Flat's How to Kick the ARE MC Questions in the Butt

I am probably the last person who should give out test taking advice. Remember that annoying student who always turned in their exam first in structures class? Yes, that was me. I race through exams, and that is not always the best thing.

Reading though the PD forums, there are plenty of red flags stating that this particular exam has set the gold standard for most ambiguous, poorly worked questions out of any exam. That alone should cause one to slow down for this exam.

I'll take a stab at my thought process when it comes to selecting the best possible answer. Take the following simple sample question:

An apple:
A. is red
B. is a fruit.
C. tastes like chicken
D. is round, high in fiber and vitamin C.

When I first read this question, the only thing I can say with certainty is I can eliminate 'C' as an answer. The remaining all seem like possibilities. So I would reread the question followed by each remaining answer and see if it still makes sense.

An apple (A) is red. True, but they are also green, yellow, and perhaps other colors as well. So I'm not sold this is the best answer.

An apple (B) is a fruit. I don't think it's a vegetable, so I think this is correct. Not much else I can add.

An apple (D) is round, high in fiber and vitamin C. Apples are roundish, I don't know if they come in other shapes. I know they make cube pumpkins, but that's off topic. I know apples are high in fiber. I know they are full of vitamins, but not sure if vitamin C is one of them. Plus, in order for this answer to be correct, there are actually three items that must be correct. Purely speaking statics here, the odds are against me. But lets assume for the moment I believe this answer to be correct.

Where do I go from here? To me, (A) and (D) are too specific and would actually fall under the broader envelope of (B). (B) trumps the others because when I read the question followed by the answer I cannot come up with any 'but' statements. An apple is a fruit but….. I got nothing. *So I conclude the answer is (B).*

So lets see what happens when we take a sample question from one of my Kaplan study guides.

The most effective way to diminish the effects of urban noise is by:
A. increasing the distance between the noise and the receiver.
B. providing a physical barrier of plant material.
C. creating water movement, such as a fountain.
D. eliminating private vehicular movement.

I really dislike this type of question where I initially think all answers are correct. So let's dissect this.

(A) I recall something about losing 6db every time the distance doubles from the source. So this is still in the running.

(B) Plant material will reduce some sound, but it's not the most effective. If the physical barrier were a wall close to the source of the sound, this answer would look really good. But all they give me is plant material. Are we talking trees or tulips? What if I'm on the 15th floor? This answer just has too many 'but' statements for my taste.

(C) I know water is great as a white noise. I use a fountain in my condo every time my frisky neighbors decide to, um, you know. But the question talks about diminishing the effects of urban noise. Water movement will only mask the noise. The noise is still there. I'm not sold on this answer either.

(D) Eliminating private vehicular movement. Hmm. What about public vehicular movement? Busses make noise. Emergency vehicles certainly make noise. Even the after effects of a meter maid make noise. I work in an urban environment; there are plenty of ways to make noise without private vehicular movement. Will eliminating private vehicular movement help, yes, but…

At this point I put the question and answer I think is correct together one more time and break down the question: The most effective way to diminish the effects of urban noise is by (A) increasing the distance between the noise and the receiver. The question asks for 'the most effective way'. If the distance of the source of the sound and the receiver increase, science takes over at this point and the sound will decrease. The question asks for 'the most effective way to diminish'. Again science. It has to diminish, by 6db.

(A) is the most correct answer.

I know this looks like this process will take forever. It doesn't. I instinctively break down every possible answer without even realizing it. It all comes from preparation. For example, the above question pertaining to sound. It mentioned nothing about placing a mass wall near the source of the sound, but that little tidbit of info popped into my thought process as soon as I saw the words 'physical barrier' in combination with sound.

There are plenty of "gimmee" questions on this exam. There are plenty of very short questions. There are plently of very short answers. Spend time on the questions that make you scratch your head. Why is one answer more correct than the other?

I look for key words or adjectives in the question or answers that may narrow my choices.

1. **Does the question mention a location?** If the question mentions Miami, what characteristics does Miami have that may sway you one way or the other. Substitute Miami with Buffalo. Does that have any affect?
2. **Does the question have a time element?** Does the question occur during the programming phase, bidding, or four years after substantial completion? Does this influence your answer? Rules may be different in one block of time versus another.
3. **Does the question mention a sequence of events?** Does event 'X' have to happen before event 'Y'?
4. **Does the question contain cause and effect?** The owner does 'X', what does the architect do? The contractor doesn't do 'Y', what does the architect do? Think contracts.
5. **Could one answer fall under the umbrella of another?**
6. **Reverse engineer the question**. This is mostly done with questions involving math, but not exclusively.

If all else fails, I put on my NCARB hard hat and pick the answer I think they want based upon the information given. The questions, in my opinion, are not meant to trick us. If information is given, I assume it is relevant and not meant to throw us a curve ball.

Hope this helps more than it hurts…..

-flats