

Dealing with Each Question

There are several established techniques for efficiently approaching multiple choice questions; find what works for you. One technique begins with identifying each question as easy, workable, or impossible. Your goal should be to answer all easy questions, resolve all workable questions in a reasonable amount of time, and make quick and intelligent guesses on all impossible questions. Most students read the stem, think of the answer, and turn immediately to the choices. A second technique is to first skim the answer choices to get a context, then read the last sentence of the question (the lead-in), and then read through the passage quickly, extracting only information relevant to answering the question. This can be particularly helpful for questions with long clinical vignettes. Try a variety of techniques on practice exams and see what works best for you. If you get overwhelmed, remember that a 30-second time out to refocus may get you back on track.

Guessing

There is **no penalty** for wrong answers. Thus **no test block should be left with unanswered questions**. If you don't know the answer, first eliminate incorrect choices, then guess among the remaining options. **Note that dozens of questions are unscored experimental questions** meant to obtain statistics for future exams. Therefore, some questions may seem unusual or unreasonably difficult simply because they are part of the development process for future exams.

Changing Your Answer

The conventional wisdom is not to second-guess your initial answers. However, studies have consistently shown that test takers are more likely to change from a wrong answer to the correct answer than the other way around. Many question banks tell you how many questions you changed from right to wrong, wrong to wrong, and wrong to right. Use this feedback to judge how good a second-guesser you are. If you have extra time, reread the question stem and make sure you didn't misinterpret the question.

► *Go with your first hunch, unless you are certain that you are a good second-guesser.*

► CLINICAL VIGNETTE STRATEGIES

In recent years, the USMLE Step 1 has become increasingly clinically oriented. This change mirrors the trend in medical education toward introducing students to clinical problem solving during the basic science years. The increasing clinical emphasis on Step 1 may be challenging to those students who attend schools with a more traditional curriculum.

► *Be prepared to read fast and think on your feet!*