

ANTH 1010-100 ■ University of Virginia ■ Spring 2017

Introduction to Anthropology

EXAM 1 – POSTMORTEM – MARCH 6, 2017

OVERVIEW

This memo is meant to answer questions you might have about the first exam and give you an overall sense of how you all did across the board. I was *very* pleased with how well many of you answered all of the questions in such a short period of time. I realize you felt pressed.

The most useful reminder I can offer is that the short-answer questions — which actually count toward your *quizzes*, not the exam as such — carry a lot less weight than the essays, in the scheme of the course. I've designed it that way for a reason. In an essay, you can show me your *thinking*. With the short answers, you can show me you're keeping up, paying attention and grasping key concepts. See more about all this, especially the grading structure, in the policies document and on the syllabus.

So, three things to keep in mind moving forward: (1) You don't need to answer the short answer questions *first*, although for bookkeeping reasons they will continue to appear first on the exams. (2) You don't need to answer them *at all*, especially given that so much extra credit is built into the quiz structure. (3) You don't need to write *so much*. In the short-answer questions, the range of accurate responses is finite and compact, as you can see below in the sample answers that I've provided. More is not always better, and could trip you up.

On page four you can also see some graphs showing aggregate data for each essay question, each exam, and each student's projected course grade. While we do not grade on a curve (I'd like nothing more than for everyone to earn As!) the grade distribution for these results is fairly normal — and actually trends toward the higher end. To me, that's great news. Individually, I know, some of you would like to do better, and Erin and I are committed to helping those who do. If, after reading carefully through this memo and the sample answers I've included, you still have questions, please let us know!

SHORT ANSWERS – SAMPLE ANSWERS BELOW IN ITALICS

These are sample answers I've written to give you a sense of what a complete and yet concise five-point response could have looked like. In practice there were a number of paths to a five, and a wide range of decent answers that got partial credit. Erin and I developed a simple rubric for each one as we graded, balancing out what we were looking for with what you collectively articulated. I've shown that below as well.

1. What role did early anthropologists play in colonialism? How and why did that change?

They often provided information about local customs and "tribes" to colonial administrators seeking to subjugate and govern indigenous peoples. Early evolutionist social theory also provided a moral basis for the colonial project. But the knowledge gained from fieldwork eventually challenged the old theory, leading to culturally relative perspectives and anticolonial politics.

Q1 Rubric	Showed some effort, knowledge?	1 point
	Got Part One? (WHAT they did)	+2 points (1 if close or muddled)
	Got Part Two? (how/why CHANGE)	+1 point for valid HOW; +1 for WHY

2. Identify TWO plausible conditions for the evolution of human language.

Symbolic thought; and the vocal anatomy necessary for speech.

[Other possibilities or more specifics included: social complexity; cooperative pressure; fine-motor communicative gestures; enlarged frontal brain capacity; descended larynx; strong chest and abdominal musculature, for breathing; etc. Many of you confused “two plausible conditions for” with “two opposing hypotheses about,” but to the extent that those answers also touched on the basic conditions for language (on which there is general agreement) they received substantial credit.]

Q2 Rubric	Showed some effort, knowledge?	1 point
	Got ONE condition?	+2 points (but 1 if close or muddled)
	Got a SECOND, <i>distinct</i> condition?	+2 points (but 1 if close or muddled)

3. In a rite of passage, what is the “liminal phase”? Name ONE important effect or characteristic common to the liminal phase in many rites of passage.

It’s when initiates in the rite are between one stage and the next, neither the persons they were going in, nor fully initiated. Often they’re segregated from regular social life.

[Many of you correctly cited lots of other characteristics and effects, for example: initiates form close bonds; they are deemed dangerous; they are treated as nonpersons or “invisible”; they may violate taboos; they are transformed into new persons (grownups, sorority members, degree holders, priests, presidents, believers, married couples, unmarried couples, and so forth); and especially, the values, factors, and social structure of a culture are laid bare, and put at risk. Note, you did not *need* to cite a specific rite — this not asked for, though it did not hurt.]

Q3 Rubric	Showed some effort, knowledge?	1 point
	Got Part One? (WHAT it is)	+2 points (but 1 if close or muddled)
	Got Part Two? (EFFECT or CHAR.)	+2 points (but 1 if close or muddled)

4. Briefly describe the Great Chain of Being and explain how it differs from Linnaeus’s model of the community of living creatures.

It’s a way of classifying beings on a linear hierarchical scale, with the nonliving and “primitive” at the bottom, the perfect and supernatural at the top. Man is just below God and the angels. Linnaeus unsettled this view by taxonomically classifying living creatures (including man) according to shared traits, in a patterned treelike hierarchy — where all species are, in effect, on the same level.

[Though it’s very much still with us, Great Chain thinking is rooted in medieval and early Enlightenment philosophy. Many of you mentioned that. Good! But its intellectual origins are not at issue here. GCB ideas *do* play into (and pattern with) social evolutionism, which some of you mentioned — but they’re not the same thing, and discussing this was overkill. Many of you equated Linnaean ideas with biological evolution. Nope. Yes, Linnaeus set the intellectual stage for Darwin’s insights, but he was not himself a proponent of evolution.]

Q4 Rubric	Showed some effort, knowledge?	1 point
	Got Part One? (DESCRIBE chain)	+2 points (1 if close or muddled)
	Got Part Two? (CONTRAST pattern)	+2 points (1 if close or muddled)

5. Provide THREE reasons why an anthropologist might study cockfighting or football matches.

Such spectacles can reveal a lot about a community: (1) shared cultural values, like ideas about honor; (2) social structure, like gender hierarchies; (3) norms of everyday interaction, like forms of violence.

[There are many other good reasons here (think modes of dress, ideas about the body, uses of money, power dynamics and so on). You all identified many, and I won't try to list them all. Some of you said these were "rites of passage." Making that claim does not actually answer the question, and sets you up with a problem: then showing that they can be rites of passage in some specific sense (hard to see in general) and why rites of passage are, yes, of interest to anthropologists — in which case you're really answering question 3. The best answers avoided that minefield and neatly got the *why* — essentially some version of the *reveal* bit.]

Q5 Rubric	Showed some effort, knowledge?	1 point
	Listed THREE reasons?	+1 point per valid reason
	Offered added depth (the WHY)?	+1 point, based on a holistic appraisal

ESSAYS – SAMPLE ANSWERS IN APPENDIX, PHOTOCOPIED

As I said, I was happy with the results here. Even pressed for time, many of you offered some very nice essay responses. Not surprisingly, your response *rate* for each question follows the semester timeline: Most of you were more confident with the more recent stuff. I.e., I know question 6 threw some you off more so than the others. It was designed with a specific goal in mind, to reward those of you paying attention from the very beginning (we talked about inductive reasoning in the second week of class) but also to give you the breathing room to apply it to more recent material, especially — if you wished — to hominid evolution, though there were many options. Those who understood the thrust of this question did really well on it, while those who didn't gave shaky answers; most of you veered toward 7 and 8 instead, which yielded a conventional range of scores. Overall, I do think the questions were rigorous but fair.

The best way to show you great answers is to share your classmates' essays with you. I asked a few of you to do so, anonymously, and compiled an appendix to this memo with photocopies of A-range samples for each question (one for question 6; three for 7; and two for 8). They are not the only possible great answers, but they give you a sense of what some of the best responses looked like. For more on the standards we have in mind as we evaluate your essays, see the letter-grade rubric in the course policies document. The appendix with sample essays is in a separate document on Collab.

GRADE DISTRIBUTIONS

Finally, on the last page of this memo, I've provided some charts with aggregate data on the exams; I'll offer a further snapshot of overall student performance in the course, along with individual mid-semester grade reports, by the end of the week. Please note, I may or may not be able to give you this level of analysis moving forward, depending on my work schedule. My hope is that it's of greatest value to you *now*, and you'll be able to apply much of what I'm sharing with you in a general way to your subsequent work. Meanwhile, I'm also digesting your own feedback for *me*, and will get back to you with some reflections on it in due time.

Have a great spring break, everyone! –RIA

