

## **Abstract**

This study focuses on the factors that affect upper secondary school students' selection of writing prompts from the written exam in compulsory English. The exam is issued by the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, and 7 college preparatory programs and 22 vocational study programs are eligible for this exam. In part two of the exam, the candidates are introduced to four different writing prompts where one is selected to be answered in written form. This selection process has been the focus of my research. So far there have been no Norwegian studies exploring second language learners' selection of writing prompts.

This study's main objective has been to find the factors that affect the students' selection of writing prompts from the exam in May 2013, analyzing secondary school students' selection and arguments for selection of prompts in English. This study's aim is to inform policy makers of the validity and reliability of an exam taken by 7000 – 8000 candidates per year. The data was collected from June 2013 to March 2014 and contains information from 146 participants who are eligible for this exam. The data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, and the methodological approaches are the constant comparative method and triangulation.

The main findings in this study can be summed up in four factors that are important in the students' selection of prompts: 1. Motivation. The student needs to be motivated for the writing process and to be motivated to demonstrate skills. Also, the task design must motivate the candidate. 2. Comprehension. The prompt must be decodable and the prompt instructions must be clear. In addition, the writing prompt's list of requirements must describe exactly what is expected. 3. Genre and topic. The topic must be interesting and the genre and writing acts must be familiar. Also, the candidate relies on previous experiences with these genres and writing acts when selecting. 4. The expected outcome. The prompt must evoke previous positive experiences and the prompts must give longer texts of higher quality. This study also found that stronger students will select prompts which give the best grade.

Based on these findings, this study suggests that policy makers investigate and debate the current exams in English in upper secondary school, and consider making study program specific written exams which are issued locally for vocational students.

## Sammendrag

Denne studien fokuserer på faktorer som påvirker videregåendelevers valg av stiloppgaver fra skriftlig eksamen i obligatorisk engelsk. Denne eksamenen utgis av Utdanningsdirektoratet og tas av 7 studieforbereende studieprogram og 22 yrkesfaglige studieprogram. I eksamenens andre del blir kandidaten presentert for fire ulike stiloppgaver der kandidaten velger én som besvares skriftlig. Dette valget har vært fokuset for min studie. Hittil finnes det ikke norsk forskning på andrespråkselevers valg av stiloppgaver.

Denne studiens hovedfokus har vært å finne hvilke faktorer det er som påvirker elevens valg av stiloppgaver fra eksamenen i mai 2013, der jeg har analysert videregåendelevers oppgavevalg i engelsk. Denne studiens mål er å belyse for myndighetene validiteten og reliabiliteten til en eksamen som årlig tas av 7000 – 8000 kandidater. Dataene ble samlet inn fra juni 2013 til mars 2014 og inneholder informasjon fra 146 informanter som er kandidater for denne eksamenen. Dataene ble samlet inn gjennom spørreundersøkelser og semi-strukturerte intervju, og den metodiske tilnærmingen har vært konstant komparativ metode og triangulering.

Hovedfunnene i denne studien kan oppsummeres i fire faktorer som er viktige for elevenes valg: 1. Motivasjon. Eleven må være motivert for skriveprosessen og for å demonstrere ferdigheter. I tillegg må oppgavens design motivere kandidaten. 2. Forståelse. Oppgaven må være forståelig for eleven og oppgavens instruksjoner må være tydelige. Oppgavens kulepunkt som lister kriteriene må også beskrive nøyaktig hva som forventes av eleven. 3. Sjanger og tema. Temaet må være interessant og sjanger og skrivehandlinger må være kjente. Kandidaten stoler også på tidligere erfaringer med disse sjangrene og skrivehandlingene når valget tas. 4. Det forventede resultatet. Oppgaven må vekke tidligere positive erfaringer med lignende oppgaver og oppgaven må gi muligheter for å produsere en lengre tekst med høy kvalitet. Denne studien fant også at faglig sterke elever vil velge oppgaver som vil kunne gi dem den beste karakteren.

Basert på disse funnene, foreslår denne studien at myndighetene utforsker og debatterer dagens eksamensordning for engelsk i videregående skole og ser på mulighetene for å gjøre eksamenen lokalgitt for yrkesfag med egne skriftligeeksamener for alle studieprogram.

## **Preface and acknowledgements**

### **Preface**

I have taught in Norwegian schools since 1995, the last 8 years in upper secondary school, and I have made numerous writing prompts in English. Some prompts were rather good, while others were anything but; however, I have always been interested to see which prompt the different students would select. Sometimes I have had my expectations confirmed, other times I have been surprised at what a student chose, and wondered why it was the favored prompt. Therefore, there was no question in my mind what my master's thesis would be about. This research has taught me so much about the students' reasons for selection, and I am positive that I from now on will be able to design more good prompts than bad.

### **Acknowledgements**

Several people have helped me on my way to a final product, and I would like to express my deep gratitude to:

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Last, but not least, my husband. Thank you for your support, your constructive criticism, for taking care of the family while I spent days in Trondheim, and for giving me time to write.

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## 1. Introduction

This is a study of writing prompts<sup>1</sup> in English in upper secondary school in Norway. The aim of the study is to get a deeper understanding of what factors affect the students' selection of writing prompts when presented with four exam prompts to choose from. My focus is on the selection process from the student reads the writing prompts for the first time, until a final choice of one prompt is made. The objective is to find the decisive factors that affect the student in the selection process in order to inform policy makers about the validity and reliability of an exam that covers 29 different study programs. This is found through an analysis of upper secondary school students' selection of writing prompts,

English in upper secondary school is a common core subject, which is a subject compulsory to all students. 7000 – 8000 students sit for this written exam in English in Norwegian upper secondary schools every spring, but so far little is known about students' selection of writing prompts. The selection of prompts may influence the final grade on an exam, and this in turn may affect possible admittance to higher education or apprenticeship. Therefore I believe this study is interesting to Norwegian policy makers as this study's findings may help teachers and writing prompt designers understand why the candidates select the particular tasks, and help us design even better exam prompts that will fit most of the candidates eligible for this exam.

The research question that will be addressed in this paper is: *What factors affect students' selection of prompts?*

The study consists of four different sets of data collected over a period from June 2013 to March 2014. The first set is based on a quantitative survey conducted in June 2013 where 91 candidates from my home county gave information on which writing prompt they had written on the 2013 written exam for compulsory English in upper secondary school. The second set is a digital survey conducted in February 2014, using both open and closed questions, where the participants from the school where I teach selected one prompt and stated the reasons for selecting this particular prompt and not selecting the other three prompts. The third set is a series of semi-structured interviews conducted in March 2014, with participants who elaborated on the reasons for their choices of prompts. The fourth is the written material from the written exam in May 2013 at the end of the course in English, ENG1002/ENG1003 in the Knowledge Promotion. When analyzing the data in order to answer my research question, I

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<sup>1</sup> Writing prompt is more commonly known as "writing task", but "writing prompt", "prompt" or "task" are the terms that will be used in this paper. For further definitions of "writing prompt", see chapter 2.3.3. Writing prompts.

compared the findings from all the four sources using triangulation and the constant comparative method.

In chapter one I will present the context of this study and in chapter two the theory which this study is based on. In chapter three I will present the methods used, the data collection and data analysis, and in chapter four I will present this study's findings before discussing these findings in chapter five. Finally, I will present this study's conclusion in chapter six.

## **1.1 The context of this study**

I will in this introductory chapter introduce the context of this study, starting with English as a second language and the findings in earlier studies. After that I will present the pilot I conducted in March 2013, and the pilot's findings. Next I will give a presentation of the candidate of the exam in upper secondary school and present the subject curriculum before finally discussing writing as a key competence.

### **1.1.1 Second language**

English is one of several foreign languages taught in upper secondary school, but the only compulsory common core foreign language taught to all students.

The second language (L2) of a learner is a language acquired after the first language (L1), which is the mother tongue of an individual. At least one L1 is acquired before one learns an L2. In Norwegian upper secondary schools one distinguishes between *second language* and *foreign language*, where the former is defined as a language learned both in school and through natural communication outside the classroom (Berggren and Tenfjord, 1999, p. 16). Berggren and Tenfjord also argue that the L2 learner may be exposed to the second language in great parts of the day, if he/she wishes to (Berggren and Tenfjord, 1999, p. 17). English is a school subject and a foreign language which to a great extent is used outside the classroom, contrary to German, French or Spanish in Norway. Therefore this paper will treat English as a second language (ESL) rather than a foreign language (EFL). This implies that the demands on language competence will be greater on an ESL text, than that of an EFL text.

### **1.1.2 Earlier studies**

There are no previous Norwegian studies on students' writing prompt selection in a second language. The two studies I have found on writing prompt selection are from the USA where the participants were second language English learners in American colleges and universities (Polio & Glew; 1996, Souza, 2012). These participants were given a host of writing prompts, selected one and answered the selected prompt in writing before interviews were conducted.

The first study is Polio and Glew's study from 1996, which focused on whether a student should be given a choice when writing in a second language. The participants were second language students in an American university, which made the second language learning an immersion process as English was the main language in all teaching of these participants. The participants were given an actual exit exam with three prompts and 30 minutes to conclude the task. After completion, the participant was interviewed on the selection of writing prompt. Polio and Glew (1996, p. 43) concluded that students' selection is based on the participant's own background knowledge, the question type and the specificity of the topic. Because the participant had only 30 minutes to write, the time factor was also an overriding consideration (Polio & Glew, 1996, p. 45).

The other study, by Souza (2012), was of the influence of writing prompt selection on ESL college students' perception of task, teacher and text. These participants were international students at a public university in the US, enrolled in their Writing Module. The participants handed in two written texts from bare prompts<sup>2</sup>. These were texts they had produced in class, and they were interviewed on the reasons for their choices. The study showed that the participants chose the writing prompt which gave the opportunity to write about something familiar (Souza, 2012, p. 78) as this gave motivation for the writing process.

These studies suggest that familiarity with the topic and background knowledge will play an important part in the writing prompt selection, but also that the topic needs to spark motivation for writing. However, the students in my study are younger than the participants in the two American studies, they only learn English in English classes at school, and are familiar with the topic of the writing prompts through the preparation booklet<sup>3</sup>. Hence, Polio and Glew's and Souza's findings may not be applicable to a written exam in a Norwegian context. I wanted to find out more about this before I started my Master's thesis, and conducted a pilot study.

### **1.1.3 Pilot**

In March 2013 I conducted a pilot study on students' writing prompt selection using interviews based on the written tasks from the exam in May 2011. Four participants were given the preparation booklet on beforehand and were hence familiar with the topic of the tasks prior to the interviews. I chose to use one girl and one boy from college preparatory classes and one girl and one boy from vocational classes. I found:

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<sup>2</sup> Bare prompts = prompts that only state the topic. For full definition, see chapter 2.3.3. 'Writing Prompts'.

<sup>3</sup> See preparation booklet, chapter 3.2 'Data collection'

1. That the major factor when choosing a writing prompt, was the possibilities of getting a good grade on the written product. 2. The participants preferred a genre they had previously obtained good grades on. From the findings in this pilot, I was interested to see if a triangulation using different methods would confirm or deny these findings and to further study the factors that affect a student's selection of prompts.

#### **1.1.4 The candidate**

All candidates for the exam have been taught the same subject curriculum in compulsory English, have the same competence aims, and are eligible for the same written exam, issued by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training.

There are two different groups of candidates who are eligible for the exam. One group is the general studies students. They are preparing for higher education and have 140 hours of English during their first year in upper secondary school. There are 7 different general studies programs (Hellekjær, 2011), where 6 of them are in combination with either sports education or a vocational program. The average grade in compulsory English for college preparatory classes 2013/2014 was 4.2<sup>4</sup>. Some of these classes are eligible for the exam in the spring of their first year in upper secondary school.

The other group is vocational students. They have received 84 hours of English during their first year in upper secondary school, and 56 hours during their second year. This equals the same amount of hours as the first year students in general studies receive during one year. The main difference is that the vocational students have work placement for several weeks in a row, twice a year, when no English is taught. The average grade in compulsory English for vocational students in 2013/2014 was 3.5. There are 22 different vocational programs in the second year (Hellekjær, 2011), and they are eligible for the exam in the spring of their second year.

To sum up, the exam covers 29 different study programs in upper secondary school, which makes this a very complex group of candidates. Moreover, the general studies students are on average one year younger than the vocational students at the time of the written exam and have a 0.7 higher grade point average than the vocational students.

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<sup>4</sup> Numbers from UDIR:  
<https://skoleporten.udir.no/rapportvisning.aspx?enhetsid=00&vurderingsomrade=11&underomrade=15&skoletype=1&skoletypemenuid=1>

### 1.1.5 English subject curriculum

The English subject curriculum has been revised several times over the last few years, with the latest revision in August 2013, but the exam this study is based on is made with the penultimate edition in mind. There are minor changes from the 2010 edition to the 2013 edition, but first I will describe the subject curriculum's 2010 version as this is the one this study is based on.

The English Subject Curriculum is made for the 13-year education, as a whole. It introduces the purpose, or the objectives, of the subject first, before addressing the competence aims after year 2, 7, 10 and after the first year in upper secondary school for general studies, and the second year for vocational studies.

The competence aims are divided into three areas: 1. Language learning, 2. Communication and 3. Culture, society and literature<sup>5</sup>. *Language learning* lists competencies in the learner's own learning, progress and the use of sources and tools. Under the heading '*Communication*' one finds the aims that describe writing, both in expressing one self, use of tone and accuracy. The curriculum states that the student shall be able to "express him/herself in writing and orally in a varied, differentiated and precise manner, with good progression and coherence" (UDIR, 2010 b). Another aim says that the student must be able to "select and use appropriate writing and speaking strategies that are adapted to purpose, situation and genre". Under the heading '*culture, society and literature*' we find the specific content area the student must master. It also states that the student must be able to "discuss and elaborate on English texts from a selection of different genres, poems, short stories, novels, films and theatre plays from different epochs and parts of the world" (UDIR 2010 b). These genres are listed as genres the candidate must be able to discuss and elaborate on.

The English subject curriculum specifies in the objectives of the subject that the learner must learn to master the systems of the English language (UDIR, 2010 b). The subject curriculum names phonology, grammar and text structuring as areas to master to be able to communicate on different topics and in different situations. It also clearly states that one must be able to distinguish between spoken and written styles as well as informal and formal styles, in

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<sup>5</sup> The competence aims can be read in full in appendix 1, where the aims stating writing competencies are marked in red.

addition to be able to take cultural norms and conventions into consideration when writing (UDIR, 2010 b). It also identifies writing as a key competence<sup>6</sup>.

In the 2010 revision of the English subject curriculum, a greater emphasis was made on the use of English within each student's education program<sup>7</sup>. This opens up for teaching English for special purposes (ESP)<sup>8</sup> to prepare the student for working life. Dysthe, Hertzberg & Hoel (2010, p. 15) claim that writing is taking part in a culture. When one starts learning a new subject it is not only about learning the subject theory, but also about learning how to speak and write in that subject. They also state that different trades have different outlooks on the world and their own ways of constructing knowledge (Dysthe et al., 2010, p. 16). Rabbini (2003) too claims that writing is a social phenomenon where each discourse community has individual qualities. This requires specialized language to develop and express this knowledge. In the 2010 version of the curriculum the authorities have attempted to open up for the vocations' different discourse communities, and there are different English textbooks to be found on different vocational studies. There is a project in Norway called FYR<sup>9</sup> which aims to make English relevant to the future occupation and to motivate vocational students for the common core subjects. This alteration is untouched in the curriculum revision of 2013.

The major alteration has to do with the division of the competence aims where there are now four different areas, rather than three. The competence aim '*communication*' has been divided into '*oral communication*' and '*written communication*' (UDIR, 2013 a), but the written competencies are the same. Hence, this paper's analysis of students' selection of writing prompts based on the 2010 subject curriculum is transferable to exams made after the revision of the curriculum.

#### **1.1.6 Writing as key competence**

Norwegian authorities have in connection to the education reform of 2006, developed a framework for basic skills where writing is one of the basic skills. The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training define the term: "skills that are basic in the sense that they are fundamental to learning in all subjects as well as a prerequisite for the pupil to show his/her qualifications" (UDIR, 2012, p. 5). Basic skills are often called key competences, and the term 'key competence' comes from OECD, describing the skills needed for a successful life

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<sup>6</sup> See the next chapter «Writing as key competence» for a thorough definition.

<sup>7</sup> See appendix 2. The writing aims focused on the study program are marked in red.

<sup>8</sup> See the next chapter «Writing as key competence» for a thorough definition.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.fremmedspraksenteret.no/nor/fremmedspraksenteret/nygiv---fyr>

and a well-functioning society (OECD, 2005). I find the term 'key competence' a more sufficient term for writing as a basic skill, and will use this term throughout this paper.

Writing is defined as a skill teachers in all subjects in school have to teach and focus on and there is no subject that has more responsibilities of teaching writing than others. The framework for basic skills defines writing as a skill where one expresses "oneself understandably and appropriately about different topics and communicating with others in the written mode" (UDIR, 2012, p. 10). This defines writing in general, and not related to a task's requirements.

When teaching writing in English, three different directions have emerged during the last years. 1. *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP), 2. *English for Academic Purposes* (EAP), 3. *Writing Across the Curriculum* (WAC) (Swales, 1990, p. 3-4). ESP is teaching language and vocabulary aimed at a specific area or occupation, which is largely done in vocational classes in Norwegian upper secondary school. This does not mean that general English is omitted, but there is emphasis on the English the individual learner will use in the target occupation. EAP is teaching English that has more academic requirements, and is hence focused more on in the college preparatory classes. This includes more academic discussions, more formal language and advanced vocabulary on academic issues. WAC is a new way of thinking where one should write, not within one particular subject, but merge different subjects when producing texts. Swales posits that this is most common in native-speaker classes (1990, p. 6), but in my experience this has been done with English vocational classes in Norway. One may suggest that there are no clear lines between the strategy of teaching English in vocational vs. general studies, but one strives to give the learners the English they will need after they graduate. Hence one may suggest that vocational English heads towards EPS and/or WAC, just as the FYR-program recommends, while general studies head towards EAP.

Having established the context of this study, it is now time to look at the theory this study is based on.

## 2. Theory

In this chapter I will present the theory this study is based on, linking it to the written exam. The first part introduces the factors which an exam is assessed by; validity, fidelity and reliability. The second part presents what is to be assessed on an exam, namely writing literacy, language competence and genre. In the third and final part I will present how the candidate experiences the exam situation in terms of motivation. I will also explain the written exam in the Norwegian context and define writing prompts and task requirements.

### 2.1. Validity, fidelity and reliability of an exam

When analyzing an exam, it is important to look at the validity, fidelity and reliability of it, (Eggen, 2009) and next I will define these three terms, starting with validity.

There are different kinds of validity in testing; *inner validity* says something about whether the exam tests the proficiency goals in the subject curriculum (Eggen, 2009, p.43). A test's inner validity is good if the test tests what it is supposed to test (Fairchild, 2002, p. 10). Fairchild puts forward that the exam must reflect the theoretical domain of the subject it is to test (2002, p. 11), which is called *content validity*. In other words; a valid exam tests the candidate based on the proficiency goals in the subject curriculum, reflecting the competence aims the candidate has been taught during the year. *Outer validity* says something about whether the assessment one does is valid in other connections (Eggen, 2009, p. 49). *Consequence validity* says something about what implications this assessment has for society, education and the individual and how the assessment affects society or system of education (Eggen, 2009, p. 49). It also says something about how the exam prepares the student for further education and society beyond school. In addition to these common validities, one now speaks of *criteria based validity* which says something about whether the exam grade in fact shows the candidate's competence.

Validity is connected to *fidelity*. When a valid test tests what it is supposed to test, one has to look at the elements the test is built up of to find the fidelity. According to Sadler (2009) fidelity "is the extent to which elements that contribute to a course grade are correctly identified as academic achievement". One must therefore look closely at what the written prompts ask for, and whether the anticipated product in fact shows the candidate's academic achievement. In the case of a written exam where the candidate can choose from different writing prompts, some prompts may have less fidelity than others, but the overall fidelity of the test may be acceptable. If a test has low fidelity, it places an upper bound on the possible



maximum level of validity on the test (Sadler, 2009). The test itself may be evaluated for validity and fidelity, but the student's results are evaluated on reliability.

*Reliability* is the “precision of the score” (Mehrens & Lehman, cited in Fairchild, 2002, p. 9). This means that one checks whether the results of an exam are consistent across several censors. A candidate should get the same score from all censors for the reliability to be high. In practice, this is very difficult when assessing a second language written exam because there are no black and white parameters in the scoring rubric in the exam information. The exam information also states that the list of criteria is not exhaustive (UDIR, 2013 c), so the use of discretion comes into play when assessing an exam, and may hence give factors that assessors may judge differently. Nevertheless, the overall impression which makes up the holistic scoring should result in equal assessments across multiple censors for the reliability to be high.

## **2.2 What is assessed on an exam**

### **2.2.1 Writing literacy**

Literacy is a basic competence in today's society, where writing literacy is one component of several which make up the term «literacy». Writing is also a key competence<sup>10</sup> in Norwegian schools, where the Norwegian department of education states that the student must learn to write comprehensibly and appropriately (UDIR, 2012, p. 10), but the requirements of the texts produced will vary by the nature of the school subject. My definition of writing will be directed towards text production in English in upper secondary school. To describe what literacy is, firstly I will define the term, before defining writing literacy. Secondly, I will explain the purpose of writing using the writing circle<sup>11</sup> and how this defines writing competencies in the Norwegian school system. Thirdly I will introduce the audience and the writer as a sender, and lastly I will address writing strategies.

### **Literacy**

Literacy in both reading and writing can be defined as:

[...] the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their

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<sup>10</sup> See chapter 1.1.6

<sup>11</sup> Also known as “The writing wheel” or “The Wheel of Writing” (Skrivehjulet).  
<http://www.skriivesenteret.no/ressurser/skrivehjulet/>

knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society (PIAAC, 2012, p. 1).

This is a rather wide term which encompasses all literacies in all situations. The PISA program, however, has a much more innovative approach to literacy as they define the term as: “A concept concerned with the capacity of students to analyze, reason and communicate effectively as they pose, solve and interpret problems in a variety of subject matter areas” (DeSeCo, cited in Smidt, 2009, p. 22). This is a term much closer to what is required of a candidate at an exam as it covers all operations one has to make in an exam situation from decoding the writing prompt to producing a written text.

### **Writing literacy**

In ESL, there are two important areas of literacy, oral and writing, and the definitions above cover them both. This study will focus on writing literacy and a definition of writing literacy is easier achieved when contrasted to speaking. Bakhtin, on the other hand (cited in Skaftun, 2002, p. 145) focuses on the similarities of speaking and writing to explain writing as a dialogue, but in this case it is more convenient to show the characteristics of writing when focusing on four differences: 1. writing is permanent, and may be read when and where one wants (Brown, cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 15-16). 2. Writers have more time to plan and revise than speakers have (Brown, cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 15-16). 3. Writing requires more standardized use of language than speaking does, and the need of accuracy is greater than in speaking (Weigle, 2002, p. 17). As the writer has no real contact with the reader, the writer must never assume that the reader has pre-knowledge of the topic, so accuracy is expected in writing. 4. Orthography, word variation and formality will affect writing to a larger extent than speaking (Brown, cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 15-16) as these affect the fluency of the written text. In sum, writing literacy is to be able to produce a written text which is comprehensible and appropriate, but also accurate in language, content, word choice, orthography and communication.

Writing literacy is a skill one needs to be able to participate in society outside of school (Weigle, 2002, p. 4), and for some to get accepted to higher education, or achieve the career they desire. Compared to earlier, more employees must be able to write in their occupation, and the requirements of the written product have increased (Dysthe et al., 2010, p. 11). In addition, occupations that traditionally have had little writing requirements are now asked to write for different purposes and in more situations than before (Dysthe et al., 2010, p. 11).

Writing is also a skill needed “for critical participation in civic and social life” (UDIR, 2012, p. 10), which makes this a key competence as presented in chapter 1.1.6.

### Writing acts and writing purposes

The figure below shows the last edition of the writing circle<sup>12</sup> which is a theoretical model for teachers when planning and assessing written texts. The teacher must, however, adapt these basic functions to the topics being taught. Yet, this model can be used as a starting point to understand the decoding<sup>13</sup> the student must master when facing a writing prompt on an exam.

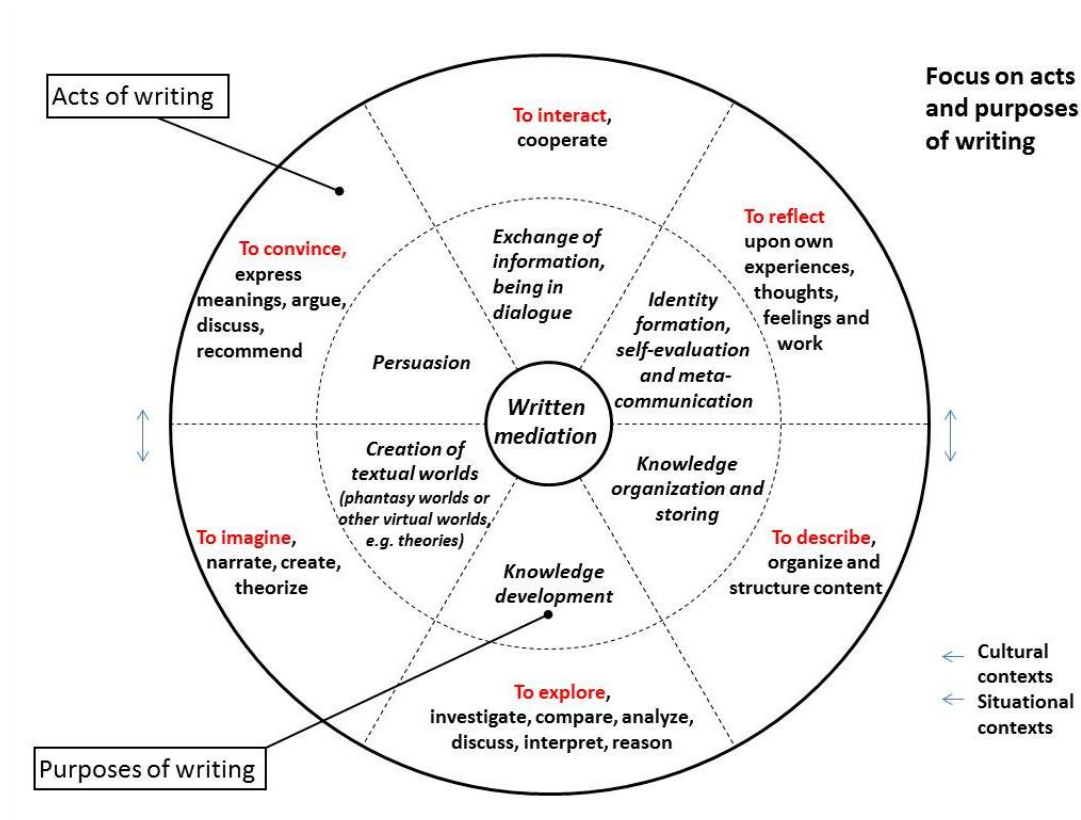


Figure 1: The writing circle

The figure above shows the intentions of writing, the connection between writing acts and writing purposes, and that writing always is an act in a context, with a purpose. It deals with six writing acts and six purposes of writing as shown in the figure above. In the outer circle, we find the six social and symbolic acts of writing which the writer finds from the verbs in the prompt. The student identifies whether one is asked to reflect, to imagine or to interact etc., before finding the purpose which can be found in the second circle from the outside. All

<sup>12</sup> This model is developed by the researchers who developed the writing tests in Norway: Kjell Lars Berge, Lars Sigfred Evensen, Rolf Fasting and Ragnar Thygesen.

<sup>13</sup> Decoding = To retrieve information from a text

writing has a purpose, and to find the purpose one has to decode the writing prompt. For instance, the act is to convince, and the candidate must identify that the purpose is to persuade someone of something. The genres are here placed outside the writing circle in the contexts of culture and situation, and the writing acts in the writing circle help realize different genres (Solheim and Matre, 2014, p. 6). When one has identified the purpose, the student then needs to pair this purpose to the correct acts to fulfill the task requirements. In the center we find the term ‘semiotic mediation’ which refers to grammar, vocabulary, structure of the text and other tools one needs to make the written product accessible to a reader. The dotted lines in the circle indicate that there are no absolute divides between different acts and different purposes, and the circles may be turned so that different acts can go with different purposes, but the model above shows the most common combination of acts and purposes. The writing circle is meant as an alternative or supplement to the traditional genre approach to writing in school, and it shows how some writing acts may be used in different genres. To illustrate the writing circle, this is the instruction in one exam prompt which was used in the May 2013 exam:

“The expression ‘you can’t judge a book by its cover’ is used in your Preparation Booklet. Based on this expression, write a short story called ‘Lovely cover, lousy book’” (UDIR, 2013 b).

The student must then identify the acts and writing competencies found in the outer circle in the writing circle. The candidate should understand that the act of this prompt is to imagine, and the purpose is to create a text, using the short story genre. In other words; for the student to perceive the requirements, the student must be able to decode the writing instructions in the prompt in order to encode the text accordingly.

If a prompt instructs the candidate to discuss a topic, and the candidate instead writes a persuasive text, the writing prompt instructions are misunderstood and the perception of the task is not adequate. Students in Norwegian schools are required to master all the model’s writing acts on a final written exam in upper secondary school, this in addition to producing a text which is comprehensible, appropriate and accurate in language, content, word choice and orthography.

### **Audience**

One always writes for an audience, and according to Dysthe et al., writing is a conversation between the reader and the writer (2010, p. 16). They posit that it is important that the writer

has the reader in mind when text is produced, and this imagined reader is a part of the writing conversation. This is mainly the case in factual text production. When one writes academic texts one is also required to cite other people, and this gives the conversation a dimension which stretches both forward towards the reader, and backwards to the people one quotes. Bereiter and Scardamalia (cited in Wray and Lewis, 1998) on the other hand, claim that when the student tries to produce a good text, the lack of dialogue inhibits them from advancing their text. They state that the natural ‘turn taking’ found in oral conversation is missing from text production and that there is no interaction between a writer and a blank sheet of paper (Bereiter et al. cited in Wray and Lewis, 1998). This is a real cognitive challenge as speakers get immediate response on their utterances, but the writer is left in the dark of whether the reader comprehends or not (Weigle, 2002, p. 18). It is prerequisite that the student has the reader in mind while writing to make this dialogue believable, and it is preferred that the audience is specified in the writing prompt. To give an example of a writing prompt that specifies the audience, I’d like to use one of the prompts from the exam in May, 2011:

“You are to give a talk to visiting English-speaking students about the education programme you are taking and how it will help you in your career. Write what you would say” (UDIR, 2011 b).

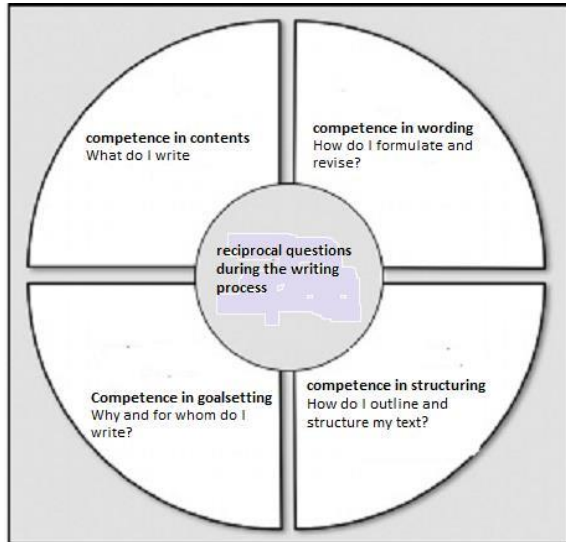
This prompt asks the student to present his/her own study program and career plans. It also states the audience as ‘visiting English-speaking students’, and the expected ‘dialogue’ between a speaker and the audience should be clear to the candidate.

### **The writer as a sender**

In addition to imagining the reader, the writer must, in some cases, imagine herself as someone else. According to Irene Clark (2005), “the student needs to assume an appropriate textual self suitable for the writing task, [and] project how that self will impact an intended audience”. She compares writing prompts to stage directions, where the writer needs to have the skill of assuming the role of the writer that the prompt asks of him/her. In most cases of academic writing, the writer is to take the role of the expert, in order to deal with the topic at hand in an appropriate manner, and a prompt may include who the writer is. In the example used in the previous chapter, the student is asked as an expert on his/her own study program to talk to other young students about this particular study program. The roles are clear; the writer is an expert speaker, and the audience is English-speaking visitors. In sum, the writer must pretend to be someone else, conveying meaning to an imagined reader.

## Strategies

To write an appropriate text, the candidate must have strategies in the writing process. The connection between competencies and strategies are shown in the figure below adapted by Sandvik<sup>14</sup>, from Fix (2012, p. 157).



The model to the left shows how competence in contents, wording, goal setting and structuring are connected when producing good texts. Fix uses reciprocal questions to help the text producer through the writing process, and thus suggests a writing strategy. All these components will eventually affect the produced text, and are hence prerequisite for the candidate to master.

Figure 2: Fix's model of the writing process

When the student masters the basic skill of writing literacy, and has found the appropriate acts to answer the writing prompt instructions, the student must be able to write a good text. The pilot-study I conducted in March 2013 showed that the main objective of writing prompt selection was the desire to write a text to the best of their ability and Dysthe et al. (2010, p. 18) give three basic prerequisites for producing a good text:

- *Knowledge*: Good knowledge of the topic one is going to write about. No one can write well about something they do not know enough about.
- *Genre*: Text knowledge. One needs to know what kind of texts one is expected to produce.
- *Strategy*: Knowledge about the writing process and about strategies one can use in different phases of the process.

Most of these points refer to Fix's model for writing, however, Fix's contents' question: "What do I write?" does not cover Dysthe et al.'s requirements of good knowledge of the topic. Fix mainly suggests that the candidate needs to find out what to write, while Dysthe et al. suggest that the need for knowledge of the topic is paramount.

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<sup>14</sup> I have made an English translation of the model.

Both Fix's model and Dysthe et al.'s basic prerequisites are meant for first language writing, and do not take language competence into consideration. When connecting these theories to second language writing one needs to be aware that the obstacle of writing in a second language may limit the vocabulary and hence the precision of the text.

To sum up Fix's model and Dysthe et al.'s theories; for a candidate to perform well on a written exam in English, the candidate needs to have knowledge of the topic he/she is going to write about, be able to identify the task requirements from the writing prompt, and know how such a text is written. Finally, the candidate needs to have strategies to know how to plan the writing, execute the plan and revise as the candidate moves forward in the writing process.

Hillocks (1987, p. 73) has developed a triangle of plans and processes in composing. Here he emphasizes the importance of the writing situation, and claims that the situation, or the context itself will affect the product. This is interesting in an high stakes exam situation as this is a context which is unique and set apart from people's everyday lives. On the day of the exam, the above mentioned skills are added to the skill of writing literacy and the mastering of roles of the reader and writer. Next I will describe how the candidate needs language competence to convey a message appropriately.

### **2.2.2 Language competence**

Language competence is a competence within *Communicative competence* which is one of several competencies in second language learning. Chomsky (cited in Berggren et al., 1999, p. 24) argues that communicative competence is the knowledge rather than the ability to use the knowledge. He also claims that the language one uses is merely an imperfect shade of the competence. Hymes (cited in Berggren et al., 1999, p. 24) on the other hand, gives an alternative definition of communicative competence, namely a competence which encompasses both grammar competence (the ability to build and interpret sentences) and pragmatic competence (the ability to express oneself to achieve the expected communicative effect). He uses the term to demonstrate the link between linguistic and social knowledge, and this makes Hymes' theory the one that appeals the most to me, and the one I have used in this study. In this chapter I will present The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and discuss how important language competence is in a complete text.

### **The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)**

To show what language competence encompasses, I have used the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (European Council, 2009), which is a framework

issued by the European Council, aiming at defining common requirements for all language learners in Europe. The aim of Norwegian authorities is that the framework should be used by language teachers, authors of textbooks, curriculum developers and linguists (UDIR, 2011, p. x), and therefore I will use the framework to theoretically establish the foreign language education's linguistic competence requirements of the student in an upper secondary school written exam. Approximately one third<sup>15</sup> of the students who take the exam are in vocational classes and are therefore expected to practice their occupation in a foreign country, or to cooperate with immigrant workers, and hence they need the skills the CEFR describes to perform well in an international workplace.

The CEFR gives an extensive description of what competencies one needs to be able to communicate effectively in a language (UDIR, 2011. p. 1). According to the CEFR, the learner must achieve communicative language competences (p. 130), which define the skills the learner needs to exhibit when conveying a message in written form. The definitions are made with the L2 learner in mind, and are hence adequate in an English exam setting. These include lexical competence, grammatical competence, semantic competence, orthographic competence, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence (European Council, p. 133-147).

<b>Communicative language competencies</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Lexical competence</b>	The knowledge of and ability to use the target language's vocabulary and accuracy in terms and expressions in English
<b>Grammatical competence</b>	The ability to use the grammar of English in an appropriate manner, and in a manner that does not interfere with the understanding of the text's message.
<b>Semantic competence</b>	The ability to build meaningful texts.
<b>Orthographic competence</b>	The ability to spell words correctly. This has greatly improved with the use of computers with spell checks, but homonyms <sup>16</sup> are still a challenge.
<b>Sociolinguistic competence</b>	The skill of communicating in a socially accepted manner in the second language.
<b>Pragmatic competence</b>	The skill of building and using messages in a foreign language.

Table 1: Communicative Language Competencies

The table above, which I have constructed from the CFR document, illustrates the different competencies the candidate must master, and the abilities and the skills the different competencies include. These come into play in all written products, and in a written essay, a combination of all these competencies must be displayed.

<sup>15</sup> In May 2013, 2 446 of 7 502 candidates were from vocational classes.



## **The importance of language competence**

Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel and Hughey (cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 115) describe *analytic scoring* as scoring where one uses scoring schemes which give more detailed information about the student's performance in different aspects of writing. Their scale is divided into five different parts, where two of them are vocabulary and language use. These two aspects equal 20 points each on a maximum of 100. In other words, Jacobs et al. value language competences to 40% of the total score on a student's written work. It is unclear how much language competence scores on the evaluation of a written exam as the criteria are not weighed by points in this manner. However, in the exam information which is given to the candidate before the actual exam, language is listed as one of the three main assessment areas in the exam.

### **2.2.3 Genre**

Genre is a French word meaning 'kind' or 'class', and a term used in more connections than just written texts, but in texts, one often sees genre as the text's structure. Even though the subject curriculum moves away from the term, it is a much used and accepted term in teaching, hence the need for a clarification of what genre really is. Chandler (1997, p. 1) argues that conventional definitions of genres tend to be based on the notion that they constitute particular conventions of content and/or form, and these are features shared by the texts belonging to a certain genre. Some theorists claim that the focus on genres has gone too far, and has made the teaching of writing too rigid and too much recipe based. However, I will here address genre, as students tend to classify texts and text production in genres. In this chapter I will explain what genres and text types are before looking at genre theory. Next I will present the genre triad before addressing how many genres there are. Finally I will explain a text's content.

### **Genre and text type**

There are two terms which have been used relating to texts; 'genre' and 'text types'. Biber (cited in Paltridge, 1996, p. 237) defines 'genre' as a category of texts which are grouped on the basis of external criteria, such as prayers, songs and poems, whereas 'text types' are texts which are similar in linguistic form, irrespective of genre. Hence, genre is a type of activity which occurs regularly in our society, such as short stories, articles, plays etc. While text types are groupings of texts which are similar in co-occurrence of linguistic patterns (Paltridge, 1996, p. 237), meaning that texts from different genres may belong to the same

text type. Hyland (2002 p. 123) argues that by using the term ‘different text types’ one allows genre blends and opens up for the possibility of having more than one text type in a genre. One genre may encompass different writing acts, but most commonly one act is predominantly used. Hence these two terms represent different, yet complementary perspectives on texts.

Paltridge (1996, p. 237) claims that the terms ‘genre’ and ‘text type’ seem to have been conflated, where ‘genre’ is being used to include both these notions, and this may be because ‘text type’ has been given less attention. Some prompts may have mixed task instructions or unspecified instructions, and in these cases, task instructions will be interpreted in terms of potentially suitable genres (Ørevik, 2012, p. 7). Mixed genre instructions combine different writing acts and demand an analysis to decode the prompt in order to write an appropriate response. In my experience, students tend to use the term ‘genre’ to define different types of texts when learning different text types’ structures and some may argue that what the students really mean is writing acts, or text types, not genre.

### **Genre theory**

There are three major schools of genre theory where the first is the New Rhetoric group (NRG) which originates in North America. In their opinion genre is a social standard strategy in the form of a discourse which is developed to respond to a rhetorical situation which recurs (Coe & Freedman cited in Hyland, 2002 p. 114). These theorists focus on the social interaction of writing in a specific genre, where the relationship between text type and rhetorical situation is important. A second orientation is ESP (English for Specific Purposes), which sees “genre as a class of structured communicative events employed by specific discourse communities whose members share broad communicative purposes” (Coe & Freedman cited in Hyland, 2002, p. 115). These purposes help shape the way genres are structured and the possible content and style the genre makes available. This is a definition one may be drawn to in vocational classes as it focuses on the discourse within the different vocations’ writing. The third school is the Australian ‘Sydney School’ led by Michael Halliday. The genre theorists belonging to this school claim that genre is an arranged, goal oriented social process which emphasizes purposeful, interactive and sequential actions. These actions are closely tied to different genres where the language used is systematically linked to the context (Coe & Freedman cited in Hyland, 2002 p. 115). The Sydney School

moves beyond the social aspect and stresses the different actions and the language used in different genres. In their opinion it is the actions within the genre that define the format.

The school of genre theory which appeals the most to me is the Sydney School, which has grown out of the Australian genre approach to writing. This is a technique where the learners are made familiar with different genres in order to be able to recognize the expected genre a prompt asks of them. Freedman (cited in Devitt, 2009, p. 340) posits that explicit instruction in genres cannot “possibly articulate to novices all the expectations and fine details that mark the texts of experienced genre users”. Devitt (2009, p. 341) on the other hand, argues that students will try to match writing assignments to genres they have encountered, even if the teacher chooses to ignore genres. Christie (cited in Devitt, 2009, p. 341) is worried that if explicit genre instruction is ignored, knowledge of specific genres will become part of the hidden curriculum. Miller (1984, p. 151) states that genre study is valuable “because it emphasizes some social and historical aspects of rhetoric that other perspectives do not”. Irene Clark (2005) goes even further and posits “that genre study can provide a useful framework for analyzing writing prompts”. She claims that writing prompts are based on an implicit assumption about what the tasks require from the candidate, which only can be understood by those who are already familiar with the genre or with the writing acts (Clark, 2005). If the candidate is unfamiliar with the genre and its characteristics, the candidate will be unable to write an acceptable text, and according to Ørevik (2012, p. 4), this may keep the student out of arenas where this genre plays a significant role.

To identify the correct genre, one has to look at the verbs used in the prompt. Clark (2005) explains that words like “discuss”, “address”, “analyze” or “compare and contrast” are words that are self-explanatory for the writing prompt designer, but the candidate may not understand the connection to the generic purpose nor have the expected experience with the genre or writing acts. Clark and Hernandez (2011) conducted a study where they investigated whether the metacognitive understanding of genre would help students make connections to writing genres they encountered in other disciplines. The students were taught explicit genre knowledge, and Clark and Hernandez concluded that this resulted in increased genre understanding in the areas of audience, author persona, purpose, formatting, citation, and structure. One may therefore suggest that there is evidence that the genre approach to writing is effective, and that students today should be taught both genres and writing acts in order to produce different types of texts.

## The Genre Triad

To show the connection between genre and text, I have chosen to use Bakhtin's genre triad (see figure below), adapted by Ongstad (cited in Smidt, 2009, p. 20).

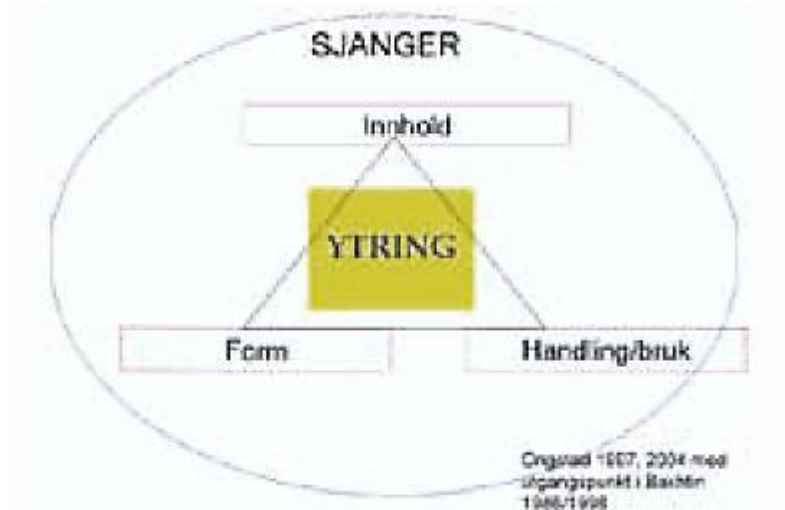


Figure 3: The genre triad

The figure above shows three aspects of all texts: 1. What the text content is (innhold), 2. The structure of the text (form), and 3. The purpose of the text (handling/bruk). All three aspects are equally important as they make up equal angles of the triangle, and the combination of these three is shown in the written product, which Bakhtin calls "utterance" (ytring). This model relates closely to the writing circle introduced earlier in this chapter, but specifies genres rather than writing acts.

### How many genres are there?

When dealing with genre, there is great discrepancy in how many written genres there are, and some may claim that it is impossible to list them all in an ever changing technological society. Carolyn Miller (cited in Chandler, 1997, p. 1) suggests that the number of genres depends on the complexity and diversity in the society it belongs to. Buckingham, (cited in Chandler, 1997, p. 3) on the other hand stresses that genre is "in a constant process of negotiation and change". This makes listing different genres quite an impossible task, and the number varies with the theorists one reads. Collerson (cited in Wray and Lewis, 1998) suggests that genres can be divided into *early genres* and *factual genres*, whereas Wing Jan (cited in Wray and Lewis, 1998) suggests using *factual genres* (reports, explanations, procedures, persuasive writing, interviews, surveys, descriptions, biographies, recounts and

narrative information) and *fictional genres* (traditional fiction and contemporary modern fiction). Graham (2008, p. 5) claims that there are eight<sup>17</sup> different genres one needs to practice to learn to write for multiple purposes, and some of these eight genres are quite similar to the writing acts in the writing circle. Sullivan County in the state of New York defines two groups of genres: Literature and informational texts, where literature has 14 different specified genres, and informational texts have 10 (Alterio, Carr and Miller, 2012). Ørevik (2012, p. 8) posits that “certain text types seem to be formed and have sole purpose within school contexts, and can, therefore, be grouped in a ‘school genre’ category”. In her study of upper secondary school exams in English, she found 10 genres which are typical of text production in written exams (2012, p. 7):

<b>Genres</b>	
Article	
Feature article	
Essay	
Letter to the editor	
Informative text	(instructions or information on a particular topic)
Promotional text	(e.g. text promoting a place or an institution)
Story	(short story or other types of literary prose)
Diary entry	
Presentation	(written or transcribed oral text about a topic presumed unknown to the audience)
Manuscript for a talk	

Table 2: School genres

The table above shows Ørevik’s genres which were identified in written exams from 1996-2011. In addition, she found certain categories which cannot be identified as genres: ‘text’, ‘personal text’ and prompts where genre instructions are constructed as, respectively, ‘mixed’ and ‘unspecified’.

It does seem, however, that there is consensus that there are texts that are fictional and nonfictional, and in this study I will use the terms *factual texts* and *fictional texts* for these two groups.

Weigle (2002, p. 100) states that there are differences in the complexity of the language required in fictional and factual texts. She posits that fictional texts are cognitively easier and require less complex language. Fictional texts tend to involve past tense verbs, present participial clauses and third person pronouns, while factual texts, on the other hand, tend to use present tense verbs and longer, more elaborate noun phrases. These texts also rely more

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<sup>17</sup> 1. Communicating with others. 2. Informing others. 3. Persuading others. 4. Learning content material. 5. Entertaining others. 6. Reflecting about self. 7. Responding to literature. 8. Demonstrating knowledge.

on transitions. These differences may affect the assessment of linguistic competence, as fictional texts are simpler in terms of language use.

Four factual texts are identified as *language of power*: expository, explanation, report and discussion (Wray & Lewis, 1998). These are texts which are powerful forms one uses to get things done. And one may argue that students who do not have a good command of these writing acts are denied access to becoming fully functioning members of society (Wray & Lewis, 1998). The students in upper secondary school are obliged to answer tasks which are more likely to contain these verbs from the subject curriculum; ‘discuss’, ‘present’, ‘give an account of’ and ‘elaborate’ and these verbs are more related to writing acts used in factual texts.

To sum up, it is impossible to find an exact number of genres, but there are certain genres which are more used in schools and in exams. I have chosen to identify two groups of genres; factual and fictional genres implying that these two groups contain several different genres one can encounter in written form.

## **Content**

It is important that a text’s content is according to task instructions. In Bakhtin’s genre triad<sup>18</sup> content is a vital component, and whichever genre the candidate chooses on an exam, the text content must be appropriate according to the writing prompt instructions.

Weigle (2002, p. 189) posits that in exams “students are frequently asked to use their own experience and opinions as content for their writing”. She also claims that if source texts, such as the exam booklet, are used as input for the writing prompt, “it is used primarily as a springboard for student writing rather than as content for which students are held accountable”. Weigle (2002, p. 189) also argues for the use of text-responsible writing, which is writing where accuracy in content is required.

Dan Willingham (2014) argues that in order to produce adequate content, one needs the right knowledge of the world. He argues that when conveying a message, a lot is read between the lines, and this demands knowledge of the world, more than pure theory. To give an example: To understand the idiom: ‘bridging gaps’, one is required to be familiar with a physical bridge and know that this connects two areas that are separated. If one knows the word and the purpose of a physical bridge, one will understand the term ‘bridging’ as closing gaps between

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<sup>18</sup> See figure 3

two sides which are far apart, and use the term adequately. The ability to use knowledge of the world this way is combined with the knowledge of genres and writing acts to bridge the gap between the prompt and the written product.

## **2.3 How the candidate experiences the exam situation**

To get a better picture of how the candidate experiences the exam situation, I will in this chapter define motivation, explain the written exam in a Norwegian context, and define writing prompts and task requirements

### **2.3.1 Motivation**

For the candidate to do his/her best, there has to be some kind of motivation behind the writing operation on the day of the exam. In the Principles for the Education issued by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and training, it says that motivated students want to learn, are persevering and curious, and show the ability to be goal focused (UDIR, 2006, p. 3). Pintrich (2003, p. 674) on the other hand, separates motivation from curiosity, stating that the latter is a personal characteristic rather than a variable which can be affected and enhanced. The principles also declare that to make students motivated, they must have the opportunity to choose tasks which are challenging and give possibilities of exploration (UDIR, 2006, p. 3). In addition, the prompts must be formed in such a way that all candidates will have the opportunity to show their competence. I will first explain intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation before moving on to two different student goals in motivation. Finally I will present the effect of motivation in an exam situation, and how motivation can be facilitated in a prompt.

The first type of motivation is *intrinsic motivation*. This refers to doing an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction of participating in it (Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Brière, Senécal and Vallières, 1992, p. 1004). Intrinsic motivation can again be defined in three different groups: 1. motivation to know, 2. to accomplish things and 3. to experience stimulation. *Intrinsic motivation to know* (Vallerand et al., 1992, p. 1005) is when the student reads a book for the pleasure of it. *Intrinsic motivation toward accomplishments* (Vallerand et al., 1992, p. 1005) may be demonstrated through extending the work beyond the mandatory task to achieve satisfaction. And *intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation* may be seen when a student reads a book for the exciting passages in the novel. Of these three, the intrinsic motivation toward accomplishments may be the most common motivation on a written exam as the candidate knows that at the end there is a final grade which will be added to the average grade score.

Another part of intrinsic motivation is the goal of engaging in an activity, where in motivation research one speaks of *goal orientation*, which is defined as the reasons and purposes for engaging in a task (Pintrich, 2003, p. 676). This again can be split in two; 1. mastery and 2. performance goals. *Mastery goal* is the one we mostly strive for in school, where the student wants to learn, to understand and develop skills to improve within the school subject. In contrast, *performance goal* is the learner's goal to achieve recognition for high ability, demonstrate skills and to be perceived as better than others (Pintrich, 2003, p. 676). When a candidate comes to a written exam, we prefer the candidate to have been mastery goal oriented during the years of learning. However, summative assessment on a high-stakes test, such as an exam, gives the candidate a grade which will influence the opportunities for higher education or employment. This will affect the goals and one must assume that performance goals affect the candidate to a larger extent on an exam than during learning.

The other type of motivation is *extrinsic*, which means that the task is seen as a means to an end, and not for the learner's sake (Vallerand et al., 1992, p. 1006). This motivation may also be divided into three: 1. external regulation, 2. introjected regulation and 3. identification. *External regulation* is where motivation is based on rewards and constraints, while *introjected regulation* is when a learner completes a task because it is expected. Finally *identification* is shown when the student accomplishes something because someone has told the learner that it is important. The first motivation, external regulation, may come into play as the candidate assesses his/her chances of success. The latter two may also occur in a candidate on a written exam, but may not give the best outcome because extrinsic motivation does not bring the whole learner into the writing process, only the mechanic acts of writing.

There is a third term in motivation; *amotivation*, which means that there is no motivation for any part of the exam. This may best be shown when candidates fail to turn up for the exam, as found in the 1000 candidate drop-out in the May 2013 exam.

Motivation comes from previous experiences and when one speaks of student motivation, the student's own understanding of self is affected by the previous experiences with similar tasks (Smith, 2009, p. 25). Hayes (cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 25) suggests that if the student believes that success is obtainable, he/she is willing to work harder and is hence more motivated for the task. The candidate's choice, persistence and performance may also be based on how well the candidate thinks he/she will do on the exam (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000, p. 68). On the other hand, if students often experience failure in similar tasks, they will work less if they



believe that success is for those with innate abilities in the subject. Here, motivation will play a significant role in the student's test performance, and it is therefore important that the writing prompts the student can choose from on a written exam are somewhat similar to tasks the learner has written in the past, and that the candidate may perceive an acceptable grade as possible.

Carol Dweck (2014), a professor of psychology at Stanford University, has developed a motivation theory called 'Fixed and Growth mindset' (2014). She posits that if students are praised for their skills, they will believe that they are 'fixed', meaning that they have reached their full potential and are unable to improve. If they instead are praised on the process or the effort, the student's mindset will be on growth, believing that they can do better. In turn, the students are more pleased with themselves, and it will lead to the student being willing to take on bigger challenges as an improved outcome seems achievable. Having a fixed mindset, on the other hand, may terrify the candidate since his/her reputation is at stake. Hence the two different mindsets may affect a student's selection of prompt.

Ames (1992, p. 263) posits that the task design may or may not influence motivation within the candidate. Embedded in the writing prompt is information which the candidate uses to evaluate his/her chances of success, and thus affects the choice of prompt. Hayes' model (presented in Weigle, 2002, p. 26) presents 'motivation and affect' as one of four key components in a candidate's writing process. This shows that writing cannot be done to full satisfaction if the candidate has no motivation for the task at hand. Ames suggests that if the task involves variety and diversity, chances are that the candidate will have an interest in the task and a desire and hope for success (1992, p. 263). One may suggest that the writing prompts in an exam should be designed in such a way that the candidate can see that success is achievable and spur interest in the topic of the writing prompt to ensure motivation for the writing task, and hence result in the best written product the candidate can master.

### **2.3.2 The written exam in the Norwegian context**

In Norway the exam grade is one of two possible grades in English. The student receives one grade on the oral and written performance throughout the school year, and one on the exam, if he or she is selected to sit the exam. By rule, 20% of the class is selected to do either a written or oral exam, but English is just one of several possible subjects. Therefore, there is no way of knowing who is selected for the exam in English, and teaching is based on the end of term

assessment and the possibility of an oral or written exam. In May 2013 there were 8 576 entered candidates, and 7 502<sup>19</sup> completed the exam and received a grade.

The exam consists of a preparation day the day before the written exam, when a booklet is handed to the candidate<sup>20</sup>. The exam lasts for a maximum of five hours, and the candidate can use any support materials, except the Internet and communication with others. The exam response is written digitally, and uploaded after completion.

An exam paper in English in Norwegian upper secondary schools is assessed through summative assessment performed by two censors. The result is a grade which gives information on the student's achieved level of competence (Andreassen & Gamlem, 2009, p. 115) and contains no explanation of the judgment. According to the Norwegian Education Act, the final grade in a subject, such as an exam grade, represents the candidate's competence at the end of the course in the subject (UDIR, 2010 a, § 3-2). This documentation is for the student, the student's parents, the school, other learning institutions and future employers. In other words, it is to be used as certification for future reference and the possible admittance to higher education or workplace. It is therefore important that the exams give results that are reliable outside the pedagogical institution (Eggen, 2009, p. 50).

Ellingsund and Hellekjær (cited in Ørevik, 2012, p. 2) argue that “textbooks and examinations exert a perhaps greater influence on teaching in Norwegian schools than do the curriculum and syllabi”. They here talk of a *wash-back* effect, which is when teaching is adjusted according to what the exam will test. Therefore, the exam prompts will have an impact beyond the exam situation.

### 2.3.3 Writing prompts

Souza (2012, p. 76) introduces two different types of prompts, *framed prompt* and *bare prompt*. A *framed prompt* is a prompt “which is more delineated and provides additional context for the writer”. Norwegian upper secondary school exams only use framed prompts, as they provide additional instructions beyond the topic of the task, and one example is this prompt from the exam of May 2013:

In the excerpt from the novel *American Dervish* (Appendix 4), the immigrant girl Mina changes as a result of new demands and new-found freedom. Use the story about Mina as a point of departure to write a text about adapting to a new role or situation.

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<sup>19</sup> Numbers from the Directorate of Education and Training.

<sup>20</sup> See chapter 3.2 “Data collection” for a description of the May 2013 booklet's contents.

Your text should include:

- an introduction
- a brief explanation of how and why Mina changed
- a discussion of whether you agree or disagree with Mina's choices
- your reflections on how best to adapt to a new role or situation
- a conclusion

Feel free to add your own points

Give your text a suitable title (UDIR, 2013 b).

The writing prompt gives the candidate a text's context as a starting point, asking the candidate to explain, discuss and reflect. This is additional information, and hence this is a framed prompt.

A *bare prompt*, on the other hand, briefly states the writing task. The latter is often referred to as a *topic* (Souza, 2012, p. 76). An example may be:

“African Americans”

This prompt simply states the topic of the text, and the writer has to find an adequate writing act and purpose that African Americans can be presented through, in addition to the appropriate content to fulfill the task requirements.

When designing writing prompts, there are different stages the test designer must go through which finally gives the wording of the task. The most important for this study is the operationalization stage where the test designer moves from a general plan to detailed test specifications (Weigle, 2002, p. 82). This is when the designer writes the instructions for the candidate, and these instructions are known as *writing prompts*. According to Weigle (2002, p. 84) these instructions may include:

- a) description of the writing task in terms of audience, purpose/communicative functions, genre or form, and source of informational content;
- b) specific information about any text or visual that serves as the source of informational content;
- c) the linguistic characteristics of the prompt;
- d) a description of the space provided for the response.

From these writing prompts, the candidate decodes the task requirements and finds an appropriate form of response. All the four requirements above may not be included in all writing prompts, but the writing prompt may still be adequate.

Kroll & Reid (cited in Souza, 2012, p. 35) posit that in developing prompts for ESL writers, the test designers must bear in mind six variables: 1. The writing situation, 2. The subject matter, 3. The wording of the prompt, 4. The task variables, 5. The theoretical specifications and 6. the scoring criteria. These variables may be taken more lightly in native language writing prompts, but are essential when introduced to an ESL learner. Kroll & Reid emphasize how the exact wording of a prompt is vital in the candidate's understanding of the prompt. If there is wording or choice of words that make the candidate confused by the instruction, the candidate will not be able to perform to the best of his/her ability (Weigle, 2002, p. 50). According to Henning Fjørtoft (personal communication, April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014), for a text to be understood, the reader must comprehend a minimum of 85 % of the words that a text comprises. If the reader comprehends less, the text is not understood to a sufficient degree. One also wants the candidates to interpret the writing prompt in the same way so that the results are comparable (Weigle, 2002, p. 61). Conversely, if the task requires background information which the candidate does not possess, the produced text will not be to the standard of the English the candidate is normally able to produce (Weigle, 2002, p. 50). Clarity is therefore essential so that the candidates can understand what is required of them quickly and easily (Weigle, 2002, p. 90).

When designing a writing prompt, Weigle stresses the importance of specifying four aspects of the writing in the writing prompt itself. These are: 1) the intended audience, 2) the purpose, 3) the form and 4) the informational content (2002, p. 86). 1) The *intended audience* is important for the writer so that he/she knows what tone and style to use in the text. Clark (2005) states that the experienced writer will know from the prompt who the audience is, but the more inexperienced writer will not, and hence have difficulties in recognizing the expected tone and style of the written text. 2) The *purpose* is also important in designing writing prompts. Weigle (2002, p. 98) claims that the best writing prompts are the authentic ones which constitute the kind of writing the candidate may expect outside of school. However, what may be authentic writing will differ greatly for different groups of candidates, and this constitutes a challenge as this exam is to cover 22 different vocational programs and 7 general studies programs (Hellekjær, 2011, p. 44). Weaver (cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 74) found in a study that the candidate needs to form a teacher-initiated topic into a self-initiated

topic to find something meaningful to produce on the exam. This may be easier if the prompt is authentic, and something the candidate can relate to and see that he/she may need in the future. 3) The *form* a text is to be written in needs to be specified in the prompt, according to Weigle (2002, p. 86). Form may be given in terms of genre or writing acts, which the candidate needs to be able to read from the prompt. Here the verbs in the prompt are essential in understanding the form the text is to be written in. 4) The *informational content* in this exam is given in the preparation booklet, which the student has had a chance to get acquainted with prior to the exam. This gives the candidate the opportunity to know on beforehand what to write about, and can hence focus on the purpose, the writing acts and the features of the genre rather than the topic itself during the exam.

According to Weigle, test instructions have to be flexible (2002, p. 86) in order to give all candidates an angle to write from. However, not too flexible so that the answers differ so much that the results cannot be compared (Weigle, 2002, p. 91). Weigle also states that a good prompt needs to fit all candidates (2002, p. 90), so that weaker writers can write to the best of their ability in the same way as a stronger writer can. The *topic* must also be interesting to all students (Weigle, 2002, p. 91) for the candidate to engage in the writing, and personal topics have the advantage that the candidate may become more interested in the topic (Weigle, 2002, p. 91). A personal topic is when the prompt asks the candidate to write about his/her own experiences and/or opinions. If there are different writing prompts for the candidate to choose from, they need to be as parallel as possible, especially in terms of discourse mode, or genre, in order to guarantee a just assessment of the produced texts (Weigle, 2002, p. 101).

Bachman and Palmer (cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 103) give three guidelines for the instructions in a prompt. Two of which are applicable to this paper: “(1) they should be simple enough for test takers to understand”(…) “(3) they should be sufficiently detailed for test takers to know exactly what is expected of them”. This shows that both simplicity and complexity of the wording in a prompt is required, and one needs to be aware of what terms and language a candidate is able to comprehend in the instructions. Irene Clark (2005) posits that writing prompts are designed by specialists “for the purpose of generating an appropriate response from novices”, and the novice may not be familiar with the wording a specialist would use. If the wording is too complex, the candidate may not produce a text to the best of his/her ability, and if there is not sufficient information, the outcome will be the same. Egeberg (2012, p. 75) speaks of two types of language; *social everyday language* and *academic school language*

where the former is easier to understand for novices than the latter. He claims that academic school language is more nominal; it incorporates more nouns and less verbs than the social everyday language, and is hence more complex to decode.

Weigle (2002, p. 103) states that the absolute minimum of instructions in a prompt is a specification of audience and purpose of the writing. Understanding the task requirements is for many candidates the most difficult part of the exam, and next I will discuss what task requirements are.

#### **2.3.4 Task requirements**

Each writing prompt gives different instructions to the writer, and through finding the task requirements, one identifies what the prompt asks from the candidate. Weigle (2002, p. 62) lists different dimensions which together make up a prompt's requirements. These are; 1) *the subject matter*, which is the general content area the prompt asks for, 2) *the stimulus*, which refers to the material that forms the basis for generating text. In our case this may be the exam booklet. The last is 3) *the genre*, which is the expected form of the finished product. From the genre the candidate should be able to identify three dimensions (Weigle, 2002, p. 62) which make up the 'acts' in the writing circle: 1. *The rhetorical task* is the traditional discourse mode of narration as specified in the prompt, which may for instance be discussion or persuasion. 2. *Pattern of exposition*, which is specific instruction to the test taker to either make comparisons or find causes and effects etc. 3. *Cognitive demands*. These refer to the intellectual functioning which is presumed to be required to fulfill the task (Weigle, 2002, p. 62). This is where we want candidates to show that they are able to deduce on their own, and not reproduce.

When a candidate has successfully understood the task requirements, he/she should be able to perform to the best of his/her abilities and achieve a grade representative of the level of English the candidate is able to produce.

I have now presented the theory on which this study is based, and it is time to present the methods I have used in this research.

### **3 Methods**

The word method comes from the Greek *methodos* which means to follow a particular path towards a goal (Johannessen, Tufte & Christoffersen, 2010, p. 29). Therefore it is paramount to know where you are going before you start the journey towards that goal. This study's aim is to find what factors affect upper secondary school students' selection of prompts, and this chapter will describe the path towards that goal. First I will present the regional context and this study's perspectives, and secondly I will present the participants in this study. Thirdly I will present the data collection before introducing the methods and analysis of the data. Finally I will look at considerations made during the collection of data and the validity and reliability of this study's findings.

#### **3.1 The regional context of my research**

Our upper secondary school is a rural school in Trøndelag with appx. 300 students enrolled in the school year of 2013/2014, who come predominantly from six different municipalities. About one third of our students lives in bedsits during the week, and goes home only for weekends, but our school also offers a national program which attracts students from the whole country, and these students only go home for school vacations.

The six municipalities the majority of our students come from are mainly agricultural with a rather homogenous middle class group of families. In addition to these students, there are some indigenous students who are south Sami, and some immigrant students. The majority of the immigrant students are in vocational classes. Both ethnic Norwegian students, south Sami students and immigrant students are taught English as a second language.

There are 58 teachers at our school, where four of us teach English, and in 2013/2014 we have 18 classes which are taught English at different levels. Most of the vocational study programs are taught English together with other vocational study programs due to the fairly small classes.

#### **3.2 Participants**

This study was conducted in my home county, using students in this county and at the school where I work, as participants, and these will be presented after this study's perspectives.

##### **3.2.1 This study's perspectives**

In my research, I have used *ontological individualism* as a perspective to reflect on the reality my participants conveyed. Ontological individualism means that a society basically consists of individuals (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 45). The *cognitive perspective* has also been vital

in my research, which states that the human being is governed by subjective thoughts around different situations (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 48). Placing the participants in a situation where they must select a prompt, implies that they need to reflect and evaluate, using subjective thoughts, to reach a final decision. My research has also been based on the *theory of rational choices*, which states that in a given situation, the individual will evaluate alternative acts and choose the one most beneficial to the individual (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 46). This view is paramount in my research as I was asking the participants to choose one of four prompts they would write on an exam. The question in my research has been aimed at the factors that constitute this choice, and I have assumed that the choice is rational and made by the individual.

### 3.2.2 Selection of Participants

I have only used participants who are eligible for this particular exam from my region and school. I have collected the data in three different stages, and these are the participants in this study:

Survey	Participants	Participants	Female	Male	Vocational	College prep.	Total of all possible participants
Questionnaire 1	Students in the county who did the exam in 2013	91	64	27	30	61	42.7%
Questionnaire 2	Students at my school eligible for the exam in 2014	51	28	23	42	9	42.5%
Interview	Students at my school eligible for the exam in 2014	4	2	2	2	2	3.3%
<b>Total</b>		<b>146</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>72</b>	

Table 3: Participants in this study

The table above shows the number of participants in this study, represented by gender, study program and the percentage of participants in the three surveys from all possible.

Fictional name	Age	Gender	Grade	Study program	Originally from
'Adam'	17	Male	5	Vocational	Southern part of Norway
'Brenda'	17	Female	3	Vocational	A school south of our catchment area
'Chris'	16	Male	2	College preparatory class	One of the schools in our catchment area
'Dana'	16	Female	4	College preparatory class	One of the schools in our catchment area.

Table 4: Participants in the interviews



The table above shows the four participants in the interviews, and their fictional names which they will be referred by in this study. It was important for me to select participants who represented the width of the students at my school in terms of origin, gender, grade and study program, and this table shows this information. None of the participants were in the same study program.

### **3.3 Data collection**

In this study I have used four sources of data, and I will start by presenting the data collection in questionnaire 1, followed by questionnaire 2 and the interviews. Finally I will present the written material in the exam from May 2013; the preparation booklet and the exam tasks. I have followed all guidelines to appropriate collection of data<sup>21</sup>.

**Questionnaire 1:** A quantitative study of the chosen prompt on the exam in May 2013, using information from 91 students from five different upper secondary schools in our county who did the exam in May 2013.

In June 2013 I conducted a survey with the help of my colleagues in different upper secondary schools in my county. I am my school's representative in the county's English network, which is a group of one representative from every upper secondary school in the county. At the meeting in May 2013, I took the opportunity to ask my colleagues from the eight different schools represented at the meeting to have the classes who did the written exam fill in a form stating their gender, their study program and the task they had chosen<sup>22</sup>. I chose to use closed questions, as these give opportunities to generalize the results (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 259). I received data from five different upper secondary schools, where the information came from two vocational classes<sup>23</sup>, and four college preparatory classes<sup>24</sup>. The participants represented three different study programs, and consisted of 64 female and 27 male participants. Not all schools sent me information, as some schools did not have any classes selected for this particular exam, and some of the network representatives may not have passed the request for information to the teachers who did. Also, only eight of fourteen schools were represented at the meeting. From the 136 college preparatory candidates and the 77 vocational candidates at the exam in our county in May

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<sup>21</sup> Questionnaire 2 was an internet survey in it's learning, but according to head of support at it's learning, it is not possible to pair a student's response to an IP address when the IP address comes from an IP pool. Our county stores all time-limited IPs on a DHCP server, which makes it impossible to retrieve the particular student's IP at the time of the survey and pair it with the particular response. Hence there was no need to report this study to NSD.

<sup>22</sup> See appendix 7 for the survey form.

<sup>23</sup> Two different media and communication classes at two different schools.

<sup>24</sup> Two sports classes and two college preparatory classes from three different schools.

2013, 91 are represented in this study. Of these were 61 students from college preparatory classes and 30 from vocational classes; a total of 42.7% of the county's candidates at this exam.

The data gave me a chance to try to find correlation between gender/study program and choice of task. This form was sent to me either as a scanned document on email, or as a letter in the mail, and the data were entered into tables showing how the participants had chosen related to gender and study program. These participants had used the preparation booklet during the preparation day before the exam and were well acquainted with its content at the time of selection.

**Questionnaire 2:** A qualitative and quantitative digital survey with both open and closed questions, using information from 51 participants at my school eligible for the written exam in the spring of 2014.

To get as much information as possible, I asked all classes at my school who are eligible for this exam in the spring of 2014 to participate in questionnaire 2, through a consent form<sup>25</sup> handed out by their English teachers in January. The total number of the asked participants was 120, where 51, or 42.5%, participated in the study. There were 28 male and 23 female participants, where 9 were from college preparatory classes and 42 from vocational classes. Eight of the nine classes are represented in questionnaire 2, and the number of participants from the different study programs range from 4 to 11<sup>26</sup>. The seven vocational study programs which were invited were: Carpentry, Electrical studies, Healthcare, Child and youth work studies, Agricultural studies, the National study program and Horse studies. The study program which was not represented is Agricultural studies, which has two students at our school, hence there were participants from six of these seven vocational study programs. The two college preparatory classes were: General studies and Sport studies, both of which had participants in the study. This means that only 8 of 29 study programs which are eligible for this particular exam are represented in this study.

The digital study was conducted in weeks 5, 6 and 7 in 2014. The survey was a digital semi structured survey, which combined both open and closed questions (Johannessen et al. (2010) p. 261). The semi structured survey was chosen to get information in closed questions to be compared to the findings in questionnaire 1, and open questions to get explanations on the

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<sup>25</sup> See appendix 5 for full text of the consent form.

<sup>26</sup> The 8 study programs' exact representation is: 5, 4, 7, 7, 8, 11, 4, 5.

participants' selections. It was made accessible through it's learning, which is the digital platform our school uses. A course named 'undersøkelse' was created, where all the students who had handed in a signed consent form were given access. The participant was only allowed one attempt at answering the questionnaire, and it was not possible to access it again once the survey was completed. The English teachers were asked to conduct the survey in English class, and no further information beyond what was written in the survey was given to any of the classes. As I teach two of the classes in question myself, I asked the homeroom teachers to conduct the survey to eliminate the possibility of me giving these classes information which the other participants did not get.

The first three questions in the survey were closed questions, stating the participant's gender, study program and grade in English in the first term of the school year. Then all four writing prompts were listed, identical to the presentation in the exam booklet. When all four writing prompts were read, the participant scrolled down to the first of four open questions, where task A was repeated, and the participant had to fill in whether or not he/she would have chosen A, and why/why not. Then the same procedure was repeated for tasks B, C and D. The last question was closed, where the participant ticked off the prompt he/she would have chosen from the four<sup>27</sup>. By combining open questions where the participant could explain the selection, with a closed question identifying the preferred prompt, I was given information on the selected prompt, and I could read why this was seen as a more preferable task. At the same time, the open questions gave me information on why the other three prompts were not selected. This opened up for a categorization of the findings. By using a survey in it's learning, I was able to view and analyze the results in Excel, which eased the quantitative analysis of the data.

I chose not to use the preparation booklet with this survey. Firstly, as there are several appendices, the risk of the participant losing interest to the point where he/she may not complete the survey was too great, as motivation to participate was very fragile. Secondly, the exam booklet is made for the candidate to gather relevant information prior to writing, and also to make the candidate familiar with the topic as a basis for writing. In questionnaire 2, there was no writing, so there was no reason to prepare. Also, the theme of the exam: "roles and expectations" reoccurs in all four writing prompts, and is hence equally unknown in all four tasks. The survey clearly states that the participant does not need to read the preparation

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<sup>27</sup> For full text of questionnaire 2, see appendix 6.

booklet nor the appendices to answer the survey. That way all participants in questionnaire 2 were equally uninformed about the contents of the booklet. The digital survey was made inactive on Friday February 14<sup>th</sup>, and an analysis could be commenced.

As we are a rural school with a great portion of our students living away from home, several of the asked participants were unable to get their parents to sign the consent form due to distance. Hence, quite a few of the asked participants did not take part in the digital survey. Another group of students did not want to participate, as they expressed that they were 'sick of surveys'. In addition, one of the English teachers did not find time to do the survey in class, so even though consent forms were handed in, the survey was not taken by as many participants in college preparatory classes as the consent forms implied. In retrospect, the survey may have had more participants if I had talked personally to each class explaining what the study investigated instead of giving that job to the English teachers. The lateness of this survey was because I had to wait until after the second term had started for the participant to state the grade he/she had received in the first term. I also wanted the participants to have learned as much of the curriculum as possible before the survey, as this would make a more realistic selection. Some vocational classes had work placement in late January/early February, so the survey was conducted in weeks 5, 6 and 7, depending on when the different vocational classes were at school.

**Interviews:** Qualitative interviews with 4 students selected from the invited participants in questionnaire 2.

A qualitative interview is useful when one needs to give the participants greater freedom to express themselves than what a questionnaire will (Johannessen et. al., 2010, p. 136), and the interviews gave me ample opportunity to follow up on the participants' explanations. The pilot I conducted in March 2013 showed that explaining the reasons for one's choice is a complex matter and that the participant needs help to dig deep enough to find the real reasons. This is why I chose to use semi structured interviews, which were conducted in March 2014, where one interview was conducted per day over a two week period. I did not decide on beforehand how many participants I wanted to talk to, but rather looked at the information from the previous data to decide whether I was receiving new information or not. In the end, I chose to use 4 students, two male and two female, who represented four study programs and four grades in the first term. In my pilot study, I chose participants who I had been advised to talk to due to their ability to talk about complex matters, and that turned out to be high

achievers. This may have influenced my findings, I feared, so I selected students with four different grades to ensure that participants with several levels of competence were represented. I chose to ask students who had been invited, but not participated in questionnaire 2 to ensure that the tasks were indeed unknown to the participant before a selection was made, and I chose participants who I have never taught. I also chose to ask one participant from the study program which was not represented in questionnaire 2. These participants were asked to participate by me personally, one at a time. I explained how the interview would be conducted and guaranteed their anonymity, before giving them a parent consent form<sup>28</sup> to be signed by their parents prior to the interview. They could at any time choose not to participate in the interview.

I chose to conduct one interview per day to be able to transcribe the interview and note all my observations before another was conducted. They were conducted using an interview guide<sup>29</sup> where the topics of the interview were noted, and it was written after the first analysis of the digital survey. The day before the interview, the participant was given the preparation booklet to prepare for the interview and to make the selection situation as similar to a real exam situation as possible. The pilot study showed that when the participant was given all four prompts on the same piece of paper, he/she was curious about the other prompts and wanted to get to the next one as soon as possible. To avoid this, the participant was shown one prompt at a time on separate pieces of paper, and he/she completed giving reasons for each prompt before a new was presented. The pilot also showed that the two first prompts which the participant was asked to talk about had far less comments than the last two. This may be due to nerves and an unknown situation, so therefore the first two participants were given the prompts in the correct order A-D, while the last two were given the prompts in reversed order D-A. This gave all prompts the same amount of data.

The interviews were recorded digitally, using both a digital recorder and a back-up recorder to guarantee that I would have one functioning recording if the other one failed. The transcriptions were made using head phones. The participants all spoke dialect, but the transcriptions were made in bokmål. However, there were a few dialect words which have a different meaning in bokmål, or are not translatable, and these were left transcribed in the dialect word in inverted commas. Transcribed interviews are an interpretation of the interview, but in the transcription I tried to note down laughter, interruptions and periods of

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<sup>28</sup> See appendix 9 for parent consent form for the interviews

<sup>29</sup> See appendix 10 for full text of the interview guide.

thought. The transcription is both based on what I observed during the interviews and on what the recording had captured, all to keep as much information as possible. All interviews were transcribed within 24 hours after completion. After transcription was completed, the interview was listened to again to avoid misinterpretations and to correct possible mistakes. Listening to the interviews more than once also gave me a better insight into the argumentation used, and categories emerged in the process of listening to the recordings. I used headlines in the transcription stating when the participant talked about task A, B, C and D. This was to make it easier to compare what the different participants said about the different prompts in an analysis. At the end of the interviews I asked the participants whether there was something else they would like to say about writing prompts, and this part was given the headline 'further information'. I never used any of the participants' names in the recordings, and all recordings were deleted after transcription was completed.

**Written material:** Part 2 of the written exam *ENG1002/1003 engelsk fellesfag* from May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2013 and its preparation booklet.

For this study, I chose to use the second part of the written exam of May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2013, issued by the Directorate of Education and Training as a basis for my research. I may well have used the very last edition, the November 2013 exam, to make sure it was issued after the last revision of the competence aims in the subject curriculum, but I chose not to. This decision was made after close consideration, and two major factors came into play. Firstly, after doing research on the changes in the curriculum, I concluded that the writing prompts in the written exam would not change due to the 2013 revision of the competence aims. Secondly, choosing the May edition of the exam allowed me to use questionnaire 1 to find out what prompts the candidates in my county in fact had selected on the exam that my study would investigate. This gave me invaluable information on what the candidates in fact had chosen, rather than what they imagine that they would choose. That way I had de facto information from questionnaire 1 on what some candidates had chosen, I could get information on what candidates think they would choose through questionnaire 2, and through the interviews I would obtain further information on why they chose the way they did.

The written material includes the preparation booklet and the exam tasks from the exam in May 2013, which will be presented next.

## Preparation Booklet

The preparation booklet is given to the candidate on the morning of the day before the exam, and the candidate may use any support materials he/she deems fit during the preparation. The topic for the preparation period and the writing prompts in part 2 is ‘Roles and Expectations’ (UDIR, 2013 d, p. 4). Page four of the booklet contains additional information about roles and expectations, plus a preparation strategy for the student. There are four key questions listed, which the candidate is to consider during the preparation:

- what kind of roles do you play during a day?
- how first impressions of people and places are not always correct
- how people are expected to behave in different ways in different situations
- typical stereotypes of English-speaking countries (UDIR, 2013 d, p. 4)

Appendix 1 is a three paragraph text called *Sara’s Story*, which is a narrative by a Vietnamese immigrant in Canada. Sara describes how she feels Canadian, but her parents want her to be less Canadian. However, when she visited Vietnam, she felt like a stranger there, even though she speaks Vietnamese. At the workplace in Canada her colleagues treat her like an immigrant, but she feels that this has made her more extroverted (UDIR, 2013 d, p 5).

Appendix 2 is called *Jasmine’s Story*, which is a narrative by a second generation Indian in the UK who is an Overseas Citizen of India. This gives her a lifelong visa for India, and the opportunity to work there. She gets a job in Mumbai and realizes that her Hindi was not as good as she thought. Still she wants to explore her roots, and living in a mega-city has forced her to stand on her own two feet (UDIR, 2013 d, p. 6).

Appendix 3 is called *Chat Room Entries*, which is a collection of four different chat room comments on how appearances can be deceptive. ‘John’ describes in the first entry a scene on a bus where an old lady has to stand. A scruffy, tattooed man asks a young well-dressed man if he can give up his seat for the lady, but the reply is anything but polite. ‘Sarah’ in entry two, works in the prison service and explains that one of the most violent rapists she had to deal with was charming and angel-like. ‘Dee’, in entry three, tells how she witnessed a woman in hijab telling off her husband in the park, and ‘Maggie’ in entry four, tells how Queen Elizabeth II had a sense of humor after all, as she was picked up by James Bond during the opening of the Olympic Games (UDIR, 2013 d, p. 7).

Appendix 4 is called *Mina's Story* and is an excerpt from the novel *American Dervish* by Ayan Akhtar. This excerpt tells how the divorced Pakistani woman Mina comes to live with friends in the US. She wants to become a beauty salon professional, loses all her traditional Pakistani looks and becomes beautiful in the western sense of the word. The protagonist in the story tells how his mom admired Mina, but did not change her Indian style. She was happy to live through Mina (UDIR, 2013 d, p. 8-9).

Appendix 5 is a cartoon which humorously presents some British stereotypes (UDIR, 2013 d, p. 10).

The first three appendices are written by The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, while the fourth and fifth are original material. To sum up, there are three fictional texts written as narratives in appendices 1, 2 and 4. Appendix 3 is a collection of chat room entries and number 5 is a cartoon, hence there are no factual texts in the booklet.

### **The exam tasks<sup>30</sup>**

Task 2 long answer in the exam booklet, starts by stating that the following tasks are based on the preparation topic 'Roles and Expectations'.

The prompt in 2A asks for an *explanation* and a *discussion* as the candidate is asked to write about the challenges of starting in a new workplace. This task is probably designed especially for the vocational students, as one of the four writing prompts in part 2 of the exam is designated for that segment of the candidates (Hellekjær, 2011, p.44).

In task 2B the prompt asks for a *presentation/comparison/reflection* of changes a literary character has undergone. As the candidate is to write about a character in a novel or a film, it also includes *literary description*, which is a fictional text, hence this prompt gives mixed genre instructions.

Task 2C asks for a fictional text in the form of a *short story* about how looks may be deceiving. In the points listed it states that the text must include conflicts based on social norms and values.

Task 2D asks for an *explanation/discussion/reflection* of adapting to a new role or situation, using one of the appendices as a point of departure. This prompt gives mixed genre instructions as it lists different writing acts as requirements.

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<sup>30</sup> The exam tasks can be read in full in appendix 3.



The exam information states that the list of instructions which follow each prompt is to be seen as part of the writing prompt and are to be regarded as minimum requirements (UDIR, 2013 c, p. 5). The candidate is free to add more points and to restructure the text<sup>31</sup>, and in these prompts there are 4-6 different requirements following each task. To give an example from the exam writing prompts from May 2013, this is task 2C:

The expression “you can’t judge a book by its cover” is used in your Preparation Booklet (Appendix 3, first text). Based on this expression, write a short story called “Lovely cover, lousy book”.

Your short story must:

- be clearly set in an English-speaking country
- involve conflicting roles and/or expectations based on social norms and values
- include some dialogue
- have a surprising and/or humorous ending

Use the title: “Lovely cover, lousy book” (UDIR, 2013 b)

This shows how all this text is part of the writing prompt, not just the first three lines. The requirements shown as bullet points are also to be understood as a part of the writing prompt.

### **3.4 Methods used**

When analyzing the data in this study I have used the constant comparative method and the mixed model or triangulation which will be presented next in this chapter.

#### **3.4.1 The Constant Comparative method**

The scientific model of analysis which I have used is the *Constant Comparative Method*. Comparison, according to Boeije (2002, p. 391), is the dominant principle of the analysis process of qualitative research. He claims that all kinds of aids, memos, close reading, coding, data matrices, texts and diagrams support the principle of comparison. This means that even though my research mixes qualitative and quantitative surveys, they can be compared when using the constant comparative method. Tech (cited in Boeije, 2002, p. 393) claims that in comparison “the goal is to discern conceptual similarities, to refine the discriminative power of categories, and to discover patterns”.

In the method of Constant Comparison (CCM), one must compare each piece of data with every other piece of relevant data (Morse and Field, cited in Boeije, 2002, p. 393). In the case

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<sup>31</sup> The full text on how task 2 is to be assessed can be read in appendix 4.

of this study, all data from both surveys and the interview needed to be compared. Glaser and Strauss described the CCM as following four distinct stages:

1. comparing incidents applicable to each category,
2. integrating categories and their properties,
3. delimiting the theory, and
4. writing the theory (cited in Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg & Coleman, 2000).

This means that the basis for the organization and conceptualization of data will be the categories. These categories are created when a researcher groups clusters of data through identifying, coding and analyzing the content of the material (Dye et. Al., 2000). Patton (cited in Dye et. Al., 2000). posits that one should use *inductive analysis*, which means “that the patterns, themes and categories of analysis emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis” Lincoln and Guba (cited in Dye et. al., 2000) claim that the process of constant comparison may lead to both descriptive and explanatory categories, but as I have been looking for what factors guide students’ choice of prompts, only *explanatory categories* have been used in the qualitative analysis of this study. When a particular category is adopted, a comparison is already implied.

When comparing, the principle is to group like with like. When the bits of information are separated into piles, representing different categories, each bit is compared to the others within the same pile. This leads to sub-piles, which in turn are compared internally, and categories and properties are integrated into the analysis. Eventually one arrives at theories regarding the different categories based on the comparisons in the piles.

Dye et al. (2000) recommend that the researcher continually attempts to define and redefine categories by “specifying and changing the criteria used for assigning them to the data”. Dey (cited in Dye et al., 2000) puts forward that we have to be “attentive and tentative – attentive to the data, and tentative in our conceptualizations of them”. This shows how comparisons are constant and need an ever ongoing analysis of the different findings.

This study also utilized triangulation of data when analyzing the material through the constant comparative method, and this will be presented next.

### **3.4.2 Mixed Model or Triangulation**

In this study, I have chosen to use a mixed model. *Mixed model* is where methods in all stages of the study are mixed, including questions, methods, documents and analysis (Truscott,

Swars, Smith, Thornton-Reid, Zhao, Dooley, Williams, Hart and Matthews, 2009, p. 2). This method is also known as a *triangulation* (Mathison, 1988, p. 13). The term ‘triangulation’ comes from navigation and military strategy that use multiple reference points to find an object’s exact location (Smith, cited in Jick, 1979, p. 602). The idea is that multiple viewpoints allow for a greater accuracy, and in all triangulation there is a basic assumption that weakness in a single method is compensated by the strengths of another (Jick, 1979, p. 604). In other words; that different methods do not share the same weaknesses and strengths, but the combination of methods even out the differences and the possibilities of bias. Jick (1979, p. 603) puts forward that triangulation can capture a more complete and holistic portrayal of the phenomenon one studies. He also claims that “the use of multiple measures may (...) uncover some unique variance which otherwise may have been neglected by single methods” (1979, p. 603). This view is what made me choose triangulation for this study of students’ writing prompt selection.

Denzin (cited in Mathison, 1988, p. 13-14) posits that there are four types of triangulation; 1) investigator triangulation, 2) theory triangulation, 3) data triangulation, and 4) methodological triangulation, and *data triangulation*, which is using several data sources, falls within the scope of this study. The first set of data was a survey of candidates who did the exam in May 2013, the second was a digital survey of the students eligible for the 2014 exam, the third was interviews with four students who are eligible for the 2014 exam, and the fourth is the exam prompts and the information booklet. Alas, there are four different sources of data in this study.

According to Mathison (1988, p. 15) there are three possible outcomes of a triangulation strategy; 1) Convergence, 2) Inconsistency, 3) Contradiction. It is most commonly accepted that *convergence* is the wanted outcome of this strategy, as this shows how data from different sources, or collected through different methods, agree. However, Mathison argues that inconsistency and contradictory results are equally important. *Inconsistency* may give the researcher new information which in turn makes it necessary to reinvestigate the earlier findings. This may lead to more precise conclusions. *Contradiction* is when the findings in a second or third method give opposing views of the phenomena being studied. This also gives a deeper understanding of the phenomena, as the results may not be as black and white as one presumed, and the theory may need to be modified. Mathison argues that triangulation is about more than confirming findings from different sources:

The value of triangulation is not a technological solution to a data collection and analysis problem, it is a technique which provides more and better evidence from which researchers can *construct meaningful propositions* about the social world. The value of triangulation lies in providing evidence such that the researcher can construct explanations of the social phenomena from which they arise (1988, p. 15).

So, when I started analyzing the data from different sources, collected through different methods, I did not only look for convergence, but I was also alert towards inconsistencies and contradictions in the data collected, as I wanted to construct meaningful propositions about what factors affect students' selection of prompts.

Burke Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004, p. 21) state that "mixed research involves a cyclical, recursive and interactional process", meaning that one has to take a step back every so often to be able to see the holistic picture in the data. The three data collections happened over a 9 month period of time, starting with questionnaire 1 of the chosen prompt in June 2013. Questionnaire 2, a survey with both quantitative and qualitative questions was conducted in February 2014, 8 months later. And the interviews were performed in March 2014. The time range of these three data collections gave me ample time to analyze and reevaluate the theories. All the three data collections in this study have equal status and are valued as equally important. While I collected new information, I went back and looked at the data previously collected to find convergence, inconsistency and contradictions to develop, and rephrase theories, using the constant comparative method.

So far I have introduced the participants, collection of data and the method, and now it is time to look at how the data were analyzed when finding what factors affect students' selection of prompts.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

The two questionnaires had quantitative data which were analyzed quantitatively, while the qualitative data from questionnaire 2 and the interviews were analyzed qualitatively. All findings were compared through the analysis and I will present the quantitative analysis first.

#### **3.5.1 Quantitative analysis**

All the quantitative data were collected and the information analyzed through the use of tables. The data from the different classes in questionnaire 1 were assembled in one table per class showing the gender and the selected prompt on the exam in Excel. That gave me six

different tables<sup>32</sup>. Next, the data from the college preparatory classes and the vocational classes were entered into separate tables showing gender and selected prompts. Finally data were converted into pie charts showing the chosen prompt to give a total overview of which were the preferred tasks among all participants.

The results from questionnaire 2, stating gender, study program, grade and selected task were analyzed using the same procedure. To ensure accuracy, the procedure was done twice and the two results compared. Then findings from questionnaire 2 were compared to the findings from questionnaire 1 to look for convergence, inconsistencies or contradictions. The results will be presented in the findings in chapter 4.

### **3.5.2 Qualitative analysis**

From the results in questionnaire 2 the participants' answers to the open questions were printed out on paper, and glued together to make a big table of all the 51 participants' responses. It showed each participant's answers to all 8 questions, and this table was put up on the wall of my study. The participants were numbered 1 to 51<sup>33</sup>. The participants' explanation for the selected prompt was marked green in the table.

From this table I was able to compare different participants' arguments for choosing the same prompt, to look for convergence, inconsistencies and contradictions. The table also made me able to see how the participant argues for and against the different prompts and see if the reasons for selecting one prompt over the others is argued differently. The different lines of argument for each participant could through the table be compared, to look for categories of reasons for the choice, and to see how many and which categories each participant used. This is how I found the first four categories which had the most arguments.

The categories which emerged from the analysis in the qualitative data were:

- Motivation
- Comprehension
- Genre and topic
- The expected outcome

After closely examining the table, all arguments were cut out from a second copy of the participants' responses and gathered in two piles: 1. the arguments used about the selected prompts, 2. the arguments used about the prompts that were not selected. From these piles a

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<sup>32</sup> To see the how the candidates in questionnaire 1 selected, See appendix 8

<sup>33</sup>When presenting these participants' arguments I will refer to the participants in questionnaire 2 as No. X, X being the number of each participant.

new category was chosen: arguments which did not give reasons. Some of the answers were in the form of “ja”, or “usikker”, and these answers were put in separate piles as they gave no obvious explanation of the selections made. Several of the arguments were related to different levels of difficulty, such as “denne er for vanskelig for meg”, or “dette er den letteste”. These arguments were also discarded as they gave no explanation of where the difficulty lay. It is important to remember that level of difficulty was commented on, but some were not specific enough to pinpoint what the difficulty was, hence these were not included in the categories.

Due to the fact that the respondents were given four different writing prompts to choose from, but only selected one, questionnaire 2 collected a larger amount of comments for not choosing prompts than comments for selecting one. Most participants gave reasons for all four tasks, while others gave none, and yet others only gave reasons regarding the one they chose. So when the arguments that gave no reasons were removed, I had 40 answers to why a prompt was selected, and 85 answers to why a prompt was discarded. The categories were found through counting the number of arguments, selecting the most frequent lines of arguments to create the sub-categories. Through the analysis, 15 sub-categories were discovered:

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Sub-categories</b>
<b>Motivation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivation to write</li> <li>• Motivation towards the topic</li> <li>• Degree of interest</li> <li>• Motivation for ideas</li> </ul>
<b>Comprehension</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult words</li> <li>• Clarity of the prompt</li> <li>• Amount of criteria</li> <li>• Phrasing</li> <li>• Specifications in the added information</li> </ul>
<b>Genre and topic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic</li> <li>• Ability to relate to the task’s topic</li> <li>• Genre</li> </ul>
<b>The expected outcome</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expectations towards the writing process</li> <li>• Expectations towards the quality of the produced text</li> <li>• Expectations towards the amount of produced text</li> </ul>

Table 5: Categories and sub-categories in the analysis

The table above shows the categories and sub-categories that were found during the analysis, with the categories to the left and each category’s sub-category to the right. These sub-categories were found using four printed sets of responses to the digital survey. Responses according to these four categories were highlighted, one category per printed material, and this gave me an opportunity to compare the factors for selection and to see which occurred more frequently. Some categories had more factors than others, and the analysis focused on

the quality of the arguments. Some respondents had arguments which covered more than one category, so this was also taken into consideration during the analysis.

Quotations from the participants' responses, plus the participants' numbers and which task they commented on were added to each sub-category, and comparisons were made of the respondents, of the arguments and between the sub-categories. When comparing the different arguments in the sub-categories, and participants making them, a list was made of the different participants with the most descriptive arguments, and how many sub-categories they occurred in. I found that 33 of the 51 participants were quoted in the sub-categories. Of these 33, 8 reoccurred more than twice, and these participants' responses were investigated further to find reasons for the reoccurrence.

From the list of 71 descriptive quotations in the different sub-categories, contradictions were noted, and investigated in terms of respondents' gender, study program and grade.

## **Interviews**

The four interviews were printed in hard copies, and in total, I had 75 minutes, and 22 pages of interviews when the transcriptions were completed. The information of which prompt each of the four participants selected were compared to the findings in the two questionnaires and then added to the total data overview in this study.

The four interviews were summarized to get the full picture of each participant's arguments. Then the printed interviews were collected in five piles: one for each of the four tasks and a fifth pile for further information. The different arguments for each prompt were analyzed in terms of convergence, inconsistencies and contradictions. All these observations were analyzed using the categories and sub-categories previously described. This also opened up for a thorough revision of the 15 sub-categories and if more categories and sub-categories needed to be added. I found that the list was complete.

## **3.6 Considerations regarding the study**

When conducting a study, there are some considerations one must bear in mind, and I will first in this chapter discuss considerations regarding research in one's own workplace before discussing this study's validity and reliability.

### **3.6.1 Doing research in one's own workplace**

I have chosen to conduct the two last surveys in my study in my own workplace, where I have worked since 2006, and there are both pros and cons to this choice. The second survey was

digital, and this created enough distance between me as a researcher and the participants, but for the third, the interviews, the question of pros and cons was more relevant.

It may be difficult for me as a researcher to achieve distance to what is researched (Nyeng & Wennes, 2006, p. 245), both because English is my subject, and because the participants are students at my school. Having both questionnaire 2 and the interviews conducted during work hours, the risk of being too close to what is studied increases. In the interviews there may also be a risk of not asking questions which are a matter of course to both the researcher and the participant, and this may influence the results (Thagaard, 2010). One cannot use data which are not on paper, and a mutual, but mute understanding is not applicable in a research setting.

Another challenge may be the fact that the participants know me, as our school is fairly small. This may give me the status of a teacher and not a researcher in the eyes of the participant, and this may affect the participant's response (Nyeng et al., 2006). He or she may answer what they think the teacher wants to hear, and not what the researcher wants to hear. However, I only used participants whom I have never taught, so they may have perceived me as a researcher more than a teacher.

There are also pros to doing research in one's own workplace. The closeness I, as a researcher, have to my subject and the students, may spur a bigger commitment and curiosity towards the research question on both my and the participants' part. In addition, the fact that the participants know me from before may make it easier for them to talk to me, and make the situation of the interview less strained. When selecting participants for the interview I also had the benefit of knowing of them, or easily getting information about them before the selection. Therefore I was able to find participants from the whole student population, and to organize the interviews to the smallest possible disadvantage for the participants, which made it easier for the students to participate in the interviews.

I have been aware of the advantages and disadvantages of doing research in my own workplace during the interviews, and have tried to take into consideration the closeness I have to the students and what is studied. Having said that, the aim was to make the participants in the interview explain their selection of writing prompts, which is a fairly 'safe' topic. There were no questions in the interview where the participant would need to expose intimate, personal or controversial information, and this makes me convinced that the participants gave me their honest opinions to me as a researcher.



### **3.6.2 This study's validity and reliability**

Validity is related to how credible or relevant data are in a research perspective (Johannessen et. al., 2010, p. 357). There are two types of validity which fall within the scope of this study; statistic validity and outer validity. *Statistic validity* regards whether a generalization from participants to population is possible (Johannessen et. al., 2010, p. 357) and there are three different groups of participants in this study. None of these surveys included all possible participants. In questionnaire 1, only five of fourteen schools responded to my request, and there was no information with the forms stating whether all students were present at the time of the survey. According to Fylkesmannen (personal communication, February 28<sup>th</sup> 2014), 213 students; 136 college preparatory candidates and 77 vocational candidates have registered grades in PAS<sup>34</sup> from the exam of May 2013. This means that 91 of 213, or 42.7% of the candidates in our county are represented in questionnaire 1. However, the schools southernmost and northernmost in the county in addition to three schools in the middle are represented, so one may argue that geographically most of the county is represented.

In questionnaire 2 I knew there would be several students who did not want to participate as there have been several different surveys going on in the school during the past year, and some students have expressed animosity towards surveys. Therefore I chose to invite all 120 students in hope that some of them would want to participate. 42.5 % did. There were a majority of vocational students in the study, and as there were only 9 from college preparatory classes, I cannot make conclusions on what college preparatory classes would choose based solely on the results from questionnaire 2. But the material for the vocational classes is substantial, and assumptions may be made on their selection. If the 51 participants are to be analyzed not on study program, but on gender and grade achieved in the first term, there is enough substantial data for the survey to be valid.

The participants in questionnaire 2 did not read the exam booklet before selecting, and this could have affected their selection. However, their selection and arguments for the selection concur with the findings in questionnaire 1 and in the interviews, so as the booklet's content was equally unknown in all four prompts, it seems their selection would not have changed if they had read the booklet before the survey.

The participants in the interviews were hand-picked based on their study program and on their grade in English. Four participants' selection cannot generalize how students would choose,

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<sup>34</sup> PAS is the digital platform for exam results in Norwegian upper secondary schools.

but rather comment on what arguments they have regarding the choice, and this information was added to the data in the open questions in questionnaire 2. This increases the validity of the findings, as there are three separate surveys investigating the same topic, and the information was analyzed in terms of convergence, inconsistencies and contradictions between the three and within all categories.

To sum up, even though not all study programs in Norwegian schools are represented, one may conclude that this study's findings on students' selection of prompts are statistically valid based on the fact that the three surveys' findings were compared, and that five schools and 9 study programs are represented; a total of 146<sup>35</sup> participants.

*Outer validity* relates to whether the findings in a study are transferrable in time and space (Johannessen et. al., 2010, p. 357). In other words, are the findings in my county and at my school transferrable to all upper secondary school students in Norway eligible for this exam? As this study involves 146 participants from 5 different schools, one may argue that they are. All these students have been taught the same subject curriculum as the rest of the country, and they have a common exam. There are tendencies which can be found on both county and school level regarding how students choose, and as there are respondents from 8 different study programs in the digital study, and the students represent all grades from 1 to 6, one may argue that most students are represented when arguing for the selection of writing prompts. The arguments for how they choose are only tied to the writing prompts in the exam from May 2013, and it is possible that the participants may argue differently when confronted with prompts that differ greatly from the ones used in this study. Therefore one can only conclude on the students' selection of these particular writing prompts from the exam in May 2013. One may argue that the selection of the prompts in this study are tied to the competence goals which were active from 2010, and that further adjustments in the subject curriculum may affect the students' selection in the future. Therefore, the outer validity of this study is higher in terms of space than time.

*Reliability* is connected to whether the data in a study are accurate and reliable (Johannessen et. al., 2010, p. 40). Johannessen et. al. (2010, p. 229) argue that reliability does not apply in qualitative research, but as this study also includes quantitative data from questionnaires 1 and 2, reliability needs to be discussed.

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<sup>35</sup> 91 + 51 + 4

Before conducting questionnaire 1, I was in touch with the Directorate of Education and Training asking for information on what prompts the candidates for the May 2013 exam had selected. I was informed that there were no data on this. Therefore one cannot check whether the participants in questionnaire 1 in fact gave reliable information. However, when comparing the findings in questionnaires 1 and 2, certain common tendencies appeared which suggest that the participants in questionnaire 1 had in fact been truthful about their choices. In the digital survey, five participants have not commented any of the prompts, and may therefore have ticked off the boxes randomly. However, 46 have given some sort of explanation, and the explanations correspond with the selected prompt. Therefore one can assume that there was careful consideration behind 46 of 51 of the responses, and the data from questionnaire 2 are hence reliable.

I have presented the theory and the methods in this study, and now I would like to present this study's findings.

#### 4. Findings

In this chapter, I will present the findings of upper secondary school students' selection of writing prompts based on the exam tasks from May 2013. This study found that there are four major factors which affect students' selection of prompts, where several details constitute each category as seen in the table below.

<b>Motivation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The candidate must be motivated for the writing process</li> <li>• The candidate must be motivated to demonstrate skills</li> <li>• The task design must motivate and give inspiration</li> </ul>
<b>Comprehension</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The prompt must be decodable</li> <li>• The prompt instructions must be clear</li> <li>• The prompts' list of requirements must describe exactly what is expected</li> <li>• The list of requirements helps the weaker learner but limits the stronger</li> </ul>
<b>Genre and topic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The topic must be interesting</li> <li>• The genre and writing acts must be familiar</li> <li>• The candidate relies on previous experiences with the different genres and writing acts</li> </ul>
<b>The expected outcome</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The prompt must evoke previous positive experiences</li> <li>• The prompt must give longer texts of higher quality</li> <li>• Stronger students will select prompts which give the best grade</li> </ul>

Table 6: Factors that selection is based on

The table above shows the factors of students' selection on the left with the details in each factor to the right, and these findings together with how the students selected will be presented in this chapter. During the analysis of the categories, five general findings appeared

which do not sort under any of the four categories. These will be presented first as they give a basis for understanding the students' selections. Finally in the general findings I will present how 146 participants selected.

#### **4.1 General findings**

##### **Highly competent students consider more factors when selecting a prompt compared to low achievers**

I found that some students gave just a few and others gave several reasons for their selection of prompts. During the analysis of the participants' responses, I noticed that eight respondents reoccurred more frequently than others, who had the grades of 4 or 5. I investigated their responses and most often there were several factors connected to one prompt. This showed inconsistency as they do not have one reason for all four prompts, but rather combine different factors for different prompts. Several combinations were found in most of these eight respondents' arguments, suggesting that there is not one factor per respondent, but rather different factors for different prompts, which vary from student to student. Like No. 40, a girl in a vocational class, reoccurs nine times in the different sub-categories. My findings indicate that during the selection, the tasks have been considered on several of the 4 categories and the 15 sub-categories, which in turn has resulted in one or several factors that form the basis for selecting or not selecting a prompt.

Participant No. 44 only uses one type of argumentation; motivation. The tasks are rated as 'interesting', 'fun' or 'boring'. This participant has the grade of 2. Participant No. 51 with the grade of 1, and participant No. 17 who has the grade of 2, both use one type of argumentation; how difficult they feel the tasks are. This suggests that there are fewer factors that affect the choices of the students with a lower competence in English, and may suggest that weaker English learners have fewer strategies when selecting a prompt. Dysthe et. al. (2010, p. 18) list three basic prerequisites for producing a good text, and one is knowledge about the writing process and about strategies one can use in different stages of the process. When a prompt is evaluated on just one factor, knowledge of the strategies may be limited, and this limitation prevents the candidate to investigate a prompt further after concluding on the one factor he/she prefers. To conclude, the number of factors which affect selection varies greatly with each candidate and their skills in L2, and students with a high competence base their selection of prompt on more factors than students with a lower competence.

### **Different prompts give a variety of individual main factors for selection.**

It was difficult to find one main reason that affected students' selection of writing prompts. Both 'Brenda' and 'Dana' had two different prompts which they liked at the end of the interviews, but when a final decision was made, their argument was the genre. They both selected task C, and argued that they preferred short stories. This shows that genre was the most important factor in their selection. However, both tasks A and task D asked for a discussion, yet A was the most preferred prompt while D was the least preferred prompt of the four, hence the writing acts were of less importance than other factors. Consequently, my research indicates that different prompts give a variety of individual main reasons for selection, and that all 4 factors and 15 subcategories come into play when selecting different prompts. Hence this study was unable to rate the factors according to importance and the factors are in this study presented in random order.

### **The candidate gives fewer arguments for not selecting a prompt**

This study also found that there were far more arguments for selecting a prompt than for not selecting one. This may be because the participant was not able to decode the prompt that was not selected and discarded it once he/she realized that the prompt was not sufficiently understood. It may also be that the candidate rejected a prompt immediately, just arguing for the most important factor to him/her at that point, and hurried along to try to find a prompt that may be more suitable. This is supported by 'Chris'' statement that as soon as he has finished reading a prompt, it is easy for him to know whether he wants to answer that prompt or not. 'Adam' is in the interview rather uninterested in the rest of the prompts after he found task C, the short story, saying about his selection: "Det er rett og slett at hvis jeg kunne valgt denne her (C) i stedet for, så hadde denne her (A)...det ville bare blitt stress". This was confirmed by No. 45 when she explains why she would not select task D: "Nei, for jeg har funnet en jeg vil skrive om. Derfor<sup>36</sup>". She selected task A. This indicates that when a prompt is selected, the candidate will not spend a lot of time considering the other prompts. In other words, this study found that once a selection is made, the rest of the prompts are uninteresting to the candidate and that the candidate uses fewer arguments for not choosing a task.

### **The factors that affect selection of prompts in English are subject specific**

The interviews showed that the factors that affected selections made in this study only apply to the subject of English. After the participants in the interviews had selected their most

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<sup>36</sup> I have not corrected any of the participants' responses in questionnaire 2.

avored prompt, I asked them if they would have chosen the same prompt if the prompts had been in the subject of Norwegian. Both ‘Brenda’ and ‘Dana’ said that they would have chosen differently. This suggests that selecting a prompt in a second language asks for different factors than if the selection is made in the candidate’s mother tongue. This may be due to the student’s perception of the task in terms of language, as Kroll & Reid (cited in Souza, 2012, p. 35) state when they posit that the writing situation is important in task development.

### **Most candidates will select a prompt even if nothing in the prompts is appealing**

I also found that there is some extrinsic motivation among the participants when selecting a prompt. As No. 29, a boy in a vocational class expresses about task A: “Jeg hadde valgt denne her fordi den virka som den letteste. Ingen av oppgavene hadde gitt meg noe motivasjon til å skrive noe som helst... (...)”. He does not comment upon any of the other tasks in the survey. This shows how Vallerand et al.’s theory of extrinsic motivation of introjected regulation applies (1992, p. 1006). This is when a learner completes a task because it is expected. This view is expressed by No. 29 as he selects one, but at the same time says that he has no motivation to write any of the tasks. No. 46, states about task A: “Kanskje hadde blitt vanskelig å fått alle punktene i teksten. Men jeg hadde prøvd hvis vi skulle hatt i oppgave å skrive denne teksten”. She shows that she would try, even though the prompt is not appealing. One may conclude that most candidates will try to find a prompt to write on an exam, due to extrinsic motivation, even if they have to select one that does not give them the opportunity to show English to the best of their ability. The findings in this study indicate that the exam prompts seldom appeal and motivate the candidate, and this affects their selection and results.

### **The results of 146 participants’ selection**

The pie chart below shows the selection of writing prompts by 146 participants based on the four prompts in the exam from May 2013:

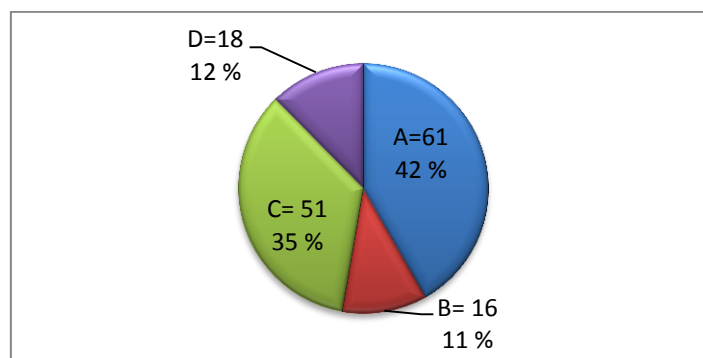


Figure 4: Students’ selection of writing prompts on the 2013 exam in English

The pie chart above shows how task A, the explanation/discussion of fitting into a new workplace, was preferred by 42% of the participants. Task C, the short story about first impressions, was preferred by 35%, but task B, where the candidate was asked to present, compare and reflect on different characters, and D, the explanation, discussion and reflection of adapting to a new role or situation, were least preferred. One may wonder whether the two tasks with mixed genre instructions, tasks B and D, were designed in such a way that very few candidates would see the possibility of writing a text to the best of their ability, and that most students in practice had two choices, A or C. If that is the case, what factors made A and C acceptable and B and D not?

I have now given the general findings, and will turn to the findings in the four categories.

## **4.2. Findings related to motivation**

This study shows that motivation is an important factor when students are selecting a prompt, which confirms Vallerand et al's claim (1992, p. 10004). My findings show that for a prompt to be selected the candidate must be 1) motivated for the writing process, 2) motivated to demonstrate skills. In addition, 3) the task design must motivate and give the candidate inspiration. I will also show how task A was preferred by 4) the weaker students and by 5) boys.

### **1. The candidate must be motivated for the writing process**

'Dana' states that writing must feel good. She says that when she writes short stories, she often has a good feeling, in particular if she is pleased with the story. She says that it is exciting to see what the characters she has created will do, and speaks enthusiastically about how they sometimes surprise her. This shows how she is excited about writing stories, and that when she writes, she is motivated by the text she herself produces. Here she expresses intrinsic motivation toward accomplishments as she explains that she wants satisfaction in the writing, as Vallerand et al. describe (1992, p. 10005). 'Brenda' also talks about how she feels that writing is fun<sup>37</sup> when she can make up a story of her own, and that it is easier to write when it is fun, as it increases her motivation. This proves that the candidate is able to imagine the writing process when reading a prompt, and imagines how the writing process will motivate, which in turn affects the student's selection of prompts.

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<sup>37</sup> The dialect word used by 'Brenda' and 'Chris' was «artig» this means positive and enjoyable, but I have chosen to translate it to "fun". Where the term "fun" is used, the original word was "artig".

'Chris', who is a low achiever (grade 2), says that he usually does not select prompts that will take too much time, because he likes to be effective, but states that if the writing is fun, he could select a prompt that takes more time to complete. In other words, a student who is barely passing in English says that he would consider more difficult tasks as long as he finds the writing process fun. This supports Dweck's (2014) theory of fixed and growth mindset, which is based on the idea that if a student believes that improvement is possible, he will select more challenging tasks, just as 'Chris' states in the interview. Several participants in questionnaire 2 also express how they imagine the writing just by reading a prompt, as No. 3 states about task A: "det ser litt interessant ut og arbeide med". This suggests that it is the act of writing that makes her select prompt A. This is also found as an argument for NOT selecting a prompt, as No. 43 states about task B: "valgte ikke denne fordi jeg ikke synes den hørtes så gøy ut å skrive om". To sum up, the student can by reading a prompt imagine the writing process, and if the imagined writing process motivates and is perceived as fun, the prompt may be selected.

## **2. The candidate must be motivated to demonstrate skills**

I also found another type of intrinsic motivation among the participants; a performance goal which shows the desire to excel. No. 20, a boy in a vocational class says about task C: "Jeg synes jeg er flink på å skrive novelle og har fantasi..." and displays a performance goal as his motivation. This confirms Pintrich's theory (2003, p. 676) which states that the learner's goal is to achieve recognition for high ability and to demonstrate skills. As No. 20 judges his ability as high regarding short stories, one may conclude that he has written fiction in the past with good results. About tasks A and D, No. 20 suggests how he would have approached the tasks, and what he may have built the texts on. Again the wish to demonstrate skills is expressed. The ability to demonstrate skills is also used as an argument for not selecting a task, as No. 34 says about task D: "Ville ikke valgt denne pga den blir for vanskelig for en så dårlig engelskelev som meg", she has the grade of 4. She perceives herself as not competent enough to demonstrate her skills in task D. 'Dana' states that she wants to produce a lot of text on an exam: "Også vil jeg ha mest mulig som kan rettes etterpå og som kan gi vurdering på". When I asked why, she answered: "Så de får se mest mulig av det jeg kan". She shows that it is important for her to demonstrate skills to ensure a good grade. When the candidate finds a task which gives the opportunity to display his/her abilities, intrinsic motivation increases, and the writing process becomes more positive along with the perceived successful outcome. This, in turn, may lead to the selection of a prompt.



### **3. The task design must motivate and give inspiration.**

This study found that the task design affects students' motivation. 'Chris' states about task C: "Ikke en oppgave som jeg ville kommet til å skrive, tror jeg, på grunn av at jeg tenker ikke for meg noe når jeg leser oppgaven. Det er ikke noe som kommer til meg". He continues explaining that if he reads a prompt, and thinks that he cannot write "mye og bra, så er det ikke noe vits i å skrive det". He dismisses the prompt because without motivation and inspiration, he cannot write a long and good text, and will not select that prompt. This confirms Ames' (1993, p. 263) claim that the way a prompt is written will affect motivation and inspiration, and this study found this to be true. 'Adam' discarded task D immediately due to lack of ideas. He states about ideas that "de kommer helt av seg selv", and talks about the speed ideas come in when reading a prompt. He explains that he was inspired by task C due to its openness:

de punktene her, det er jo bare... det skal være et engelsksnakkende land, alt fra Jamaica til England til USA, ikke sant. Også konflikt, der kan du ta hva som helst. Også dialog, hva som helst. Og en morsom eller overraskende slutt. Der kan jeg jo egentlig skrive hva jeg vil.

He describes how the bullet points are directing him and motivating him, rather than limiting his imagination. Participant No. 45 argues that she would choose task A, and finishes by stating: "jeg har lyst til det selv :)". She expresses the desire to answer task A, adding a smiley to show how much she liked the task. The task design was also used as an argument for not selecting a task, as No. 33 states about task B: "Jeg ville ikke valgt B fordi den virket litt komplisert og tung. I hvert fall i forhold til de andre oppgavene". Here the participant compares the task design of task B with the others and she concludes that she prefers task A. This shows how the task design may affect students' motivation and inspiration in the selection process.

### **4. Weaker students<sup>38</sup> preferred task A, the discussion of starting in a new workplace**

This study found that weaker students preferred task A, the discussion of starting in a new workplace. Participant No. 44, a girl in a vocational class with the grade of 2, only uses motivation as argument for selecting or not selecting the tasks, where she rates them on how interesting they sound to her. The candidates with the lowest grades in the subject of English had fewer arguments, but most of them related to motivation.

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<sup>38</sup> See appendix 11 for grades of the participants in questionnaire 2

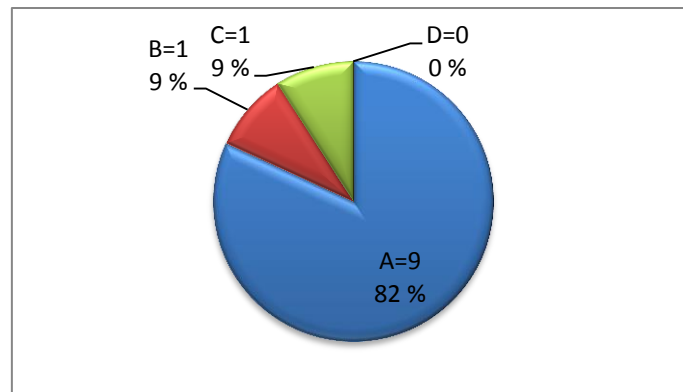


Figure 5: How 11 participants with the grade of 1 or 2 selected

The pie chart above shows that this study found that 82 % of the students with the grades of 1 and 2 preferred prompt A, where the candidate was asked to write an explanation/discussion about fitting into a new workplace. Both participants No. 43 and 44, who have the grade of 2 say that task A “hørtes spennende ut”. This suggests that prompt A motivates the candidate to answer this task and this study found that motivation is more important for the weaker learner. 10 of the 11 students with the grade of 1 or 2 are in vocational classes, and task A is the most work related prompt, as No. 3 states: “Fordi det har litt me fag å gjør”. Also No. 14 states about task A: “...det har noe med vi som går yrkesfag å gjøre”. This suggests that prompt A motivates the weaker vocational students because the candidate can write about his/her own profession and this makes the prompt interesting.

### 5. Boys preferred task A, the discussion of starting in a new workplace

This study also found that boys preferred task A, as 54% of the 56 boys in this study selected this task. Of these, 8 were from college preparatory classes. Task A is a discussion of starting in a new workplace, and clearly the task which was aimed at vocational students. Hence one may conclude that this type of task also appeals to some of the college preparatory students. As ‘Chris’, a boy in a college preparatory class states about this task:

Dette er en oppgave som jeg definitivt kunne skrevet. På grunn av at det er lett å tenke seg til hva du skal skrive. Bare sette deg inn i den situasjonen som oppgaven er og finne ut hvordan du skal legge opp kjøret framover når du skriver.

This shows that even though the task is work related, the wording of the prompt gives inspiration to college preparatory students as well. As No. 1, a college preparatory student, states: “det er ikke så utrolig vanskelig å begynne å se for seg en tekst med kreativt innhold bare når jeg leser oppgaven, jeg får altså mange forskjellige ideer”. Task A was a prompt

which opened up for both personal experiences and the use of the candidates' imagination, and this may be one reason why not only vocational students selected task A, and why task A was preferred by boys.

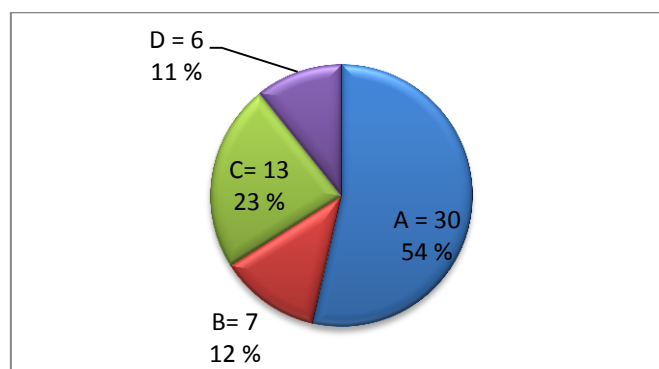


Figure 6: How 56 boys selected

The pie chart above shows the selections by the boys in this study, and that 54 % of the boys preferred task A, where the candidate was asked to write an explanation/discussion about fitting into a new workplace. This prompt had a personal topic, which confirms Weigle's (2002, p. 91) claim that such a prompt may spur interest on the candidate's part.

To sum up: a prompt must give motivation for the writing and for the student to demonstrate skills, plus the task design itself must inspire and motivate. This study found that task A was preferred by boys and by vocational students.

### 4.3. Findings related to comprehension

Several theorists claim that a prompt must be understood by the candidate, both for the task to be selected, and for the student to be able to perform to the best of his/her ability. This study found that 1) selection is made on the basis of whether the prompt is decodable, 2) whether the prompt instructions are clear and 3) whether the bullet points in the task describe exactly what is expected. It also found that 4) the list of requirements helps the weaker learner, but limits the stronger.

#### 1. The prompt must be decodable

This study found that if a prompt is not understood to a satisfactory degree, it is automatically discarded. 'Brenda' expresses about prompt B in the interview: "det var litt sånn rart skrevet da egentlig", but at the same time she explains that she understands all the words. This suggests that even though the words were understandable, she was not able to decode what the prompt asked of her. She goes on explaining about task B: "Så du må lese den ganske

nøye da, og skjønne hva den går ut på. Som tar tid, da”. She recognizes that time is of an essence and that understanding a complex prompt is time consuming, hence it is discarded. This confirms Kroll & Reid’s (cited in Souza, 2012, p. 35) claim that the exact wording of a writing prompt is vital in the candidate’s understanding of it. This is also expressed by No. 1 and No. 13 about task B: No. 1: “Jeg bruker vanligvis altfor lang tid på å komme på en person som jeg er fornøyd med som passer til stilen”. No. 13: “Jeg må sikkert lese de 1, 2 og 4 på nytt for og huske hva det var, og det tar for lang tid”. This suggests that when a prompt takes too much time to decode, it is discarded. How important it is to understand a prompt is also expressed by No. 25, a boy in a college preparatory class with the grade of 3: “I wouldnt have chosen this task because I dont think I understand it”. He uses this argument for all the three discarded prompts, and this seems to be the primary factor that guides his selection. He does not say that he does not understand it, but that he thinks he does not understand it. This suggests that he has not taken the time to decode the prompts properly, but rather looked for another prompt which was easier for him to understand.

Clark (2005) posits that a prompt is to generate an appropriate response from a novice, but that the novice may not be familiar with the wording a specialist would use. Clark (2005) also states that words like ‘discuss’, ‘address’, ‘analyze’ or ‘compare and contrast’ are words that the task designer sees as self-explanatory but may not be decoded correctly by the candidate. This was evident in this study, particularly in task B, which asks the candidate to present, compare, contrast and reflect on characters’ experiences. As No. 40 expresses about task B: “Hvis det er mye vanskelige ord som jeg ikke forstår på en oppgave, f. eks. som denne ville jeg ikke valgt. Da føler jeg selv at jeg kommer til å gjøre oppgaven feil og kommer ikke til å forstå hva jeg skal gjøre”. This confirms Fjørtoft’s (personal communication, April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014) claim that a minimum of 85% of the words must be understood to fully comprehend the text. To sum up, for a prompt to be selected, the candidate needs to be able to understand what the prompt asks of him/her.

## **2. The prompt instructions must be clear.**

This study found that if the prompt instructions are unclear, the prompt will not be selected. No. 40, a girl in a vocational class states about task A: “... egentlig ville jeg valgt en lettere oppgave. Fordi jeg liker å gjøre oppgaver som jeg forstår best og kan klare å løse på best mulig måte”. She here connects the difficulty of understanding a task to the act of writing and the perceived outcome. This confirms Bachman and Palmer’s guidelines (cited in Weigle,

2002, p. 103) which say that the prompt instructions should be simple enough for test takers to understand, and this seems to have been a major factor in prompt selection. No. 27, a girl in a vocational class uses clarity when arguing for selecting task A: "... det fordi det var enkelt å se hva oppgaven skulle inneholde, og da er det også lettere å skrive", and she links comprehension to the writing act. 'Brenda' says about task A that: "Det er skrevet ganske greit hva du skal gjøre. Så det blir ingen misforståelser". She explains that she is worried that if she misunderstands the task, she will wonder whether she had included all information the task asked for in the days following the exam, and that she wants to feel satisfied with the produced text. No. 34, a girl in a college preparatory class states about task B: "kunne heller tenkt meg en oppgave som det står akkurat hva jeg skal gjøre". She expresses that task B is unclear, and that she wants prompts to have clearer instructions. She selected task A, so apparently she felt that task A explained better what she was asked to do. This shows that a prompt may be discarded if the prompt instructions are unclear.

'Chris', a weaker English learner, misunderstands all the prompts in the exam, and explains that he would write short stories in tasks A, B and D. While he does not understand task C, which is the only short story task in this exam. Even though the tasks were printed in full on different pieces of paper, he completely fails to see the list of requirements in the bullet points following each prompt. This suggests that the weaker learner may not understand that all text is a part of the prompt. No. 13, a boy with the grade of 4 chose prompt C, stating that: "når det står: skriv en kort tekst, tror jeg passer de fleste gutter best". He understands the genre of short story as an instruction to write a story that is short. This shows that if a prompt is not understood to a sufficient degree, there will not be an appropriate response to the prompt, and the candidate will not be able to perform to the best of his/her ability. No. 51 states about task B: "Ville ikke ha valgt denne, den er veldig lang og komplisert for meg". This is a student with the grade of 1 in English, and she argues that the length and complexity of the task makes it too difficult for her. It is not the appropriate response that she finds too long and complex, but the task instructions. This shows how a prompt may be selected or not selected based on the clarity of the prompt instructions.

### **3. The prompts' lists of requirements<sup>39</sup> must describe exactly what is expected**

Some participants also commented on the bullet points which list the task requirements. No. 36, a girl in a vocational class states about task D: "Jeg ville ikke valgt denne, for den har

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<sup>39</sup> 'The list of requirements' refers to the bullet points following each prompt stating the requirements of each prompt. See appendix 3 for full text of prompts and the lists of requirements.

også med refleksjoner, diskusjon og konklusjon som jeg føler er vanskeligere å få en god karakter på”. Another girl in a vocational class, No. 27, says about task B. “Det fordi jeg ikke liker når det er så mye som MÅ være med, og jeg skjønnte heller ikke helt hva oppgaven sa”. The amount of requirements has been the decisive factor for not selecting these tasks. This was also expressed by ‘Dana’ when she discarded task A stating the reason as: “Det var veldig mye sånne...punkt. Og veldig vanskelige punkt som ikke passer helt sammen”. She is here confused by the mixed genre instructions, which confirms Ørevik’s (2012, p. 18) claim that mixed genre instructions may ask for hybrid genres which are not seen outside of school, and may hence be confusing. No. 1, a boy in a college preparatory class says about task C, the short story: “...fordi her får man nesten helt fritt valg om hva man vil skrive om. Mange forskjellige kreative ideer kan settes inn her”. Here the limited restrictions in the requirements has been the factor that made him choose task C. This supports Bachman and Palmer’s (cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 103) third requirement of prompt instructions; they should be sufficiently detailed for test takers to know exactly what is expected of them. ‘Dana’ states about the added information in task C that they were acceptable to her: “for de var egentlig ganske abstrakte selv om de hjalp litt til om hvor du skal gå hen. Det var ikke HELT bestemt hva du skal skrive men det var litt sånn hjelp”. She was very negative to the added information in task A, but liked them in task C. She explains that she liked task A better if she could disregard the bullet points. Tasks B and D, which were not preferred, are the ones with the most negative comments on the bullet points, hence one may wonder whether there is too much information and/or restrictions in these prompts. This shows that the list of requirements must be open and at the same time give clear instructions for a task to be selected.

#### **4. The list of requirements helps the weaker learner but limits the stronger.**

It also seems that the requirements connected to each prompt are seen differently among stronger and weaker learners. No. 27 expresses that she likes that task C states the headline of the short story. She has the grade of 3. While No. 38 discards task C because the headline is already given. He has the grade of 5. It seems that weaker students welcome tight frames in a prompt more than stronger students do. This was also seen in No. 36’s response “Det er for mye som må være med”. She has the grade of 5. No. 47, who has the grade of 3 states “...oppsettet til et eventuelt innhold virket spennende og enkelt”. Also ‘Brenda’, a weaker student, welcomes the added information: “Det er hjelp, for da har du jo start. Da vet du hvilke punkt du skal ha, så kan du bare sette opp dem også kan du sette opp underpunkt som

du tenker om”. She here describes how she would use the bullet points to scaffold a text. ‘Dana’, on the other hand, who has the grade of 4 is skeptical to the added information, as they, to her, represent a key to how the response is to be written. She states about task B: «vi skal skrive om noe som er...ja, som på en måte har en fasit da. Som er bestemt hvordan den skal være». This shows that a stronger English learner wants to be less restrained by the prompt instructions, and rather selects prompts which give room for freer writing. This is supported by ‘Adam’, who has the grade of 5, when he talks about task D and discards it because the task instructions are too limiting: “Jeg får liksom ikke bygd ut til siden. Jeg kan ikke kjøre på med det jeg vil skrive da. Og da synes jeg det blir vanskelig”. This shows that a stronger learner feels that the list of requirements may make the task more difficult as these requirements limit the writer’s freedom. These findings suggest that the detailed and framed prompts benefit the weaker student, but puts limitations on the stronger student to the point where the prompt is discarded. Weigle (2002, p. 90) claims that a good prompt needs to fit all candidates, but the extensive lists of required criteria in the exam prompts seem not to benefit all candidates to the same degree.

To sum up: for a prompt to be selected, the prompt must be understood. This means that the prompt must be decodable, the instructions must be clear and the prompts’ list of requirements must describe exactly what is expected. This study also found that the list of requirements is helpful for the weaker learner, but limits the stronger learner.

#### **4.4. Findings related to genre and topic**

This study found that the genre and topic must be interesting, familiar and relatable. This concurs with Polio & Glew’s (1996) and Souza’s (2012) findings. They found in their research that the main reason for ESL learners’ selection was familiarity with the topic and question type. In this chapter I will show how 1) the topic must be interesting for a prompt to be selected, and 2) that task A was preferred by vocational students. Next I will show 3) that the genre and writing acts must be familiar and 4) that the candidate must have had previous experiences with the different genres and writing acts to select a prompt. This study also found 5) that girls preferred task C, the short story.

##### **1. The topic must be interesting**

My findings show that the topic must be interesting for a prompt to be selected. Even though the topic ‘roles and expectations’ is familiar to the candidates before the exam, there seems to be lack of interest in what some of the prompts encompass. 19 arguments in the digital study

are about degree of interest or how ‘exciting’ the participant feels that the task is. Both No. 43 and 44, with the grade of 2, use the argumentation of how interesting a task is when selecting. This suggests that interest for the topic is crucial when selecting a task, especially for the weaker learner, and it confirms Weigle’s (2002, p. 91) claim that the topic must be interesting for the candidate to engage in writing. ‘Chris’ who has the grade of 2, expresses this view. At the end of the interview he found that he could write both tasks A and D, and the amount of text he could produce would have been the same in both tasks, but selects A. When asked why, he answers: “Jeg kunne skrevet D også men jeg har mer interesse for A”. This suggests that at the end of the day, the weaker learner will select the prompt with the most interesting topic. No. 42 states about task A: “Jeg ville ikke ha skrevet denne oppgaven fordi jeg er ikke så veldig interessert i å skrive om jobb osv.”. No. 42 is a girl in vocational class, but does not select the work related task due to lack of interest. No. 21 confirms this as he explains why he would not select task B: «jeg er ikke interisert i det stoffet handler om”. ‘Adam’, the stronger English learner states about tasks he has encountered in the past: “Jeg synes jo de alltid skal ha så mye sånne rare temaer da” and goes on suggesting: “kunne hatt litt sånn mer lagt opp for å skrive oppgaver da. Og stiler. Noe interessant fakta”. Here the stronger student suggests that prompts should be focusing on more interesting facts than he has experienced in the past. At the end, he selects the prompt which he feels is the freer task in terms of topic and genre as he can include what he is interested in. He speaks vividly about how he would write about drugs and crime. This confirms Ames’ claim (1992, p. 263) that if the task involves variety and diversity, the candidate may have an interest in the task. This study showed that if the candidate has sufficient interest in the prompt’s topic, it may be selected.

## 2. Vocational students preferred task A, the work related prompt

The vocational students in this study preferred task A and several of the arguments are related to previous experiences either in work placement or in real life. Task A is relatable to the vocational student and may be a major contributor to why task A is the most popular.

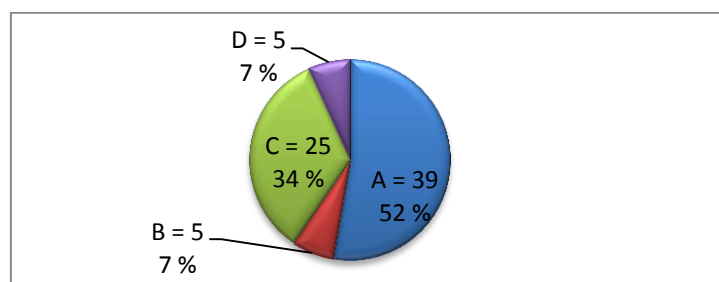


Figure 7: How 74 vocational students selected



The pie chart above shows that 52 % of the vocational students preferred task A, the explanation/discussion of fitting into a new workplace. Task A opens up for more personal responses, and Weigle (2002, p. 91) claims that prompts which ask for personal response are easier to relate to for the candidate. This is clearly shown in the arguments of the vocational participants, like No. 6 and No. 7 state about selection of task A. No. 6: “fordi det er lettere for oss som har vært ut i praksis å vite hvordan første møte med arbeidslivet er”. No. 7: “fordi det angår oss som går yrkesfag og er på utplassering og skal bli lærlinger”. Task A is clearly the most work related task of the four, and appeals to the vocational students as they can base the text on what they have encountered through their vocational training. However, also college preparatory participants argue that they can relate to this prompt. Like No. 35, a girl in a college preparatory class states about task A: “Ville valgt denne fordi det er noe jeg kunne satt meg inn i situasjonen med en ny arbeidsplass og utfordringene med det selv for så å skrive hvordan jeg faktisk ser det for meg”. This shows that task A not only is based on experiences, but also is related to real life and hence easier to relate to and to imagine for all students.

Rabbini (2003) and Dysthe et al.’s (2010, p. 15) claim that each subject or vocation has its own discourse community and culture, which the candidate to a certain degree can display in task A. This is supported by No. 29, who states about task A: “Innafor våres temaer så har vi mye engelske ord og uttrykk vi ikke får brukt på en vanlig eksamen”. He argues that the exam prompts should be more related to each specific vocational program and not working life in general. ‘Adam’ expresses in the interview that he thinks his classmates would have preferred to write about topics related to their vocation, and this is confirmed by No 29: “hadde en hatt mer av oppgaver relatert til selve yrkesfaget ville flere elever hevet karakteren”. By this he suggests that the grades may be affected positively if the tasks had been more oriented towards vocational writing. One may conclude that vocational students may gain from writing prompts which are related to their vocation, and may select prompts on the same basis.

This study found that task A was preferred by vocational students and the most preferred prompt by all 146, as it was selected by 42 % of all participants in this study<sup>40</sup>. This shows that it is important that the candidate can relate to the topic of the prompt for the prompt to be selected.

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<sup>40</sup> See Fig. No: 4

### **3. The genre and writing acts must be familiar to the candidate**

The participants' selection is also based on familiarity with the genre or the writing acts. No. 48 identifies task A as an article, and uses this as an argument for selecting this prompt, while No. 42 states about task B: "Jeg liker ikke å skrive artikkel", and selected task C instead. In both cases the genre is used as an argument, and the genre is obviously familiar to the participants as the genre is not specified in task A, B and D. Dysthe et al. (2010, p. 18) state that one of three basic prerequisites for producing a good text is familiarity with the genre, and this study found that this was also a factor in selection. This confirms Devitt's claim (2009, p. 341) that students will try to match writing assignments to genres they have encountered in the past. 'Brenda' states that she would not select an article on an exam: "Det er jo greit å skrive artikkel, men det skriver jeg nok av i norsken. Så det er ikke noe man har lyst til å skrive på selve eksamen". Her statement shows that she is familiar with the genres, but prefers another genre for variation. This is confirmed by 'Adam' who discards tasks A, B and D because: "Jeg liker jo ikke fagtekster da... jeg er ikke noe glad i det uansett". His main argument for selecting C was the genre, short story, and says that as long as the short story task is sufficiently open he will select it regardless, and genre was his primary argument. No. 26, a boy in a college preparatory class states about task B: "synes denne oppgaven virker enklest fordi man skal analysere teksten. Sammenligne opplevelsene deres virker enklest av alle oppgavene". Here he has identified that the prompt asks him to compare and contrast, and he believes this is easiest. When a student makes that assumption, one can conclude that the task instructions are familiar to him. 'Dana' states in the interview that she would not select task A because: "jeg skal halvveis si meningene mine og halvveis lage en historie om en arbeidsplass". She expresses confusion about how different writing acts are combined in the task. She explains: "Jeg vet ikke helt hvordan jeg ville lagt det opp når jeg hadde skrevet det. Jeg tror det er veldig vanskelig å ordne en bra stil av det". She has difficulties identifying the appropriate form of the response from the prompt instructions, and task A does not specify the genre in which an appropriate response is to be written, merely the writing acts. Due to this, task A was discarded.

Most arguments related to genre are in connection with task C, where the genre is stated in the prompt. It is clear from the participants' responses that this genre was immediately identified, as the genre was used as an argument for or against selecting it by 13 participants in questionnaire 2. This supports Clark's view (2005) that one needs to be familiar with a genre to be able to write it. 'Dana' has at the end of the interview found that she liked both tasks C

and D, but selected C because: “jeg er veldig glad i noveller og den ville vært lettest for meg å skrive. Og jeg tror det er den jeg ville fått best karakter på også”. She goes on explaining: “jeg tror jeg ville hatt det ‘artigere’ hvis jeg hadde skrevet novellen”. She promptly identified task C as a short story, and used the genre in all arguments regarding task C. The short story, which C asks for, is a fictional text which Weigle (2002, p. 100) argues is less complex in language. This may be one of the reasons why it is perceived as easier by some of the participants and why it was selected by only vocational students in questionnaire 2. This confirms Weigle’s claim (2002, p. 86) that the genre or writing acts need to be specified in the prompt. One may speculate whether the short story was selected by so many because the genre in fact was specified in it.

#### **4. The candidate relies on previous experiences with different genres and writing acts.**

Previous experiences of the genre and topic seem to be affecting selection as well, as commented on by No. 32: “Jeg ville valgt oppgave A på grunn av at det er en typisk oppgave vi har drevet med så mange ganger før”. This shows that No. 32 uses previous experiences to select a task which is familiar. No. 42 and No. 46, both girls in the same vocational class with the grade of 4 say this about task D. No 42: “...jeg synes det er vanskelig å bruke en historie også skrive etterpå”. No. 46: “... det er en oppgave som jeg liker, ta ut ifra en tekst og finne opp noe mere”. They display opposite views on the same prompt, but both of them express that they have had previous experiences with this type of prompt through the use of the words “synes” and “liker”. This confirms Ames’ claim (1992, p. 263) that previous experiences may influence the selection of writing prompts. ‘Adam’ selects task C solely based on the genre, and states: “jeg får bedre på historier”. This shows that his experiences with writing short stories have given him good results in the past and is a genre that he knows he will achieve good results from. Familiarity is also used as an argument for not selecting a prompt, as No. 36 states about task B: “jeg liker ikke denne typen oppgaver”. As she is able to say what she dislikes, she must be familiar with that type of task, and uses this as an argument for not selecting task B. To sum up, familiarity with the genre and writing acts will affect students’ selection.

#### **5. Girls preferred task C, the short story**

This study found that the fictional task C was preferred by the female participants. When arguing for selection of task C, most girls refer to the task as ‘open’ or ‘free’. Like No. 36 states: “denne ville jeg valgt, for da kan du skrive en historie nesten fritt”. ‘Brenda’ also

preferred task C stating that: “du kan skrive det du selv tenker egentlig (...) det er ikke noe som kan stoppe deg da, (...) det er litt ‘artiar’ å skrive også”. Several also talk about the joy of using their imagination. Like ‘Dana’ states about task A: “Jeg liker å skrive fritt...jeg liker å bruke fantasien når jeg skriver”. No. 50, was also positive to the fictional task: “Denne oppgaven virker ganske enkel, hvis du har fantasi”. No. 36 argues for using her imagination: “Synes også det er lettest å skrive en historie for da kan du finne på ting selv”. Some also argue that if a prompt is free, the writing and outcome are better as well, like ‘Brenda’ states in the interview: “Du får litt fire tøyler. Det er greit, for da skriver du mye bedre selv”. She says that she is a weak English learner, and for her it is important to be satisfied with the text she has produced. This study showed that task C was preferred by the female participants.

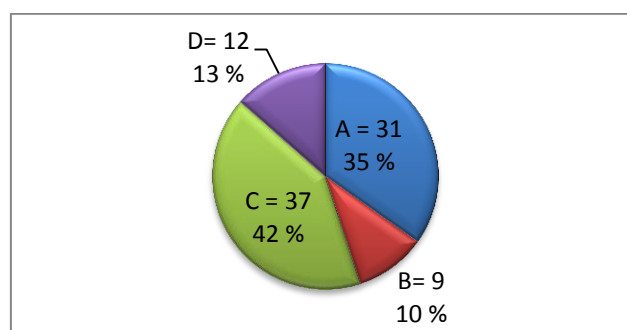


Figure 8: How 89 female participants selected

The pie chart above shows that task C, a short story about first impressions, was the girls’ most preferred prompt as it was selected by 42 % of the girls. ‘Dana’ expresses great enthusiasm towards free writing, and that she likes her imagination to take over, as arguments for selecting task C.

The fact that task C was perceived by many as the most open prompt collides with Weigle’s (2002, p. 101) claim that the prompts the candidate can choose from need to be as parallel as possible in terms of discourse mode or genre, in order to guarantee a just assessment of the produced texts. One may argue that the great variation in these four prompts makes them difficult to assess according to the same criteria.

To sum up: for a prompt to be selected the topic must be interesting, the genre and writing acts must be familiar and the candidate must have had previous experiences with the different genres and writing acts. In addition, this study found that task A was preferred by vocational students, and that girls preferred task C, the short story.

## **4.5. Findings related to the expected outcome**

Theorists argue that previous experiences will influence how the candidate perceives his/her abilities and that these experiences may influence the selection of prompts. In this chapter I will show that this study found 1) that students will select prompts which evoke previous positive experiences, 2) that students will select tasks which will give longer texts of higher quality, and 3) that the stronger student will select prompts which will give the best grade.

### **1. The prompt must evoke previous positive experiences**

When I asked ‘Adam’ whether he has had good results on short stories in the past, he answered “Det går alltid mye bedre. Det pleier å gå veldig fort og det pleier å gå veldig bra men jeg pleier å bruke litt tid liksom på å komme opp med en historie”. He goes on listing the grades he has received on similar tasks, and he concludes that he would select the short story, because he has had positive experiences with that genre in the past. This study found that the student’s own understanding of oneself is affected by previous experiences with similar tasks, which confirms Smith’s claim (2009, p. 25). ‘Chris’ also refers to previous experiences when talking about task C: “Jeg liker ikke å skrive slike oppgaver på grunn av at det er vanskelig å tenke seg fram til og bruker lang tid på å skrive den.” He has apparently encountered similar tasks, and from that he draws the conclusion that this type of text is difficult for him and takes too much time, hence he discards it. No. 32 states that he would not select task B: “på grunn av at jeg er fryktelig dårlig til å sammenligne bøker med filmer”. He says that he knows, due to previous experiences, that his abilities in this type of text are inadequate and uses this fact as an argument for not selecting task B. No. 26 argues against choosing task C: “jeg er ikke noen veldig bra ‘short-story’ skriver”. He obviously has received worse results than he expected writing this genre in the past, and discards the prompt because of that. This shows how the student will select prompts which have given good results in the past.

### **2. The prompt must give longer texts of higher quality**

Some of the participants argued that the quality or the length of the perceived produced text was important, like No, 17 states about task A: “fordi jeg tror den er den beste til at jeg kan få til en interessant tekst”. He argues here that he thinks the quality of the text will be better in task A than in the other tasks. The imagined text is also commented on by No 34: “Det er en spennende tekst som kommer ut av denne oppgaven”. She is here able to see that task A will prompt a text with high quality. This is confirmed by No. 18 who selected task C because: “det er den oppgaven som virker enklest å svare godt på”. ‘Brenda’ states in the interview that

she likes writing her opinions: “Når du selv kan skrive hva du selv mener så er det mye lettere å starte å skrive. Og få skrevet det bedre også for da får du skrevet det som du selv vil. I stedet for at det er noen andre som...har skrevet det før deg hva du skal mene”. ‘Brenda’ here comments the quality of the imagined text and refers to the bullet points when she states that someone else has decided what her opinion should be. This is confirmed by ‘Dana’ when she explains that she would not select task B: “Det blir mer referat og ting som noen andre har skrevet”. She goes on explaining how this would not give a good text and states that the text’s potential is limited: “fordi at vi skal finne noe som allerede er bestemt”. She is also referring to the bullet points, and acknowledges that the text that she could produce from this prompt would not be of a satisfactory quality. The quality of the imagined text is No. 17’s only argument, who states about task B, C and D: “fordi jeg tror det er litt vanskeligere å få til en bra tekst iforhold til oppgave A”.

The length of the perceived text was also considered. No. 28 says about task A: “den jeg føler jeg kan skrive mest og best om”, where he argues that both the quality and the length will be better in task A than in the other tasks. The length of the produced text is also important to ‘Chris’ as he states: “Det er viktig å skrive langt og innholdsrikt”. When he was asked whether this was his opinion, or the teachers’, he replied: “Det er noe jeg kjenner på”. This view is supported by ‘Dana’, who states: “hvis jeg ikke skriver mye så føler jeg ikke at jeg har gjort nok på oppgaven”. The feeling of not doing sufficient work on a text if it is not long, may be one of the reasons why several of the participants commented on the length of the imagined text. This is expressed by No. 16, who states about task B: “Det er mye å se på denne oppgaven, og derfor er det lettere og skrive en lenger tekst.” He concludes that as long as he can write a longer text, he is positive to the task. The imagined text is also used as an argument for not selecting a prompt, as No. 5 states about task D: “Jeg ville ikke valgt denne. For her tror jeg har kommet til å fått vanskeligheter med å komme på noe å skrive om”. He uses the same argument for all prompts that he did not select. He selects A arguing: “Jeg ville valgt denne, for det er lett for meg å komme opp med ideer for hva jeg skulle skrivet på denne”. Through his arguments for selecting and not selecting prompts, one can see that the amount of ideas or things to write about, which in turn will make him able to produce longer texts, is the paramount factor for this student’s selection. This study found that the participants were able to imagine the text they would produce from reading the prompt, and use the quality and length of the imagined text as an argument for or against selecting the different tasks.

### **3. The stronger student will select prompts which will give the best grade**

This study found that if a prompt gave reasons to expect a good grade, it may be selected. One may argue that all arguments related to the expected outcome is founded on the desire to receive a good grade, but only the stronger students voiced grade as an argument for selecting or not selecting tasks. ‘Dana’ says that she is able to imagine the outcome of a task just by reading it once, and explains about task B: “jeg tror kanskje det er vanskelig å få god karakter på denne...ser jeg for meg, fordi det blir veldig faglig da”. She compares task B to task C and states: “Jeg tenker det er lettere å få en god karakter på en novelle eller det er mye...hvordan de tolker den etter dine ting. Denne (B) er det litt mer fasit i”. This confirms Wigfield & Eccles’ (2000, p. 68) claim that a students’ selection may be based on how well the candidate expects the outcome to be, and Ames’ (1992, p. 263) statement that the prompt may embed information which the candidates use to evaluate their chances of success. ‘Adam’ says about his selection of the short story: “I en novelle ... så vil jeg tro det er større mulighet for gode resultater”. He has had several good results in that genre in the past, and is not willing to consider any of the other tasks after he read task C. No. 36, a girl with the grade of 5 says about task B: “Jeg liker ikke denne typen oppgave, og føler det er vanskeligere å få en god karakter”. She clearly considers her possibilities of a good grade, and discards prompt B as it does not satisfy her criteria. She uses the same argument for discarding task D. This study showed that only students with the grades of 4 and 5 commented on the possibility of getting a good grade, which suggests that they are more goal oriented and may have higher expectations to their own effort and outcome. It may also be that they have greater self confidence in the subject of English and are not afraid to state that their main goal is to achieve good grades.

To sum up: For a prompt to be selected the candidate must have had positive experiences with similar tasks in the past. The task must give longer texts of higher quality and the stronger student will select prompts which, in their opinion, will give the best grade.

### **4.6 Summary of findings**

This study shows that students use a range of factors to select their preferred prompt and that these factors are individual and may vary from prompt to prompt. The data shows that there are four major factors that decide students’ choice of prompt: 1. Motivation 2. Comprehension 3. Genre and topic, and 4. The expected outcome.

It is interesting to see how there were two prompts (tasks A and C) which were clearly more preferred in this exam as they constitute the selection of 77% of all participants in this study. This study proves that prompts related to working life (task A) are particularly motivating for boys, vocational students and weaker students. Prompts related to fiction (task C) are particularly motivating to girls.

As there are so many different factors that affect selection, this study found that it is important to give all candidates a realistic choice which will give him/her the chance to display his/her abilities. The question is: is it possible to design exam writing prompts which fulfill all the requirements and at the same time are equally appropriate for 29 study programs? In the next chapter I will discuss the consequences of my findings.

## **5. Discussion**

In this chapter I will discuss the consequences of this study's findings and look at the validity and reliability of these writing prompts. A student's selection of writing prompts on an exam may affect the quality of the exam text, and in turn affect the grade on the exam. The exam grade is added to the grade point average of the student, which is the basis for admittance to further education or apprenticeship. Therefore it is important that the student can find a prompt that to the greatest possible extent gives the candidate the possibility of demonstrating the level of competence he/she possesses.

Each part of this chapter discusses one of the factors which affect students' selection of writing prompts, divided into sub-chapters presenting the specifications made in the findings. I will start by discussing motivation.

### **5.1 Discussion regarding motivation**

#### **The candidate must be motivated for the writing process**

This study found that for a prompt to be selected it has to motivate the candidate for the writing process. As several of the participants speak of how motivation for the writing comes to them and how some prompts give them an instant feeling of how the writing process will be, it seems that students are able to imagine the writing process just by reading a prompt. Several of the participants in this study write about how writing can be 'fun' and that a prompt may be interesting to work with, hence the writing process needs to be positive. The decision of which prompt they choose is made quite quickly and it is paramount that the candidate finds some motivation for the writing just by reading the prompt. So; what does a



prompt need to motivate for writing? I will discuss this using examples from the prompts used in this study.

The major trends in this study are that the participants were more motivated for the writing of tasks A and C. A asks for an explanation/discussion of a workplace and C is a fictional text. If one looks closely at these two prompts, they have something in common: they open up for the use of the imagination. In the explanation/discussion, the candidate is asked to choose an occupation and write about the challenges of starting in a new workplace. The participants are free to find one occupation that they are familiar with, or are able to imagine, and elaborate on what it requires to fit into that particular workplace. Even though the bullet points state that they have to include a discussion, there is room for the use of the imagination when addressing how the employee, the employer and the co-worker can help new workers settle in. The fictional text is all about using the imagination as it asks the candidate to write a short story called “Lovely cover, lousy book”. The story must be about conflicting roles and/or expectations based on social norms and values, which limits the prompt slightly, but is still open enough for the candidate to use the imagination in directions which interest the individual. Therefore one can conclude that to spur motivation towards the writing process, the prompts should to a certain extent be open enough for the candidate to write about topics that they have an interest in, or can imagine.

### **The candidate must be motivated to demonstrate skills**

Another of the findings in this study was that the candidate must be motivated to demonstrate skills. The stronger participants in this study clearly showed that they selected prompts which gave the greatest opportunity to demonstrate skills, but this may be more difficult for a weak ESL learner. According to Carol Dweck’s theory of fixed and growth mindset, the ability to imagine the possibility of improvement within a subject will make the candidate more motivated to demonstrate skills. One can easily imagine the weaker student who has done his/her best in English for several years without achieving grades that match the effort that the student has invested in the subject, and understand the reason for lack of motivation towards demonstrating skills. So the question is; how do we spur that kind of motivation within the weaker student?

In my experience it is important that the teacher guides the learner through different tasks in baby-steps, giving the learner reasonable expectations. The teacher and learner may agree that in English, the goal is to achieve a 2 to pass the subject. If expectations are set to a realistic

level, and the process of learning is emphasized more than the result, the student may be more positive towards the writing and the tasks he/she has to complete in the subject. No learners are identical, and the teacher needs to have the experience and the knowledge of people to know whether he/she is able to take in more realistic expectations or if this will damage the learner's self-confidence. The main point here is that motivation to demonstrate skills is a skill which is developed during the learning of a subject, and the exam prompt should be similar to the prompts the student has encountered during the learning of English. If the candidate recognizes the exam prompt as a task which he/she has been guided through in baby-steps by the teacher, motivation to demonstrate skills may increase as the level of expectation is already clear and the candidate is able to recognize what the prompt asks of him/her. As weaker students preferred the discussion/explanation about a workplace, one must conclude that this prompt may be the one that the candidate thinks will give him/her motivation.

### **The task design must motivate and give inspiration**

This study also found that for a prompt to be selected, the task design must motivate and give inspiration. In Norway one has chosen to have an exam booklet and a preparation day before the English exam to give the candidate the opportunity to prepare for the topic of the essay and to gather information which the candidate may use during the exam. If the candidate spends the preparation day wisely, this arrangement strengthens the candidate's possibilities of finding something to write about. So when the topic is clear and understood, and the preparation is completed, the task design is the factor which influences the candidate's selection.

For a prompt to be selected, the task design must motivate and give inspiration. Let us have a closer look at the preferred prompts; A, the explanation/discussion and C, the fictional text. Task A is followed by six bullet points which list the requirements of the prompt, while task C has four bullet points. As earlier mentioned; both prompts are opening up for the use of the imagination, but there is one more thing these two have in common: The bullet points frame the task, but do not limit the candidate's opportunity to include topics or details they are interested in. This confirms Weigle's (2002, p. 86) claim that test instructions have to be flexible in order to give all candidates an angle to write from as the participants in this study comment on the flexibility of tasks A and C. In task A the candidate selects the occupation. As the prompt asks the candidates to write about settling into a new workplace, they may

imagine occupations with different challenges. For instance, the challenges may be completely different when starting work in the cashier at Rema 1000 than if you start working as a welder on an oil platform in the Black sea. The limit is that it has to deal with starting in a workplace, but it is up to the candidate to find the challenge and the setting of that workplace. This is also seen in task C, where the short story has to be set in an English-speaking country. The candidate may choose the USA, India, South Africa, Jamaica, New Zealand, the UK, Ireland etc. The list of possible settings is almost endless as English speaking countries are all over the world and constitute different cultural and political challenges. The setting in the short story frames the prompt and inspires ideas, but does not limit the candidates' opportunity to focus on something they have an interest in. A and C are more personal prompts compared to B and D, as they give room for the candidate's own experiences and opinions. This concurs with Weigle's (2002, p. 91) claim that prompts with personal topics spur more interest in the candidate. When looking at task D, the discussion which only 12 % selected, one can see that the bullet points in the prompt limits the candidate more than in tasks A and C. In task D the prompt asks the candidate to focus on Mina in the excerpt from the novel *American Dervish*. This prompt only asks for information showing that the candidate has understood the text, is able to read between the lines and look only at how Mina has changed. This shows that if a prompt limits the candidate too much, the task design influences the selection of a prompt. When candidates see the opportunity to add facts that they are motivated for, they are more inspired and the prompt may be selected.

## **5.2 Discussion regarding comprehension**

### **The prompt must be decodable**

For a prompt to be decodable, the candidate needs to be able to understand exactly what the prompt asks him/her to do to create an appropriate response. That means that the candidate needs to know what form or genre the response is to be written in, what writing acts he/she has to use and what the response has to focus on.

To demonstrate this, I would like to turn to task B, which was the least preferred prompt, and has the most negative comments on whether the prompt was understood. In task B, the candidate has to know the content of appendix 1, 2 and 4, selecting a character from one of them, who has changed. In addition, the candidate needs to know of and write about a character from another literary text or film who has changed due to the same reasons. In other words, appendices 1, 2 and 4 need to be studied again to find a character who has changed

and find the reason for that change. Once this reason is found, the candidate needs to think of another character from a text or a film, who has changed for the same reason. When this is done, the prompt states that: “Write a text in which you compare and contrast their experiences”. When preparing for the writing, the candidate has to focus on the changes each character has undergone, but in the prompt it states that he/she should write about their experiences, not how and why they have changed. Then, in the bullet points, the candidate is asked to write a comparison of the changes they have gone through, with examples and quotations. This seems like contradictory orders; first compare and contrast experiences, then compare the changes. The word ‘comparison’ is mentioned twice, but the term ‘contrast’ is not defined anywhere in the task. This may make it difficult for the candidate to understand the wording of the prompt as the term ‘compare and contrast’ is a term only used in prompts, and rarely in real life. The only way a candidate can know how to respond appropriately to this prompt is if he/she has previously encountered prompts with the term ‘compare and contrast’. The prompt also asks the candidate to use quotations. Using quotations from one of the appendices in the text should be easy enough, but to use quotations from the text or film that the candidate has selected is impossible unless the text is brought to the exam. Hence the task requirements are very difficult to fulfill. It is therefore reasonable to think that task B is too difficult to decode due to contradictory orders, difficult wording and requirements which are hard to fulfill, and may be a major factor to why this prompt was the least preferred.

### **Prompt instructions must be clear**

I found that a selection may be based on whether the prompt instructions are clear. When instructions are clear, they are easily understood and the candidate does not need a lot of time to find out on what the prompt asks of him/her. According to Fjørtoft (personal communication, April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014); if less than 85 % of the words in a task is understood, the text is not decodable to the candidate. The first part of the prompts<sup>41</sup> in this exam has an average of 44 words, which means that more than 37 of the words in a prompt must be comprehensible to the candidate. Hence, if there are more than seven difficult or advanced words in a prompt, it is not understood to an acceptable degree. In task B, the presentation/comparison/reflection of changes in a character, the more complex words ‘appendices’, ‘encounter’, ‘character’, ‘undergone’, ‘similar’, ‘compare’, ‘contrast’ and ‘experiences’, a total of eight academic words, may make the prompt too difficult to

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<sup>41</sup> Excluding the bullet points

understand, and this may be one of the reasons why task B was the least preferred. These are more academic words which may be understood only by the students with a higher competence in English. The importance of choice of words in a task is emphasized by Kroll & Reid (cited in Souza, 2012, p. 35) as they claim that this is more important for L2 learners than to native English students. To be able to respond appropriately to a prompt, the prompt must be understandable to the candidate, and the large amount of academic words may inhibit the candidates' understanding.

Task A, the explanation/discussion was the most preferred prompt, therefore we should have a closer look at how this task's instructions are written. The main body of the prompt has two sentences, one where the prompt refers to two named characters in the preparation booklet explaining that the focus is on different experiences of fitting into a new occupation and that there may be expectations relating to that. In the second sentence, the instructions are: "Write a text about the challenges of starting in a new workplace of your choice". First it introduces the context and then a sentence which instructs the candidate on what the text should be about. This format is also seen in prompt C, the fictional text which also was a preferred prompt and these two constitute the selection of 86% of the vocational students. Task D, the discussion, has a similar format, but in the second sentence the text is: "Use the story about Mina as a point of departure to write a text about adapting to a new role or situation". This sentence does not start by "write a text", but starts with what the point of departure is. For a candidate to respond adequately to this prompt, he/she must know what it means to use something as a point of departure and must recall the Mina text. This may be enough for the candidate to be confused, see the prompt instructions as unclear and discard the prompt.

Both tasks A and D ask for a discussion, yet A was the most favored prompt and D one of the least favored. To find the reason why, I investigated whether the language used is social everyday language or academic school language (Egeberg, 2012, p. 75). The difference between them is that academic school language consists of more nouns and less verbs than social everyday language. When focusing on the first part of the writing prompts, A has 6 nouns and 5 verbs, while task D has 10 nouns and 4 verbs. The two prompts have approximately the same amount of words, but task D has more nouns and less verbs than task A has. This shows that task D uses more academic and advanced language than task A, and that this complexity of language may be one of the reasons why task A was preferred while task D was not.

It is strange that none of the prompts in this exam has specified the audience, as this is of paramount importance to both Weigle (2002, p. 86) and Clark (2005). According to Weigle (2002, p. 103) the absolute minimum of instructions in a prompt are specification of audience and the purpose of the writing. The intended audience is implied in all prompts, and Clark (2005) posits that only more experienced writers will understand this. Hence, the more inexperienced writer will have difficulties in recognizing the expected tone and style of the written text from the prompts in this exam. One may therefore recommend policy makers to make sure the intended audience is specified in the exam writing prompts in the future.

### **The list of requirements must describe exactly what is expected**

This study found that the list of requirements helps the weaker learner but limits the stronger. The weaker student welcomes the bullet points as it makes a scaffold which the text can be built on, but they restrict the stronger learner to such an extent that a prompt may not be selected. The participants in this study had quite a few comments on the bullet points which follow each exam prompt, and this study found that the bullet points must describe exactly what is expected for the prompt to be selected. The lists in tasks A, B and D start by: “Your text should include:” The use of ‘should’ clearly shows that if these criteria are not included, the assignment is not answered to a satisfactory degree. It could have said “Your text may include”, but the verb used is ‘should’. Therefore the candidate who understands that the list of requirements is a part of the prompt, will read the list as assessment criteria. Task D also instructs the candidate to add his/her own points to the list, but no other prompt gives this instruction, suggesting that the lists in tasks A and B are exhaustive.

The weaker student uses the bullet points as a scaffold to build the text on, and I am sure that this also is the intention. However, this study found that the list limits the stronger student to the degree where a prompt may be discarded. The stronger students in this study often argue that their choice is the prompt which opens up and is not too limited. Therefore it is important that the list of requirements is designed so that it scaffolds the weaker learner, but does not inhibit the stronger learner from producing a text to the best of his/her ability.

It is interesting to see that the bullet points in task A, the vocational task, are more detailed than tasks B and D, the other factual prompts. All of them start by listing introduction as the first requirement, as tasks B and D do: “an introduction”, but in task A, the text is: “an introduction to an occupation and workplace of your choice”. The same thing happens in the last bullet point, where the criterion is that the text must include a conclusion. Tasks B and D

simply state: “a conclusion”, but in task A it says: “A suitable conclusion”. The word ‘suitable’ is omitted in tasks B and D, suggesting that only task A needs a conclusion which is suitable. This is of course not the intention, but it seems the idea is that the prompt which is made for vocational students needs to be more detailed to avoid misunderstandings. The bullet points in task A comprise 70 words in the list of criteria, while the other prompts have 56, 40 and 54 words. This suggests that one has gone to lengths to make task A more understandable than the other prompts, catering to the vocational students with a 0.7 lower grade point average than the college preparatory students. In addition, three of the bullet points in task A are written as instructions starting with the questioning word ‘what’ omitting the verb. To give an example, this is a bullet point from task A; “what an employee can do to fit into the new workplace”. If one adds the verb ‘write’ before this sentence, there are very clear instructions on what the text should include. One may argue that the other prompts also have the potential of adding ‘write’ to the bullet point, but in my opinion “what an employer can do to help new workers settle in” (task A) is a far clearer instruction than “a brief explanation of how and why Mina changed” (task D). Both of them ask the candidate to explain something, but in task D, there is no questioning word in the beginning of the sentence, and there is a double order: explain both how and why Mina changed. To avoid double orders in task A, more bullet points are added to the task and task A is the only prompt with six bullet points. All the six bullet points in task A are similarly easy to read as instructions and this may be one of the reasons that task A was selected by a majority of the participants. The grade point average in compulsory English is 0.7 lower for vocational students than for college preparatory students, and that may be the reason why the vocational prompt has clearer instructions, less academic language and describes more clearly what is expected. This study found that boys, vocational students and weaker students preferred task A, and this may be because the task instructions and the bullet points were clearer than in the other prompts.

Tasks B and D have mixed genre instructions, where a combination of writing acts were asked for. Ørevik (2012, p.18) claims that these are mixed in a manner “which does not reflect changed or hybrid genres in discourse outside of school” and that these will have limited effect in developing the candidates’ genre awareness and text competence. It may be beneficial to list the exam prompts’ genres, writing acts and their characteristics in the preparation booklet to create genre awareness among the students. That way the mixed genre

instructions will be less confusing, and the candidate has a greater chance of selecting a prompt which he/she can write an appropriate response to.

### **5.3 Discussion regarding genre and topic**

#### **The topic must be interesting**

My study shows that if the prompt is open enough for the candidate to steer the text towards something he/she finds interesting, the prompt may be selected, and the topic was one of the criteria which many of the participants in this study based their selection on. The preparation booklet has informed the candidate that the topic all tasks in part 2 of the exam are based on is ‘Roles and expectations’ presenting five different texts that the candidate has to read and consider during the preparation. Yet, many participants comment whether the topic of the prompt is interesting or uninteresting, suggesting that even though the topic is familiar, it may not interest the candidate. As the aim of a final exam is to give the candidate the opportunity to show English to the best of his/her ability, it is important that the candidate finds a prompt which is interesting, but it may be a tall order to find a topic which interests all 8 500 candidates for this exam. However, this is possible through tasks which inspire, but do not limit the topic or content of the expected text. If the task gives leeway for the candidate to fill in and steer the produced text in a direction which he/she finds interesting, chances are that the task is selected. This is found in both tasks A and C, as explained in chapter 5.1.

It is interesting to look at how the four prompts in this exam relate to the stated topic of roles and expectations. Three of the texts in the preparation booklet are about adapting to different cultures, still none of the prompts ask specifically for knowledge of this. It does seem, however, that tasks B and D focus on change, A focuses on adapting and C focuses on first impressions. Some may find it hard to understand how change, adapting and first impressions relate to roles and expectations, but if everything else fails, the candidate may find inspiration in the preparation booklet. At least one of the terms ‘roles’ and ‘expectations’ is mentioned in all prompts, but in tasks A and B, they are only mentioned in the first sentence of the prompt, where the context is defined. Task C is the only prompt where both ‘roles’ and ‘expectations’ are mentioned in the bullet points, which is a clear instruction to write the text on what the candidate has prepared in the preparation period. This clear instruction related to the stated genre may be one of the reasons why task C was the second most preferred prompt in this exam.



This study showed that vocational students are more motivated towards topics which relate to working life. The subject curriculum states that the student should be able to write texts related to their own study program<sup>42</sup>, but this is unfortunately a competence which one cannot test on this exam as it covers 29 study programs. I have worked with the FYR-project for several years, trying to adapt English learning to the language required by each vocation. This has given the students the ability to communicate in the discourse community within their vocation. Unfortunately as this is not tested on the final exam, the wash-back effect is that the emphasis on FYR work has diminished and the teacher has to focus on the types of writing tasks the student will encounter on an exam. Therefore work related English cannot be prioritized to the extent one would have wished. This confirms Ellingsund and Hellekjær's (cited in Ørevik, 2012, p. 2) claim that exams exert a greater influence on teaching than the curriculum. Still it is quite important that vocational students are able to communicate in English with international co-workers to secure their own safety in the workplace. Several professions in Norway today have workers from different nations, and it is paramount that they are able to communicate in the lingua franca of English. In my experience, motivation towards the subject of English increases dramatically when the learner feels that what we are doing in class is directly relatable to the work situation. As work related English encompasses topics which the student is engaged in and can draw on previous experiences from, one may suggest that we could have provided the candidates with the possibility of finding topics which are interesting to more of them if the exam prompts had been designed with the particular study program in mind. This can be achieved by making the exam local for vocational students. This would also have showed the importance of learning vocational English, the teaching could have been more directed to practical use of English in the workplace, and the topics on the exam may have been more interesting for the candidate. In addition, one would be able to test more proficiency goals in the subject curriculum, and the inner validity in terms of content validity of the exam would increase.

**The genre and writing acts must be familiar and the candidate must have had previous experiences with the different genres and writing acts.**

This study found that for a prompt to be selected, the genre and the writing acts must be familiar, and the candidate must have had previous experiences with the different genres and writing acts. The only prompt which states the genre is task C. Most arguments for or against

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<sup>42</sup> See appendix 2.

selecting task C is based on the genre, as some prefer short stories, while others do not. This study found that girls prefer writing short stories, and this fact has been known by teachers in Norwegian schools for decades, but there have been few studies to confirm it. I will not discuss here whether making up stories is an innate ability in girls, or whether society has affected girls to make up stories, but the fact is that most of the girls who selected task C argue that they like to use their imagination. The genre was obviously familiar to most of the participants and this influenced their selection.

Weigle (2002, p. 100) argues that fictional texts require less complex language than factual texts. This may be one of the reasons why so many preferred task C, but it is difficult to assess the answers in prompt C, the fictional text, to A, B and D, factual texts, on the same criteria. Let us imagine that the short story prompt was taken out of the final exam. If there was no short story prompt, what would that 35 % of the candidates have selected to write texts to the best of their ability? Another question that arises in a scenario where the short story is omitted; how will the wash-back effect be? It is important that the candidate is familiar with the genre and writing acts, so the teaching of writing will focus on the genres and writing acts that will appear on an exam. My fear, and many of my colleagues' fear, is that if the short story is omitted, one will stop teaching story writing in the subject of English due to lack of time. Since short story is a genre which requires less complex language, the learner will be able to develop both text complexity and vocabulary through writing short stories, to a degree which factual texts never could. If short stories are not taught, this vital tool for language development may disappear.

Ørevik (2012, p. 17) claims that so many exam prompts are genre unspecified or have mixed genre instructions that it seems that other principles or objectives have taken priority over genre awareness in the design of the exam prompts. She calls for a greater genre awareness in exam prompts, and as this study showed that the genre in task C was used as an argument for and against selection by so many, one may conclude that genre awareness was a major factor in selection. Therefore one may suggest more prompts with specified genre instructions.

One possible way of creating familiarity with the prompt is to specify the genres and writing acts in the preparation booklet. That way the preparation material will have an additional function as a source of reference. The genres and writing acts could be followed by key words listing important genre characteristics, and this may create a positive wash-back effect where genre awareness is more focused on. In addition, the preparation day would not be only about

gathering information about the topic of the exam, but also about text construction and genre awareness. However, there is still the question of a just assessment of fictional and factual texts. As of spring 2013, the exam instructions and assessment criteria are the same for both candidate and censor. Hence one set of criteria is used for both fictional and factual texts, and the exam instructions must be general enough to not disclose to the candidate what the genres and writing acts in the exam are going to be. It is difficult to assess fictional and factual texts on the same criteria, as fictional texts require less complex language. If the genres, writing acts and their characteristics were listed in the preparation booklet, the criteria and benchmark scripts for both fictional and factual texts could have been open to all as there would be no need to keep the genres from the candidate. That way the results are comparable and assessable on basis of the type of text produced and better represent the level of English the candidate is able to produce on an exam. Jacobs et al. (cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 115) argue for analytic scoring where scoring schemes are used for more detailed scoring. Using this type of scoring may help the censors in the assessment of both fictional and factual texts and would increase the reliability of the exam results.

This study found that the writing acts and genres need to be familiar to the candidate, and if they were listed in the preparation booklet, chances are that the candidate would not discard a prompt due to unfamiliar genres and writing acts. Both tasks B and D in the exam from May 2013 combine several writing acts, giving mixed genre instructions, where task B asks the candidate to present, compare, contrast and reflect, and task D asks the candidate to explain, discuss and reflect. As these were the two least preferred prompts one may wonder whether the combination of writing acts is unfamiliar and hence has affected the rejection of these prompts. Ørevik (2012, p.17) posits that such combinations of writing acts will not “call for verbal strategies useful in future written discourse”, and hence make the candidate display a skill he/she will not need outside of school. The combination of writing acts may be an influential factor for selecting or not selecting a prompt. As there are several writing acts which can be combined in numerous ways, it is very difficult for the student to have encountered all combinations in the learning, and the candidate may select the prompt which is more similar to a prompt which he/she has encountered in the past. The small amount of writing acts may be one of the reasons why tasks A and C were preferred.

#### **5.4 Discussion regarding the expected outcome**

**Students will select prompts which have given positive experiences in the past and given the best grades**

One of the factors selection is based on is whether the candidate has had previous positive experiences with that type of prompt. This shows the importance of giving candidates prompts of all kinds during English learning. In addition, the learner must have had the chance to develop this type of prompt response to achieve positive experiences. When the candidate reads an exam prompt for the first time, there has to be some kind of recognition which makes the candidate see positive outcome as possible. This work is done during learning English before the candidate enters the exam, and the question is; how can we guarantee that the candidate will be presented with prompts that are familiar and have given positive outcome in the past?

There are 29 study programs which are eligible for this particular exam, and due to the diversity of these study programs, the topic of the different exams must be general enough for all 29 study programs to relate to. This means that the variety of topics for an English exam is limited. If there had been local exams for the vocational students where each study program had custom made exam prompts, one would have been able to use authentic writing prompts, as Weigle (2002, p. 98) describes. Authentic writing prompts are the kind of writing the candidate may expect outside of school and fulfill a realistic purpose. If there had been an emphasis on authentic writing within each vocation during learning, the student would most likely recognize the exam prompts and would expect a good outcome. Authentic writing for college preparatory students would have been texts which are used in a more academic setting, similar to what they would encounter in higher education. Another thing that would have been possible if the exam was custom made, was to have text-responsible writing (Weigle, 2002, p. 189). This is when the content is tested just as much as language competence. Let me give an example: if a candidate from a carpentry class was asked to write how he/she would explain to an English speaking customer how to build a garden shed and the reasons for the selected techniques, the candidate would have shown competence in the vocation of carpentry at the same time as the language skills were tested. This way the candidate can display knowledge and skills in the exam text, beyond language and text construction, and it opens up for the possibility to assess the competence aims of writing texts

from one's own study program<sup>43</sup>. If the candidate could have written texts which are related to their study programs, chances are that they more easily will recognize the prompts from their vocational subject tasks as well, and be able to imagine a positive outcome. Text-responsible and authentic writing prompts relating to each study program would also increase the exam's content validity because more competence aims in the curriculum could have been tested. In order for a censor to assess this kind of writing properly, there need to be detailed benchmark scripts in the assessment criteria, preferably designed together with teachers of that vocational subject.

An arrangement where vocational exams were local would also have benefitted the college preparatory students, as their writing also could have been more text-responsible. The teaching of English could have been able to focus more on EAP<sup>44</sup> and prepare better for higher education. As the situation is today, English is not compulsory beyond the first year in upper secondary school, but can be selected in second and/or third year. The fact is that most higher education today has syllabi in English, and the need to understand and write academic English is greater today than just a few years ago. If the college preparatory classes had exams issued by the Directorate of Education and Training, the exam designers would have been able to develop more academic writing prompts which are text-responsible and more directed towards the competence aims in the subject curriculum under the heading 'Culture, society and literature'. One could for instance have tested the candidates' ability to discuss literature by and about indigenous peoples in the English speaking world, expecting them to use text content which displays knowledge and understanding of that particular indigenous people. That way, not only the language and text-building skills would have been tested, but the student would get used to prompts which ask for academic texts focusing on content. The student would be able to practice writing academic tasks throughout learning and feel more comfortable when an exam prompt is similar to what they have encountered earlier. In addition, the student would have been better prepared for higher education, and been familiar with that type of prompt prior to the exam. This would have increased the exam's consequence validity as it affects the students' further education.

There are vocational students who take a third year in upper secondary school to be able to go on to higher education. For these students it is important that they too are introduced to academic writing, as there is no compulsory English in their third year so one of the exam

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<sup>43</sup> See Appendix 2

<sup>44</sup> EAP= English for Academic Purposes. See chapter 1.1.6 for full definition

prompts could have been more academic, but custom made for the vocational student aiming for higher education.

### **Students will select tasks which will give longer texts of higher quality**

When the bullet points were introduced in English exams, I believe that the main goal was to help the candidate produce longer texts. This study found that weaker students find the list of requirements helpful as it instructs the candidate on what the exam text is to include. The candidate who understands that the bullet points are a part of the prompt will read the list and assess his/her chances of producing enough text on each prompt when a selection is made. However, this study also found that the list of requirements limits the stronger learner, to the point where a prompt is discarded. In my analysis of the exam tasks this study is based on, I found that task A, which is the most vocational prompt, includes more detailed instructions and social everyday language<sup>45</sup>. To be able to cater to both weaker and stronger students, one may consider using bullet points as in task A, on vocational writing prompts, but exclude, or reduce them in writing prompts for the college preparatory candidates. The best way to do this was if vocational exams were made locally, while college preparatory classes had exams issued by the Directorate of Education and Training.

If one made vocational exams local and custom made to each study program, one could design several writing prompts which were more detailed with a simpler language for the vocational candidates. That way the vocational candidate would in practice have a choice when faced with four different prompts, and still write longer texts of higher quality. As it is today, a weaker vocational student has in practice just one choice; the task which he/she understands, and is designed with the vocational learner in mind. In other words; if all exams were custom made to each study program, it may be easier for all students to find the prompt which he/she can produce the longest and best text from. This would increase the exam's criteria based validity as one would be certain that the exam grade shows the candidate's competence in English.

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<sup>45</sup> See chapter 5.2

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to find what factors affect students' selection of prompts in order to inform policy makers on the validity and reliability of the exam from May 2013. 146 participants selected prompts from four exam tasks where 55 gave reasons for their selection. In this conclusion I will put the findings in this study into the context of the ENG1002/ENG1003 exam in upper secondary school and suggest how one may design prompts which give each candidate more options when introduced to four different exam prompts. This study found that there were two prompts which were preferred by most participants; Task A, the task which was designed for vocational students, and task C, which asked for a fictional text in the form of a short story. The most important factors for selection were: 'motivation', 'comprehension', 'genre and topic' and 'the expected outcome'.

To do well on an exam, the student must be motivated for the writing. English is a common core subject in Norwegian upper secondary schools, and unfortunately, common core subjects tend to have vocational students who lack motivation for the subject. Norwegian authorities have attempted to increase the motivation for common core subjects through the FYR-project. In my experience, this does work, as vocational students' motivation for the subject increases when working with such texts. However, the wash-back effect influences the teaching and this exam is designed for 29 different study programs, hence a majority of the English taught in class is aimed at the exam. The exam cannot test their skills in the language of their vocation as it covers many study programs. If the written exam was local and the writing prompts custom made for each vocational class, the content validity of the exam would increase as one could test more proficiency goals. The prompts could have been designed similar to prompts the student has encountered in the vocational subjects; hence the prompts would have been more recognizable to the candidate. Also, motivation among the weaker students would increase and the results may improve.

This study found that task A, which was the prompt that was specially made for vocational students used social everyday language and clearer instructions than the other prompts. This may have been one of the reasons why it was the most preferred prompt by all students, vocational students and students with the grade of 1 and 2. This shows that it is beneficial to design prompts which are simpler for the weaker or the less motivated student to find a prompt that they understand and can write appropriate texts from. This would mainly be for the vocational students as they have a lower grade point average than the college preparatory students. Unfortunately, as A is the only prompt which has simpler language and clearer

instructions, weaker students have in fact no option but to select the prompt which they understand, and have to deal with the topic of that particular prompt. As it is today, where 86% of the vocational students selected tasks A or C, is there a need for two tasks with more academic language for this group of candidates? If there were several equally simplified prompts for the vocational student to select from, chances are that the topic of the prompt would have been the decisive factor and that the candidate could have selected the topic which interests him/her the most and spurred motivation for the writing and for displaying skills. That way one would take into consideration that the vocational student has a 0.7 lower grade point average than the college preparatory student, and design prompts more suitable for that group of students. The college preparatory candidate needs to display more academic language and to understand academic tasks, so the best solution may be to make vocational exams local. That way the vocational student would have the opportunity to display language skills from simplified writing prompts while college preparatory classes could have more text responsible academic tasks to display the students' academic skills. This would increase the exam's consequence validity.

This study also found that the prompt's bullet points scaffold the weaker student's text but limits the stronger students' options. Therefore it would be possible to design more limiting tasks for vocational students and more inspirational and less limiting tasks for college preparatory classes, if the vocational exam was issued locally. In addition, to help the candidate use the appropriate tone and style, the audience should have been specified in the prompts. This would make the purpose of the writing more obvious to the candidate and give a greater chance of success. Task C was the most favored prompt by girls, and the second most favored by all, and it is the only prompt where the genre is specified. Most arguments for and against selecting task C were regarding the genre. Therefore one may consider specifying the genre in more prompts in the future to create genre awareness and ease the candidates' selection.

Another important factor for selection is whether the genre and topic are interesting, familiar and relatable. To find one topic which interests 8 500 students in 29 study programs twice a year is a tall order, so again one may wonder whether it may have been beneficial to design custom made exam prompts for the different study programs. There is greater chance to find a topic which interests the majority within the same study program, and if the prompts were closely connected with the vocational subjects of each study program, more of the candidates may find both the topic and the purpose of writing such texts motivating. This also applies to



genres and writing acts, as a custom made exam prompt may ask the candidate to write in genres that the student will meet in real life and in practicing their occupation, opening up for more authentic and text-responsible writing tasks. To create genre awareness, the genres and writing acts asked for in the exam could be listed in the preparation booklet so that the candidate can prepare for the genres and writing acts the prompts require. This would also have made it easier for the student to decode the prompt and to expect a good outcome. That way, genres that are necessary in an occupation are mirrored in teaching and at the exam, and one could test all competence aims in the subject curriculum. This would increase the exam's content validity.

There are some concerns around making the English exam local. Some vocational students go on to a third year in upper secondary school to be able to go to higher education, and these students need to be introduced to more academic writing as well. If vocational exams were made locally, one of the prompts in the vocational exams could have been more academic. One could either choose to use one that is designed for the college preparatory classes, or one is issued specially by the Directorate, but is mandatory for all vocational exams in the country. That way the local exam designers only had to design three writing prompts for each exam and each vocational program.

This study also found that the genre of short story is preferred by girls, as they tend to like to make up stories. The problem is that fictional texts are perceived to require simpler language than factual texts and are hence difficult to assess by the same criteria. This issue may be handled by making different assessment criteria for the two types of texts, so that the fictional texts may be assessed on that text type's particular characteristics and factual texts on theirs. If the genres and writing acts were listed in the preparation booklet, one would not be worried that the exam information would give away too much information about the exam tasks, and the assessment criteria of both types of texts could be given to the candidate. If the assessment criteria of a short story were more pronounced, one could help the students become better short story writers, and not only story tellers. Beyond education, the majority of Norwegians will read and enjoy fiction, and this genre awareness would give a clear signal to students that fiction is equally important in society. They would also recognize fiction as text types which are assessed differently from factual texts which will create a positive wash-back effect and give the students who prefer short stories the opportunity to improve their skills. This would also ease the assessment of the two types of texts and increase the exam's reliability as there would be more detailed benchmark scripts for fictional texts and hence give a more precise

assessment. In addition, if the genres were listed in the preparation booklet, the genres and writing acts would be familiar and chances are that the candidates would to a greater extent be able to demonstrate their skills in English.

When a candidate has to select a prompt that does not allow him/her to show the skills which he/she possesses, the grade from the exam is not representative of that candidate's skills and is going to hurt the average grade on the diploma, and possibly chances of higher education or apprenticeship. This affects the criteria based validity of the grade, as this grade would not represent the candidate's competence in English. As it is today, I fear that the winners in this exam arrangement where both vocational and college preparatory students have a common exam are the students who are not selected for the exam.

It may be time to face the fact that most Norwegian employees need to be able to communicate with international co-workers in English, and recognize that this competence is unique within each profession. Also, academic institutions in Norway use English to a larger extent in education than before. The college preparatory students which leave upper secondary school today are not sufficiently prepared for that level of English after one year of compulsory English, and need to have a greater focus on academic writing in upper secondary school. Therefore, one may consider making the vocational English exam local, more work related and simplified with scaffolding bullet points for vocational students. College preparatory students could have more open, inspirational, text responsible and academic tasks issued by the Directorate for Education and Training.

This study has shown what students select and what factors the selection is based on. Another question is why as many as 1000 of the 8 500 students who were candidates for the exam did not turn up at the exam. It would be interesting to see if the turnout would increase if vocational exams were custom made for each study program. However, further research may be conducted on the reasons for the 1000 candidate dropout.

I would like to end this study in the words of participant number 29, who is a boy in a vocational class with the grade of 1:

“Hadde en hatt mer av oppgaver relatert til selve yrkesfaget ville flere hevet karakteren. Innafor våres temaer så har vi mye engelske ord og uttrykk vi ikke får brukt på en vanlig eksamen”.

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I have drawn the illustration on the cover myself.

## **APPENDIX 1      COMPETENCE AIMS WHICH ARE TESTED ON A WRITTEN EXAM IN RED**

### **Language learning**

The aims of the studies are to enable pupils to

- exploit and assess various situations, working methods and strategies for learning English
- describe and evaluate the effects of different verbal forms of expression
- assess and comment on his/her progress in learning English
- use a wide selection of digital and other aids independently, including monolingual dictionaries

### **Communication**

The aims of the studies are to enable pupils to

- understand and use a wide general vocabulary and an academic vocabulary related to his/her own education programme
- understand oral and written presentations about general and specialised themes related to his/her own education programme
- express him/herself in writing and orally in a varied, differentiated and precise manner, with good progression and coherence
- select and use appropriate reading and listening strategies to locate information in oral and written texts
- select and use appropriate writing and speaking strategies that are adapted to a purpose, situation and genre
- take the initiative to begin, end and keep a conversation going
- read texts from different genres and with different objectives
- write formal and informal texts with good writing structure and coherence based on themes that interest him/her and which are important for society
- read and write texts related to his/her own education programme
- select and use content from different sources independently, critically and responsibly
- use technical and mathematical information in communication
- produce composite texts using digital media

- select an in-depth study topic within his/her own education programme and present this to the other pupils

### **Culture, society and literature**

The aims of the studies are to enable pupils to

- discuss social and cultural conditions and values from a number of English-speaking countries
- present and discuss international news topics and current events
- give an account of the use of English as a universal world language
- discuss and elaborate on English texts from a selection of different genres, poems, short stories, novels, films and theatre plays from different epochs and parts of the world
- discuss literature by and about indigenous peoples in the English-speaking world

## **APPENDIX 2      COMPETENCE AIMS FOR STUDY PROGRAMS IN RED**

### **Language learning**

The aims of the studies are to enable pupils to

- exploit and assess various situations, working methods and strategies for learning English
- describe and evaluate the effects of different verbal forms of expression
- assess and comment on his/her progress in learning English
- use a wide selection of digital and other aids independently, including monolingual dictionaries

### **Communication**

The aims of the studies are to enable pupils to

- **understand and use a wide general vocabulary and an academic vocabulary related to his/her own education programme**
- understand oral and written presentations about general and specialised themes related to his/her own education programme
- express him/herself in writing and orally in a varied, differentiated and precise manner, with good progression and coherence
- select and use appropriate reading and listening strategies to locate information in oral and written texts
- select and use appropriate writing and speaking strategies that are adapted to a purpose, situation and genre
- take the initiative to begin, end and keep a conversation going
- read texts from different genres and with different objectives
- write formal and informal texts with good writing structure and coherence based on themes that interest him/her and which are important for society
- **read and write texts related to his/her own education programme**
- select and use content from different sources independently, critically and responsibly
- use technical and mathematical information in communication
- produce composite texts using digital media



- select an in-depth study topic within his/her own education programme and present this to the other pupils

### **Culture, society and literature**

The aims of the studies are to enable pupils to

- discuss social and cultural conditions and values from a number of English-speaking countries
- present and discuss international news topics and current events
- give an account of the use of English as a universal world language
- discuss and elaborate on English texts from a selection of different genres, poems, short stories, novels, films and theatre plays from different epochs and parts of the world
- discuss literature by and about indigenous peoples in the English-speaking world

## **APPENDIX 3 EXAM WRITING PROMPTS MAY 2013**

### Task 2A

Sara and Jasmine in Appendices 1 and 2 have different experiences of fitting into a new occupation and workplace, where newcomers might face high expectations. Write a text about the challenges of starting in a new workplace of your choice.

Your text should include:

- an introduction to an occupation and workplace of your choice
- what an employee can do to fit into the new workplace
- what an employer can do to help new workers settle in
- what co-workers can do welcome new colleagues
- a discussion of what makes a good workplace for all
- a suitable conclusion.

Give your text a suitable title.

### Task 2B

In Appendices 1, 2 and 4, you can read about people who change as a result of new situations, roles or expectations they encounter. Choose one of them and a character from a literary text or film you have studied who has also undergone change for similar reasons. Write a text in which you compare and contrast their experiences.

Your text should include:

- an introduction
- a brief presentation and comparison of the person and character you have chosen
- a comparison of the changes they have gone through, with examples and quotations
- your reflections on how and why they have changed
- a conclusion

Feel free to add your own points.

Give your text a suitable title.

## Task 2C

The expression “you can’t judge a book by its cover” is used in your Preparation Booklet (Appendix 3, first text). Based on this expression, write a short story called “Lovely cover, lousy book”.

Your short story must:

- be clearly set in an English-speaking country
- involve conflicting roles and/or expectations based on social norms and values
- include some dialogue
- have a surprising and/or humorous ending

Use the title: “Lovely cover, lousy book”.

## Task 2D

In the excerpt from the novel *American Dervish* (Appendix 4), the immigrant girl Mina changes as a result of new demands and new-found freedom. Use the story about Mina as a point of departure to write a text about adapting to a new role or situation.

Your text should include:

- an introduction
- a brief explanation of how and why Mina changed
- a discussion of whether you agree or disagree with Mina’s choices
- your reflections on how best to adapt to a new role or situation
- a conclusion

Feel free to add your own points

Give your text a suitable title.

## **APPENDIX 4 ASSESSMENT OF EXAM TASKS**

### **4. Vurdering av eksamensbesvarelser i engelsk fellesfag. (UDIR, 2013, c)**

#### **4.2.3 Task 2**

Task 2 er en langsvarsoppgave, og det forventes derfor en grundigere behandling av tema og bruk av relevante kunnskaper. Elevene skal skrive om ett av flere alternativ.

I tillegg til å skrive en kommunikasjonstilpasset tekst med relevant innhold, skal elevene også vise sin kompetanse i tekststruktur og eventuelt også kildebruk. Språket bør være variert, idiomatisk, hensiktsmessig og tilnærmet korrekt. Teksten bør også ha en klar og logisk oppbygning, god indre sammenheng og relevant innhold i samsvar med den oppgaven eleven har valgt. Teksten bør videre dekke innholdet i kulepunktene som er en del av oppgaveinstruksjonen for hver av langsvarsoppgavene. Disse er å betrakte som minimumskrav. Elevene står fritt til å legge til annet relevant innhold, til å utbrodere og eventuelt omdisponere tekst og innhold i forhold til kulepunktene.

Ettersom selvstendig bruk av ulike kilder er en del av kompetansemålene i læreplanen, blir også bruken av og henvisning til ulike kilder en del av vurderingsgrunnlaget. Dersom eleven bruker kilder, skal disse oppgis på en etterrettelig og tydelig måte. En del oppgaver kan eleven også besvare uten kildebruk.

## APPENDIX 5 PARENT CONSENT FORM, Questionnaire 2

### Samtykke til deltakelse i undersøkelse av elevers valg av stiloppgaver

Ansvarlig institusjon: NTNU

Student: Ingeborg Berg ([ingeborg.berg@ntfk.no](mailto:ingeborg.berg@ntfk.no))

Veileder: Inger Dagrun Langseth

Mitt navn er Ingeborg Berg og jeg holder for tiden på med en masteroppgave ved NTNU, i tillegg til min daglige jobb som engelsklærer ved [REDACTED] vgs.

I forbindelse med min mastergrad i engelsk fagdidaktikk ønsker jeg å gjennomføre en studie med tanke på hvilke mekanismer det er som påvirker elevene i valg av langsvarsoppgaver i engelsk. Derfor vil jeg gjennomføre en undersøkelse som involverer alle elever på VG1 studiespesialiserende, VG1 idrettsfag og alle elever på VG2 yrkesfag.

Jeg ønsker å bruke en anonym undersøkelse på it's learning som er knyttet mot bestemte stiloppgaver på eksamen i engelsk. Eleven vil bli spurt om hvilken oppgave han/hun ville velge fra fire alternativer, og bli bedt om å begrunne valget.

Undersøkelsen vil bli gjennomført i en vanlig engelsktime og tar ca. en halv time å gjennomføre. Selv om eleven ikke skal delta i undersøkelsen, vil eleven måtte være til stede i klasserommet under gjennomføringen av undersøkelsen. Eleven får altså ikke fri til å gjøre andre ting mens undersøkelsen pågår. Det vil ikke være mulig for hverken meg eller andre å identifisere eleven ut fra denne undersøkelsen, så resultatene vil ikke påvirke elevens karakter i faget.

Vennligst fyll ut og lever denne samtykkeerklæringen til elevens engelsklærer så snart som mulig. Dersom eleven er fylt 18, kan han/hun selv signere samtykkeerklæringen.

Ta kontakt med Ingeborg for spørsmål.

På forhånd takk.

Ingeborg Berg

Jostein Kvernmo

(avdelingsleder allmennfag)

---

#### SVARSLIPP:

Ja, jeg har lest informasjonen om undersøkelsen, og jeg som foresatt samtykker til å la mitt barn delta i undersøkelsen:

Elevens navn og klasse: \_\_\_\_\_

Dato og underskrift:

\_\_\_\_\_



- an introduction to an occupation and workplace of your choice
- what an employee can do to fit into the new workplace
- what an employer can do to help new workers settle in
- what co-workers can do to welcome new colleagues
- a discussion of what makes a good workplace for all
- a suitable conclusion.

Give your text a suitable title.

### **Task 2B**

In Appendices 1, 2 and 4, you can read about people who change as a result of new situations, roles or expectations they encounter. Choose one of them and a character from a literary text or film you have studied who has also undergone change for similar reasons. Write a text in which you compare and contrast their experiences.

Your text should include:

- an introduction
- a brief presentation and comparison of the person and character you have chosen
- a comparison of the changes they have gone through, with examples and quotations
- your reflections on how and why they have changed
- a conclusion

Feel free to add your own points.

Give your text a suitable title.

### **Task 2C**

The expression “you can’t judge a book by its cover” is used in your Preparation Booklet (Appendix 3, first text). Based on this expression, write a short story called “Lovely cover, lousy book”.

Your short story must:

- be clearly set in an English-speaking country
- involve conflicting roles and/or expectations based on social norms and values
- include some dialogue

- have a surprising and/or humorous ending

Use the title: “Lovely cover, lousy book”.

### **Task 2D**

In the excerpt from the novel *American Dervish* (Appendix 4), the immigrant girl Mina changes as a result of new demands and new-found freedom. Use the story about Mina as a point of departure to write a text about adapting to a new role or situation.

Your text should include:

- an introduction
- a brief explanation of how and why Mina changed
- a discussion of whether you agree or disagree with Mina’s choices
- your reflections on how best to adapt to a new role or situation
- a conclusion

Feel free to add your own points

Give your text a suitable title.

*Når du har lest alle de fire oppgavene kan du gå til neste spørsmål.*

### **5. Ville du valgt å skrive oppgave 2A? Forklar hvorfor/hvorfor ikke.**

### **Task 2A**

Sara and Jasmine in Appendices 1 and 2 have different experiences of fitting into a new occupation and workplace, where newcomers might face high expectations. Write a text about the challenges of starting in a new workplace of your choice.

Your text should include:

- an introduction to an occupation and workplace of your choice
- what an employee can do to fit into the new workplace
- what an employer can do to help new workers settle in
- what co-workers can do to welcome new colleagues



- a discussion of what makes a good workplace for all
- a suitable conclusion.

Give your text a suitable title.

**6. Ville du valgt å skrive oppgave 2B? Forklar hvorfor/hvorfor ikke.**

**Task 2B**

In Appendices 1, 2 and 4, you can read about people who change as a result of new situations, roles or expectations they encounter. Choose one of them and a character from a literary text or film you have studied who has also undergone change for similar reasons. Write a text in which you compare and contrast their experiences.

Your text should include:

- an introduction
- a brief presentation and comparison of the person and character you have chosen
- a comparison of the changes they have gone through, with examples and quotations
- your reflections on how and why they have changed
- a conclusion

Feel free to add your own points.

Give your text a suitable title.

**7. Ville du valgt å skrive oppgave 2C? Forklar hvorfor/hvorfor ikke.**

**Task 2C**

The expression “you can’t judge a book by its cover” is used in your Preparation Booklet (Appendix 3, first text). Based on this expression, write a short story called “Lovely cover, lousy book”.

Your short story must:

- be clearly set in an English-speaking country

- involve conflicting roles and/or expectations based on social norms and values
- include some dialogue
- have a surprising and/or humorous ending

Use the title: “Lovely cover, lousy book”.

**8. Ville du valgt å skrive oppgave 2D? Forklar hvorfor/hvorfor ikke.**

### **Task 2D**

In the excerpt from the novel *American Dervish* (Appendix 4), the immigrant girl Mina changes as a result of new demands and new-found freedom. Use the story about Mina as a point of departure to write a text about adapting to a new role or situation.

Your text should include:

- an introduction
- a brief explanation of how and why Mina changed
- a discussion of whether you agree or disagree with Mina’s choices
- your reflections on how best to adapt to a new role or situation
- a conclusion

Feel free to add your own points

Give your text a suitable title.

**I spørsmål 9 velges ett alternativ.**

9. Hvilken av disse fire oppgavene ville du velge?                      2A    2B    2C    2D

## APPENDIX 7 QUESTIONNAIRE 1

Skole: \_\_\_\_\_

Elevens kjønn	Klasse	Valgt langsvarsoppgave (A, B, C, eller D)
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		
16		
17		
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19		
20		
21		
22		
23		
24		
25		

Navn på  
faglærer: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 8 WHAT DID THE CANDIDATES SELECT ON THE EXAM IN MAY 2013

SCHOOL 1 2MK YF Media and communication

Kjønn/antall	Oppg. A	Oppg. B	Oppg. C	Oppg. D
Jente 11	6		3	2
Gutt 5	3		2	
Sum 16	9	0	5	2

SCHOOL 2 2MKA YF Media and communication

Kjønn/antall	Oppg. A	Oppg. B	Oppg. C	Oppg. D
Jente 10	4	2	3	1
Gutt 4	3		1	
Sum 14	7	2	4	1

SCHOOL 3 1IDB SF- sports

Kjønn/antall	Oppg. A	Oppg. B	Oppg. C	Oppg. D
Jente 9	3	2	2	2
Gutt 8		2	4	2
Sum 17	3	4	6	4

SCHOOL 4 IST SF-sports

Kjønn/antall	Oppg. A	Oppg. B	Oppg. C	Oppg. D
Jente 8	2		4	2
Gutt 3	2		1	
Sum 11	4	0	5	2

SCHOOL 4 VG1 SF- general studies

Kjønn/antall	Oppg. A	Oppg. B	Oppg. C	Oppg. D
Jente 8	1	2	3	2
Gutt 4	3			1
Sum 12	4	2	3	3

SCHOOL 5 1STA SF-general studies

Kjønn/antall	Oppg. A	Oppg. B	Oppg. C	Oppg. D
Jente 18	4	2	10	2
Gutt 3	1		1	1
Sum 21	5	2	11	3

**Total of all study programs:**

<b>Gender (number)</b>	<b>Task A</b>	<b>Task B</b>	<b>Task C</b>	<b>Task D</b>
<b>Female (64)</b>	20	8	25	11
<b>Male (27)</b>	12	2	9	4
<b>Sum (91)</b>	32	10	34	15

**General studies :**

<b>Gender (number)</b>	<b>Task A</b>	<b>Task B</b>	<b>Task C</b>	<b>Task D</b>
<b>Female (53)</b>	10	6	19	8
<b>Male (18)</b>	6	2	6	4
<b>Sum (61)</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>12</b>

**Vocational studies :**

<b>Gender (number)</b>	<b>Task A</b>	<b>Task B</b>	<b>Task C</b>	<b>Task D</b>
<b>Female (21)</b>	10	2	6	3
<b>Male (9)</b>	6		3	
<b>Sum (30)</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>

## APPENDIX 9 PARENT CONSENT FORM - interviews

24.02.14

### INTERVJU I FORBINDELSE MED MASTEROPPGAVE

Mitt navn er Ingeborg Berg og jeg holder for tiden på med masterstudier ved NTNU i tillegg til min daglige jobb som engelsklærer ved [REDACTED].

I forbindelse med min mastergrad i engelsk fagdidaktikk ønsker jeg å intervju ditt barn med tanke på hvilke mekanismer det er som påvirker elevene i valg av langsvarsoppgaver i engelsk.

Eleven vil bli vist fire ulike stiloppgaver og jeg vil at han/hun skal forklare om de enkelte oppgavene ville blitt valgt på en eksamen og grunnene til dette. Eleven vil på forhånd få med seg forberedelsesheftet for å sette seg inn i emnet oppgavene tar for seg. Han/hun skal ikke skrive, men forklare hva han/hun tenker om hvorfor én oppgave velges, mens de andre forkastes.

Intervjuet vil foregå i skoletida og ta ca 20 minutter. Jeg vil avtale med faglærer og elev når det passer best for alle parter, men vil helst ha det gjennomført i uke 9, 10 eller 11. Jeg vil ta opp intervjuet på digital diktafon, der fila blir slettet etter at intervjuet er transkribert. Det vil ikke være mulig å identifisere ditt barn ut fra hverken transkripsjon eller lydfil.

Nederst er en samtykkeerklæring jeg vil at eleven skal ta med tilbake til meg så snart som mulig.

På forhånd takk.

Med vennlig hilsen

Ingeborg Berg

Jostein Kvernmo

(avdelingsleder allmennfag)

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#### SVARSLIPP:

Ja, jeg har lest informasjonen om undersøkelsen og jeg som foresatt samtykker til å la mitt barn delta i undersøkelsen og samtykker i at du tar kontakt med mitt barn for intervju:

Navn på elev: \_\_\_\_\_

Dato og underskrift:

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## APPENDIX 10 INTERVIEW GUIDE

Exam ENG1002/1003 23.05.2013

### Topic: Roles and expectations

#### Preparation (5 texts):

- What kind of roles do you play during a day?
- How first impressions of people and places are not always correct
- How people are expected to behave in different ways in different situations
- Typical stereotypes of English speaking countries

Presenter meg selv, studiet mitt og hva jeg er ute etter

Hvordan forstår eleven oppgaven? Hva tror han/hun det kreves? Har han/hun en plan for hvordan denne oppgaven kan løses?

Vis én oppgave av gangen: Kunne du valgt denne oppgaven? Hvorfor? Hvorfor ikke?

#### **TASKS:**

- 2A: Fitting into a new occupation and workplace. **Explanation/discussion**
- 2B: Compare and contrast experiences of characters in a text or film who have changed. **Mixed genre instruction** Related to appendix 1,2 and 4
- 2C: “Lovely cover, lousy book”. **Short story** Related to appendix 3, first text
- 2D: Write a text about adapting to a new role or situation. **Mixed genre instruction** Related to appendix 4.

Hvis disse oppgavene var gitt på norsktentamen, ville du valgt den samme?

Har du noe mer du vil legge til om stiloppgaver?

**APPENDIX 11 GRADES OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN QUESTIONNAIRE 2**

