



Tips for Certification Exam Preparation

Pesticide Safety Education Program

Taking a test can be stressful, but with the right guidance and state of mind, you can set yourself up to be better prepared.

Preparing yourself for the exam

Most importantly is to study and know the material. There are some other things you can do to prepare your body and mind:

- Get plenty of rest the night before. This really affects your ability to concentrate.
- Avoid too much caffeine, which can make you jittery and can confuse your ability to think and function.
- Avoid consuming a lot of liquids. Those trips to the bathroom take away time from testing.
- Eat a light meal of carbohydrates beforehand. Carbs give you quick energy; heavy meals make you sleepy.
- Don't sit by friends. If they are anxious, this can increase your anxiety. You don't need the extra stress.
- Give the test your complete attention. This is your job at this time and place.
- Don't waste time worrying or thinking about other things.
- Sleepy? Take a quick walk beforehand. This will get the blood circulating and reinvigorate you.

Some tips for overall test-taking strategy

- Preview the exam as soon as you get it. See how many pages there are. What sections or questions look like they'll be the easiest or most difficult? Look briefly at the provided product label and the inside of the test booklet at the conversions/formulations.
- Work on one section at a time rather than randomly jumping around. It will be less confusing and keep you more focused.
- Read or follow directions carefully. If something is not clear, don't be afraid to ask for clarification. This does not mean you can say, "I'm not sure I understand number 2. Could you tell me what answer they are looking for?"
- Knock out the easiest, quickest ones first. If you can't come up with an answer after several seconds to a minute, move on. Tackle the toughest ones last when you can spend more time. The tough ones may seem easier the second time around because you are more relaxed and maybe you read something that will help you answer.
- Keep track of the questions you need to go back to. Maybe write down the numbers

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on scrap paper. If you can get a question narrowed down to 2 choices, make a note of it. Return to those problems first. Save the ones you are absolutely clueless on for last.

- Don't leave any questions unanswered. The odds are better if you guess. You're guaranteed to get it wrong if you leave it blank. If you guess, you've got a 1 in 4 chance.



- If you are clueless, choose B or C. Studies show these are correct slightly more often than would be predicted by chance alone. This has not been verified with the pesticide certification exams however!
- Budget your time. If you think you might not have enough time, then maybe set progress points in the beginning. Maybe after 1 hour, you want to be 1/3 of the way done. If you aren't then you might have to speed up a bit. Of course, you run the risk of making mistakes when you speed up. But if you don't have time to fill in an answer, you're going to miss those questions anyway.

Now some tips for answering exam questions.

- Read the entire question carefully! One little word can change the meaning.

- “Is” and “is not” – That little 3 letter word changes the whole meaning. It goes from positive to negative. “He loves me, he loves me not”. Two very different things.
 “Best” and “worst” – You get the idea.
- Try to answer before looking at the options. Seeing similar choices in print before you think about the answer can cause you to second guess yourself. Suddenly EPA and USDA both look right.
- Read all possible choices first, then eliminate the obviously wrong ones.
- Look for a pattern in the choices.
- If 2 choices look similar, except for 1-2 words, odds are decent that one of them is the correct answer. Additionally, these 1-2 words may look or sound alike. For example, interference vs. interferon.
- If 2 choices mean the opposite, odds are that one of them is the correct answer and the “none/all of the above” choice is incorrect too.
 Dogs: a) are mammals, b) are not mammals. Either they are or they aren't.
- If 2 choices mean the same, odds are they are both incorrect.
- If one answer is more detailed or longer than the others, odds are it is the correct answer. On the other hand, beware of the extra-long or “jargony answers.” These are often used as decoys.
- If given a wide range of numerical values, choosing a value at or near the middle is often a good guess.
- If you know one answer is correct but you aren't sure about the other two, don't be fooled into guessing “all of the above”.

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- For answers that say “all of the above,” “none of the above,” or “a and b but not c”, treat each as a true/false question and relate it back to the main question. So look at each part separately and ask if it makes the sentence true, then eliminate anything that makes it false. In order for the answer to be “all of the above,” all answers must apply totally. However, if you are still completely, absolutely stumped, “all of the above” will frequently be the correct answer.
 - Eliminate choices not in the topic or area of the question. The terminology of these choices may come from another section. At first it may look like a viable option until you realize it has nothing to do with the question. Make sure the statement applies to the question.
 - Go with your first instinct. Then move on quickly. If you’ve got time when you finish the exam, recheck your answers but don’t second guess yourself and change a bunch of answers in the end. Studies show that your first instinct is usually correct. Change answers only if you have a good reason for doing so.
 - Do not eliminate a possible answer just because the last 4 questions were also, “b” and you think, “what are the odds of 5 in a row?” This is not a good reason to rule it out.
 - Look for key words, which can help you focus in on what the question is really asking. You can’t write in the test booklet but you can make a short list on scrap paper if needed.
 - Look for clues in the question as to how many answers there are.
 - “Which one of the following...” The answer is probably not “all of the above.”
 - “What factors...” Look for several answers. Keep in mind that each choice may include a couple of factors so you don’t want to automatically pick “all of the above.”
- Beware of descriptive words such as “sometimes,” “always,” “never,” “only,” “all,” “none,” “some,” “many,” “few,” or “most.” Such statements are highly restrictive and very difficult to defend. It’s a strong statement to say that something always is something or something never is something. These are rarely correct options but sometimes could be. If you are flat out guessing, you might eliminate choices that have extreme words like always/never or all/none. Guarded statements tend to be correct more often than predicted by chance alone. These are statements like “may sometimes be” or “can occasionally result in”.
 - Often grammar can help you decide. Read the question with each answer. Does the answer read right or sound right? Does it flow? Does its wording fit the question’s wording? If not, you can probably eliminate that answer.
 - “A” versus “an” – The question ends in “an” so you know the answer should begin with a vowel.
 - Subject and verb agreement – This can also help you find the answer or eliminate some choices.

Overall, remember that you are looking for the best answer, not just a correct one, and not one which must be true all the time, in all cases, and without exception. Again, read all choices. Don’t stop after finding one that seems likely.

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Finally, some tips for calming your nerves

- Don't panic when others finish before you. This is not a race.
 - Relax. Breathe deeply.
 - Keep a positive attitude. Try to ignore the little voice in your head that's saying, "I'm failing, I'm failing."
 - If feeling anxious and allowed by the proctor, take a break. Stretch, get a drink, sharpen your pencil or go to the bathroom.
 - Chew gum or suck on hard candy. Of course you want to be quiet about it or the guy next to you will kick your chair. Be courteous. Your gum smacking could be sensory overload for someone within earshot.
- This is only a test. You have a 2nd chance and even a 3rd for the pesticide certification exams.
 - If you suffer from test anxiety, there is help. There are good resources available. Anxiety is normal. Adrenaline gets you pumped up. But too much anxiety can also hurt you if you are short of breath or you just blank out or you are sweating all over your test and your pencil won't write.
 - It might help to remember you are not alone. People take tests every day and even the smallest ones get experienced test takers worked up.

After the test:

- Reward yourself.
- Don't dwell on mistakes. You can't change the past but you can learn from it.

If you didn't pass, go back through your notes and mark the material that was covered on the exam. This will really help you for your 2nd attempt. You want to do this as soon as you can. The longer you wait, the less you'll remember. Focus your study efforts on areas you didn't do well on. Use all study materials available such as training clinics, workbooks, manuals, and online trainings. Study with coworkers.



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