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. The following concepts are important in understanding English as a second/foreign language learning and teaching:

   (1) learning strategies
   (2) learning styles
   (3) post-method era
   (4) motivation
   (5) communicative competence
   (6) aptitude

Select THREE of these terms. For each one, (a) define it to show its breath and complexity; (b) explain its significance for language learning in general; <u>and</u> (c) discuss how such concepts can be incorporated into the teaching of English as a second/foreign language. Include concrete examples to illustrate your points. Refer to relevant literature as appropriate. Be sure to include a brief introduction and conclusion in your response.

2. English language teaching professionals often promote the use of a pre-, during-, and post-instructional format to enhance skills instruction and mastery.

a. Explain, in general terms, the benefits of a pre-, during-, and post-instructional format, and how this instructional format can assist students in mastering language skills.

b. Then choose TWO of the following skills: reading, writing, speaking, listening.

c. Demonstrate your understanding of the complex nature of <u>each</u> skill by explaining how skill development and mastery can be achieved through pre-, during-, and post-activities. In the process of explaining the skills and how each one can be addressed at each lesson stage, be sure to (1) explain the goals often associated with each lesson stage (pre, during, post), and (2) provide at least one concrete example of skill-specific activities at each point in the lesson (pre, during, post).

Refer to relevant literature, where appropriate, to strengthen your claims.

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

1.

You are applying for a multifaceted position in a language program that involves at a minimum teaching and curriculum-development responsibilities. The job ad specifies that the program has determined, through the self-study process, that it no longer meets students' needs as well as it could, and that it is in the process of major curriculum renewal efforts.

As part of your application, you need to submit a statement 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.

Be sure to include a brief introduction and conclusion in your response. Refer to relevant literature, when appropriate.

2.

You have been asked to serve as chair of a textbook evaluation and selection subcommittee in the language program where you are teaching. 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 on this committee and why it is important for a person in such a leadership position.

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

Section III: Grammar (answer both questions)

1. One important distinction for dependent clause types relates to the concept of "finiteness". Describe the grammatical 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 structural forms, syntactic functions, and word classes of all words and constituents in each sentence.
   a. I would hope that we can have more control over them.
   b. But if I am given a question that I was not expecting I'll stop and think.
   c. I think it's amazing that *Vanity Fair* let me write 13,000 words about the Department of Agriculture.
   d. It makes them very competitive.
   e. Reporters are digging into his past in the belief that many women who may have feared speaking out in the past may now feel emboldened to do so.

Section IV: Sociolinguistics (answer both questions)

1. Define "crosstalk" from a sociolinguistic perspective (giving relevant examples and citing relevant studies). Then, state why this concept is important for the field of sociolinguistics and second language teaching.

2. The following three text samples are from three different types of letters: a personal letter between good friends, a professional letter from an academic colleague, and a letter of recommendation. For each letter, do the following:
- Describe the situational characteristics (e.g., addressee, addressor, purpose) for the letter,
- Describe the characteristic linguistic features (e.g. lexical choices, type and length of grammatical construction, relative frequency of important features),
- Propose functional reasons for the observed associations among the situational and linguistic characteristics.

Text Sample 1: Personal letter

Great to get your letter. No, I wasn't robbed of Prize by Singer - my applications are for 1979. Of course, as you hint, I may not get it - and maybe Norman Mailer will. Respectable! What s$%t! just like these Swedes of the Academy.
    Yes, my Brenda is the best ever. No tiffs or arguments. Perfect harmony. It's unbelievable. And - she is from our Midi - Mississippi! Near New Orleans. Has conquered her southern accent - for film work and theatre.
    Also got my divorce a month or so ago from Hoki - easy settlement.
    Think a lot about death recently. Am on good terms with her. (Like St. Francis of Assisi, if I may be so bold.)
    But enuf Carry on - you have tomes still inside you. You will undoubtedly receive Nobel Prize one day - even if it's just a lot of horse s%$t to you. Cheerio!

Text Sample 2: Professional letter

This resolution text is far from ideal. The parliamentarian can help you phrase it more clearly, and I'm sure you can do a lot with it yourself; my intent is only to suggest a vehicle for getting the notion in front of the membership. Furthermore, it would be really inappropriate for me to put words in your mouth. In short, you should really take the format of the resolution and put in your own thoughts... Please understand that while I am sympathetic to what you are trying to achieve, and that while I understand what certain N populations are more severely impacted than others, I am not at present entirely in sympathy with the notion...

Text Sample 3: Letter of Recommendation [continued on the next page]

It is my pleasure to recommend X.Y.

I first met X three years ago, when he was a student in my intermediate Latin class at State University. Later he took my Cicero class there, and now, two years later, he has joined a private Greek class of mine. Since he is a rather quiet, private person, I have not gotten to know him well privately. However, I can honestly say that he fits smoothly and cheerfully into various peer groups. This characteristic, his scholarly interests and his academic success seem to me to make X and ideal student. I am confident that he would be an asset to your department.

Section V: Second Language Acquisition (answer both questions)

1. Interest in the role of interaction (input, output, and corrective feedback) in SLA has led to a number of theoretical propositions and a substantial body of research. Address each of the following three issues in your response to this prompt, focusing on TWO of the constructs listed below: 1) Identify and describe the constructs you choose. 2) Explain how these two constructs relate to each other and to language learning more generally, both in theory and as described in results found in the empirical literature. 3) Discuss how the interactionist tradition of SLA has contributed to L2 pedagogy both generally and with respect to the two constructs you've chosen.

negotiation of meaning
negotiation of form
feedback
modified/comprehensible input
(pushed) output
noticing

2. The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) has led to a long-standing yet contentious line of research in SLA. Define the CPH and then cite two opposing positions related to the CPH. For each position, describe what research on age from both empirical and theoretical papers has shown. For each position, discuss implications of the CPH to educational policy and practice.