

11 TIPS ON HOW TO ANSWER BOARD EXAM QUESTIONS

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(A Sequel to the “Tips & Tricks in the Board Examination”)

Preparing for the board exams is one thing. Answering the actual board exams is another.

After long sleepless nights of eyebrow burning during your review, your date with the board exams has finally come. It is a day most people are dreading. But for some people who are confident and have painstakingly prepared on how to go about in the actual board exams, this day is their milestone.

I have taken a total of three (3) PRC Licensure Examinations as of this date. The first was the Licensure Examination for Architects in June 2006 where I placed 1st with a grade of 84.6% (only 470 out of the 1,105 examinees passed the exam or about 42%). The second was the Licensure Examination for Master Plumbers in March 2007 where I placed 10th with a grade of 76.1% (only 77 out of the 174 examinees passed the exam or about 44%). The most recent was the Licensure Examination for Environmental Planners this June 2008 where I placed 4th with a grade of 76.0% (only 26 out of 55 passed the exam or about 47%).

Given my experience in taking board examinations, I would like to share with you, in my own little way, how I did it. In this article, you will find pointers and pieces of advice that would help you prepare for exam day. This article is a complementary sequel to my previous one written a year ago – “Tips & Tricks in the Board Examination” – in which I talked about preparing for an efficient board exam review. It is my hope that as you read along you will gain confidence, study vigorously and be inspired even more to reach your dreams of passing (and hopefully topping) the board exams.

TIP #1: BRUSH UP ON YOUR READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

Your ability to understand whatever you read is no doubt the most important aspect in the board exams (and, more importantly, in your careers). Every word that appears in the question that you read serves as clues to the right answer. During the exam, you will encounter questions wherein

you will not be able to recall the word-by-word definition as taken from the book or reviewer. If this happens (and I am sure it will happen frequently), you would then have to rely on analyzing the meaning of the question being asked based on the words that you see. The higher your comprehension of what is being asked or defined, the higher your chances of getting the answer correctly.

There are several ways to improve your reading comprehension. These need not be lifeless and boring like memorizing the encyclopedia or the dictionary. Try to grab your favorite magazine or a newspaper once in a while and read some articles found in there. It can be about fashion, cars, current events, show business, music, games... whatever your interest is. The point here is to immerse yourself on trying to understand whatever it is that you read. Also, you can increase your vocabulary by playing games like crossword puzzles, boggle, hangman, scrabble, etc.

TIP #2: BE PHYSICALLY AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY PREPARED

Never underestimate your body's limitation. I have stressed in my previous article the importance of being physically prepared in your review. The same thing goes for during the exam itself. Avoid drowsiness by getting a long-night's sleep the night before the exam. If you are itching to do a last-minute study or browsing of notes, **I suggest you do it the next morning before you go to the exam venue.**

Attend to your personal needs before the examination begins. Depending on the strictness of the assigned proctors, you are not allowed to go out of the room once the exam has started. So watch what you eat and drink. You are, however, allowed to bring food and drinks and consume them while taking the exams. I strongly recommend that you bring something that is **just light** for your stomach and something that **is not too messy, noisy, or smelly to eat.**

During the examination, you should be ready for long hours of thinking and answering. Depending on the subject, board exams usually last from 3 hours to as long as 6 hours (even 9 hours for design subjects). Be prepared for uncomfortable seats (like drafting table chairs with no backrests or wooden armchairs with no cushions). While answering, take some **2-minute rests once in a while to recharge your mind and body.** **Doing a little stretching or closing your eyes for a few minutes might also help.**

Just as much as your physical condition is important in the board exams so are your mental and emotional states. Do not let **pressure and nervousness control you.** You must be able to control them. The board exam is like a war and you will be going into battle. You have to release that warrior instinct in you and own the examination. More people with positive mental attitudes succeed in life than people who are pessimistic. Declare that you are going to win and that nothing can stop you from doing so.

TIP #3: EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Some of us have this obsessive-compulsive behavior reviewing for the board exams. We would have prepared a lot, read volumes of books from cover to cover, and memorized tons of formula, tables and data, and still would not be contented about it. That is okay. But always remember:

Do not expect that everything you have read and studied in your review will come out in the exam. In my experience taking up three (3) board examinations, I can say that only about 35% to 50% of what I have read, studied and memorized during my review have appeared in the actual exams.

The remaining 50% to 65% of the questions would comprise a combination of the following things:

- Things you can learn only from actual first-hand experience (in this case, you did not get to experience it)
- Things that are a bit trivial but you might have an idea (but not really sure)
- Things you have not encountered in your review but might have tackled way back in college (or high school)
- Things you have encountered in your review but could not recall (because you decided the data seemed irrelevant to memorize at that time), and lastly
- Things you really don't know squat about

Do not get demoralized if you find out that only a few of the questions in the exam were covered in your review. Of course, the only way to increase the percentage of questions you hope will come out is to also increase your time reviewing, reading, and researching for board exam topics. That means the less time and effort you exerted in preparing for the board exams, the less chances of you knowing what the question is all about.

Consequently, this is where your reading comprehension skills come in handy. Like I said in Tip #1, your reading comprehension would play an important role in answering questions you don't know or have not tackled in your review.

TIP #4: WHAT YOU HAVE WRITTEN, YOU HAVE WRITTEN

You would be required to use pencils to shade answers in your exam because answer sheets are checked using lead-sensor machines. Erasures are prohibited. Once you have shaded an answer, you cannot change it and pick another one. Erasing a previously shaded answer will still leave spots of lead on the paper. This means that when your answer sheet is processed by the machine, it will detect two answers and will automatically mark that item wrong.

This is the very reason why I do not recommend using your answer sheets immediately. This method is prone to errors and is very risky since you are already finalizing your answers without even seeing the rest of the questions which might give additional hints or clues.

I know an examinee that has had a very bad experience with this. He was directly shading answers on his answer sheet as he reads a question on his questionnaire. The problem started when he skipped a question he does not know (say, Question # 10). He proceeded to the next

one (Question # 11) but subconsciously shaded # 10 in the answer sheet. It went on for about 15 more items before he realized he was shading the wrong numbers!

The best way to avoid these kinds of errors is to use your questionnaires as your temporary answer sheets first and then transfer them later. I usually allot one (1) hour for the transferring and final checking of my answers (as I will be discussing in Tip #5). You are allowed to write on your questionnaires. In fact, PRC would even advise you to use your questionnaires as your scratch papers. So use your questionnaires as your “thinking pad”. Write down notes and tables, encircle or underline important words, cross out choices you think does not belong, etc.

TIP #5: WHAT’S THE HURRY? – MAKE THE MOST OUT OF YOUR TIME

So much as time management is important in your review, so is it important during the board exam itself. First order of business is to know which subjects you are going to tackle on which time or days. PRC releases an exam schedule alongside the syllabus of the subjects in your particular licensure examination.

For example, in the recently held Licensure Examination for Environmental Planners, the exams were to be held in two days. Day 1 covers one subject (i.e., Environmental Planning Processes, Methods, and Strategies). This subject is scheduled from 8:00am to 2:00pm (or 6 hours). Day 2, on the other hand, covers two subjects. The first subject (i.e., History, Concepts, Theories, and Principles of Environmental Planning) is scheduled from 8:00am to 11:00am (or 3 hours), while the second subject (i.e., Environmental Plan Implementation and Legal Aspects) is scheduled from 12:00pm to 4:00pm (or 4 hours).

Having known the number of hours allotted, the next step is to try to know the number of questions or items for each subject. In the example above, the Day 1 subject of Environmental Planning Processes, Methods, and Strategies consists of 200 questions. With 6 hours allotted for this subject, I first subtract an hour for transferring of answers (see Tip #4). This gives me 5 hours to answer a total of 200 questions (and 1 hour for transferring and finalizing my answers). So the rate in which I have to answer is given at 200 questions per 300 minutes. Simplifying, this means I have 1 minute and 30 seconds to answer one question in my Day 1 subject.

The same formula goes for the other subjects. In the same example above, the first subject in Day 2 (i.e., History, Concepts, Theories, and Principles of Environmental Planning) consists of 100 questions. With 3 hours allotted for this subject, I subtract an hour for transferring of answers. This gives me 2 hours to answer a total of 100 questions. So the rate in which I have to answer is given at 100 questions per 120 minutes. Simplifying, this means I have 1 minute and 12 seconds to answer one question in my Day 2 subject.

Another very important thing to remember is that each question, regardless of its difficulty, is just worth 1 point. So, **I strongly recommend that you answer the easier questions first.** If you do not know the answer or you are having difficulties deciding which among the choices to pick, just skip it immediately and proceed to the next item. You must not waste too much time thinking and fishing for an answer on a very difficult question. You will be going back to it later after you have read all the others. This is a very good strategy because sometimes there are

questions or choices similar to the one you are having trouble with that would help you get to the right answer (see example in Tip #7).

Keep track of your time by wearing a wrist watch (not a cellular phone since you would have to turn this off and surrender to the proctors). Do not be forced to finish your exam early just because other examinees are finishing their exams way ahead of everyone else. You will encounter in your classroom these kinds of examinees that will stand up and submit their answer sheets just one or two hours after the exam has started. Well, that's their business. You mind your own exam. You do not get additional points for finishing first. So make the most out of your time by **double-checking and triple-checking your answers in your questionnaire** until you are satisfied before transferring them to your answer sheet as your final answers.

TIP #6: PRACTICE ELIMINATION – EXPLOIT THE WEAKNESS OF MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

The 70's board exam was all about identification, fill-in-the-blanks, and written essays that are checked manually. Nowadays, the board examinations are "modernized" and are checked using the computer. For ease of checking, questions are now prepared with multiple choices. This modernization of the board exam has actually made your lives much easier in so far as getting an answer correctly. Multiple-choice questions, usually with 4 choices (A, B, C or D), give you a higher probability of getting a right answer than identification questions... simply because the answer is already there – you just have to pick it.

Practice the art of elimination to increase this probability especially for questions you do not know. Here is an example of a question I have encountered in the board exam in which I do not know the exact answer but was able to figure out by means of elimination:

Question: Who is this Swiss-born architect who designed the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art?

Choices: a. Le Corbusier b. Frank Lloyd Wright c. Santiago Calatrava d. Mario Botta

From the question, we already know that we are looking for an architect who was born in Switzerland. Among the choices, I am only familiar with Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright (I have heard of the Calatrava guy before but not in detail). Based on what I know in college, I was able to identify immediately that Frank Lloyd Wright is an American architect who worked during the late 1800's towards the 20th century. Having eliminated choice B, my probability of getting a right answer increased from 1:4 (or 25%) to 1:3 (or 33.3%). I then continued analyzing my three remaining choices.

I then remembered one magazine article I read regarding the works of this Santiago Calatrava. He is an engineer-architect and was, as I recalled, probably a Spaniard. If C is the right answer, the question should have mentioned that he is a civil engineer because I heard that his works were known for its outstanding structural beauty. Since the question did not mention anything about it and I was convinced he is really from Spain (judging by his surname), I then eliminated

choice C, leaving me with only two options to choose from. My probability of getting a right answer now increased from 1:3 (or 33.3%) to 1:2 (or 50%).

With only two remaining choices, I know that Le Corbusier is a Swiss-born architect. So, choice A might be correct. But he is one of the well-known architects during the 1930's, and I never heard of his designing a museum in San Francisco. Also, I remembered from an internet article that this museum was built around the 80's or 90's (since it was a modern art museum). Even though Le Corbusier was born in Switzerland, he might not have been alive when this museum was designed. So having that analysis, I eliminated choice A (Le Corbusier) and decided to choose the lesser-known choice D (Mario Botta).

After the exams, I researched to see if I had the right analysis, and true to what I thought, I was right. Mario Botta was that Swiss-born architect who designed the San Francisco Modern Art Museum.

The ability to eliminate choices depends on how much knowledge you have on the other given choices. That is why the more you have prepared in your review and the more topics you have read, the higher the chances of you knowing which choices to eliminate. Otherwise, you might be running the risk of eliminating the correct answer.

TIP #7: "ELEMENTARY, MY DEAR WATSON" – LOGICAL REASONING REALLY HELPS

As Sherlock Holmes put it. Having logical skills is a valuable tool to deduce an answer in certain questions you are not familiar with. These, in particular, are recurring questions or questions with similar choices. Here is an example of a recurring question that appeared during my Environmental Planning exams:

Question # 15: Which among the following describes ancient planning of towns in the Tigris-Euphrates River?

- | | | |
|------------|---|---|
| <i>I</i> | - | <i>At the center of these towns are Agoras</i> |
| <i>II</i> | - | <i>Towns are enclosed by walls</i> |
| <i>III</i> | - | <i>Structures are usually built with mud bricks</i> |
| <i>IV</i> | - | <i>The streets have no definite patterns</i> |
| <i>V</i> | - | <i>They usually have temples</i> |

Choices: *a. I, III, V* *b. II, III, IV, V* *c. I, II, III, IV, V* *d. I, II, III*

Question # 42: In the planning of ancient towns found along the Tigris and Euphrates River, which among the following characteristics are evident?

- I* - *Structures are usually built with mud bricks*
- II* - *Streets are laid out with no definite patterns*
- III* - *Towns are enclosed by walls*
- IV* - *They usually contain temples*
- V* - *Agoras are located centrally*

Choices: *a. I, II, III* *b. II, IV, V* *c. III, IV, V* *d. I, II, III, IV*

Now let us try to analyze these two questions that talk about the same topic and see if we can get the answers through logical and deductive reasoning.

In Question # 15, notice that “III” appears in all of the choices. This simply means that “III – *Structures are usually built with mud bricks*” must be one of the characteristics of ancient towns. Therefore, in Question # 42, if “*Structures are usually built with mud bricks*” is correct, then, we can surmise that only either choice A or choice D is correct (since these are the only choices which contain that characteristic). We can now safely eliminate choice B and C in Question # 42.

Now, analyzing choice A and choice D in Question # 42, notice that “II” and “III” also appear in both these possible choices. This means that “II – *Streets are laid out with no definite patterns*” and “III – *Towns are enclosed by walls*” must be characteristics of ancient towns as well. Therefore, going back to Question # 15, we can surmise that only either choice B or choice C is correct (since these are the only choices which contain both those characteristics). We can now safely eliminate choice A and D in Question # 15.

So now we are left with only two choices for each question. In Question # 15, it is either B or C. In Question # 42, it is either A or D. On we go...

Taking a look at Question # 15, notice that “V” appears on both choices B and C (the only two choices left to choose from after eliminating choices A and D). This means that “V – *They usually have temples*” must be another characteristic of ancient towns. Therefore, in Question # 42 wherein we are left with either choice A or D, we can surmise that choice D must be the right answer since it is the only one that contains that characteristic.

If choice D is the correct answer for Question # 42, we can say that “V – *Agoras are centrally located*” is not a characteristic (because “V” does not appear in choice D). Therefore, going back to Question # 15, we can surmise that choice B must be the right answer since it also does not contain that same characteristic.

So our final answers would be: Question # 15 is choice B and Question # 42 is choice D. See how we have managed to get the right answers because of deductive and logical reasoning? Even

though we have no idea what the characteristics of ancient city planning in the Tigris and Euphrates River were, we were still able to get the answer correctly.

TIP #8: READ QUESTIONS VERY, VERY CAREFULLY – BE AWARE OF STINGERS

Read the question twice, thrice or even four times before you answer. Do not be a high-speed answerer by just reading the first few lines of the question and assuming that you already know what is being asked. You might miss important words that give hints to the right choice. You also have to look out for “Stinger Words” like the words NOT and EXCEPT. For example:

*Question: The postmodern movement was an answer to the modernists’ principles of mass production, standardization, and the international style of architecture – that often diminishes the architectural character of a certain culture, promotes machines rather than human art, and removes the complexity and variety of structures in the 20th century. Which among the following characteristic **is not** among the principles of the postmodern movement?*

Question: The following are examples of baroque churches in the Philippines established under Spanish rule, except:

In the two examples above, you have to be aware on what is being asked for. A clumsy examinee would often miss out the words “**NOT**” and “**EXCEPT**”. He would answer right away after just reading a few lines on the question not knowing he is answering the direct opposite of what is being sought.

Another important tip is to analyze the questions and forget about “patterns”. Most of us fall victim to these patterns. Wherein we judge a correct answer based on how it looks like. For example, I encountered a question in which I have no idea what the answer is:

Question: Which among the following laws, established in 1935, has not be amended and is still used today?

Choices: a. RA 7482 b. RA 6969 c. Commonwealth Act No. 141 d. RA 4726

Most of us who look at patterns would generally eliminate choice C and concentrate on the other choices which “look similar”. Never base your answers because of “patterns” or “whatever looks similar”. In the above example, there is actually a clue that somewhat gives out the right answer if you only try to analyze it. Notice that the law being sought was established in 1935. With the given choices, I know that RA (or Republic Acts) were only established during the post-Marcos era. Also, 1930’s was the Commonwealth Period in the Philippines where we were still under the auspices of the American Government. Therefore, through analysis (and not by patterns), I was able to pick the right answer by choosing C even though I honestly really don’t know what that law is all about.

TIP #9: CATEGORIZE YOUR ANSWERS TO GAUGE YOUR SCORE

This is my way of projecting my possible score in the exam. You may or may not want to do this but, for me, it is an effective tool on re-evaluating my answers especially for the items I am not sure with before I transfer them to my answer sheet.

All of your answers can be summed up into three (3) categories, namely: *Sure Answers, 50-50 Answers, and Wild Guesses*. After having answered all the items in my questionnaire and before I start transferring them as final answers **into** my answer sheet, I always calculate my possible score by marking questions into these categories.

Here is how to do it: On the questionnaires, mark questions with a **STAR** if you are 90% to 100% sure you got it right (whether you are sure because you really know the answer or you are sure because by using the process of elimination you were able to get to the right answer). Now for answers in which you are a bit, shall we say “**50-50**”, you mark those questions with a **BOX** (50-50 usually means leaving you with two very close answers to choose from – and it could go either way as the right answer). Lastly, for answers you really have no idea, you mark them with a **CIRCLE**.

Now that you have categorized all your answers, it is time to calculate your projected score. Count the number of stars and multiply the total by 1. This is based on the probability that all your 90% to 100% sure answers are really correct. Next, count the number of boxes and multiply the total by $\frac{1}{2}$ (or 50%). This is based on the probability that in every two of your 50-50 guess, one will be correct. And lastly, count the number of circles and multiply the total by $\frac{1}{4}$ (or 25%). This is based on the probability that in every four of your wild guesses, only one will be correct.

Here is an example of my projected score during the actual Board Exam: (The exam has 200 items)

CATEGORY	NO. OF ITEMS	MULTIPLIER	PROJECTED SCORE
Stars (90% to 100% Sure)	82 items	1	82
Boxes (50-50 / Educated Guess)	71 items	$\frac{1}{2}$	36 (approx.)
Circles (Wild Guesses)	47 items	$\frac{1}{4}$	12 (approx.)
TOTAL	200 items		130 / 200 (or 65%)

Note that this is just a projection. It may go up (or go down – hopefully not). It all depends on your 50-50 and wild guesses if you have gotten them correct (or wrong – again, hopefully not). This is the importance of your review. Your goal is to get as much 90% to 100% sure answers and less of those 50-50 and wild guesses.

The point in doing this is not only to see what your possible score is but to be able to re-check and re-evaluate your answers especially those that belong in the 50-50 category. So get back at those questions and spend some time re-thinking about your answers before you transfer them as final answers in your answer sheet.

TIP #10: QUESTIONNAIRES FIRST, ANSWER SHEETS LATER

You would not be needing your answer sheets for the moment until you have read all the questions and ready to make your final judgment. So the first step is setting your answer sheet aside and just focus on your questionnaires.

Do a quick scan on the questionnaire. Take note of the number of questions and see if everything is in order. Check if there are missing pages or missing numbers. Check also your SET (if set A or set B). Be aware of corrections or bonus questions (these are usually written on the blackboard and/or announced by the proctor).

If everything is in order, you must perform a quick browse on the questions. Starting from the first one, read ALL questions up to the last one and only answer those that you know first. Mark these questions with stars (as in Tip #9). Skip and proceed to the next one if you are having trouble with it. You will be coming back to it later. Like I said in Tip #5, do not spend too much time thinking on a certain question on your first browse. Skip it immediately if you feel like you do not know it. Do not panic if in case you are skipping consecutive questions. Just answer the things you know first. During my exam for Master Plumbers, I recall that in our 150-item subject, I had no idea what the answers are for Question #3 (first page of the questionnaire) all the way up to Question # 25 (fourth page of the questionnaire). I left four pages blank! That is okay, because my goal was not to answer immediately but to know what questions were being asked.

So, after your first browse, you would have accomplished the following:

- Answered all questions that are easy or that you are 90% to 100% sure.
- Have an idea on what questions are asked and know what topics they pertain to.
- Taken note on repeating questions (yes, this happens a lot)
- Taken note on recurring questions with similar choices (this will help you in your elimination process)

This first browse is very important since it funnels the topics you only have to recall from your review. Note that before the exam begins, you have a lot of memorized knowledge stored in your brain. After performing this first browse, you can then focus on the only things you need to remember as you get ready for your next sweep.

The next run-down would be a little bit gritty as this is the time where you are going to spend a lot of energy analyzing the question, remembering what you read in your review, and recalling what you have memorized in order to eliminate the choices and pick the right answer. You will be going back and forth the test questionnaires and really be getting your hands (and brains) dirty.

Try to get into the examiners' minds and understand how the questions were formulated. In this part of the exams, you are on your own. Whatever you have reviewed, how much effort you exerted in your studies, and how much your brain can recall and understand what is being asked would all determine how you will get the right answers.

Mark your answers with a star (if you were able to eliminate the other choices and you are 90% to 100% sure of your answer), a box (if it is a 50-50 answer), or a circle (if you really have no idea what the answer is). After having answered all of the questions on your questionnaires, try to project your score by using the method discussed in Tip #9.

Get back to the questions and re-evaluate your answers especially your 50-50 and wild guesses. Take your time to figure out and recall those topics that you have reviewed. If you are satisfied with your answers, it is time to transfer your answers from your questionnaire to your answer sheet as your FINAL answers.

Before you submit your answer sheets, check if you have shaded the right set (set A or set B).

TIP #11: WILL YOU DREAD THE EXAM OR WILL YOU DECLARE TO EXCEL?

This final tip takes us back to my introduction: Are you one of the people who dread the exam or are you one of the few who will declare they will excel?

Be honest, for you are the only one who can answer this.

All I can say for now as my final advice is this: Never look at things as problems or troubles that would hinder your development as a person. Look at things as challenges and opportunities for you to learn and grow.

If your answer to my question is the latter, then I believe you are on your way to creating your own milestone.

Good luck in your board examinations and always aim for that top spot!