

Tip Sheet on Taking and Passing Multiple Choice, Open Book Exams

The exams that Service Alberta prepares that the student is required to pass for certification are multiple choice, open book exams. This tip sheet provides some guidance on how to best prepare.

Before the Exam

Successfully passing an open book exam requires some careful preparation. Just because the information is provided at the time of the exam, doesn't mean that you can expect the exam to be easy. In fact, because you have access to a considerable amount of material, the exams can actually be more difficult than traditional exams. Instead of requiring you to simply memorize facts, the exams usually demand that you apply concepts and fully understand ideas. Open book exams require just as much studying as any other type of exam. The key to succeeding is in careful preparation.

1. Thoroughly read all the material. As you take the course, make notes. If you print out the material, highlight key terms. Review any quizzes that appear in the course material or any practice exams. As you go through the course, print out any tip sheets and create your own resource binder.
2. Become familiar with the layout of the manuals. Learn where important ideas and concepts are located so you do not have to waste time searching for them during the exam. If you print out the manuals, get out your post-it notes and mark where to quickly locate important material. If you use the online manual, it will be helpful if you have a printed table of contents and notes to direct you to the pages you are likely to need to reference. Use the search function in the browser or document. The online manual will be available during the exam and you may bring a printed copy of the manual with you. In certain circumstances, a printed copy may be provided but your own version, organized the way you like it, will be much more useful to you.
3. Memorize key concepts. Although you have material with you, you may not have time to look up every answer.
4. Have all your material organized and ready to take with you. Don't forget pencils, erasers, pens, rulers and the like. Bring a watch so you can keep track of the time. Electronic devices such as cell phones will not be permitted.

Reducing Pre-Exam Anxiety

If you are working in a registry agent location, check RAnet for any examination information. For example, Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan Certification Program (AHCIP) has published examination information that describes the requirements for taking that exam.

Remember, it is normal for everyone to feel anxious prior to taking an exam. You can reduce your anxiety by following a few simple steps:

1. Be well prepared and maintain a positive attitude.

2. Get a good night's sleep the night before the exam. If you have trouble waking up, set your alarm and a back up alarm so you can relax and get to sleep.
3. Eat before the test. Having food in your stomach will give you energy. Just avoid heavy food that tends to make you groggy.
4. Arrive to the exam location early so you have time to get registered and organize your workspace. We recommend getting to the exam site at least 15 minutes prior to allow for any administrative tasks that may be required.
5. Go to the bathroom before walking into the exam room. There is nothing worse than feeling uncomfortable while trying to concentrate.
6. Stay relaxed. If you begin to get nervous, take a few deep breaths to calm yourself.

During the Exam

1. Begin by carefully reading the instructions. Calculate how much time you can spend on each question. For example, the AHCIP exam has 50 questions and you have 3 hours to write. This means you should spend no more than about 3.5 minutes on each question.
2. Don't allow the exam to intimidate or overwhelm you. The irony with an open book exam is that you can feel overwhelmed due to the sheer volume of material you have with you.
3. Resist the temptation to answer the question before you have read it all the way. It is amazing how many people miss a multiple-choice question because they stopped reading too soon and missed an important detail.
4. Answer any questions that you automatically know. Then go back to the others.
5. Read the questions carefully and pay particular attention to questions that are phrased in a tricky manner. Watch for double negatives in a question.
6. Be sure you put your answers in the right spot. Many multiple choice questions have circles or ovals that you need to colour in. Use your ruler to keep you in the right place and a pencil to fill in the circles. Keep your eraser handy.
7. Never change an answer unless you are positive your first answer was wrong. Most often your first hunch is the right one.
8. Keep in mind that if 2 answer options are very similar to each other, while the others do not sound similar, the answer is almost always one of the 2 similar ones.
9. Don't give up too soon on a question just because you think you do not know the answer. Typically, you will be able to rule out one or two of the answer options, and therefore have increased your chances of selecting the right response.
10. Never leave a question blank unless the marking system penalizes you for guesses.
11. If you have nothing else to go on, play the odds. Consider these tips:
 - *Responses that use absolute words, such as "always" or "never" are less likely to be correct than ones that use conditional words such as "usually" or "probably."*
 - *"Funny" responses are usually wrong.*
 - *"All of the above" is often a correct response. If you can verify that more than one response is correct, then choose "all of the above."*

- *“None of the above” is usually an incorrect response although this is less reliable than the “all of the above” tip. Be careful not to be trapped by double negatives.*
- *Look for grammatical clues. If the stem ends with the indefinite article “an,” for example, then the correct response is going to start with a vowel.*
- *The longest response is often the correct one, because the examiner tends to load it with qualifying adjectives or phrases.*
- *Look for verbal associations. A response that repeats key words that are in the stem is likely to be correct.*
- *If all else fails, choose response (b) or (c). For some reason, many examiners subconsciously feel that the correct answer is “hidden” better if it is surrounded by distracters (other options). Response (a) is usually least likely to be the correct one.¹*

Sources:

1. Centre for Teaching Excellence