

MA-TESL Comprehensive Exam for August 20, 2013

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 (5) sections on the test. You must complete **three (3)** of them. All MA-TESL students must take the ESL Foundations and Methods section. MA-TESL students will then **choose two (2)** 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 (3)** sections, but they 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 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, and 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.

I. Foundations and Methods (two questions; answer both)

1. English language teaching professionals recognize the importance of various learner characteristics in language teaching and learning. Some of the learner characteristics commonly mentioned are listed below:

- Age
- Aptitude
- Beliefs and attitudes
- Identity and ethnic group affiliation
- Intelligence
- Learning strategies
- Learning styles
- Motivation
- Personality

Select FOUR of the nine terms listed. For EACH one selected, (a) provide a definition of the term(s) that illustrates the multi-dimensionality of the learner characteristic, (b) explain its significance and implications for the language classroom, and (c) describe how the factor will inform your teaching of English as a second/foreign language. Include concrete examples to illustrate your points. Refer to relevant literature to strengthen your claims, when appropriate. Remember to provide a brief introductory paragraph that identifies the four learner characteristics that you plan to explore in your response.

2. Describe HOW you would teach TWO of the following skills: Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing. Provide a rationale for the instructional practices that you are advocating. Be thorough in your response, showing understanding of (a) each skill and its related subskills and (b) the choices of activities.

Begin your response by identifying briefly (a) a teaching context (e.g., middle school language arts classroom for English language learners, adult school for new immigrants in an ESL setting, intensive English program for EAP students, university English language foundation program in an EFL context), (b) the target students' level(s) of L2 proficiency, and (c) students' purpose(s) for studying English. Refer to relevant literature to add support to your response.

II. Curriculum and Program Administration (two questions; answer both)

1. Imagine that you are a language program administrator. You have just returned from a TESOL convention where you attended numerous sessions on language program administration. During those sessions, you gained insights into some of the challenges that you are currently facing. You've returned to your home institution determined to do the following: (a) inspire innovation among faculty, (b) reinvigorate burnt out faculty, (c) initiate strategic planning, (d) become a better advocate of language program students and faculty, (e) run more effective meetings, and (f) do a better job of decision making and negotiating.

Select FOUR of these areas for immediate attention. In your opening paragraph, identify the challenges that you are going to focus on. Provide a rationale for your decision to pursue each area, and then describe the steps that you might take to bring about each of these programmatic changes. Refer to relevant literature when applicable.

2. ESL/EFL teachers sometimes find themselves asked to plan new courses and, as part of the process, to select the type(s) of syllabi that will structure the courses. As you know from your studies, there are many different approaches to teaching and syllabus design. These different approaches to teaching and syllabus types impact the type of instruction that students receive.

Select **three (3) different syllabi** types (e.g., notional-functional syllabus, discrete or integrated skill syllabus, situational syllabus, task-based syllabus). For each syllabus type, (a) write a description of the syllabus and highlight its unique characteristics, (b) briefly describe a course (including setting, students, and course goals) for which that type of syllabus would be well suited to maximize student learning, and (c) provide a brief rationale for your choice of syllabus for that setting. Support your response, where appropriate, with references to pertinent literature. Make sure that your full response has an adequate introduction and conclusion.

III. Sociolinguistics (two questions; answer both)

1. Many aspects of sociolinguistic research depend on the notion of linguistic variation. Explain why the study of linguistic variation is central to the field of sociolinguistics, citing at least three empirical studies of linguistic variation and describing how their findings help to understand the relationship between language variation and non-linguistic factors.

2. Based on sociolinguistic research, describe at least five characteristics of American conversational English identified by investigators. Then comment on whether and how these features and associated patterns of language use might create communicative difficulties in interpersonal and/or cross-cultural communication. Provide references for the features discussed and for studies identifying cross-cultural issues.

IV. Grammar (two questions; answer both)

1. The clause is a major unit of grammatical analysis. One important distinction for dependent clause types relates to the concept of “finiteness”. Describe the structural differences between finite and non-finite dependent clauses. In addition, identify and illustrate 6 specific dependent clause types: 3 finite clause types, and 3 non-finite clause types. Which of these types are especially common in conversation? Which are especially common in academic writing?
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.
 - a. The interests of young children were subsequently related to performance indirection of attentional shift to items in the peripheral visual field. (Acad)
 - b. He paused to give the jury a chance to consider the circumstances surrounding the murder. (News)
 - c. She asked me to tell her why I left the room to run after the waiter. (Fict)
 - d. That’s somebody that I think I want to know about. (Conv)
 - e. I didn't even let him in the door because I thought you might want to go out tonight. (Conv)

V. SLA (two questions; answer both)

1. Age and SLA

The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) has led to a long-standing yet contentious line of research in SLA. Define the CPH and the controversy surrounding it. Cite two different positions and for each one describe what research on age from both empirical and theoretical/position papers has shown. For each position, discuss implications of the CPH to L2 policy and practice.

2. Research Methods in SLA

As a field of empirical inquiry, understanding L2 research methods is central to understanding study outcomes, their validity, and their potential to inform theory and practice. Describe two techniques commonly used by SLA researchers for each of the following procedures: (a) to sample, (b) to create and implement treatments/interventions, (c) to assess, and (d) to analyze data from L2 learners. As you explain each technique, describe its relative merits and drawbacks, providing examples of individual studies when appropriate.