

MA-TESL Comprehensive Exam

Instructions for test-takers: This is a “closed book” exam. Thus, you may not use any reference materials while responding; you may not consult notes, books, and/or articles during the examination. If you are writing the examination on the computer, you may not access any additional files or documents that may reside on the computer hard drive or be available through a network, the Internet or any other external website or device, or in your own email.

There are five sections on the test. You must complete three of them.

- All MA-TESL students must take the ESL Foundations and Methods section. MA-TESL students will then choose two of the remaining four sections (ESL Curriculum and Program Administration; Second Language Acquisition; Grammar; and Sociolinguistics).
- PhD students taking the test for screening purposes can answer questions in any three sections, but you cannot choose both (a) ESL Foundations and Methods and (b) ESL Curriculum and Program Administration.

You will have **four hours and fifteen minutes** to complete this test. This period includes printing time and any breaks you need to take. You should plan to spend approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes on each section you answer. Each section has two questions, and you must answer both questions. Thus, you should spend approximately 40 minutes per question. Budget your time so that you can quickly review your responses.

Your answers to the questions should be well written and should synthesize relevant knowledge in a coherent and insightful manner. You should include references to specific sources and studies, including current scholarship. We recognize that this test requires rapid written responses, yet you should strive to write as clearly and effectively as possible.

- Begin your answer to each question on a new sheet of paper.
- Write the last four (4) digits of your university ID number in the upper right-hand corner of each page. (DO NOT write your name on the exam responses.)
- Number your pages.
- Print your responses as you finish each section. Do not wait until you have completed the entire test to begin to print your responses.

Section I: Foundations and Methods (answer both questions)

1. Individual differences play a key role in second language learning. The following terms are often mentioned.

- (a) personality
- (b) motivation
- (c) attitude
- (d) learning styles
- (e) learning strategies
- (f) aptitude

Select and explain THREE of these individual differences in detail. For each one, (a) provide a brief definition and (b) describe how these individual-difference factors inform and influence the teaching of English as a second/foreign language. Give specific examples in your explanation.

Refer to relevant literature as appropriate. Frame your response with a proper (and brief) introduction and conclusion. In your introduction, be sure to identify the three individual differences that you plan to discuss.

2. Imagine that you are a coordinator of a language program that is in the process of creating a new integrated-skills courses. You have been asked to start a task by focusing on textbooks that integrate TWO of the following four skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Identify the TWO skills that you want to focus on in one of these settings: (a) an intensive English program with an academic orientation, (b) an elementary or secondary classroom for ESL/EFL students, (c) an adult basic literacy program, and (d) university English language foundation program in an EFL context.

Begin by providing a detailed description of the components of each skill that you want covered in the ideal textbook, making clear your understanding of the complexity of each skill and its related sub-skills. Then depict the ideal textbook by describing (a) a sampling of textbook tasks or activities that would promote individual skill mastery and (b) other tasks or activities that would be included to integrate the two skills in a purposeful way.

Refer to the literature to add support to your response. Frame your response with a proper (and brief) introduction and conclusion. In your introduction, be sure to identify the two skills that you plan to discuss.

Section II: Curriculum Development and Program Administration (answer both questions)

1. As part of your application to be the Director of an intensive English program, you have been asked to write a statement that explains some steps that you could take to resolve possible dilemmas facing you as a language program administrator.

Address the three dilemmas presented below by stating (1) the possible origins of the dilemma; (2) specific steps that could be taken to resolve the dilemma; and (3) a rationale for the steps that you propose. Refer to relevant literature to strengthen your answers. The overall response should include a brief introduction and conclusion.

Dilemma 1: The program shows signs of stagnation at curricular, staffing, and technological levels.

Dilemma 2: The language program is misunderstood by many constituents both on and off campus.

Dilemma 3: The majority of language program faculty consider monthly faculty meetings to be a total waste of time, yet all would agree that, in principle, meetings are important for the health of the program.

2. You have been appointed to Chair the Curriculum and Course Development Committee. Comprehensive needs analysis and situation analysis have been completed, but the committee is now at a standstill because members (1) cannot distinguish among aims, objectives, and outcomes and (2) are unfamiliar with the different syllabus types that might be matched to different combinations of aims, objectives, and outcomes (as, for example, they are described in Richards, 2017).

Write a two-part memo to the committee. In the first part of the memo, explain the role of specifying aims, objectives, and outcomes in the curriculum and course development process, and differentiate among aims, objectives, and outcomes, with both language and non-language examples. In the second part of the memo, identify three syllabi frameworks (also known as “units of progression,” as described by Nation and Macalister, 2010) that could complement different combinations of aims, objectives, and outcomes. Assume that the committee members are unfamiliar with the syllabus types mentioned. Therefore, it will be important to identify the essential characteristics of each syllabus type. Refer to relevant literature, when appropriate.

Section III: Grammar (answer both questions)

1. Verbs can be grouped into verb types, or 'valencies' (e.g., intransitive, monotransitive). The valency type specifies the clause elements that occur with a verb. Identify the possible valency types of verbs in English, describing the defining criteria for each valency. Also discuss the range of structural variants that can occur with each valency type. Include discussion of the valencies of phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs, and free combinations.

In many cases, a single verb can occur with different valencies in different clauses. Identify and illustrate specific verbs that can function as multiple types.

2. Analyze the following sentences using the diagramming system that you are most familiar with. In your diagrams, label the forms, grammatical functions, and word classes of all words and constituents in each sentence.

1. I thought it might be something that we might want to talk about.
2. I went to Eddie's house to get back my wool plaid shirt.
3. Jones said he had asked for permission to see the flight deck.
4. Citing Marx's assertion that the state is the organ of class rule, Melotti rejects the notion that Asiatic society is not a true class society.

Section IV: Sociolinguistics (answer both questions)

1. Survey the major external (i.e., non-linguistic) parameters that have been used to study patterns of linguistic variation in sociolinguistics. Include discussion of social, regional, and situational characteristics.

Then, choose three different social variables for more detailed discussion. For each variable, summarize two empirical studies that have investigated sociolinguistic variation across social categories (referring to researchers by last name and date). Include discussions of the external (i.e., non-linguistic) characteristics that were studied, as well as a description of the patterns of linguistic variation.

2. Examine the following excerpt from a conversational interaction between a cashier and a customer in a university bookstore. Analyze the conversational features observed and relate them to the register reflected in the excerpt. Describe the situational characteristics of this register; identify three linguistic features that are especially typical of the register; and describe functional reasons for the prevalence of those features in this register. In addition, describe any genre characteristics that you notice in this text excerpt. Finally, discuss ways in which this interaction is similar to – and different from – everyday face-to-face conversations between friends.

1: I can help you . . . hello.

2: You take Visa don't you?

1: Yep. Sure do.

2: I started only getting a couple of hats and then I thought well if I do that.

1: Mhm.

2: Not happy but.

1: Fifty three seventy five is your total.

1: You need to sign that.

1: Uh oh. Somebody trying to sneak out with clothes.

2: That's not good.

1: No.

2: What is that, twenty five percent on my next visit?

[laughter]

1: No you only get those coupons on Fridays.

1: Your receipt's in the bag.

2: Thank you.

Section V: Second Language Acquisition (answer both questions)

1. The constructs of input and output are central to second language acquisition research. Views regarding the role that these constructs play in second language learning have shifted over time depending on the prevalent theoretical orientation. Choose two major theoretical approaches to SLA (which may be referred to as “theories” or “hypotheses”) that speak to the roles of both input and output and:

- a) describe the positions they have taken regarding the role of input and output in second language learning; and
- b) describe the types of research questions that have been asked in each of the two theories/hypotheses and how these questions have been answered by specific research findings.

2. Questions pertaining to the effects of instruction are central to the applications of L2 theory and research. Write two research questions that this line of research has addressed. For each question, citing both seminal and current studies, explain the following:

- a) What aspect of instructed SLA are researchers interested in?
- b) What type(s) of instruction/approach was involved?
- c) What different areas of L2 knowledge/ability were targeted?
- d) What have the findings to date shown regarding the question you asked?