

Description of Exam #1

Distributed in discussion section on Friday, October 6.

The first exam in this course will be given in class (usual time and location) on Wednesday, October 11. You will have the entire class period to complete the exam.

The exam has two parts. There are three essay questions worth 10 points each, and there are 25 multiple-choice questions worth 3 points each. This adds up to 105 points, which means that there is an automatic 5-point upward curve already built into the exam.

Bring a pen and a sharpened #2 pencil with an eraser. You do not need to bring paper; you will be writing the essays on the exam itself and you will be answering the multiple-choice questions on a machine-scored answer sheet.

The exam will test your knowledge of material in the lectures and reading assignments up through and including lecture #9. When you study, concentrate on the questions asked in the course pack, pages 18-42 and 95-104. You can review the PowerPoint presentations at the course website, <http://courses.umass.edu/ling101s>.

The essay portion of the exam will consist of three questions. Each essay should be one well-structured, clearly written paragraph that includes evidence (examples) and arguments (reasoning). Mere opinions, without supporting evidence and arguments, are not acceptable. You will *not* lose points for errors in grammar, punctuation, or spelling, since we don't expect you to proofread your work in an exam situation. You *will* lose up to 3 points, however, if your paragraph is poorly structured or your prose is not clear. (The other 7 points of the essay grade is for content.) A lot of space is provided on the exam; don't feel that you have to fill it. Don't exceed one paragraph in any essay. Don't pad your essays with irrelevant stuff.

To make it easier for you to think about content and structure, we're giving you some information in advance about the essay questions. Here are six possible essay questions. John will choose three of these questions for the exam. Obviously, you'll need to think about all six topics when you are preparing for the exam.

- (1) Even though children learn many other skills by imitation and correction, children do not learn language by imitation and correction. What is the evidence that this statement is correct? Why is language different in this respect from other skills?
- (2) Is American Sign Language (ASL) a real language like English or Spanish? Give evidence and arguments in support of your answer.
- (3) Is there a critical period for human language acquisition? Give evidence and arguments in support of your answer.
- (4) Have experiments in teaching human language to apes been successful? Give evidence and arguments in support of your answer.
- (5) Explain how the descent of the larynx fits into human evolution and how it may be relevant to the origin of language.
- (6) Children acquire language by successive approximation to the correct rules. Explain this statement and give evidence for it.

We also have some advice for you about multiple-choice questions. Some questions are very straightforward:

- (1) What is the name of John's cat?
- A. Pyewacket.
 - B. Garfield.
 - C. Brendan.
 - D. In-the-hat.
 - E. Salem.

But some questions require closer attention. When answering multiple-choice questions, watch out for small but important words like "not", "all", "always", "never", etc. For example:

- (2) Which of the following qualities is *not* true of John's cat?
- A. Hunting ability.
 - B. Keen intelligence.
 - C. Good looks.
 - D. Orange color.
 - E. Irish-sounding name.

The hardest multiple choice questions are those that ask about causation and inference: What is the reason for this? What is the cause of that? What can we conclude from this evidence? Which evidence supports this conclusion? For example:

- (3) The main reason why John's cat grew up to be a mediocre hunter is that:
- A. Mice are very small and quick, so they are hard to catch.
 - B. He is fed an expensive prescription diet for cats.
 - C. His color is very conspicuous.
 - D. He lives in a modern house, so he has few opportunities to catch mice.
 - E. He became separated from his mother and couldn't complete the learning part of developing the hunting instinct during the critical period.

This question is hard because all of the statements are true, but only one of them (E) is the *reason* that the question asks for. ((A): all cats must deal with the size and speed of mice. (B): cats catch prey even if they aren't interested in eating it. (C): Brendan's color is conspicuous, but not to small rodents, which are nearly colorblind. (D): current opportunities for practice don't matter.)

Watch out for questions with more than one "right" answer but only one *best* answer:

- (4) Which of the following cats is orange?
- A. Brendan.
 - B. Morris.
 - C. Both A and B.
 - D. Salem.
 - E. Pyewacket.

Here, (C) is the best answer, since both Brendan and Morris are orange cats. (Salem (in *Sabrina*) is black and Pyewacket (in *Bell, Book, and Candle*) is Siamese.) You would receive *no points* for answering (A) or (B). Only *one choice* gets points in any question.

Overall advice: read the questions *carefully* before answering them.