

ASWB Social Work Exam Preparation Tips & Strategies

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- We acknowledge that the UBC Vancouver campus is situated on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam).
- We acknowledge that the UBC Okanagan Campus is situated on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Syilx Peoples.

Workshop Content

- From: Apgar, D. (2015). *Social work ASWB masters exam prep guide: A comprehensive study guide for success*, Springer: New York.

Big Picture

- This examination **assess knowledge of social work content**
- The difference between passing and not passing the exam is almost always the result of gaps in knowledge
- **You will never feel “ready” to take the ASWB examination.** You will walk into the examination without feeling totally ready, but **this is typical** of others who have passed.

Study Materials

Limit your study materials!

- This is not the time to go back and read all your textbooks! Use outside materials if something is unclear or you feel that you need a bit more information, perhaps because you didn't learn content in a specific area

Available at UBC library Online:

- Social work ASWB masters exam prep guide: a comprehensive study guide for success
- *Social work ASWB bachelors practice test: 170 questions to identify knowledge gaps*
- *And more...*

Study Tips

- **Study in 4-hour blocks** of time rather than for a few minutes here and there. This may be difficult, but it will be beneficial because it will get you prepared to keep your concentration and focus during a long period
- **Create a “mock” examination:** take the practice test at the end of the book, pretend that it is an actual examination, make it as real as possible.

Test Taking Tips

- Select an answer **based on the content** that you studied, not on your field experience
 - Since everyone has different practice experience, **basin**g your answers on what you see or do in the field may lead you to a different response than someone else taking the examination
- Remember, there is only one correct answer for each question

Test Taking Tips

- **The “best looking” answer is not always the correct answer**

If you are judging answers solely based on the inclusion of important social work terms— independent of what the question is really asking— you will often be drawn to the “best looking” answers, but they may not be correct

Test Taking Tips

- If you are asked to select between four listed terms, diagnoses, or theories, and you do not know with certainty what all the terms listed mean or the criteria for all of the named diagnoses, **you should only choose between those that you know.**
- Only in instances in which you are able to eliminate with 100% certainty the three choices that you know—which is almost never the case—should you choose the “mystery” term, diagnosis, or theory.

Test Taking Tips

- **You will have plenty of time to answer the questions**
Although the examination is timed, most people finish with 30 minutes or more remaining in the 4 hours
- Answer the questions in the order they are presented. Skipping around wastes time. **Select an answer and move on**

Test Taking Tips

- **You do not have to be an expert** in all theories, practice models, or perspectives. Instead, your knowledge base needs to be “**an inch deep, but a mile wide.**” You do not need to know the material in great depth, but you do need to have basic knowledge about a lot of paradigms

Test Taking Tips

- **Perhaps the biggest mistake that social workers make when taking the examinations is adding material to the questions.**
 - This is done unconsciously when social workers mistakenly think of a client or practice situation in their own lives that is similar to what is described in a question

Test Taking Tips

- **Look for qualifying words in examination questions**
 - These words are often capitalized, but not always. Examples of qualifying words are “best,” “next,” “least,” “most,” “first,” and “not”
 - **Whenever you see a qualifying word, it is the key to selecting the correct answer** from the others and is directly related to the answer
- **Look for quotation marks throughout the question or clues in the last sentence** before the response choices
 - Both are often clues to selecting the correct answers

Test Taking Tips

- Many of the response choices to questions on the examination begin with verbs. **If you are debating between multiple answers, the verb choices often provide some clues**
- **If the age of a client** or others is included in a case vignette, it is usually relevant to selecting the correct response

Test Taking Tips

- Some questions on the exam require social workers to identify what they would do “first” or “next” or to pick out the issue or problem that is “most” important in a case scenario. **A useful framework for prioritizing client needs and addressing them sequentially is Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.**
- Another critical tool available to select the correct answer is the **problem-solving process (i.e., engagement, assessment, planning, intervention, evaluation, and termination)**. Understanding the goal of each phase and the tasks to be completed therein is critical because many questions focus on the correct order

Test Taking Tips

- Questions on the exam aim to assess whether a social worker is appropriately **placing a client as the priority and respecting their right to self-determination**
 - Questions may focus on conflicts between meeting a client's needs v. adhering to practices/policies created by an agency. When there is a barrier to meeting a client's needs, **a social worker should always take responsibility for trying to remove the barrier**

Test Taking Tips

It is essential that the question is thoroughly understood before looking at the answers.

- 1. Read the question** exactly as it is written, paying attention to qualifying words and those in quotes. Do not look at the response choices yet!
- 2. Ask “What is this question about?” to determine which of the Knowledge-Skills-Attitudes (KSA) is being tested**
- 3. Think about the important concepts** related to the KSA; they will be essential in selecting the correct answers from the incorrect ones
- 4. Examine the question again to confirm** that your assumption about which KSA is being tested is correct and to determine how the important concepts related to the KSA are relevant to the question
- 5. Now look at the response choices** for the first time! Read each carefully
- 6. Eliminate** any that do not appear to be correct. If more than one response choice appears to be viable, **go back and read the question again**—looking only at the remaining viable responses. It is difficult to eliminate three of four possible answers immediately, so this process may involve multiple iterations. Each time a response choice is eliminated, **read the question and the answers that are left**. Going back to the question each time you are unable to dismiss all but one response choice will assist in selecting the correct answer for that particular question

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KEEP CALM
AND
DO YOUR BEST!