Studying tips.

Multiple-choice tests are deceiving.

They appear easy because we think we will 'recognize' the right answer when we see it (relying on a sense of familiarity). Unfortunately, all the answers will seem familiar because they are all typically relevant to the content, but only one is correct.

To properly study for a multiple-choice test you need to simulate the relevant behavior (we will learn more about memory and transfer-appropriate processing in the memory chapters). Therefore, you should study the material until you feel confident in your understanding, then test yourself by coming up with multiple choice questions. Pair up with a study-buddy and write questions for each other.

It is crucial that you practice the behavior as close to the actual conditions as possible. If you only study by memorizing word-for-word definitions and testing yourself by seeing if you can repeat back or recognize definitions, you will do poorly on a multiple choice test.

Cognitive science tells us a lot about how we learn and how best to optimize our study habits. There is a great set of videos explaining the science behind good study habits and tips on how to improve studying that I highly recommend you watch:

https://www.samford.edu/departments/academic-success-center/how-to-study

Understanding the kinds of questions you will be asked.

Definitional / Fact-based. When we think of multiple choice questions, we often think of definitional kinds. Here, you're either provided a definition or provided a term and asked to identify the definition. These could also be just factual questions ("The duration of short-term memory is…"). These are the easiest kinds of questions and will only represent a small subset of the questions asked.

E.g., If I want to measure brain activity, non-invasively, and have the highest temporal resolution, I would use:

      a. functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging
      b. Electroencephalograph
      c. Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation
      d. Single-unit recording

More likely, questions will be conceptual. That is, they ask you to apply your knowledge of a concept in one way or another. A good general strategy for tackling these questions

is to first try to identify the concept that the question is referring to and then identify how the answers relate to that concept.

Compare and Contrast. Often you will be asked to compare and contrast two concepts. How are they similar, how are they different, etc. Sometimes you can be asked about both of them at the same time (e.g., "Helmholtz and the Gestalts differed in their views of perception in that.. ") and other times asked how one is specifically different than the other:

E.g., The main difference between early and late selection models of attention is that in late selection models, selection of stimuli for final processing doesn't occur until the information is analyzed for

     a. modality.
     b. meaning.
     c. physical characteristics.
     d. location.

This is an example of… Sometimes you will provided an example or situation (that you've never seen before) and have to identify what it is an example of.

E.g., The sequence of steps that includes the image on the retina, changing the image into electrical signals, and neural processing is an example of _____ processing.

     a. bottom-up
     b. top-down
     c. sequential
     d. serial

These are probably the most difficult because I can ask about a concept without even referring to it by name. Therefore, you'll need to figure out what the underlying concept is, and figure out how it would apply:

E.g., If kittens are raised in an environment that contains only verticals, you would predict that most of the neurons in their visual cortex would respond best to the visual presentation of a

     a. brick wall.
     b. chain link fence.
     c. solid wall.
     d. picket fence.

This provides evidence for.. or illustrates.. Another common question in Psychology exams is about experimental evidence. That is, you could be asked about a phenomenon (an experimental finding or observation) and asked what that finding is evidence for, or which psychological concept it illustrates.

E.g., Articulatory suppression can decrease or eliminate the wordlength effect because
      a. saying "the, the, the" fills up the phonological loop.
      b. saying "la, la, la" forces participants to use visual encoding.
      c. talking makes the longer words seem even longer.
      d. elaborative rehearsal helps transfer information into LTM.

Negatives and Double-negatives. Don't forget to read the question very carefully. Half the battle is understanding what the question is asking for before jumping to a 'familiar' feeling answer.

E.g., Which of the following is NOT an example of a physical regularity in your text?

      a. The oblique effect
      b. The light-from-above assumption
      c. Angled orientation
      d. Having one object that is partially covered by another "come out the other side"

Or the reverse.. Of course any of these questions can be flipped around. You can take any of the previous examples and reword them so the answer is now the question and the question is now the answer.

E.g., "The light-from-above assumption is an example of… "

Test-taking tips

From: https://www.lib.sfu.ca/system/files/28965/MCPsychology.pdf

Multiple-choice questions can be unnerving for students unfamiliar with them. The following twelve suggestions should help you with them. To be of maximum benefit, it is recommended that you review them before each test.

1. Do not count on being able to answer multiple-choice questions correctly merely by recognizing the correct answer. Recognition usually entails choosing a familiar item. However, in a multiple-choice question, it is possible for every alternative to be familiar. The problem, then, is not familiarity, but rather understanding the meaning of each of the alternatives with respect to the context of the question posed. You can best achieve this level of understanding by studying for the test as though it will be a short-answer or

essay test. Read each question stem twice. As you read, underline words such as "not" or "always" to help you remember what it is you are looking for.

2. Before reading the answer alternatives, attempt first your own answer to the question stem. Because the answer alternatives may sometimes begin to confuse you, it is best to reflect on what you know before looking at these alternatives. If the question stem does not seem to provide sufficient information about what is being asked, then glance over the alternatives to get a better idea.

3. When you are ready to read the answer alternatives, always read answer alternatives, carefully before jumping to the conclusion that a particular one must be the best.

4. Beware of jargon. Answer alternatives may appear in technical language in order to detect whether you know the difference between what "looks right" and what" is right". The correct answer may also appear in jargon to see whether you know the relevant technical terminology.

5. Beware too, of answer alternatives that are correct statements in and of themselves but are not correct answer alternatives to the questions stem. Be sure that your choice is the best completion of the stem.

6. Be particularly careful with answer alternatives such as "all of the above," "none of the above" and"more than one, but not all, of the above." These choices are frequently most difficult. Look at every other answer alternative very carefully to be sure that it says what you think it says. Sloppy reading can be particularly disastrous with items such as these.

7. Watch out for double negatives! Though we believe that a good multiple-choice test really should not have such questions, sometimes they do slip in. A question whose question stem is "Which of the following is not true?" can be particularly difficult. This difficulty is compounded if one or more of the answer alternatives also contains negatives. You find yourself saying to yourself such things as "It is not true that this alternative is not true."! To make such answer alternatives more manageable, rephrase such a negative question stem to yourself according to the following strategy: If I can find just one answer alternative that is not true, then the other alternatives, the correct (false) answer alternative will be clear by a process of elimination. This procedure is not as complicated as it appears and will help you cope with such cases. Try it.

8. In general, a good strategy for taking multiple-choice tests is to first go through the test, answering all the questions you can, without worrying about the ones you cannot answer for the moment. There are two reasons for this: doing the easier questions first may help allay some of the anxiety that test often evoke; and sometimes seeing the answer alternatives to later questions will remind you of the answer alternatives to

earlier questions. Subsequently, go through the test again, answering all the questions about which you are uncertain.

9. Pace yourself properly throughout the test. On average, you will have just over one minute per question. You will probably want to reserve additional time to review your answers, and you will require some time to transfer your answers to your computer answer sheet, IF APPLICABLE. Note: Extra time is not allowed for transferring answers to a computer answer sheet. A good general rule of thumb is to try to answer five multiple-choice questions about every five minutes. This strategy will allow sufficient time at the end for those questions you found most problematic.