Exams: MCQ papers

Multiple choice question papers

✓ MCQs test understanding across the breadth of a subject and you need to learn all of the material to do well.
✓ Usually you are expected to answer all of the questions.
✓ Questions usually carry the same number of marks, but do check.
✓ Know whether or not you are penalised for wrong answers.

MCQs are answered under time pressure

Before the exam
• Work out how many marks the question paper is worth and how long you have to do the whole paper.
• Work out a time to allow for a set of questions (e.g. five questions).
• Stick to this during the exam.

Practice the format
• Testing yourself is the best way to prepare.
• Do batches of questions against the clock (say 15 to 20 minutes).
• It is a good idea to make up your own questions based on the course you did (even if past papers are available).

Work out a strategy to use during the exam

Think about and rehearse in your own mind what steps you are going to take.
• Always start by reading the instructions, even when you think you know what they are going to be.
• Your appropriate ‘set of steps’ will depend on the exact format of your exam paper.

An elimination-based set of steps for each question:
1. Read the question carefully (note any units, statistics and the context);
2. Before reading the options, what is your first instinct?
3. Read all of the options – eliminate any you know are not right;
4. If you have more than one left, choose the one that fits best;
5. Trust yourself and move on – dithering wastes time.

Possible alternatives:
• Treat each option as a true-false question, and choose the ‘most true’.
• Cover the options and answer - select the option closest to your answer.

Top tips:
• Try not to leave answers blank to come back later. It is easy to forget these.
• Guess only as a last resort and when there is no penalty for guessing.