First Midterm Examination Study Questions

The questions below will help you focus on the most important concepts presented in class as you prepare for the first midterm exam. These questions don’t necessarily cover all of the material on which you may be tested, nor will you necessarily be tested on all of the material noted below, but these questions are a good starting point for studying.

1. Define the following terms associated with latitude and longitude: parallel, meridian, equator, prime meridian.
2. Latitude ranges from ______ ° to ______ °, while longitude ranges from ______ ° to ______ °.
3. Using a world map or globe, estimate the latitude and longitude of New York City and Sydney, Australia. Be sure to specify if these locations are north or south latitude, and east or west longitude.
4. Describe and explain the concepts of graphic map scales, fractional map scales and verbal map scales.
5. What is meant by a map scale of 1:100,000?
6. What is the difference between an equivalent map and a conformal map?
7. Briefly describe the four major families of map projections: cylindrical, plane, conic, and pseudocylindrical (“elliptical”).
8. What is an isoline on a map?
9. Describe and explain the four factors in Earth-Sun relations associated with the change of seasons: rotation, revolution around the Sun, inclination of Earth’s axis, and polarity (“parallelism”).
10. Beginning with the March equinox, describe the changing latitude of the vertical rays of the Sun throughout the year.
11. For the equator, describe and contrast the general angle of the noon Sun above the horizon (the solar altitude) and the approximate number of daylight hours on the following days of the year: March equinox, June solstice, September equinox and December solstice.
12. For the midlatitudes of the Northern Hemisphere (such as here in San Francisco), describe and contrast the general angle of the noon Sun above the horizon and the approximate number of daylight hours on the following days of the year: March equinox, June solstice, September equinox and December solstice.
13. For the North Pole, describe and contrast the general angle of the noon Sun above the horizon and the approximate number of daylight hours on the following days of the year: March equinox, June solstice, September equinox and December solstice.
14. In terms of the change of seasons, explain the significance of the Tropic of Cancer, the Tropic of Capricorn, the Arctic Circle and the Antarctic Circle.
15. What is the longest day of the year (the day with the greatest number of daylight hours) in the Northern Hemisphere? What is the longest day of the year in the Southern Hemisphere?
16. Describe the most important “constant” components and “variable” components of the atmosphere.
17. Describe the general size and temperature characteristics of the troposphere and stratosphere.
18. What is ozone and why is it important in the atmosphere?
19. What are the four elements of weather and climate? What are the seven dominant controls of weather and climate?
20. Describe the Coriolis effect and its cause.
22. What is meant by the term insolation?
23. Briefly describe the following heating and cooling processes associated with electromagnetic energy: radiation (emission), absorption, reflection, transmission, and scattering.
24. Why is the sky blue? Why are sunsets orange and red?
25. Briefly describe the following heating and cooling processes: conduction, convection, advection, expansion (adiabatic cooling) and compression (adiabatic warming).
26. What happens to the temperature of air when it rises? When it descends? Why?
27. Briefly describe and explain how the troposphere is heated by energy from the Sun.
28. Describe and explain the greenhouse effect in the atmosphere, noting the two most important natural greenhouse gases.
29. How might humans be enhancing the natural greenhouse effect?
30. Explain the reasons for the unequal heating (by latitude) of Earth by the Sun.
31. Explain why land heats and cools faster and more than water.
32. Describe the average lapse rate (average vertical temperature gradient) in the troposphere.
33. Why does temperature generally decrease with increasing altitude in the troposphere?
34. What are the two dominant mechanisms of heat transfer around the world? How would global temperature patterns be different without this heat transfer?
35. Where in the world do we generally find the greatest average annual temperature ranges and where do we find the smallest average annual temperature ranges? Why?
36. Describe the basic pattern of ocean currents around the margins of a major ocean basin (including the relative temperature of each current—either “cool” or “warm”). [You should be able to sketch the direction of movement (and note the relative temperature) of major ocean currents on a blank map of an ocean basin.]
37. What is the relative temperature of the ocean current flowing along the west coast of a continent in the midlatitudes? Along the east coast of a continent?
38. What is an isotherm?
39. Using the isotherm maps of average January and July sea level temperatures (Figures 4-32 and 4-33 in Physical Geography 9th ed.) describe the influence of latitude, season, land-water contrasts and ocean currents on global temperature patterns.
40. What generally happens to atmospheric pressure with increasing altitude?
41. What factors generally cause low atmospheric pressure cells and high atmospheric pressure cells near the surface?
42. What is an isobar?
43. When referring to air pressure, what is a ridge and what is a trough?
44. How and why are surface (“friction-layer”) winds different from upper-atmosphere geostrophic winds?
45. Describe and explain the pattern of wind flow in the Northern Hemisphere around: a surface high; a surface low; an upper atmosphere high; an upper atmosphere low [You should be able to sketch the wind direction on isobar maps of highs and lows near the surface and in the upper atmosphere for both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres.]
46. What is the reason for the difference in wind flow patterns in the Northern Hemisphere and the Southern Hemisphere?
47. What is a cyclone? An anticyclone?
48. Describe the pattern of vertical air movement within a cyclone and an anticyclone.
49. Describe the relationship between the “steepness” of a pressure gradient and the speed of the wind along that pressure gradient. Describe the general wind speed associated with a gentle (gradual) pressure gradient and a steep (abrupt) pressure gradient.
50. What are the Hadley Cells, and generally what causes them?
51. Describe the general location and characteristics of the following atmospheric circulation components: intertropical convergence zone (ITCZ), trade winds, subtropical highs, and the westerlies. [You should be able to sketch in the location of these four components on a blank map of an ocean basin.]
52. Describe the characteristic weather associated with the intertropical convergence zone (ITCZ) and the characteristic weather associated with subtropical highs.