

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 (2 parts — Answer both questions)

1. Teaching methods and approaches often reflect the dominant paradigms of how people learn and how to best teach languages. Select TWO of the following teaching approaches or methods listed below:

- Audio Lingual Method
- Total Physical Response
- Silent Way
- Task-based language teaching
- Form focused instruction
- Communicative language teaching
- Content-based instruction

In a clearly written response about the two teaching approaches you have chosen, provide the following:

- (a) describe the selected approaches including the principles and goals of the approaches and any teaching or learning theories that are linked to the approaches;
- (b) name one or more proponents of the approaches; and
- (c) discuss any limitations of the approaches in terms of language skill/ability development.

Refer to relevant literature when appropriate to support your response.

2. English language teaching professionals debate the best ways to promote skill mastery. Explain the benefits, in general terms, of a pre-, during-, and post- instructional format. Then, explore those benefits in more detail in TWO of the following four skill areas: Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing. In your discussion of each of the two skills, make clear the nature of the skill and how a pre-, during-, and post- instructional format can assist students in mastering the skill under discussion. In your response, provide at least one concrete example of activities at each point in the lesson (pre, during, and post) to demonstrate (a) the value of the pre, during, and post format, and (b) the potential for skills improvement in the two targeted skills.

Refer to relevant 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 and Program Administration (2 parts — Answer both questions)

1. You are applying for a language program instructorship that involves curriculum-development responsibilities. During an informal conversation with program personnel, you learn that the program has just completed a self-study and that faculty and administrators now agree that the current curriculum, in place for over a decade, no longer meets students' needs.

You are asked to submit a statement, as part of your job application, that details the steps that you think the program should take to revise its curriculum. Write that statement, providing as much detail as possible. For each step in the curriculum-renewal process, provide a rationale, pose questions that should be asked, introduce options that might be considered, and propose decisions that will need to be made. Refer to relevant literature, when appropriate.

2. It is not often that MA TESL graduates are hired immediately, upon graduation, into a language program director's position. Nonetheless, many MA TESL graduates assume leadership positions in their early years of full-time employment. Examples of such leadership positions include serving as chair of a textbook selection committee, an assessment team, a program accreditation subcommittee, a guest speaker committee, or a course-articulation committee.

Imagine that you have been asked to serve as chair of one such committee. What principles of leadership can you draw from the language program administration literature that will guide you in serving effectively? Identify at least FIVE principles. For each principle, explain how you will translate it into practice and why it is important for a person in a leadership position.

Be sure to include a brief introduction and conclusion in your response. And cite relevant sources to strengthen your response.

Section III: Grammar (2 questions, answer both)

1. 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) Another good movie to see is that one that Bob told us about.
- b) I don't know if you remember why he did a whole class period on pattern variables.
- c) And what I'm trying to do is to outline a model of language use by identifying the basic constructs.
- d) But I don't think we would want to make it sound scientific.

2. There are numerous structural devices in English that can be used to vary word order, and the underlined parts of the sentences below illustrate the use of some of these devices. Describe the grammatical characteristics and discourse functions of three of these structural devices, making reference to the relevant example sentences (below) in your response. Be sure to include discussion of the discourse functions that influence the choice between grammatical variants.

- a. Of course, the big issue is your opposition to the war in Iraq, and you've pointed it out again today.
- b. Mr. Alexander, however, is not terrorized. As the conversation meanders along, he points out that about 93 percent of the funding for public schools now comes from state and local governments, and he says this must continue to be the case.
- c. That was the guy I was working with. I gave him a copy of the report I was working on, and then we met last week.
- d. The Jimmy Carter campaign gave donations to black ministers who supported him in the California primary.
- e. Yeah, well, I just don't know how Claire has managed to be so happy. That she put up with his nagging for all those years is just amazing to me.
- f. It is amazing that one sector of the water industry has been treated so favorably for all these years.
- g. After the deposition, Mr. Ashton was approached by a group of irate investors who had just learned about the proposed settlement.

Section IV: Sociolinguistics (answer both questions)

1. What is the importance of language variation for sociolinguistics? Talk about at least three types of language variation that is studied in sociolinguistics, provide specific examples, and explain the importance of each type for sociolinguistic research more generally.
2. The relationship between sociolinguistics and second language learning/teaching is a major concern for both researchers and teachers. One commonly-studied topic in this area is in the study of speech acts and how they are achieved in different cultures. In a well-organized essay, do the following: 1) introduce the concept of 'speech act', 2) choose a particular speech act and describe its defining characteristics; 3) describe differences in how that given speech act is achieved by speakers from different native language backgrounds; 4) discuss how these differences might lead to potential problems in communication between people from two different language backgrounds; and 5) discuss your view on whether (and how) pragmatic use should be explicitly taught in the target language. Use relevant sources to support/defend your ideas.

Section V: Second Language Acquisition (answer both questions)

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

- a) What aspect of instructed SLA are the 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 this question?

2. A great deal of SLA research has sought to describe interlanguage and development of grammatical features such as question formation, relative clauses, negation, and tense/aspect. In your response, answer the following four (4) questions:

- a) What is interlanguage?
- b) How has knowledge of TWO morphosyntactic features been operationalized and measured?
- c) What challenges do researchers face when attempting to measure and interpret results?

Cite relevant studies to support your answers.