The midterm will consist of questions drawn from those listed below. These questions are drawn chronologically from the chapters in the assigned reading. They are arranged in sections: authority in language; phonology & morphology; and syntax. You will be asked to answer one essay question from each section.

I. General questions about language and language authority

1. If we can use language without explicitly understanding its grammar, what do we gain from studying the structure of the language?
2. Some people pronounce the word spelled ask as [æsk] while others say [æks]. Discuss the social and linguistic significance of the two pronunciations.
3. People judge you by the words you use. Explain what this means and give examples.
4. Language is a system. Explain.
5. What is the difference between descriptive and prescriptive grammar?
6. How is human language different from animal communication? Give examples.
7. Language changes over time. Does that change represent progress or decay? Explain.
8. When we say, “the dictionary says,” what do we mean?
9. What are some of the general characteristics of standard English?
10. Give an example of a prescriptive grammatical rule. Comment on its appropriateness and its effect.
11. What are some of the key differences between speech and writing? Be sure to give examples.

II. Phonetics, Phonology, and Morphology

12. Define the phoneme and explain why it is a useful concept.
13. What is the difference between a consonant and a vowel? Give examples.
14. Explaining both stops and voicing, what is the difference between a voiced and a voiceless stop? Give examples.
15. Vowels are classified according to tongue height and tongue position in the mouth. What is the difference in tongue placement between a high front vowel and a low back vowel. Give an example of each.
16. Explain and give an example of one of the following phonological processes: assimilation, deletion, insertion, metathesis.
17. Give three reasons why English spelling is so complex and illustrate with examples of each.
18. Define the morpheme and explain why it is a useful concept.
19. Discuss the difference between a free and a bound morpheme, giving examples.
20. What is the difference between an inflectional and a derivational morpheme? Give examples of each.
21. Discuss two ways forming new words in English and give an example of each.

III. Syntax

22. Why do traditional school definitions of the parts of speech fall short? Give examples where they lack explanatory adequacy.
23. Why are semantic definitions of the parts of speech less useful than ones which consider a word’s form and function?
24. Lexical categories may be open or closed. Define and give an example of an open and a closed category.
25. Speakers of a language know the difference between an utterance that is grammatical and one that is acceptable. Explain what this means, and what it tells us about the nature of language competence?
26. What are the major components of a sentence?
27. How are units like noun phrase, adjectival phrase, and adverbial phrase defined in terms of form and function?
28. Explain the concept of universal grammar. Give examples of grammatical elements that are universal, and that are not.
29. Why is the sentence a useful unit of grammatical analysis?
30. What are the limitations of taking the sentence as the basic unit of grammatical analysis?
31. The notion of a well-formed sentence is descriptive. That of a properly formed sentence is prescriptive. Explain the difference between these two notions of sentence appropriateness.