

South Carleton High School
Department of Canadian and World Studies and Social Sciences

Exam Writing Tips and Techniques
For
Grade 9 Geography Students



2009/2010
CGC1D

Lesson 1: Multiple Choice Questions

Multiple choice questions usually include a phrase or question followed by three to five options.

1. **Read the directions carefully.** The directions usually indicate that some alternatives may be partly correct or correct statements in themselves, but not when joined to the phrase/question. The directions may say: "choose the most correct answer" or "mark the one best answer."

2. **Improve your odds, think critically:**

A. **Cover the options, read the phrase/question, and try to answer.** Then select the option that most closely matches your answer

B. **Use the process of elimination procedure.** Eliminate the obviously incorrect alternatives.

3. **What to do with difficult questions** (the ones that you still don't know the answer even when using the techniques above)

A. **Read all of the phrase/question with every option.** Most of the time, the correct answer will sound better grammatically with the question/phrase. This also allows you to eliminate any obviously wrong answers.

B. **Consider "all of the above" and "none of the above."** Examine the "above" alternatives to see if all of them or none of them apply *totally*. If even one does not apply totally, do not consider "all of the above" or "none of the above" as the correct answer. Make sure that a statement applies to the question since it can be true, but not be relevant to the question at hand!

C. **Note negatives.** If a negative such as "none", "not", "never", or "neither" occurs in the phrase/question, know that the correct alternative must be a fact or absolute and that the other alternatives could be true statements, but not the correct answer.

D. **Note superlatives.** Words such as "every", "all", "none", "always", and "only" are superlatives that indicate the correct answer must be an undisputed fact. In the geography, absolutes are rare.

E. **Note qualifying words.** "Usually", "often", "generally", "may", and "seldom" are qualifiers that *could* indicate a true statement.

4. **Plan your time wisely.**

Some questions will only take seconds to answer while others may require more thought. Put a * or ? beside a question that requires more thought and go back to them once you are done answering all the multiple choice questions. **DO NOT FORGET TO GO BACK AND ANSWER THESE !!**

Quiz Time!!

Directions: Choose the best answer for each phrase/question.

1. When beginning the multiple choice section of an exam you should
 - a. Read the directions carefully
 - b. Write your name on the exam
 - c. Close your eyes and make a wish

2. In order to improve your odds and thinking critically about each multiple choice question you should:
 - a. Cover the possible answers and try to answer the question yourself first
 - b. Eliminate the obviously incorrect answers
 - c. Both a and b
 - d. Neither a and b

3. When you get to a difficult question you should:
 - a. Answer c because it has the most probability of being correct
 - b. Put a star or question mark beside it and come back to it later
 - c. Always stare at the page and wait until the answer gets to you

4. Grade 9 geography students who prepare well for exams
 - a. Always get 100%
 - b. Usually do better than if they had not prepared
 - c. All of the above

5. When you have gone through all of the multiple choice questions on the exam you should
 - a. Raise your hand and tell your teacher that you are done
 - b. Close your eyes and take a nap
 - c. Go back through the questions to answer the ones with a * or ? beside it
 - d. Make sure that the answer that you filled out on the scantron card is in fact your answer
 - e. Both a and b
 - f. Both c and d

Congratulations! You have just completed your first lesson in Exam writing tips.
Stay tuned for the next lesson on Matching questions.

Lesson 2: Matching Questions

Matching questions involve matching a word (or phrase) with another phrase. It is the relationship of these two items that is key.

1. **Read the directions carefully.** Some instructions state that a word or phrase is used **ONLY ONCE**, so be careful.
2. **First, Read all of the items in each list before you match anything** (read all of the words; read all of the phrases). The information will be in your head. Then later, reading the items will then **trigger** some of this information.
3. Answer the questions that you definitely know, first - the ones that you know **instantly**.
4. For the others, don't choose the first answer that seems correct because you may find a better answer further down the list.
5. **Cross off** items as they are eliminated.
6. To **save time**, match the longer phrase to the word (not the other way around) so that you will be reading the phrases fewer times; and then you can quickly scan down the other list for the correct word.
7. Mark the answers lightly as you may need to change answers later on.

Quiz Time!!

Directions: Match the best word(s) to the phrase. Choose from the words below and write it in the appropriate box.

Words	Phrase (or definition)
	1. Do this to the words as you use them up
	2. Look for this between the word and the phrase. (think of how they are connected)
	3. How you should mark the answers in case you need to make changes later
	4. First, match those that you definitely or _____ know.
	5. Match the longer phrase to the word (not the other way around)

- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| a. lightly | d. instantly | g. saves time |
| b. cross off | e. relationship | h. takes up a lot of time |
| c. scribble out | f. opposites | i. randomly |

Congratulations! You have just completed your second lesson in Exam writing tips.
Stay tuned for the next lesson on Map Identification.

Lesson 3: Map Identification

A) Memorizing the Canadian Provinces.

1. **Write out the provinces and territories from a list.** This will help you to know them and to spell them correctly.
2. The southern provinces are (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and Newfoundland). Memorize these first, using the following method:
 - i) Use a **peg word** such as BASMOQN ('bas-mok-win') (made from the first letter in each of the provinces)
 - ii) Make up a **sentence**, such as 'Bill and Sally Made One Quart of Nothing'
Or, 'Bart A. Simpson Marred Our Quiet Night'. A sentence that you make up will be remembered for a long time.
3. For the top three territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut) 'YNN' or 'yinn' can be remembered as You Naughty Nut!
4. **Use Colour.** For some people, memorizing a place by a specific colour is very helpful. Therefore, colour a map as a way of studying.

B) Memorizing the countries of the World.

1. Break down or section off what you need to know into continents.
2. Use Peg Words as described above.
3. Or, make a sentence out of the first letters of the countries for each continent. Your sentence will be much easier to remember than someone else's.

C) During the Exam...

1. Write down those you know for sure while leaving the others for later.
2. Write little notes about details of an area if you can't immediately think of its name. This may trigger the name of it. (ie. "wheat grows here" "prairies" "big city Saskatoon" "SASKATCHEWAN, that's it!!!")
3. Don't leave any blank. Trying something is better than nothing.

Congratulations! You have just completed your third lesson in Exam writing tips.
Stay tuned for the next lesson on diagrams and explanations.

Lesson 4: Diagrams and Explanations

Diagram Questions: Diagrams are an effective way to illustrate a process, series of relationships between sub-topics, or related terms. Your preparation must practice drawing the diagram from memory, neatly and completely, with correctly spelled and complete labels.

Strategies and techniques include:

- Draw unlabelled diagrams on cue cards with blank places for labels shown and a list of labels on the back. You test yourself by looking at the diagram and naming the labels required and showing where they go. You can also use the label list to practice drawing the diagram part from memory. You then check what you were able to remember against the perfect diagram you drew earlier in your study notes. With practice you need to get to the point where you can neatly draw a perfectly labelled diagram.
- Collect the diagrams encountered in each of the units of study into their own section of your study notes, include your cue cards from above.
- Some people will use a jigsaw puzzle approach if a diagram can involve parts such as special purpose Canada maps for example, or concept maps. Have the unlabelled diagram parts in a zip lock baggy that you can take out and put together in front you summarizing the key ideas of each piece, part or section.
- examples: landform regions, plate tectonics (mountain building by folding and faulting), natural systems, human systems, disappearing salmon case study, global circulation: pressure and prevailing winds, MALOOP climate factors (each), cold and warm fronts, convection, orographic and frontal precipitation, population pyramid.

Explain questions: When you draw a diagram you will be asked to explain it. You must carefully read the question to **know what is being asked** for, to **know if there is choice**, to **know how many marks** are given, make sure that your labels and/or key ideas match with the marks available.

It is also good to write down a draft of points you want to make as they come to mind, then organize it for order and ensuring it answers the question asked before writing your final answer properly.

Congratulations! You have just completed your fourth lesson in Exam writing tips.
Stay tuned for the next lesson on diagrams and explanations.

Lesson 5: How to Read and Decode Short Answer and Paragraph Questions

To be successful in answering questions that require a few sentences or a paragraph answer, you first need to understand exactly what is being asked. There are two things you need to figure out when reading a question of this type:

1. **The Content**
2. **The Expected Answer Format**

Example Question A - Short Answer:

Explain what Canada's immigration point system is and justify why you think it is either fair or unfair for either the immigrants to Canada or current Canadians.

(5 marks)

The Content: you need to know what "*Canada's immigration point system*" means and you need to know *specific examples* of how the point system is fair or unfair to immigrants and to current Canadians.

The Expected Answer Format: You will notice that the question is worth 5 marks and it is worded to guide your answer. There are some key words in the question to help you with the answer format. *Explain:* means to pretend that the reader does not know about your topic and you need to get them to understand (should explain what and why). This part is probably worth 2 marks. *Justify:* means you need to prove your opinion by giving specific evidence that explains why you have the opinion that you do. This part is probably worth 3 marks.

Example Question B - Paragraph Answer:

Explain what an ecological footprint is and how Canada ranks compared to the rest of the world. Describe FIVE (5) ways that you can reduce your ecological footprint. (10 marks = 7 marks for content + 3 marks for paragraph style)

The Content: you will need to know what '*ecological footprint*' is and be able to explain it. You will have to know where Canada stands in comparison to other countries' footprints. You will have to be familiar enough to describe ways that you can reduce the ecological footprint. Notice that this says '*describe*' and not 'list' which means you should be able to explain how each action actually reduces the footprint. Take time to plan what you are going to write by making a point form rough copy.

The Expected Answer Format: The paragraph must open with a general introductory sentence explaining ecological footprint. A minimum of five sentences will be needed in the body of your paragraph to explain how Canada compares and to describe 5 ways to reduce your ecological footprint. The paragraph must then end with a concluding sentence to sum up what has been discussed.

Key Questioning Words Discussion: Discuss with your teacher and classmates the meanings of words that are found in many exam questions.

List, Define, Compare, Contrast, Examine, Give Evidence, Convince, Prove, Show, Summarize, Elaborate, Discuss, Who, Where, What, Why, When

Congratulations! You have just completed your LAST lesson in Exam writing tips. Not only will these tips help you to write your exam but they should also help you with your studying as well.

Important terms to know for Short-Answer and Paragraph type questions

Compare:

Examine qualities, or characteristics, to discover resemblances. "Compare" is usually stated as "compare with": you are to emphasize similarities, although differences may be mentioned.

Contrast:

Stress dissimilarities, differences, or unlikeness of things, qualities, events, or problems.

Criticize:

Express your judgment or correctness or merit. Discuss the limitations and good points or contributions of the plan or work in question.

Define:

Definitions call for concise, clear, authoritative meanings. Details are not required but limitations of the definition should be briefly cited. You must keep in mind the class to which a thing belongs and whatever differentiates the particular object from all others in the class.

Describe:

In a descriptive answer you should recount, characterize, sketch or relate in narrative form.

Diagram:

For a question which specifies a diagram you should present a drawing, chart, plan, or graphic representation in your answer. Generally you are expected to label the diagram and in some cases add a brief explanation or description.

Discuss:

The term discuss, which appears often in essay questions, directs you to examine, analyze carefully, and present considerations pro and con regarding the problems or items involved. This type of question calls for a complete and entailed answer.

Enumerate:

The word enumerate specifies a list or outline form of reply. In such questions you should recount, one by one, in concise form, the points required.

Evaluate:

In an evaluation question you are expected to present a careful appraisal of the problem stressing both advantages and limitations. Evaluation implies authoritative and, to a lesser degree, personal appraisal of both contributions and limitations.

Explain:

In explanatory answers it is important that you clarify the material you present. In such an answer it is best to state the "how or why," discuss any differences in opinion or experimental results, and, where possible, state causes. The aim is to clearly give the reasons surrounding an issue, theory or understanding.

Illustrate:

A question which asks you to illustrate usually requires you to explain or clarify your answer to the problem by presenting a figure, picture, diagram, or concrete example.

Interpret:

An interpretation question is similar to one requiring explanation. You are expected to translate, exemplify, solve, or comment upon the subject and usually to give your judgment or reaction to the problem.

Justify:

When you are instructed to justify your answer you must prove or show grounds for decisions. In such an answer, evidence should be presented in convincing form.

List:

Listing is similar to enumeration. You are expected in such questions to present an itemized series or tabulation. Such answers should always be given in concise form.

Outline:

An outline answer is organized description. You should give main points and essential supplementary materials, omitting minor details, and present the information in a systematic arrangement or classification.

Prove:

A question which requires proof is one which demands confirmation or verification. In such discussions you should establish something with certainty by evaluating and citing experimental evidence or by logical reasoning.

Relate:

In a question which asks you to show the relationship or to relate, your answer should emphasize connections and associations in descriptive form.

Review:

A review specifies a critical examination. You should analyze and comment briefly in organized sequence upon the major points of the problem.

State:

In questions which direct you to specify, give, state, or present, you are called upon to express the high points in brief, clear narrative form. Details, and usually illustrations or examples, may be omitted.

Summarize:

When you are asked to summarize or present a summarization, you should give in condensed form the main points or facts. All details, illustrations and elaboration are to be omitted.

Exam writing tips and techniques have been taken and adapted from the following sources:

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