**MCQ Strategy**

Tips from Mrs. Paher and the Princeton Review

Half of your score on the AP exam will come from multiple choice questions. There will be **80 questions**, and you’ll have **55 minutes** to answer them.

Part of doing well on the MCQ section of the exam is knowing the information. That’s why we’re studying hard. But even if you don’t know much about the topic of a certain MCQ, you may still figure out the answer based on other factors!

This e-lecture gives some tips on MCQs to help strengthen you for this part of the exam. Here are a number of helpful hints:

* **Answer EVERY SINGLE QUESTION!!**  The scoring has changed—they no longer take off points for wrong answers. You’ll get points for the ones you get right, but no points taken away if you get any wrong. This means there is no penalty for guessing! So eliminate the choices you know definitely aren’t it, and guess from the remaining ones. It’s to your advantage, and it will raise your score. *Answer every* *MCQ* on the exam!
* **“All of the Above” is the answer.** Usually, if choice E is “All of the above,” that is the correct answer. Not always, of course—but most of the time. Here’s a quick way to double check: are at least two of the answer choices true? If at least two are true, it’s definitely “all of the above.”

Which of the following occurred during the French Revolution?

1. A new calendar system *Yup!*
2. Women’s march on Versailles *Yup!*
3. Haitian slave revolt *Um, maybe?*
4. Wars of the Vendée *What’s that?*
5. All of the above *A & B are definitely true—this is it!*

Even if you have so clue when the Haitian slave revolt was and have never heard of the Wars of the Vendée, if you know the Women’s March on Versailles and a new calendar happened during the French Revolution, you can still get this question right! Since *at least two of the answers are true*, it has to be E, “all of the above.”

If you’re running out of time at the end of the exam and need to guess, choose “all of the above.” It’s probably right.

* **“None of the Above” is NOT the answer.** Usually, if choice E is “None of the above,” that is NOT the correct answer. Not always, but most of the time. If you’re running out of time and have to guess, don’t choose “none of the above.” Eliminate it, and guess a different one.
* **Go for the Famous Person/Thing.** Usually, the answer will be someone you’ve heard of, so if you’re stumped, go for the most famous person/thing. For example:

Blahblah blah a great Russian leader blahblah blah blah

1. Ivan the Terrible *Famous, but definitely not great!*
2. Peter the Great *Must be great—you’ve heard of him!*
3. Alexander I *Who’s he?*
4. Nicholas I *I guess he must have lived before Nicky II*?
5. Nicholas II *Got killed during the Russian Rev, right?*

Go with Peter the Great, the famous guy you’ve heard of.

* **Often, the more detailed answers are correct.** If some of the answer choices are kind of vague, and others are much more specific, chances are a **more detailed** answer is the correct one. For example, look at this MCQ from the 2009 AP Euro exam:

Which of the following was most directly responsible for the founding of the Fifth Republic in 1958?

A.  economic recession

B.  the Suez Crisis

C.  the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu

D.  political conflict over the war in Algeria

E.  the resignation of Prime Minister Charles de Gaulle

Vague answers like “economic recession” are much less likely to be correct, than a more specific choice like “political conflict over the war in Algeria.” (The answer to this question is D.)

* **Think ERA. Think COUNTRY.** Organize all the facts in your head into eras (time periods), similar to your timeline. Most questions on the exam are very specific factually, but they are usually connected to an era and a country. Think about the big picture. What was important in each era? Who were the main characters? What were the main events? What was going on? If you know the time period and the country of a question, you can greatly narrow down your choices and have a better chance of figuring out the correct answer.

Let’s practice with the Tudors. What comes to mind? Henry VIII, six wives, the English Reformation, Elizabeth I, the Spanish Armada, the founding of Jamestown and Virginia, Shakespeare…

Now suppose you came across this question:

Monarchs of the late fifteenth century, such as the Tudors, maintained their political power through

1. The military strength of the monarch and his ability to keep order
2. The removal of religious leaders from under state control
3. The growth of state-sanctioned religions
4. The continental leadership of the Roman Catholic Church
5. Decentralization of power caused by the feudal system

Even if you don’t know much about the Tudors, think about the **era**. The late fifteenth century is the late 1400s – around the beginning of the Renaissance. What would help keep a monarch in power? Obviously, **B** is wrongbecause removing *anyone* from state control would weaken a monarch. **C** can’t be right, either, since it refers to the *growth* of state-sanctioned religion, and the Roman Catholic Church was pretty much the only sanctioned religion during the entire Middle Ages and beginning of the Renaissance. **D** refers to *continental* leadership of the Catholic Church, and (think country!) since the question refers to the Tudors of England, likely D is not the answer. (Not to mention that Church leadership often conflicted with a secular monarch’s power.) You can also eliminate **E** based on common sense, because any decentralization of power would weaken a monarch!

Of the choices here, only **A** would help keep a strong monarch in power. Therefore, based on just a little background knowledge of the country and era, as well as common sense, you can figure out that A is the correct answer.

* **Eliminate Non-Era Answer Choices.** Cross out choices that cannot be true, based on what you know about the time period and place. Some answers are just plain silly when you think about the era and country. For example:

Which of the following was a reform established following the French Revolution?

1. Equality of all races and genders
2. The right to decent and affordable housing
3. The establishment of a republic
4. Reduced powers of the military
5. The end of feudalistic practices

Think about the **era**. The French Revolution occurred in the late 1700s. What was that time period like? Both choices A and B (equal rights and decent housing) sound like good reforms, but think about the time period—the late 1700s. Neither women’s equal rights or the idea of a right to decent housing occurred until recently; therefore **A** and **B** are both wrong based on **era**. **D** is wrong because Napoleon, a great military general, rose to power at the end of the French Revolution and started the Napoleonic wars. **E** is wrong because feudalism had already been weakening for centuries *before* the French Revolution. So, by eliminating the non-era choices, you find the correct answer: **C**.

* **EXCEPT Questions**. These can be tricky. But relax—they are really True/False questions in disguise! (The same goes for NOT and LEAST questions.) It’s the EXCEPT part that gets confusing, so cross out that word—literally, with your pencil. After you cross it out, read the question without the EXCEPT, and then answer True or False to each question choice. Write “T” next to a true statement, and “F” next to a false one. On EXCEPT questions, the right answer will always be the “False.” Remember, you are looking for the exception—the one that is not true of the question.

Let’s Practice:

All of the following countries contributed to the flowering of culture during the Renaissance ~~EXCEPT~~

1. Italy *T*
2. The Soviet Union *F—it wasn’t even around yet!*
3. France *T*
4. Spain *T*
5. England *T*

The answer is **B**—the “False.”

* **“One of These Things is Not Like the Others…”** Remember that game? You can use this on EXCEPT questions, too. Sometimes one answer choice will noticeably stick out from the others. The one that’s different (the exception) is the answer. Use this with the **era/country** technique—often the exception is the non-era choice.

Blah blah blah eighteenth-century philosophy blahblah blah EXCEPT

1. Religious tolerance
2. Freedom of thought and expression
3. Thought about political and social structures
4. Communal sharing of land
5. Value of scientific logic

Eighteenth-century philosophy means the 1700s, the Enlightenment, and the Scientific Revolution. Choice **D** is noticeably out of that era—communal property in Europe is a very nineteenth-century idea. Therefore, D is the answer. The “not like the others” choice is the answer for EXCEPT questions.

* **Quote Questions.** Some MCQs will give you a quote or passage, then ask you to identify the speaker, time period, or general philosophy of the writer. These questions are usually fairly general, so using the era/country approach works well on quote questions. It’s tempting to think, “Oh, I need to slow down and read this quote carefully!” but DON’T!! **Read the question first**, so you know what you’re looking for (person, philosophy, time period, etc.). **Then go back and read the quote.** Usually the answers will be very different, like A) Frederick the Great of Prussia, B) Hitler, C) Charles II.

Here is the strategy for quote questions:

* 1. Read the question first!!
  2. Read only as much of the quote as necessary to find the answer. Think **era** and **country**.
  3. Eliminate incorrect answers.
  4. If more than one choice is left, go back and read more carefully.
  5. Don’t waste too much time on one question! If necessary, guess and move on.
* **Chart/Picture/Map/Cartoon Questions.** On the exam, there will likely be 5 to 10 MCQs that include a chart, map, or picture of some kind. **First, read the question**, because there’s no point trying to analyze a picture, chart, or map if you don’t know what you’re looking for! Then look at the image. Think era and country, and use common sense.
* **Put it all together.** By using the era/country, non-era, and other techniques we’re learned, you can usually make a good guess, even if you aren’t sure. Let’s look at this example:

The religious legislation passed by Parliament in 1558 and 1559 under Elizabeth I mandated which of the following?

*(Ok, think era and country. Era=Reformation, Country=England.)*

1. The Anglican Church rejoin the Roman Catholic Church
2. All churches be issued a copy of the King James Bible
3. Religious freedom for Catholics, Quakers, and Anabaptists
4. All clerics taking a church office in England had to swear allegiance to the English monarch as “Supreme Head of the Church of England”
5. All English monarchs hold the Protestant faith

Even if you have no clue about religious legislation passed under Elizabeth I, you can still figure things out. The question is about *Elizabeth I’s reign*, and it concerns *religious laws*. You should immediately think of Elizabeth’s Protestant policies and her father’s (Henry VIII’s) separation from Rome. **A** can be eliminated based on Elizabeth’s Protestant policies; she was Protestant and never encouraged a reunion with the Catholic church. Then **think era** and eliminate all non-era answer choices; **B** refers to the King James Bible, and since King James I came *after* Elizabeth I, **B** is wrong. **Think country**—choice **C** refers Anabaptists, which were mainly centered in Germany, not England, so **C** is wrong. Choice **E**, that all English monarchs be Protestant, is actually from the English Bill of Rights, which was from the Glorious Revolution in the 1600s—wrong **era**. That leaves **D**, which is the correct answer.

* **Quick Review—Strategy for MCQs:**
  1. Read the question. Connect it to an era and a country.
  2. Eliminate non-era/non-country choices.
  3. Use the “All of the Above,” “None of the Above,” and “Famous Person/Thing” techniques.
  4. Use True/False formula for EXCEPT questions.
  5. If you still can’t figure it out, let the question be your guide—reread it carefully.
  6. Last resort—guess and move on.
  7. Be sure you answer ALL the MCQs on the exam! They don’t take off points for wrong answers.