer is to be a number, and 3, 57, 89, 1103 are the choices given, you should eliminate the 3 and 1103, and take a guess at one of the remaining choices.
9. If you are unable to eliminate any answer on a 4 answer question, choose the third. Experience has shown that it has a better than 25% chance of being the correct answer.
10. Don't try to apply definitions from outside the course. Answer the questions found on your lecture and class reading, not based on educational knowledge that you have.
11. Never argue with a question. Accept it at face value.
12. When all else fails:
 - a. choose the alternative that makes the best sentence, when added to the open-ended question.
 - b. look for subject-verb agreement.
 - c. know the instructor's quirks of language.
 - d. choose the longer answer. The instructor may have used more words to make the answer precise; thus the most correct.
13. None of these rules works all the time, so use them only if you have to.

¹ See <http://www.college.ucla.edu/up/aap/tutoring/General/Guessrule.html>