

## Abstract

This study investigates the characteristics of writing assignments for the ESL classroom in lower secondary school in Norway. In this thesis, a writing assignment is defined as a text written by a task designer, often a teacher, with the aim of prompting writing. Hence, a writing assignment does not refer to a text written by a student, but the written assignment, task or prompt students are given in school, and expected to provide a written answer or response to. Designing writing assignments has been described as one of the most important jobs a teacher has, and it is a fundamental part of the teaching of writing. A writing assignment is a text of its own, with its own content, form and specific aim. Despite this, there are few studies conducted on task design in the ESL classroom in Norway, and it is important with more studies on writing assignments in order to highlight different aspects of this topic.

The main objective of this study is to create a higher awareness among task designers on the implications writing assignments can have on students' texts. My aim is to contribute to producing a meta language for teachers and task designers to be able to discuss, analyse and evaluate writing assignments. Hopefully, the characteristics of assignments that are presented in this study can help teachers make conscious choices when planning and designing writing assignments. In order to identify the characteristics of writing assignments, I carried out several analyses of writing assignments utilised in year 10 in Norwegian lower secondary school. In order to concretise the analyses, the *characteristics* of writing assignments, were specified as the *main components* and *key text features* asked for in the writing assignments. In addition, the analyses included a focus on how assignments facilitate for providing students with *choices* on how to answer writing assignments.

Some of the findings from the study were that most of the tasks included clear *task expectations*, in terms of clear descriptions and instructions on what the student's text was expected to include. Very few of the tasks asked students *to interact* and *to convince*, while tasks asking students *to reflect* occurred most frequently. A majority of the assignments also asked students to write *factual texts*, and to write texts related to the curriculum's main subject area; *culture, society and literature*.



## Sammendrag

Denne studien undersøker kjennetegnene ved skriveoppgaver i engelskfaget i ungdomsskolen. I denne masteroppgaven er en skriveoppgave definert som en tekst skrevet av en oppgavedesigner, ofte en lærer, som har som mål å igangsette skriving. Derfor referer en skriveoppgave ikke til en tekst skrevet av en elev, men til den skriftlige oppgaven eller teksten som elever blir tildelt i skolen, og som det er forventet at de gir en skriftlig besvarelse til. Å designe en skriveoppgave har blitt definert som en av de viktigste jobbene en lærer kan ha, og den er en grunnleggende del av skriveopplæringen. En skriveoppgave er en selvstendig tekst, med sitt eget innhold, sin egen form og spesifikke mål. På tross av dette, er det gjennomført få studier på oppgavedesign i engelskfaget, og det er viktig med flere studier av skriveoppgaver for å fremheve ulike aspekter ved dette temaet.

Hovedmålet med denne studien er å skape en høyere bevissthet hos oppgavedesignere angående virkningene skriveoppgaver kan ha på elevens tekster. Målet mitt er å bidra til å produsere et metaspråk for lærere og oppgavedesignere slik at det skal være mulig å diskutere, analysere og evaluere skriveoppgaver. Forhåpentligvis vil kjennetegnene ved skriveoppgaver som er presentert i denne studien hjelpe lærere til å ta bevisste valg i planleggingen og utformingen av skriveoppgaver. For å kunne identifisere kjennetegnene ved skriveoppgaver har jeg gjort flere analyser av skriveoppgaver brukt i 10. trinn i ungdomsskolen. For å konkretisere analysen, har *kjennetegnene* ved skriveoppgaver blitt spesifisert som *hovedkomponentene* og *nøkkeltekstkjennetegnene* etterspurt i skriveoppgavene. I tillegg inkluderer analysen et fokus på hvordan oppgavene legger til rette for at elevene har valgmuligheter angående hvordan de skal svare på oppgavene.

Noen av funnene fra studien var at de fleste oppgavene hadde tydelige *oppgaveforventninger*, som betyr at de hadde tydelige beskrivelser og instruksjoner angående hva som var forventet av innhold i elevens tekst. Veldig få av oppgavene ba elevene om å *samhandle* og å *overbevise*, mens oppgaver som ba elevene om å *reflektere* forekom oftest. Et flertall av oppgavene ba elevene om å skrive *faktatekster*, og om å skrive tekster relatert til læreplanens hovedområde; *kultur, samfunn og litteratur*.



# **Preface and acknowledgements**

## **Preface**

I have been teaching English in lower secondary school in Norway since 2011, and I have made a considerable amount of writing assignments since I started my career as a teacher. In the beginning, the focus was primarily on what I wanted the students to write, and the assignments had characteristics similar to prescriptive writing instructions. Some time back, I came upon research and literature on writing assignments that had prescriptions on certain features vital to create assignments that could appeal to students. This made me more aware of the fact that a writing assignment is a text of its own, where the content and words applied are issues that should be evaluated carefully before presenting the assignment to students. This inspired me to look at my own practice of creating writing assignments, but also the practice in other schools.

## **Acknowledgements**

I want to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to everyone who has supported me in the work on my master's thesis. First, I would like to thank my academic supervisor, Hildegunn Otnes, for her constructive feedback and valuable support in the process of working with this thesis. I also would like to thank Anita Normann, who provided helpful and detailed feedback, and Inger Dagrun Langseth, who initially guided my attention to the topic of writing assignments.

I want to thank my employer for supporting me and giving me the opportunity to complete this master's programme while working full time as a teacher, and my colleagues at work for being supportive and positive. I also have to thank my colleagues from other schools who shared their writing assignments with me, and a special thanks to my friend and colleague Øystein Gjerde Nilsen, who helped out by providing highly valued response on my text.

Last, but not least, thank you to my lovely fiancée, Ina, who has been very patient and supportive in the recent years, and for taking care of our son while I have been occupied with my studies.

Trondheim, May 2018, Øyvind Øverås Moland



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## 1.0 Introduction

This thesis is a study of writing assignments from the English subject, collected from lower secondary schools in Norway. The aim has been to find what the main components and key features of writing assignments for the ESL classroom can be. By studying these assignments through the spectacles of theory on the topic, and what earlier research has presented as vital features of writing assignments, the goal has been to identify patterns in a selection of writing assignments presented to students attending year 10 in Norwegian lower secondary education. In order to find these patterns, I have conducted a qualitative study on 41 writing assignments utilised in a selection of Norwegian lower secondary schools. The main research question for my thesis is thus:

“What characterises writing assignments for lower secondary Norwegian ESL classrooms?”

I will try to answer this main research question through the following three research questions:

“How do the assignments facilitate for providing students with choices on how to answer?”

“What are the main components of the writing assignments?”

“What are the key text features of the specific task expectations?”

My research questions will form the structure of the analyses presented in chapter 4, while chapter 5 is a discussion of the results of the analyses. In chapter 5, I will discuss the findings from chapter 4 by comparing the findings to a selection of theory, earlier research and what the English subject curriculum says on writing and writing assignments.

The reason for studying writing assignments is because of its importance as a constituent in the teaching of writing, and consequently language learning in general. Thus it is a relevant issue to study when focusing on the English subject. Writing competence is considered a vital

constituent of language learning, and is explicitly highlighted in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the English subject curriculum in Norway as an important skill to teach and learn. Linguistic competences, i.e. lexical, grammatical, semantic and orthographic competences are in the CEFR identified as important elements of a language learner's communicative competence (Council of Europe, 2011). In the English subject curriculum, writing is integrated in the competence aims as one of five basic skills that are meant to contribute to the development of competence in the subject. Writing is highlighted as a tool for language learning and an important skill to learn, in order to be able to “express ideas and opinions in an understandable and purposeful manner” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013, pp. 4, 5).

Furthermore, in higher education the ability to write cannot be overestimated. Knowledge is then mostly documented through written works, thus the ability to express and transmit ideas through the written form is vital (Dysthe, Hertzberg, & Hoel, 2010). According to Dysthe et al. (2010), writing is an important learning strategy since it provides the opportunity to write down thoughts and later revisit them in order to reformulate them. This makes it possible to discover new connections and can lead to in-depth learning as opposed to superficial knowledge. Academic writing skills are a necessity for students in higher education and a significant competence for most people's professional life after student years.

Writing is also important on a personal level, and to be able to write in English is becoming more relevant in today's global community as “advances in transportation and technology allow people from nations and cultures throughout the world to interact with each other” (Weigle, 2002, p. 1). The teaching of English has thus increased its focus on language as a system of communication rather than as an object of study (Weigle, 2002). Literacy is the ability to read and write and the fact that the United Nations recently completed their Literacy Decade, substantiates how literacy is considered a crucial part in the acquisition of essential life skills, and “represents an essential step in basic education, which is an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2002, p. 3).

Summarised, literacy and the individual's ability to write is regarded as a vital skill, relevant and necessary in most levels of society. In the most basic sense, the basic skills required to be able to participate in a twenty-first century world, to the higher level required for academic

writing, necessary for education and professional life. Being able to communicate and write in English, is thus an essential skill, considering the fact that English in today's global world is the dominant language of communication, and with indications that its role as a world language will only increase in the years to come (Schulzke, 2014).

My research material is writing assignments for the English subject, collected from four different Norwegian lower secondary schools, in addition to two centrally standardised exam sets for written English in Norway. During the analysis the assignments were categorised according to *components* and the *text features* asked for in the writing assignments. A component is in this context meant as the parts or pieces that an assignment is comprised of, not analysing the content of the text in the assignment. When studying the text features asked for in the assignments, I am looking at the text content of the writing assignment, with the aim of finding what the assignment is asking the student to do. The assignments were partly analysed through a theoretical framework with a functional view on writing, a view visualised through a model entitled the Wheel of Writing, but also analysed through findings from earlier research and the English subject curriculum.

## **1.1 Writing assignments' impact on development of writing skills**

School provides an appropriate platform for developing English writing skills, and given the continuous growth of the English language globally, students and young people with other mother tongues than English should learn how to express themselves in written English. School may be an obvious location for such work, but the question remains, how can schools develop and improve students' English writing skills?

One starting point, and an explicit issue teachers can work with in order to develop their students' writing skills, is to be very attentive to the writing assignments they provide to the students. The reason behind the focus on writing assignments is related to the impact they have on the teaching of writing. Tasks or writing assignments "have a marked effect upon the writing process and the product" (Ruth & Murphy, 1988, p. 12). A writing assignment is also the initiator for most writing and has a significant role in the teaching of writing. In many ways, it is the structure that can hold the teaching of writing together. It can address goals for the students and influence their engagement (Gardner, 2008). Student performance in writing

is closely related to the assignment the students are asked to respond to. So if the assignments happen to be “dull, indecipherable or daunting, students may not be able to come up with their best composing act” (Smith & Swain, 2011, p. 1). These statements underline the importance of designing writing assignments that appeal to students, and emphasise the relevancy of my study.

To design assignments that can inspire and engage students to start writing is a goal many teachers aspire to. If an assignment can inspire and engage students to write, it will also help them to become better writers. This is because of the general assumption that when you are inspired to write, it can lead to more writing, which in turn can improve writing skills, an assumption that is supported by the Writing Study Group of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), which is a United States professional organisation. The organisation published the “NCTE Beliefs About the Teaching of Writing”, where one principle was that “(p)eople learn to write by writing.” (Gardner, 2008, p. 9). Thus, teachers have a great responsibility of creating writing assignments that will encourage students to write, and this thesis sets out to explore some factors of writing assignments that can be vital to reach that goal.

## **1.2 Definitions of some relevant terms**

The main material in this thesis is writing assignments designed for students attending year 10 in Norwegian secondary education, which is the final year of lower secondary school in Norway. In this context, a writing assignment is the written task, assignment or prompt that students are given in school and thus expected to provide a written answer or response to. Hence, a writing assignment does not mean a text written by a student, but the task they are asked to respond to, in writing. My definition of the terms *task*, *assignment* and *prompt* is explained further in the following paragraphs.

In this thesis, a writing assignment is perceived as a text of its own, with its own content, form and specific purpose. A writing assignment is a text written by a task designer, often a teacher, with the aim of prompting writing (Otnes, 2015). Such texts, often characterised by being short, but important texts where the teacher is the author, and the recipient is the student invited to write a text, constitute the material analysed in this thesis.

In literature on writing assignments, the term *prompt* is often used interchangeably with *assignment*. A prompt is something that causes "someone to take a course of action" (Oxford English Dictionary Online, n.d.). It is a trigger for something else to happen. Hence a writing assignment is not necessarily a prompt before it serves its purpose, namely to get students to write. Prompt is also a noun with ambiguous connotations, since it is also utilised for the extra material provided to students as support to help them understand and answer writing assignments, and not as a term used for the assignment itself (Way, Joiner, & Seaman, 2000). This study does not focus on students' response to assignments, thus it is not possible to answer which types of assignments that can trigger students to write, and that have the characteristics of a prompt. Because of this, *writing assignments* or *tasks* are the most appropriate terms for this thesis.

It should be stressed early on that this thesis will be analysing assignments as isolated texts, with a premise that the teacher is not available to give further instructions or explanations. In order for this to be possible, assignments need to include a certain level of information, and provide enough support to make it possible for students to provide an answer or response. It is this information from the assignment sets that make up the data material in my thesis.

There are mainly two distinctive terms that apply to the data material in this analysis, *writing assignment set* and *writing assignment*. The specific terms have different meanings, and understanding the difference is vital in order to follow the descriptions in this thesis. When using the term *writing assignment set*, *assignment set* or simply *set*, I am referring to the units collected from the schools and the exam sets. The reason for entitling these units, assignment sets, was because several of them contained more than one writing assignment, and thus, the need to distinguish between the assignment sets and the specific assignments, became necessary. Because of this, a *writing assignment* or *assignment* refers to the specific tasks within the assignment sets.

A synonym for *assignment* is *task*, and these terms are both applied in my text, referring to the specific units within each assignment set. In literature on the topic, both *task* and *assignment* are terms applied when referring to texts written by teachers aiming to prompt writing, and in that regard the terms task and assignment will also be utilised interchangeably in my text, also when referring to writing assignments in general. The data material in this study is thus

comprised of 14 assignment sets and 41 writing task, and in this thesis, the most vital distinction to be aware of, is when I am referring to a *set* or not.

## 1.2 English as a second language

Outside of school, English is today a common language in most Norwegians' everyday life, and many Norwegians are exposed to the language daily. According to the English Proficiency Index, Norway has a very high proficiency in English, but it is still not an official language of Norway (EF Education First, 2016; Vikør, 2015). Below, I will discuss the role of the English language in Norway in brief, in order to understand what it means to write in English for a Norwegian adolescent.

The role of the English language in Norway is not easy to classify. In order to do this, some terms need to be clarified and explained. A person's first language is regarded as the language that is learned before the age of three, and is also, in most cases, a child's mother tongue or tongues (Berggreen, 1999). Literature on language learning tend to distinguish between how to learn a second language and a foreign language, when discussing how additional languages to a person's first language is learned. According to Byram (2008), there is no useful distinction between the acquisition processes when learning a second or foreign language, since they from a psychological perspective are identical. However, in an educational and political context, the status of a language in a society is important.

English is regarded as the most important language in Norway for international communication (Vikør, 2015). The English Proficiency Index states that Norway is among the world leaders in English language education, and Norwegians have a very high proficiency in English, which is ensured through the public education system, but also because of constant exposure to English through media (EF Education First, 2016). In this regard, English is officially a foreign language in Norway, but most Norwegians experience a substantial exposure to English in their everyday lives.

Berggreen draws the distinction between second and foreign languages on where they are used and learned. If a language primarily is learned in the classroom and through formal education, it can be defined as a foreign language, whereas if a language is used actively as a way of natural communication in the learner's environment outside of the classroom, it can be



defined as a second language. Other features of a second language is its high degree of exposure in the learner's daily life, something that involves having to discover significant parts of the new language without guidance from a teacher (1999). Based on the level of exposure the English language has in Norwegian society outside of the classroom, English is defined as a second language (ESL) in this thesis, as opposed to the definition, English as a foreign language (EFL).

According to Williams (2012), second language (L2) production can in general contribute to language learning, but there are some features that are unique for written production when compared to oral production, namely its permanence and its slower pace. For language learners, these features can facilitate a stronger learning value, due to the greater opportunity to notice shortcomings in their L2. The permanence of the written form provides material that makes it possible to almost immediately consult experts, or to reflect "on their explicit knowledge during the composing process itself." (p. 323). These issues and differences between the oral and written form are not restricted only to L2 production, but are also examples of more general differences between the two forms of output, and also applies to first language (L1) production. Evidence shows that students often transfer writing processes from their L1 to their L2, but there is a tendency that they write shorter texts and revise more in their L2 (Thorson, 2000).

Given that the focus of this thesis is about L2-writing, it is relevant to consider whether there are other features of writing in a second language that differentiates it from L1-writing. Way, Joiner and Seaman (2000), conducted a study on foreign language (FL) and stress the importance of using real-life interactive tasks in order to produce proficient FL writers, e.g. letter exchanges with native speakers. This article suggests that there are different considerations to be taken when studying foreign language-writing compared to ESL-writing, but their findings can apply to ESL students as well, especially for students at lower language levels, where English is perceived as more similar to a foreign language than to a second language.

### **1.3 What can we learn about writing assignments from the English subject curriculum?**

English writing skills are integral parts of the English subject curriculum. Written communication is one of four main subject areas in the curriculum in Norway, and “deals with understanding and using English language through reading, writing and using suitable reading and writing strategies.” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013, p. 3). It states that students should write different texts for situations where written communication is necessary and thus acquire knowledge, experience greater understanding and also, to stimulate the joy of writing. This is an essential point for task designers when designing and creating writing assignments. Students should throughout a school year be provided different types of tasks, and teachers should aim at making writing assignments that will encourage students to write.

Being able to express oneself in writing in English is one of the five basic skills in the English subject. Working on these five basic skills are meant to contribute to the development of competence in the subject. According to the curriculum, the writing skill includes developing competence in writing different kinds of texts, learning orthography, expanding vocabulary and being able to express ideas and opinions in an understandable manner. It is also expressed that in order to succeed in an English speaking world, students need to be able to adapt the language to different topics and communication situations, and to be able to take cultural norms and conventions into consideration when communicating in English (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013).

Some of the competences referenced to above are specified in the competence aims in the curriculum as essential factors for developing writing skills, and thus important to acknowledge when designing writing assignments. Below is a selection of relevant competence aims for written communication after year 10, where it is stated that the aims of the studies are to enable pupils to:

- choose and use different reading and writing strategies that are suitable for the purpose
- understand and use a general vocabulary related to different topics
- use own notes and different sources as a basis for writing

- write different types of texts with structure and coherence
- use central patterns for orthography, word inflection, sentence and construction to produce texts
- use digital tools and formal requirements for information processing, text production and communication (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013, p. 9).

The English subject curriculum in Norway draws heavily on the guidelines presented in the CEFRL. Both documents operate with learner competences as a description of the aims of the language learner. In the CEFRL, linguistic competence is regarded as language related competences and one of three vital components of the broader term, communicative competence. Linguistic competence includes, as previously stated, lexical, grammatical, semantic and orthographic competences (Council of Europe, 2011). These are all features of language learning that are central in order to develop writing skills. Lexical competence is the knowledge of, and the ability to use the vocabulary of a language, while to have knowledge of, and the ability to use the grammatical resources of a language is considered to be grammatical competence, something that also includes knowledge of the distinction between morphology and syntax. Semantic competence focuses on the learner's control of the organisation of meaning, while orthography involves knowledge and skills in spelling, punctuation and the basic form of letters (Council of Europe, 2011).

The issues presented above, concerning the role of the English language in Norway, and what executive documents state on the aims of English writing skills, are vital in regards to the main topic for this study, writing assignments. The reason for this is the connection between writing assignments and the development of writing skills. Writing assignments can have a major impact on students' writing development, and thus should be designed with great care and with clear aims.

A writing assignment should be a trigger for students to practice and develop, in addition to general writing skills, and knowledge on a variety of features from the curriculum. One aim for creators of writing assignments is to design assignments that are based on the content of the curriculum. Texts produced by students are usually handed in to a teacher, and thus make up the material available to the teacher when providing feedback and assessment on writing skills. In order to provide students with relevant assessments and feedback on their texts, the

initial assignment must be designed and created with the curriculum as a basis and starting point.

The curriculum for the English subject in Norway is structured into four main subject areas with different competence aims. The four areas are *language learning*, *oral communication*, *written communication* and *culture, society and literature* (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013). Oral communication is not relevant in my study, but the other three main subject areas are. The focus on these three main areas is substantiated in the exam guidelines for English written exams in year 10, where it is stated that the exam assignments are based on the competence aims in the curriculum, and are meant to test the students' competence in all main subject areas, except for oral communication (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2016).

The most relevant aims for written communication are highlighted in the competence aims presented above, but other areas also involve general aims significant for developing reading and writing skills. The language learning area contains four aims, also expressed in quite general terms, e.g. "use different situations, working methods and learning strategies to develop one's English language skills" and "comment on own work in English". Finally, there is the area entitled culture, society and literature, which includes more detailed aims focusing on current events, history and literature in English speaking countries, but also a more general aim stating that the students are supposed to "communicate and converse about contemporary and academic topics" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013). This main subject area is especially relevant in terms of what type of *content* assignments ask students to include in their texts.

When studying the English subject curriculum, and noticing the general tone of many of the aims, it becomes clear that when focusing on the content of writing assignments, assignments can ask students to produce texts about almost any subject and still be valid. It is a goal in itself to make students "write different types of texts with structure and coherence" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013, p. 9). The aims expressed in the main area culture, society and literature are the only aims that explicitly formulate instructions on the content of the teaching in the subject. These are issues that have to be taken into consideration when formulating and designing writing assignments.

The curriculum is a relevant starting point for designing writing assignments, and for the English subject in Norway, teachers should also keep in mind that for most students, it is a second language. However, in general the English language proficiency level in Norway is very high, and thus the consideration and attention that has to be given by teachers to the fact that English is a second language, is of less importance compared to the considerations taken in teaching other foreign languages. The reason for this is partly because of the extensive level of English language exposure Norwegians experience in their everyday lives. Therefore, general guidelines on writing assignment design, not necessarily focusing on second or foreign language learning, also apply to my study, and thus a review of writing assignment design in general is presented below.

## **1.4 Literature review on writing assignment design**

In order to contextualise my study in the relevant field of research, this introduction will continue with providing a short literature review on writing assignment design in general. Writing assignments have been described as a fundamental part of the teaching of writing, and designing writing assignments is one of the most important jobs a teacher has (Gardner, 2008; Ruth & Murphy, 1988). Traci Gardner compares the challenges teachers have when composing writing assignments to the challenges students face when they are asked to answer an assignment. Audience, purpose and voice needs to be identified, and structure and format needs to be decided upon. The time frame should also be determined and relevant resources should be pointed out in order to help the students complete the assignment (Gardner, 2008).

There are several international studies and research on the topic of task design. Many of these are studies conducted in countries where English is the first or official language. They are still relevant for this thesis, because they focus on general rules for creating writing assignments that apply to students in their adolescent years. The studies have explored issues such as whether there are any key features of task design that can motivate students to write, and if it is possible to discover any improvement in students' writing skills based on the type of assignments they are asked to respond to (Newmann, Bryk, & Nagaoka, 2001; Smith & Swain, 2011).

The analyses presented in chapter 3 are partly based on the theory presented in chapter 2, but some of the findings presented in the studies presented below, are also utilised in my analyses. The findings and issues from these studies that are relevant for my categorisation, are thus repeated and described further in chapter 3.

#### 1.4.1 Assignments should appeal to students' interests

As presented earlier in this chapter, tasks could focus on topics from the curriculum's main subject area, culture, society and literature, and ask students to show knowledge on issues related to English speaking countries. However, given the generality of a majority of the competence aims in the curriculum, students can write about almost any topic as long as they can practice and develop their general writing skills. Studies conducted on the topic (Newmann et al., 2001; Ruth & Murphy, 1988; Smith & Swain, 2011; Weigle, 2002) support this notion, by stressing the importance of creating assignments that appeal to students' interests, i.e., assignments that ask for their personal experiences on a specific subject or everyday life outside school.

Tasks should be centred around a topic that is interesting to students, and make them so engaged that they feel that they have something to say about the subject (Weigle, 2002). To ask for students' personal experiences on a topic is an effective way of focusing an assignment around a topic where the student is the expert. The invitation to write about personal experiences can open up a whole range of responses, and it provides students with an opportunity of sharing information only they possess, as opposed to sharing information that they believe the readers already have (Smith & Swain, 2011). By asking for the students' opinion and experiences on a topic, the assignment positions the student as the expert, thus they are provided the opportunity to express themselves and write with authority.

Finding a subject suitable for a wide range of students is a challenge for the teacher, but ideally the subject of a writing assignment should attract attention, interest and initiate thought, reflection and imagination (Ruth & Murphy, 1988). Whether the best way to achieve this is to have assignments that are "neutral" and that turn to personal topics, or assignments that are subject specific, where students are asked to show knowledge on a subject, has been debated in the research on writing and subject selection. Evidence shows that the most vital

part is that assignments feel relevant and accessible to the student and whether they turn to personal topics or are subject specific is a secondary concern (Ruth & Murphy, 1988).

Ruth and Murphy (1988), whose main focus is on how to design writing tasks for the assessment of writing, also stress the idea that students write best when they are asked to write about something that interests them, and about something they would like to share with others. If a topic seems dull, confusing or intimidating they will not be able to perform their best, thus it becomes hard for a teacher to measure their real writing abilities. Ruth and Murphy's studies date some years back, at a time when little research existed on the field of writing assignment design. They named the writing task the "neglected variable" in writing and research on writing, calling for a greater focus on how writing tasks are written and designed. Still, they acknowledged that "(t)here is an increasing awareness that wording and other properties of writing tasks will have a marked effect upon the writing process and the product" (1988, p. 12). This argument correlates well with the studies and research carried out in more recent years.

A study of Chicago teachers' assignments in writing, concluded with the fact that assignments calling for more authentic intellectual work improved student scores on conventional tests (Newmann et al., 2001). Authentic intellectual work was in this study defined as assignments asking for original application of knowledge and skills, i.e. construction of knowledge around authentic assignments, rather than reproduction and use of facts and procedures. The aim was that students could produce discourse that had value beyond school. The study demonstrated that when students were exposed to such assignments, they also performed better in tests and programs measuring basic skills (Newmann et al., 2001).

One of the arguments highlighted when asked how authentic intellectual work can enhance basic skill learning, is that these type of assignments actually help to motivate and sustain students in the hard work that learning requires (Newmann et al., 2001). Providing writing assignments to students that appeal to their interests and everyday life outside school, does not only have the potential of motivating them to answer a specific task, but can also have a long time effect on learning and on the development of students' basic skills.

### 1.4.2 Assignments should provide support and information

According to Gardner (2008), generic assignments such as “Write a persuasive essay” or “Write an analysis of the novel” can result in general responses with unclear purposes and audiences. These are examples of tasks that do not provide students with the support or information needed to successfully complete a writing task. A writing assignment should offer considerable support and details and include information that makes it easy for the students to understand the setting and background for the text they are asked to write, this includes providing information about who the readers of their text are.

In order to make sure that a writing assignment provides enough support for a student to complete an assignment there are certain guidelines to follow. Instructions should be short and simple enough for students to understand, but also be sufficiently detailed for students to know what is expected of them. Writing tasks should, at minimum, include the purpose of the writing and a specification of who the student is writing for. It should also include and give some information regarding expected length of the student’s response, and information about how the text will be assessed (Weigle, 2002). Gardner states that to be certain that the students fully comprehend the expectations for writing assignments, teachers must also unpack the meaning of an assignment by explaining to create a shared understanding of the activity. Teachers should also provide students with model responses and share rubrics and other resources that highlights assessment criteria (Gardner, 2008).

The audience of an assignment should preferably be an authentic group of readers, and the audience and purpose should be explicitly stated in the task (Gardner, 2008). This, is especially important if students are asked to write texts intended to inform, persuade or explain. If the assignment is unclear about its audience, it becomes difficult for students to know who to persuade. The whole point of transactional writing is to get something done by someone, and a predetermined audience is a significant constituent of transactional writing assignments. “When audience is specified in a writing task that provides a full rhetorical context and a clear purpose for writing, the effect is to create a more realistic writing problem” (Smith & Swain, 2011, p. 12)

Smith & Swain (2011) have explored what it takes to frame writing tasks that will motivate students to show off what they really can do, and have looked at how writing assignments



should be designed when the teacher is not available to give further instructions to the students. They stress the fact that designing writing assignments is challenging for teachers, and that there are many considerations that need to be taken in the process.

## **1.5 Studies on writing assignments in Norway**

There are not many examples of research on task design for the ESL classroom in Norway, but one recent study entitled *Developing national standards for the assessment of writing – a tool for teaching and learning (Normprosjektet)*, explored how to facilitate for a good writing environment through assignment formulations (Otnes, 2015). This study did not, however, focus on the English subject, but had its primary focus on subjects where students write in Norwegian. Still, there are elements from this study that are relevant also to the ESL classroom. During a time span of 2 years' intervention on 20 schools, more than 600 writing assignments were collected. In general, the study found that many assignments were not precise in their formulation and thus became ambiguous and inconsistent, which in turn led to different interpretations of the assignments by students (Otnes, 2015).

A study that did focus on the ESL classroom was Ørevik's (2015) study on the writing assignments from the English subject exams in Norwegian upper secondary school. This study's primary focus was on which literary genres that were dominant in the exams for Vg1 – programmes for general studies in recent years. Another example was Berg's (2014) study of the factors that affects students' selection of prompts. In common with my study, both of these studies focus on writing assignments. Because there are relatively few studies conducted on task design in the ESL classroom in Norway, it is important with more studies on this subject in order to highlight different aspects on this topic.

This chapter has provided a background and rationale for my study. I have described the relationship between writing assignments and writing skills, presented a selection of relevant terms, and explained some characteristic of English as a second language. I have also pointed out some key elements regarding writing and writing assignments from the English subject curriculum, and earlier research, that are relevant to my study. The next chapter will continue with presenting the theoretical background for my study.



## 2.0 Theoretical background

The following pages will present the theoretical framework and basis for the variables that were utilised when analysing the data, i.e. the writing assignments from the different schools and the written exam assignments from 2015 and 2016. First, I will present the framework for this thesis' perspective and view on writing, a functional one, which is illustrated by Jakobson's views and Vähäpassi's model of general writing discourse. The view, and the semiotic approach to writing presented in Vähäpassi's model, presents an early display of the views later shown in the Wheel of Writing-model, which has a significant function in this study. Next, I will lay out definitions and differences between the terms genre and text types, before explaining the meaning of curricular validity. Finally, this chapter will present how the theories and ideas above are applied in my study.

### 2.1 A functional view on writing

The basis for the perspective on writing in this thesis is a sociocultural one, with roots in the Russian semiotic tradition developed by Vygotsky and Bakhtin, which later has been developed further by several writing linguists (Barton, 2007; Goody, 1987; Gorman, Purves, & Degenhart, 1988; Halliday, 2014). Writing is, from this perspective, a functional tool used as a means to communicate. Language, writing and texts are social phenomena and an expression for different text cultures. There are models for everything we write, and intertextuality is a vital issue within the sociocultural perspective. This involves that whenever we speak or write, we use other texts as starting points, and from there texts are in constant dialogue through borrowing, reacting and imitating each other (Bakhtin, 1987). Writing is thus, a "culturally and individually intentional act of semiotic mediation" (Berge, Evensen, & Thygesen, 2016, p. 1). British linguist, M.A.K. Halliday (2014), argues that text can be conceived as a kind of "supersentence", meaning that sentence and text are of the same kind; linguistic units, but of different size. "(F)rom a sociolinguistic perspective it is more useful to think of text as *encoded* in sentences, not as composed of them." (p. 265).

Before the 1980s, the dominant view in literacy research focused on formal skills and individual aspects of writing, whereas during the 1980s this gradually changed toward viewing writing as more contextualised in social life and cultural practices. This change in

focus was, to a large extent, because of the research and work carried out through the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) (Berge et al., 2016). In the writing study, carried out through the IEA, interactional, sociocultural, functional and communicative aspects of writing were considered and discussed, which represent the basis for the perspective on writing in this thesis.

The full title of the IEA's writing study was The International Study of Written Composition, which examined the teaching and learning of written composition in the schools of 14 countries. The activities in the study included curriculum analysis, pilot testing, main testing and data analysis (Takala, 1988). In the study, the writing situation was analysed from both a social and cognitive perspective. The latter focused on the cognitive process and relationship between text content and writer, or text content and reader, while the social perspective concentrated on the relationship between writer and reader.

Writing is an act of communication, and this act has a purpose, as most human activity does. The goal is to convey a message to a reader, and in doing so, from a social perspective, understanding the purpose and audience is vital (Vähäpassi, 1988). The purpose, or function of the text may differ according to whether the writer's aim is to inform, argue, convey feelings, or to entertain. The most important feature that distinguishes writing from face-to-face conversational interaction is its monologic aspect. The writer produces a text alone, without any immediate feedback from the reader, and thus, writing imposes great demands on communication through text (Vähäpassi, 1988).

When discussing the domain of writing, or the role of written discourse, its purposes and functions in human life need to be taken into consideration. Several theories on language function have been developed for different intentions, but for capturing the special nature of writing, Roman Jakobson's (1960) views are relevant. According to Jakobson, in any act of communication there is an ADDRESSER who sends a MESSAGE to an ADDRESSEE. The message requires a CONTEXT referred to, graspable to the addressee, in order to be operative, and a CODE, which has to be fully or partially common to the addresser and the addressee, or encoder and decoder of the message. Finally, there has to be a CONTACT, which is a physical or psychological connection between the addresser and addressee. Jakobson states that each of these six factors determines a different function of a language, and the factors can be schematised as in Figure 1.

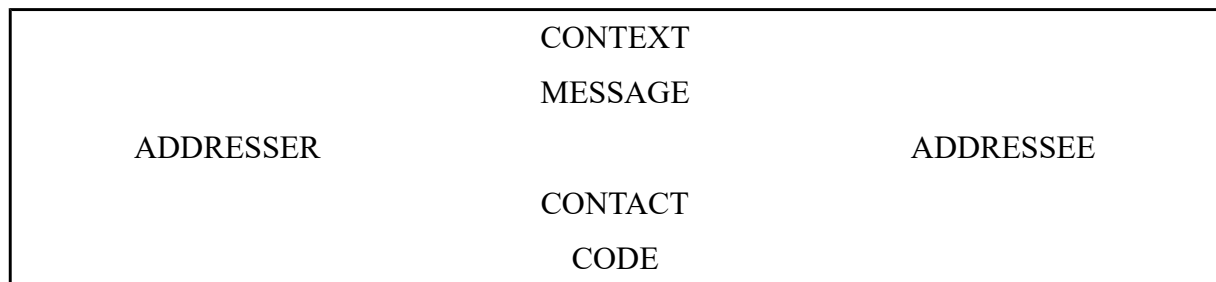


Figure 1: Jakobson's six factors of communication

According to Jakobson, the structure of a message depends primarily on the predominant function, in which there are six of; REFERENTIAL, EMOTIVE, CONATIVE, PHATIC, METALINGUAL and POETIC (1960). The referential function is the leading task of numerous messages, and is a function where *context* plays a dominant role. This function is served when knowledge is acquired and presented, and when the dominant intention is to inform. The emotive function has its dominant intention on conveying feelings and focuses on the *addressers* expressions of feelings and experiences, while the conative function focuses on the *addressee*, with a focus on changing the addressee's thinking and behaviour through convincing or persuading. The phatic function is primarily about establishing *contact*, while the metalingual function conveys information about the syntactical or lexical *code* of language, and thus is applied when writing to learn. In the last function, the poetic, the focus is on the *message* itself, with the dominant intention to entertain, delight or please (Jakobson, 1960; Vähäpassi, 1988).

A model developed during the IEA study by Vähäpassi, applied Jakobson's theories and organised them into a general model of writing discourse, guided by the view that, when arranging and selecting writing tasks in teaching, several dimensions must be considered. The main advantage, and at the time, the innovative feature of this model, was that its semiotic approach drew attention to the purposes and functions of school writing, in its aim to investigate learning outcomes and its focus on teaching. "The model reflects a theory of semiotic structure in that it takes into account the relationship between writer, reader, and the message." (Vähäpassi, 1988, p. 21).

There are differences between developing a model for writing discourse in general, and developing a model focusing on school writing. However, the characteristics of communication, presented by Jakobson, apply in both cases. But still, the IEA study focused

on school writing and thus the model was also designed with a primary focus on writing in school, something that primarily is visible in its layout. So, when defining the domain of school writing, or the role of writing in school, there are a few issues that stand out. First of all, acquiring literacy is an important aspect of school, not only as a goal in itself, but also as a means to achieving other goals. Some children may know how to read when they come to school, but fewer children know how to write, thus writing can generally be considered a school based activity. Compared to reading, writing is not an activity many students do in their pastime outside of school, and thus school has a decisive effect on writing development, since writing requires special skills, which must be learned in a school-like setting (Vähäpassi, 1988).

Writing is a way of communicating, in which there are various ways of doing, something Jakobson (1960) has categorised into six predominant functions. Communication through writing, is a skill that, as mentioned above, is learned and practised in school or school-like settings, which in turn brings us to the characteristic features of school writing. School is a place for learning, and in developing writing skills the school should guide students on how to write for different communicative purposes, and to help students make a transition from utterance to text. In doing so, students need to be presented with a wide range of tasks, with an increasing level of cognitive and communicative effort (Vähäpassi, 1988). With this in mind, it becomes clear that the IEA model's layout is not random, with two axes together aiming at covering the different communicative purposes and cognitive processing. The model provides a structured presentation of communicative purposes and displays examples of concrete text types that students can be asked to write, in order to practice the various writing purposes. This makes the model relevant for school writing, because a teacher could use it as a tool when planning writing tasks for students.

The model is organised in a way that makes it possible to separate purpose and mode of writing, through being arranged with two main dimensions; the vertical axis; dominant intention/purpose and the horizontal axis; cognitive processing. The dominant intention/purpose dimension is defined with Jakobson's six functions, but are also expressed in verb form, in order to highlight the active role of the writer. The horizontal axis shows an increase in cognitive demands from left to right, from reproduction of ideas and language, to

production of the writer's own ideas with appropriate rhetorical and linguistic forms (Vähäpassi, 1988).

The model creates a system that covers the different writing text types, and thus describes and categorises their most important characteristics. The two major dimensions; cognitive processing and dominant intention/purpose, provide a comprehensible overview of the relationship between Jakobson's theories and applicable text types. For each of the six different purposes for writing, *to learn*, *to convey emotions*, *to inform*, *to convince*, *to entertain* and *to keep in touch*, three cognitive levels are described. The different levels represent an ascending degree of cognitive processing, and the model provides examples on text types suitable for the different writing purposes and cognitive levels. Thus, the model becomes applicable to curriculum planners, textbook writers and teachers. Table 1 shows a modified version of Vähäpassi's model. The modifications have been done by me, and are primarily regarding reducing text, in order to highlight the main content of the model. The different dominant intentions/purposes are visualised in bold vertically, and the levels of cognitive processing are visualised in bold horizontally. The different text types suitable for the respective dominant intentions and levels of cognitive processing, are thus shown in non-bold letters.

*Table 1: Modified version of Vähäpassi's (1988) model of writing discourse*

	<b>Cognitive processing</b>	<b>I REPRODUCE</b>	<b>II ORGANISE / REORGANISE</b>	<b>III INVENT / GENERATE</b>
<b>Dominant intention / Purpose</b>				
<b>1. To learn (metalingual)</b>		Copying, taking dictations	Retell a story Summary Outline	Comments on book margins Metaphors
<b>2. To convey emotions (emotive)</b>		Stream of consciousness	Personal story, diary, letter	Reflective writing Traditional literary writing
<b>3. To inform (referential)</b>		Quote Fill in a form	Narrative report News Biography	Expository writing Traditional literary writing
<b>4. To convince, persuade (conative)</b>		Citation from authority / expert	Letter of application Statement of personal views, opinions	Argumentative writing Traditional literary writing
<b>5. To entertain, delight, please (poetic)</b>		Quotation of poetry and prose	Given an ending – create a story Retell a story	Entertainment writing Traditional literary writing
<b>6. To keep in touch (phatic)</b>		Postcards	Postcards Letters	Humorous greeting Traditional literary writing

## 2.2 The Wheel of Writing

The Wheel of Writing is a model developed by a group of researchers, initiated by the Minister of Education in Norway. The indirect reason for the development of the model was the implementation of writing as a key competency in all subjects in the Norwegian curriculum in 2006 (Berge et al., 2016). The Wheel of Writing draws on the ideas presented in the IEA's writing study, presented through Vähäpassi's model, with its focus on interactional and sociocultural aspects of writing. Both models aim at covering the different *acts* or *purposes* of writing, and accordingly provide a sociocultural view on writing. The Wheel of Writing wanted to focus more on the qualities of the text as opposed to the IEA's focus on mental states, and thus the approach for the development of the Wheel of Writing is a more complex one, where various perspectives merge; semiotics, applied linguistics, textual studies, literacy research, didactics, writing research and pedagogy (Berge et al., 2016).

The model's framework approaches writing as an issue of meaning and context, where an instance of writing that is understood as intentional, is characterised as an utterance, i.e. a meaningful act oriented towards a possible addressee (Berge et al., 2016). The basic function of acting through an utterance through language, is to make it possible for an addressee to be able to interpret the utterance. This interactional feature of writing may be contingent, but written utterances may also be self-oriented and include self-addressivity, a view that is accounted for in the model.

The model's functional framework, is made up by a focus on writing *acts* and *purposes* of writing, which in combination constitute the *intentionality* of writing. Together, the differences between these three aspects of the communicative intentionality of writing, comprise the background for the basic constituents of writing featured in this model, visualised in the Wheel of Writing (Berge et al., 2016). The model is displayed in Figure 2.



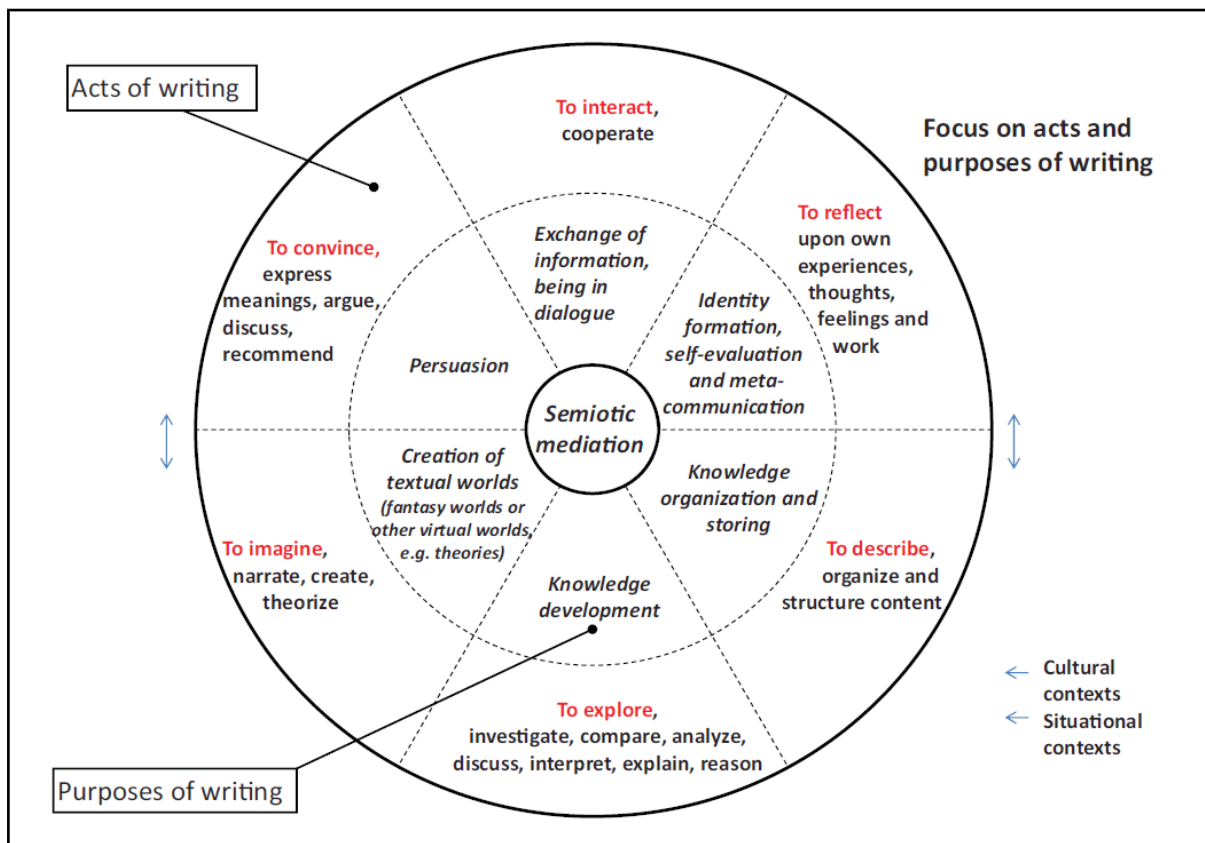


Figure 2: *The Wheel of Writing: focus on intentionalities of writing: act and purpose* (Berge et al., 2016, p. 9)

In Figure 2, the model's functional approach is visible, with its focus on writing acts and purposes of writing. Acting through writing, relies on that the utterance has to be mediated through language and other semiotic resources, and then oriented towards a possible reader and the actual purpose (Matre & Solheim, 2015). The view that writing is regarded as an activity, is captured in the outer circle of the model where it operates with six different acts of writing; to interact, to reflect, to describe, to explore, to imagine and to convince. The next circle, which is the first encapsulated circle, represents that when writing, we do it with a purpose. Lastly, the third, or inner circle, represents that to write is a specific type of semiotic meditation. We create meaning with the help of a specific technology when we write. Text is created through a written language system or other multimodal resources, e.g. drawings, pictures or graphs (Berge et al., 2016).

The model defines six writing acts and six writing purposes, which can correlate with each other in the default situation shown in the figure. When the purpose is to persuade the reader

of something written, the act would be to convince. But the default setting of act and purpose in the figure is not contingent, as an act of convincing may have as its purpose to develop knowledge. The concentric dotted circles of the model aims at showing that the circles are not independent of each other, but the model is constructed to be dynamic in such a way that the outer circle may be rotated to uncover less conventional configuration of layers (Berge et al., 2016).

Berge et al. (2016) describe the six acts in the following way; beginning with to *interact*, which might be the most obvious writing act, in the sense of that the purpose of the writing is to keep in touch with other people and establishing and strengthening relationships with others. Examples of this type of writing are postcards and informal letters. To *reflect* is to reflect upon personal experiences, thoughts and feelings. When writing texts to reflect, the primary audience is normally oneself, through writing summaries, resumes and outlines in order to learn. To *describe* can be the act of organising and structuring text. Examples of descriptive texts can be recipes, technical descriptions and encyclopedias. Writing to *explore* is often connected with writing in order to develop knowledge. Examples of exploring texts are texts written to discuss, compare, analyse or to investigate. Examples of texts that are created through the act of *imagining*, are texts placed in the traditional literary genre, e.g. novels and short stories. Texts created by imagining are stories that present a reality constituted by the text, meaning that a reality does not exist in other places than the fiction expressed in the text. Finally, texts that are written in order to *convince* are texts that express opinions, arguments and that can have an aim of persuading the reader into sharing the writer's position, personal views and opinions.

Finally, it should be noted that texts can constitute several writing acts, and are not always necessarily only comprised of characteristics from one specific act, however in some cases one act can be identified as more dominant than the other. In my analysis of the writing assignments, I will use the Wheel of Writing, and the acts of writing as an analysis tool, since it is a continuation and further development of the ideas first presented in Vähäpassi's model.

## 2.3 Genres and text types

In the endeavour of categorising texts, several terms are used. *Genre* and *text type* are two common terms, but concepts such as *register*, *domain* and *style* are also applied when categorising and classifying texts. According to Lee (2001), there is much confusion regarding the usage of these terms, and there is a need to point out the different nuances of meaning behind their use in order to know what kind of language researchers and language teachers are examining and describing. Categorising texts is about generalising, and it is not easy to make generalisations about abstract constructions such as “general English”, but when categorising language and texts into *genres*, *domains* or *text types*, it becomes less complicated to discuss and talk about texts, e.g. different *genres* of text, or language used in different *domains* (Lee, 2001).

Even though genre is quite established as a term applied when classifying texts, the English subject curriculum does not use this term in its descriptions of aims for the subject. It rather operates with generic descriptions, stating that the students should be “writing different texts in English in different situations where written communication is necessary to stimulate the joy of writing”, “developing versatile competence in writing different kinds of generalised, literary and technical texts in English using informal and formal language that is suited to the objective and recipient”, and evaluating and using “suitable reading and writing strategies adapted for the purpose and type of text” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013, pp. 3, 5, 10). Learning about different genres is not an aim in itself, but students are expected to learn how to write different kinds or types of text.

In English, a general view on genres include definitions such as novels, newspaper articles, editorials and academic articles. In this view, genres are primarily defined by external criteria, such as purpose and intended audience, and assigned on the basis of use rather than on the basis of form (Biber, 1989; Lee, 2001). When comparing to text types, Biber states that “there are marked linguistic differences among the genres of English”, but “genre distinctions do not adequately represent the underlying text types of English” (Biber, 1989, p. 6). Distinct texts from within a genre can represent different text types, in the same way that similar texts from different genres can represent a single text type. Texts can come from two different genres but still belong to the same text type, “because they have similarities in linguistic form” (Lee,

2001, p. 39). For example the two distinct genres, novels and biographies may share linguistic features such as *past tense* and *third-person narrative*, and thus belong to the same text type.

There are numerous ways of categorising texts, and different opinions on the terms applied when discussing text nuances, but a fundamental distinction between texts is whether they belong in the world of fiction or non-fiction. Non-fiction, or factual texts include rhetorical modes such as writing to inform, describe or argue, while fictional texts is a generic term applied for stories that are not based on real events or people, but imaginary events and characters (Chandler & Munday, 2011a, 2011b).

## 2.4 Curricular validity

Writing assignments in school, should be valid in terms of their relevance to the aims in the curriculum, which is important in order to develop writing skills that are compatible with the curriculum. In assessment, validity is the “overall evaluative judgement of the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support the adequacy and appropriateness of interpretations and actions on the basis of test scores or other modes of assessment” (Messick, 1995, p. 741). In an educational context, validity is divided into three main parts; *content validity*, which applies to which domain of the subject that is relevant to the assessment, *outer validity*, which says something about whether the assessments utilised in one context also is valid in other contexts, and finally, *consequential validity* which refers to the implications a particular test can give to educational systems, societies or social relationships (Eggen, 2009). In my thesis, the most relevant type of validity is content validity, focusing on if the writing assignments are relevant to the English subject curriculum, specified as *curricular validity*.

According to Eggen (2009), validity is important to both *assessment for learning* and *assessment of learning*. The latter can be completely aimed at assessing the content of the curriculum and its aims and focus on competences, while the former, assessment for learning, focuses on the student’s academic level according to the aims in the curriculum, which also can apply to assessment of students’ texts. It is significant to study whether writing assignments in school are relevant to the curriculum, and thus provide valid practice in order to provide students with the opportunity to develop their writing skills and academic level.

In the English subject curriculum, there are specific aims focusing on writing skills, and the extent to which these assignments incorporate these aims in their tasks, specify their level of *curricular validity*. Vähäpassi (1988) states that written language always has played a dominant role in formal education, and writing in school features some special characteristics, such as helping students developing writing skills and to foster the development of cognitive processes. These practices, and the ways to reach these aims, should be included in the curriculum, and thus, curricular validity in writing assignments is the emphasis given to issues such as these in the writing instructions.

## 2.5 Applicability for this thesis

In the analysis of the assignment sets and assignments collected for this thesis, a total of six tables were designed in order to register different perspectives in the analysis. The functional view on writing applies to the analysis in general and thus all the tables, and the main perspective behind all the registrations are based on this. Three of the tables, however, are to a greater degree directly linked to the theoretical views presented in this chapter. Below is a brief explanation of the connection between the theory presented in this chapter and these three tables, but the different analysis categories will also be further explained in chapter 4.

Table 7, entitled *content*, is a registration of what the students are asked to show knowledge on, and write about in their texts. Two of the categories in this table derive from the curriculum, in the sense of what the curriculum prescribes as the content of the English subject. It is related to *curricular validity* in regards to the assignments' link to the curriculum in terms of what issues it asks the students to write about.

The English subject curriculum is organised into four main subject areas, with only one focusing explicitly on the content of the teaching; *culture, society and literature* (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013). Thus, it is one of three categories in the Table 7. The other main subject areas in the curriculum do not prescribe any specific details on the content, but the other two categories are also relevant to the English subject curriculum. The importance of practising general writing skills in all school subjects, is underlined by the fact that writing as key competency in all subjects was implemented in the Norwegian curriculum

in 2006 (Berge et al., 2016). In this regard, the other two categories in Table 7, are also relevant for the curriculum, and can be applied when analysing curricular validity.

*Type of text*, is the title of Table 8, and it is categorising the tasks based on the topics discussed in chapter 2.3. There are several ways of categorising and labelling texts, but eventually in the analysis the focus is the distinction between whether the tasks are asking students to write factual or fictional texts, or thirdly, if the students are given the option of choosing which type of text to write.

Finally, the theories presented through the Wheel of Writing is applied in a thorough analysis of the distinctive tasks, in regards of which acts of writing they are asking students to carry out. This is done through studying the texts and words applied in the different tasks, and especially the verbs used in the text, or the genres or types of text the students are asked to write. The verbs applied and genres requested in a writing task, correspond, in a higher or lower degree, to each main writing act presented in the Wheel of Writing, and thus each writing task can comply with a writing act.

## **3.0 Method**

The aim of this study is to find what the main components and key features of writing assignments for the ESL classroom are. With the exception of national tests and centrally standardised exams, the writing assignments provided to students at school are generally created and designed locally. I had little knowledge on which kinds of writing assignments students were provided in their writing education, other than the assignments applied in the school where I am employed. In order to learn more about this, I conducted a qualitative study on a selection of assignments from several lower secondary schools. More specifically, writing assignments utilised in year 10 at the respective schools.

### **3.1 Research design**

As described in chapter 2, the perspective on writing in this thesis is based on a sociocultural view, which in turn is related to social constructivism, in the sense that human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others (McKinley, 2015). To answer my research question, I have chosen a qualitative research design, which aims at describing the characteristics, or traits of certain phenomena (Repstad, 2007). Which, in this thesis, is to analyse a selection of writing assignments, searching for certain characteristics and study how these assignments comply with theory and previous studies conducted on the features of writing assignments.

Also, since I requested assignments that were already available at the different schools, the intention was not to study development or changes in the practice of designing writing assignments, but rather to study the current status of writing assignments. Thus, the study utilises data from a specific time, and consequently also has the characteristics of a cross-sectional design (Johannessen, Tufte, & Christoffersen, 2010; Ringdal, 2013). A cross-sectional study provides an image on the status of a phenomenon at a certain time, which is the case for the study of the assignment and exam sets in my thesis. I was interested in studying the assignments that were in use, and utilised in the classroom at the time of my request. In other words, I did not ask the teachers to design or create new writing assignments for my thesis.

The initial interest and curiosity for studying the features of writing assignments, came through reading literature on writing assignment design and assessment (Gardner, 2008; Ruth & Murphy, 1988; Smith & Swain, 2011; Weigle, 2002). The findings in these publications, had prescriptions on certain features vital to create writing assignments that would appeal to students and guide them in the writing process. The issues presented there, inspired me to look at my own practice on designing writing assignments, but also made me curious of the practice in other schools.

Other than the centrally standardised exams, there is no standardisation on the writing assignments students are provided in lower secondary school. Teachers and educators are required to follow the aims described in the curriculum, but there are no prescriptions there on how to design and create writing assignments, and thus the practice will differ from school to school. This, in turn, led to my main research question; “What characterises writing assignments for lower secondary Norwegian ESL classrooms?”.

As analysis tools to study these features, I designed several tables largely based on research and theory on writing assignments, and utilised these tables when analysing the collected writing assignments and exam sets. The design and content of the tables were thus mostly theory driven, but some of the categories applied in the tables also were developed based on the content of the writing assignment sets. I discovered features and patterns in the sets that I found relevant to include in the analysis, and thus the content of the tables are also partly empirically driven. Summarised, the tables utilised in the study are the result of a combination of earlier research and theories on writing assignments and features discovered in the data material during the analysis.

## **3.2 Context**

I am myself an English teacher at a lower secondary school in Norway, which is part of the reason for the desire to study this topic, but also partly the reason for why I have chosen the lower secondary level, as opposed to the upper secondary level of education. In Norway, lower secondary school comprise year 8 – 10, in which year 10 is the final year of compulsory education in Norway (Ministry of Education and Research, 2014). This is also a part of the



equation of why the lower secondary level is relevant to study, given the fact that in theory, this is an educational level all Norwegian adolescents are required to attend.

The curriculum also operates with competence aims spanning from year 8 to 10, in which the objective is for the aims to be reached after year 10 (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013). This makes the writing assignments provided to students in year 10 relevant to study, because they are an indication of what the students are expected to know and understand after 10 years of compulsory education, and thus the choice of collecting writing assignments from year 10 is not random, but based on the characteristics of criterion-based selection (Johannessen et al., 2010). When applying this strategy, the informants or data utilised in the study, has to meet certain criteria. In this case, the writing assignments had to be from the English subject, 10<sup>th</sup> grade and a Norwegian lower secondary school.

### **3.3 Material**

I contacted fifteen lower secondary schools in Norway by e-mail, enquiring writing assignments (appendix A), and ended up receiving assignments from four of the respective schools. Initially, my plan was to conduct interviews with a selection of the teachers and task designers, and thus I contacted the lower secondary schools geographically closest to my place of residence. As a starting point, I contacted the schools using e-mail- addresses found on the respective schools' online home pages, and then, in some cases, I received contact information from relevant teachers to reach out to. Regarding the interviews, I eventually ended up not conducting them, which I will explain the reason for, toward the end of this chapter.

This process resulted in a total of two assignment sets from one school, three assignment sets from two schools and four assignment sets from one school. In addition to the assignment sets from the schools, I included two exam sets for written English in my study. In Norway, the exam sets are centrally standardised exams intended for all 10<sup>th</sup> graders in the country. The exam sets applied in my study are the English written exams from spring 2015 and 2016. Including the exams, the complete number of assignment sets for the study was fourteen, and the total number of writing tasks was 41, which in turn became the main material to analyse. Getting this basic overview of the data was the first step of the analysis process, and how I

reached this number is explained in the next paragraph. The reason for operating with the term *assignment set*, is because several of the units collected from the schools, contained more than one *writing assignment* or *writing task*, and thus a distinction between the two was made. The difference and definition of the different terms was explained more thoroughly in chapter 1, but it should be pointed out again that the term *task* and *assignment* will be used as synonyms in my thesis, and the main issue to be aware of is when referring to a *set* or not.

Once I had collected all the material, the first part of the analysis process was to provide each assignment set with a letter and a number. The labelling with the letters (A-E) had the intention of registering which school the respective assignment sets were from. Next, the sets from each school were provided a number from 1 and up. In doing this, it became easier to organise, and tell the assignments apart, given that all assignments tagged with the letter A was from the same school and that the same applied to the letters B, C and D. The assignments labelled with the letter E, were the exams. The labelling with letters and numbers were carried out in a random manner, meaning that which letter and number an assignment set was provided had no motive other than to register and tell them apart.

It should be noted that assignment set A3 and A4 were not designed or created by teachers at school A. These two assignment sets are created by an English textbook publishing house. They are, however, still relevant to study because the school utilises these assignments every semester as a part of their writing education. It should also be noted that assignment set A3 and A4 are organised in a similar way, and are quite similar in structure and layout as the two exam sets, E1 and E2, e.g. all four sets have preparation material in form of a booklet containing texts and images. Assignment set A3 and A4 can thus be regarded as mock exams. More details on the characteristics of these four sets will be described in chapter 4.

Still, within several of the assignment sets there were distinctive tasks, each with characteristic features, which in turn required a registration of each task included in the assignments sets. In registering the tasks, Roman numerals were applied, which resulted in the assignments being labelled with a letter, a number and a Roman numeral. There were four exceptions to this, given that four of the assignment sets only included one task, and thus it was sufficient to utilise only a letter and a number when labelling those sets. A list of the assignment sets' letters, numbers and numerals is presented in Table 2.

*Table 2: A presentation of the assignment sets with letter, number and tasks within each set*

ASSIGNMENT SETS	
Assignment set letter and number	Tasks within each assignment set
A1	I, II, III, IV
A2	I, II
A3	I, II, III, IV
A4	I, II, III, IV
B1	I, II, III
B2	I, II, III
B3	
C1	
C2	
D1	I, II, III, IV
D2	I, II, III, IV, V
D3	
E1	I, II, III, IV
E2	I, II, III, IV

Finally, titles were added to each assignment set. Nine of the assignment sets had titles at the time of collection, made by the creators of the assignments, while the remaining five sets were provided titles by me. The aim was for the titles to capture the main content of the assignment sets, and using and applying titles to each assignment set made it easier to separate the sets from each other during the analysis. In addition, when utilising the titles, as opposed to only letter and number in the analysis, the content of each assignment set is easier to remember and separate from each other when reading the analysis. This process is explained in more detail, including a list displaying letters, numbers and titles of the assignment sets, in chapter 4.

### **3.4 Methods applied in the data analysis**

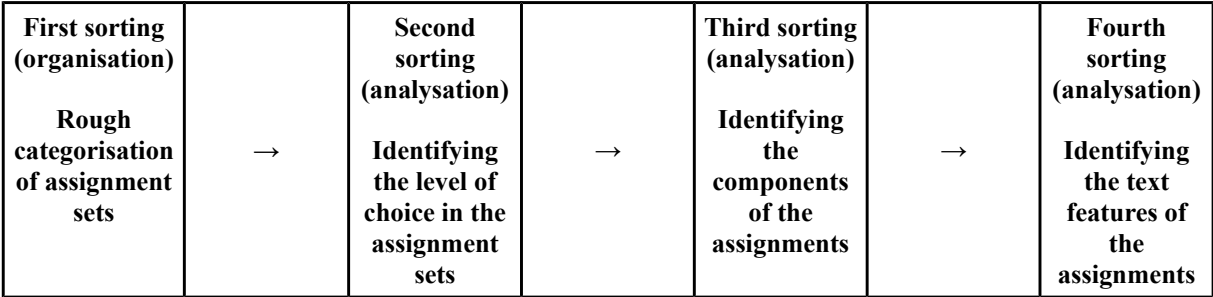
The method applied in my thesis is a textual analysis, which has as its purpose to describe the content, structure and functions of messages contained in texts. The texts in this study, are the assignment and exam sets. In textual analysis, there are two general categories of text. The first main category is verbatim recordings, or transcripts of communication, and the second is messages produced by communicators, or outputs of communication (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). The texts in my thesis belong in the latter category, where the texts are produced by

teachers and educators, aiming at utilising text to communicate a writing assignment to students.

My focus is thus on the writing assignment as a text in itself, a text that often is written by teachers, with an aim of prompting writing. According to Gardner (2008), designing writing assignments is a demanding form of writing, which calls for the teacher to use the entire writing process. Creating a writing assignment thus becomes a text that requires time and effort, and has to go through many phases before being considered a finished text. A writing assignment is a text of its own, with its own content, its own form, and with a specific aim. The designer or creator of an assignment thus becomes an author of a small, but important text, where the recipient is the student (Otnes, 2015).

Analysing texts can have two main purposes; to organise and categorise the data based on certain main topics and then to analyse and interpret the data (Johannessen et al., 2010). The aim, when organising and categorising, is to reduce and systematise the data, in order to provide a solid foundation for the analysis, and to avoid losing vital information. This was the first sorting in my analysis process, in which, as explained above, the assignment sets and assignments were provided letters, numbers and Roman numerals in order to make the rest of the process easier and lucid.

After this rough categorisation of the writing assignment sets, I continued with the second, third and fourth sorting of the sets and assignments, which had a more analytical approach than the first sorting. The second sorting focused on the assignment sets, identifying whether the students were provided options on how to answer and respond to the sets. The third sorting focused on identifying the components of the assignments, i.e. to deconstruct the assignments and to identify the pieces or components that the assignment were comprised of. The fourth sorting focused on the content of the assignment text and what it asked the students to do, in terms of what type of content it asked the students to cover in their texts, and what type of text it asked the students to write. Finally, the fourth sorting included an analysis of which acts of writing the students were asked to carry out, based on the theory presented in the Wheel of Writing-model (Berge et al., 2016). The sorting process is illustrated in Figure 3.



*Figure 3: The process of organising and analysing the writing assignment sets and assignments*

For the second, third and fourth sorting, when organising the data, I used a category based division of the content of the assignment sets. This method is also called cross-sectional based organisation and it often culminates in a form of categorisation of the data (Johannessen et al., 2010). The categories applied and the process leading up the categorisation is further explained in chapter 4. The idea behind cross-sectional based organisation, and categorisation of the data is to apply one set of categories systematically and consequently on all the data material, which will, like the headlines in a book, provide a description of the content of each text. The categories and findings are finally presented in tables in chapter 4 in order to visualise, in a lucid manner, what the features and characteristics of each assignment set are.

### **3.5 Considerations in this study**

There are some considerations regarding the study that need to be addressed, which are considerations regarding the design, the material and the reliability and validity of the study. First, a qualitative design has few units of material to study and thus drawing conclusions on features of writing assignments in general is not obvious. An alternative approach would be a quantitative design, collecting a large number of writing assignments, providing a potentially higher possibility of a representative sample. An elemental difference between a quantitative and a qualitative design, in addition to the number of units to study, is that a quantitative study focuses primarily on numbers and figures, while a qualitative approach has its focus and attention to text and content (Ringdal, 2013). In order to study the content of each assignment set thoroughly, I wanted my study to have a qualitative design so I could study the material carefully. The qualitative approach was also essential in how the different categories applied in my study were created. Many of the categories were made based on research and theory on

writing assignments, but many were also generated from studying the various assignment sets. These will be identified in chapter 4.

Second, regarding the material from the schools I contacted, I requested all writing assignments provided to students on year 10 that made up the foundation for the assessment of written English that year. There is no further guarantee that I actually received all the assignments applied during a school year, other than this was what I requested. Still, based on the material I received and used in my study, I believe they provided an elemental insight into the types of writing assignments applied in the different schools.

Third, I received assignment sets from four different schools in Norway, one based in the Oslo region and three based in the Trondheim region. The number of schools and the geographic dispersion is also a consideration that needs to be taken into account when reading this study. But, in the same way that a qualitative design was chosen over a quantitative design, the aim is not to find and comment on the status of ESL writing assignments for Norway in general, but rather to study a few in order to look for certain characteristics and features. This is also the reason for why the exam sets were included in my study. The sets are utilised in the English written exam in all lower secondary schools in the country, and thus provide vital information on the types of assignments students are expected to work with, comprehend and understand at the end of 10 years of Norwegian compulsory education, independent of where in the country the school is situated.

Finally, I would like to comment on some key elements of research in general; the study's reliability and validity. The relevance of these terms for qualitative data is a debated topic, given that, as opposed to the focus on numbers and figures of quantitative studies, in qualitative studies the researcher's reflections on his or her own work is more apparent and important (Ringdal, 2013). Johannesen et al. (2010) argues for applying slightly different terms when evaluating qualitative studies; *reliability*, *credibility*, *outer validity* and *accountability*.

In a qualitative study, its reliability can be strengthened through providing the reader detailed descriptions of the study's context and method (Johannesen et al., 2010). The aim, which is my intention and what I have tried to achieve especially in this chapter, is to make the process as transparent as possible, so that the readers can follow it, understand it and make their own

evaluation of the study from reading the text. This transparency is also vital for strengthening the study's accountability.

Credibility is closely related to validity, in terms of if there is a connection between the phenomenon that is studied and the data that is collected, but according to this definition qualitative studies are not valid because they can not be quantified (Johannessen et al., 2010). For qualitative studies, it is more relevant to ask whether the method applied provides answers to the objective of the study. Triangulation, applying several methods to a study, can strengthen a study's credibility by approaching the material from several settings, e.g. using interviews combined with textual analysis. Originally, my plan for this thesis was to interview the creators of the assignment sets I received, in order to ask them about the choices they made and questions regarding the process of creating the assignments, but I finally decided to only focus on the content of the text, and not the choices or reasons behind the content. This was partly due to the time and resources available for a master's thesis, but mostly because my approach was to study the tasks without any explanation from the creator, and observe them as texts where there is no teacher available to explain the meaning of the distinctive tasks and assignment sets. I wanted to analyse the text from the same perspective a student does. In many settings at school, e.g. an exam setting, a student reads writing assignment sets and assignments without the support of a teacher to provide further explanations.

Finally, outer validity, whether the results can be transferred to similar phenomena, is a key element of evaluating qualitative studies (Johannessen et al., 2010). As pointed out above, the qualitative design in general, the number of assignment sets studied and the number of participating schools in this study, makes it impossible to comment on the quality or status of ESL assignments in Norway in general. However, through basing my analysis of these assignment sets on empiricism, previous research and theory on writing assignments, I have hopefully provided tools and terms that can be applied when analysing other ESL writing assignments. Tools and terms that can be utilised by teachers and researchers when designing and evaluating writing assignments for the ESL classroom in other contexts and settings than mine.





## 4.0 A presentation and an analysis of the collected writing assignment sets

This chapter is a presentation of the findings from analysing and comparing the writing assignment sets and tasks. For this study, 14 assignment sets were collected. 10 of these sets were comprised of more than one writing task, which makes the total number of tasks analysed 41. I have provided descriptions of the process leading to entitling and numbering the assignments sets below, and in chapter 4.1 there is a presentation of the sets, identified by title, set number, and task number. After this initial presentation of the assignment sets, six different analyses are presented. In chapter 4.2, I focus on whether the assignment sets provide students with options when writing their texts. The next two chapters give an overview with a focus on the *components* of the writing assignments, while the last three contain an identification on text features of the writing assignments, and show the results of three different analyses of the assignments; the *content*, *type of text* and *the acts of writing* in the texts the students are asked to write.

The difference between what I have categorised as an assignment set and task is described in chapter 1. As an example, assignment set B2 – The British Isles (appendix E) is displayed in Figure 4, displaying the difference between assignment set and task. The figure shows the complete assignment set handed out to students, where I have highlighted the three specific tasks in yellow. I have used Roman numerals when categorising the tasks, and thus in my thesis, task 1 is registered as I, task 2 as II, and task 3 as III. Further down, in Table 3, all the writing assignment sets are listed, displaying the sets' titles, numbers and tasks.

The British Isles – individual task

Choose one of these tasks:

1. Write an article for a journal or a magazine about
  - a) The British monarchy
  - b) The Irish Question
2. Write a text about a British historical topic for an English school book (10<sup>th</sup> grade). Decide whether you focus on a historical British person, specific period or event.
3. Write a letter to David Cameron where you reflect and come with your opinion about the British school system. Compare with the Norwegian school system.

- Write 2-3 pages (1000 words).
- Feel free to include pictures, statistics or other relevant illustrations.
- Refer to sources in the text and in a source list
- Use at least three different sources. Avoid using Wikipedia as a source.

The evaluation will have a main focus on the usage of sources in addition to content, genre and language.

Hand in on It's Learning Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> of February.




Figure 4: Assignment set B2, The British Isles, with tasks marked in yellow

## 4.1 Assignment set titles

Table 3 presents a list of the 14 writing assignment sets that make up the data for this thesis. As mentioned in chapter 1, an assignment set contains instructions and information on what students are expected to write about. It can include various loads of information, but has at least one explicit writing task. A set can, however, also consist of several writing tasks, where the student is expected to choose one of them.

Each assignment set in this study, has been categorised using a letter and a number. Most of the assignment sets are created by teachers from four different schools, thus the letters A to D respectively provide information on which school the sets are retrieved from. The numbers given to each specific set are in a random order, and only used as a means to separate and categorise them. The sets categorised with the letter E, are two centrally standardised English

written exams for 10<sup>th</sup> grade in Norway. E1 is the exam from 2015, and E2 is the exam from 2016.

The respective assignment sets have also been provided a title, which is meant to make it easier to tell them apart in the analysis. Nine of the assignment sets included titles when they were collected for this study, i.e. the titles were created by the task designer, while five of the assignment sets did not have any form of headline or title, and thus have been provided titles by me. All 14 titles nonetheless intend to capture the main content of the different assignment sets, and present a basic idea of the content for each of them. Because of this, the title of assignment set D3 (appendix I) has been changed from its original title, *Special assignment*, to *US Civil Rights*. It is obviously challenging to categorise and place assignment sets like these in a table consisting of individual categories with distinctive features, thus explanations and clarifications of my choices will be described below.

Roman numerals have been utilised to represent distinctive tasks or options, only connected through the main topic of the assignment set. The assignment sets not marked with Roman letters are the sets containing only one writing task, in which the students are expected to respond to. Thus the total number of distinctive writing tasks that are analysed for this study is 41.

*Table 3: Overview of assignment set title, number and task number*

ASSIGNMENT SETS		
Assignment set number – (task number)	Assignment set title	Appendix
A1 – (I, II, III, IV)	Fight for Your Rights	B
A2 – (I, II)	Romeo and Juliet	B
A3 – (I, II, III, IV)	Equality	C
A4 – (I, II, III, IV)	Borders and Boundaries	D
B1 – (I, II, III)	Mysteries	E
B2 – (I, II, III)	The British Isles	E
B3	Chocolate	F
C1	Terrorist	F
C2	Hybrid Animal	G
D1 – (I, II, III, IV)	Wars and Conflicts	H
D2 – (I, II, III, IV, V)	Newspaper Report	I
D3	US Civil Rights	I
E1 – (I, II, III, IV)	Challenges	J
E2 – (I, II, III, IV)	Around the World: Exploring some English-speaking countries	K

To summarise, and as previously mentioned, Table 3 presents an overview of all the assignment sets studied in my thesis. The table displays the titles and numbers applied to each assignment set. In order to categorise the sets, they were registered with a number and a letter, but the sets containing more than one task were also tagged with a Roman numeral, in order to easily be able to refer to specific tasks in my text. The sets containing only one task were not tagged with a Roman numeral, because the letter and number provides sufficient information for specifying which task that is referred to.

The two exam sets; *E1 Challenges* and *E2 Around the World: Exploring some English-speaking Countries* (appendix J, K), are divided into two main parts; part 1 and part 2. Part 1 is made up by task 1a and task 1b, and are smaller tasks where students are expected to write short texts. Part 2 consist of four tasks; task 2a, 2b, 2c and 2d, which are four separate tasks where the student is expected to answer one of them, and provide a longer text. These four tasks in part 2 are the ones labelled as I, II, III and IV in my study.

*A3 Equality* and *A4 Borders and Boundaries* (appendix C, D) are organised in a similar manner as the two exam sets, with two main parts, whereas in these sets the two main parts are labelled as part A and part B. Part A is made up by two tasks, task 1 and task 2, which are short answer-tasks. Part B comprises four tasks; task 3a, 3b, 3c and 3d, and is the part where the students are supposed to choose one task, and where a longer text is expected. These four tasks in part B are the ones labelled as I, II, III and IV in this study. It should be noted, and as mentioned in chapter 3, these are the two assignment sets that were created by a textbook publishing house.

*Challenges*, *Around the World: Exploring some English-speaking Countries*, *Equality* and *Borders and Boundaries* are the only assignment sets in this study that are divided into two main parts, and the focus in my study is solely on the longer answer-tasks (part 2 and B respectively). Consequently, the longer answer tasks from these four sets, are the only parts included in the appendices. It is also worth noticing that these four assignment sets also include preparation material, in the form of a booklet containing a selection of texts and images. These booklets are also not included in the appendices.

An example of how tasks can be connected through an assignment set, is the assignment set entitled *Fight for Your Rights* (appendix B), which is a set with one main writing instruction,

but where the student is provided four distinctive options on how to respond to the instruction. In this case the main instructions provide a directive on the type of text, or genre of the student's text, which is a formal letter, whereas the four options give the student a choice of who to write to, and which topic that should be the focus of the formal letter. The student is asked to choose one of the four options, and there is no alternative that opens up for writing a formal letter on a self-chosen topic. Another example of an assignment where the options are linked through instructions on genre, is the assignment set entitled *Newspaper Report* (appendix I). *Fight for your Rights* and *Newspaper Report* are the only two sets containing multiple tasks, where type of text is the link that binds the different writing tasks together.

*Romeo and Juliet* (appendix B) is an example of an assignment where the main topic is given, but the students are provided two options on how to write about this topic. The topic is the story of Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare, while the options are to either write a film review of Romeo and Juliet or to write an essay about Romeo and Juliet. In this example the assignment set presents a main content, while the options provide alternatives on type of text. The Romeo and Juliet assignment is a case where the main topic is referring to a specific story and thus the content for the tasks has distinctive limitations in terms of what the students can write about. *Mysteries* and *The British Isles* (appendix E) are also assignment sets where the main topic is quite content-specific, but where students are provided options on which type of text their response can be written as.

*Equality, Borders and Boundaries, Wars and Conflicts, Challenges* and *Around the World: Exploring some English-speaking Countries* (appendix C, D, H, J and K), are also assignment sets where the various tasks are linked through an overarching main topic, but in these cases the main topics are of a more general character, and the content of the students' text is not guided in the same way as the former assignment titles. The titles of the latter assignment sets indicate the more general characteristics of the main topic in these sets, and a closer look at two of the tasks in *Challenges* further strengthen this notion. In task 2b the students are asked to answer; "which challenge or challenges mentioned in the preparation material do you think need most attention in today's society?", while task 2d asks the students to "create a text where you describe a challenge and how you would use social media to deal with it.". In essence, and as explained above, the assignment sets containing more than one task are

organised in different ways, and there are several characteristics that can connect distinctive tasks within a set.

## 4.2 Choice

Table 4 displays a registration of whether the various assignment sets provide the students with options on how to respond to the writing assignments. The analysis is partly empirically-driven, in the sense that during the analysis I discovered that several of the assignment sets contained more than one writing task, meaning that the students could choose which task to answer, while other assignment sets did not provide any options for the students. This discovery is also the main reason for why the distinctive units collected for my analysis are entitled *assignment sets* and not merely *assignments*, and the focus for the analysis and registration of *choice* is thus on the assignment sets, not the specific tasks.

The table is also inspired by the views forwarded by Newmann et al. (2001), Ruth & Murphy (1988), Smith & Swain (2011) and Weigle (2002), in the sense that they argue for assignments that appeal to students' interests and topics they feel they have something to say about. When provided options on how to respond to an assignment, the students, to a certain degree and within the framework of the assignment set, can decide on what topic to write about. The categories applied in Table 4, are created by me, but influenced by the works presented above.

The assignment sets registered as *free* are the ones that provide students with the chance to choose between several tasks when responding, and also that open up to giving them the flexibility to decide which genre, or type of text to select when responding.

The assignment sets labelled as *controlled*, are sets with clear and explicit instructions on what the students are expected to write about, but also in some of the cases, how to respond in terms of genre or type of text. These assignments have certain expectations on content and form, and do not provide any alternatives or ways of letting students choose between several ways of responding to the assignment.

The last category in this table are for the assignment sets that show characteristics of both free and controlled sets, hence the title *combination*. These are assignment sets with clear expectations on form and content, but where students are provided options on how to answer the assignment. Students are provided some degree of choice in these assignments, but due to

the explicit instructions for the respective options they become a combination of free and controlled.

Table 4: A presentation of assignment sets and how they facilitate student choice

CHOICE			
School / exam	Free	Controlled	Combination
A	3, 4		1, 2
B		3	1, 2
C		1, 2	
D		3	1, 2
E	1, 2		

As the table shows, assignment set A3, A4, E1 and E2 (appendix C, D, J and K) are categorised as free, meaning these sets provide students with a lot of flexibility in terms of how to respond to an assignment, while set B3, C1, C2 and D3 (appendix F, G and I) do not provide any flexibility to students on how to respond. Assignment set A1, A2, B1, B2, D1 and D2 (appendix B, E, H and I) provide students with some degree of flexibility, meaning that they are provided choice on either the content of their text, or type of text. The level of choice in the assignment sets is quite evenly distributed in the material, with four sets registered as *free*, six registered as *controlled*, and six registered as *combination*. An interesting finding, and something I will comment further on in chapter 5, is the discovery that none of the four assignment sets categorised as free, are created locally at any of the schools – assignment set A3 and A4 are the sets created by the English textbook publisher, and set E1 and E2 are the exam sets.

Assignment set A1 – Fight for your Rights (appendix B) is one example of a combination of free and controlled. It is free, in the sense that students are provided a choice between four different tasks when responding, but at the same time the set is controlled because the students are not given any form of choice in regards of type of text. The assignment set states that “you are going to write a formal letter. Choose ONE of these tasks:”. The response has to be written in the style of a formal letter, but students are given four options on content, which in turn have clear and detailed prescriptions on the topic. Assignment set A1 is displayed in Figure 5, as an example of where students are provided options on the content, but not on which type of text to write. I have marked the four tasks in yellow which shows that students

are asked to write a formal letter, but are provided four options on which content the letter should have. Task 1 is registered as I, task 2 as II, task 3 as III, and task 4 as IV

### Formal letter – fight for your rights

**You are going to write a formal letter. Choose ONE of these tasks:**

1. Write a letter to the Montgomery Police Department in year 1955 where you request Rosa Parks' freedom.
2. Write a letter to the Russian government today where you request gay equality by law.
3. Write a letter to the British Government in year 1900 where you request that women
4. Write a letter to the South African Government in year 1989 where you request Nelson Mandela's freedom.

Here is the list of criteria you will be assessed by:

- > The structure of your letter (see example and useful phrases on it's learning)
  - o Place, date
  - o Name and address of sender
  - o Name and address of receiver
  - o Headline
  - o Introduction
  - o Main part
  - o Conclusion
  - o A polite closing
- > Content
  - o Describe the current situation
  - o State your request
  - o Argue why they should consider your request
- > Formal language and appropriate vocabulary
- > Grammar (focus on verbs: concord and tense)

*Figure 5: Assignment set A1, Fight for your Rights*

An example of a set where students are provided a choice in terms of type of text, but not on content, is assignment set A2 – Romeo and Juliet (appendix B). This set provides two options on type of text, film review or essay, but the content of the assignment is controlled in the way that the students have to focus on the story of Romeo and Juliet. Each of the two options also provide quite detailed prescriptions on expectations on the content of the respective tasks. Assignment set A2 is displayed in Figure 6, where I have marked the two tasks in yellow. This is an example of where students are not provided choice on content, but are provided two options on type of text to write. Task 1 is registered as task I, and task 2 as II.



Romeo and Juliet

**1) Write a film review of *Romeo & Juliet*.**

The review should include the following:

- Title, release year, genre, actors and director.
- A plot synopsis. What is the movie about? What happens? When and where is it set? What is the main conflict?
- A description of the main characters. Who are they? What are their motivations? Are there any important supporting characters?
- Your opinion. Did you like the movie? Why? Why not? What parts of it were good? What parts did you not like? Who would you recommend this movie to?

Write one paragraph of at least seven lines for each topic.

Use the uploaded template (if you want). I have also uploaded an example of a film review that you can use for inspiration.

**2) Write an essay about *Romeo & Juliet*.**

Write an essay of at least five paragraphs about *Romeo & Juliet*. Use the "Five-paragraph essay" method (see ITL for details) if you want to. Choose your own topic/angle.

The focus of this assignment is for you to practice your essay-writing skills. I will assess your written English as always, but I will also focus on how you structure your text and paragraphs.

You should plan your text thoroughly, so please write an outline (disposisjon)

Assessment scheme			
	Lav måloppnåelse	Middels måloppnåelse	Høy måloppnåelse
Oppgavekrav			
Språk			
Struktur			
Innhold			

Figure 6: Assignment set A2, *Romeo and Juliet*

Assignment set D3 – US Civil Rights (appendix I), is a controlled assignment as it contains only one task, and does not provide any explicit options on ways to respond to it. The task is quite detailed in its prescription and presents background information, and two concrete questions that are to be answered. The background information, or framing is expressed the following way. “Over the past few years, several instances of violence have caused strained race relations in the US, such as the shootings of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, and the Charleston Church shootings.”. This provides a setting for the task and includes some concrete examples of recent incidents in the US.

The next part is the actual writing task, which is followed up by two questions. The task asks the students to “create a text where you do a research on these shootings and focus on race relations and integration in the US, and answer the following questions: - Has Martin Luther King Jr.s’ dream come true in today’s America? Why/why not? - Which role did race play on the incidents of the “racial murders” mentioned above, and are there any other factors than racism which can explain them?”. There is no direct request on type of text in this example,

but the design of the task including the questions asked, directs the type of response wanted towards an expository text. The assignment set does not provide students with options, and thus a choice in how to answer the assignment, because there is only one task in the assignment set, and it asks students to answer quite specific questions.

Finally, an assignment set labelled as free, is found in E1 – Challenges (appendix J). Firstly, the set provides the student with four distinctive options (task I, II, III and IV) for answering, which in turn are tasks that have few prescriptions on type of text and content. An illustration of this is seen in task III, which says that the student should “create a text inspired by one or more texts or pictures in the preparation material. It should be clear which one(s) you have based your text on. Your text must include a challenge and a change.”. The only requirements here, are that the student’s response must be based on some of the content from the preparation material, and that the text must include a challenge and a change. A task like this opens up for a wide range of responses, both in terms of content and type of text, and thus is categorised as *free*.

### **4.3 The components that comprise the writing assignments**

The next aspect I have analysed is entitled *the components of a writing assignments*, meaning the components that comprise the different writing assignments. When analysing the components of the assignment sets, the focus is not on the content of the writing assignment, or what it asks the student to do, but rather a registration of the parts or pieces that the assignment are comprised of. It draws on elements from literature on task design, and the components or categories presented in the table below, are based on features highlighted in past studies (Gardner, 2008; Smith & Swain, 2011; Weigle, 2002). The specific categories applied in the table are, however, based on the empirical data, i.e. the writing assignment sets. The sets were analysed, patterns observed, and later dissected into the categories described in the table.

As described in chapter 1, Gardner (2008) highlights how important it is that writing assignments provide sufficient support and information for a student to complete a writing task. This includes information on the setting and background for the text, a view supported by Smith & Swain (2011) as a vital feature of writing assignments. Gardner and Smith &

Swain's views are specified in the table as *framing*, *writing instruction* and *preparation material*.

Weigle (2002) supports the views presented above in that writing instructions should be detailed enough for students to know what is expected of them, but at the same time short and simple enough for students to understand the task. In addition, Weigle states that a writing assignment should include information on how the text will be assessed and expectations on the length of the student's response. The idea of including information on assessment, model responses and assessment criteria are also notions supported by Gardner (2008). In Table 5, the ideas of expectations and assessment are specified as *formal criteria* and *assessment criteria*.

The final category applied is not a specific feature highlighted in the literature referenced to above, but when studying the data material I discovered that *images* was a component included in several of the assignment sets and tasks. Images is, to a higher or lower extent, a component aiming at providing support and information to the students in the writing process. An image might make the task easier to understand and to accomplish, and is a component included to provide support in addition to the written text. A more detailed description of each category applied in the table is presented below.

*Framing* is concerned with whether the assignment provides a *frame* for what the student is asked to write about, i.e. if the assignment provides the student with relevant information in terms of a starting point or context for the writing the student is asked to carry out. Framing can be written as a case that the student is asked to use as a starting point for the writing, or texts that provide information on a topic relevant to the content of the writing assignment.

*Writing instruction* refers to the actual writing task, meaning an explicit explanation of what the student is expected to include and focus on in the text, but also how to write and which act of writing that is expected. It should be clear and explicitly formulated as a specific unit within all the text and information that make up the writing assignment. This, as opposed to if the actual task is written implicitly in the writing assignment text, and hence supposed to be understood indirectly.

*Formal criteria* is a registration whether criteria or expectations such as number of pages, font, font size and line spacing is included in the writing assignment text.

*Preparation material* are assignments that use written texts or pamphlets as part of the writing assignment, in order to help the student to understand and to answer the writing task properly.

*Assessment criteria* registers if criteria for the assessment of the students answer is specified in the assignment. This could be through assessment rubrics or bullet points that pinpoint what the focus of the assessment of the students' replies will be.

Finally, *images* registers the writing assignments that apply pictures or images in addition to written text, as a part of the assignment.

Table 5: The components of the writing assignments

THE COMPONENTS OF THE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS						
School / exam	Framing	Writing instruction	Formal criteria	Preparation material	Assessment criteria	Images
A	3 (I, II, III, IV) 4 (I, II, III, IV)	1 (I, II, III, IV) 2 (I, II) 3 (I, II, III, IV) 4 (I, II, III, IV)	3 (I, II, III, IV) 4 (I, II, III, IV)	3 (I, II, III, IV) 4 (I, II, III, IV)	1 (I, II, III, IV) 2 (I, II)	3 (I, II, III, IV) 4 (I, II, III, IV)
B		1 (I, II, III) 2 (I, II, III)	1 (I, II, III) 2 (I, II, III)		1 (I, II, III) 2 (I, II, III)	1 (I, II, III) 2 (I, II, III)
C	2	1 2	1 2		2	1 2
D	3	1 (I, II, III, IV) 2 (I, II, III, IV, V) 3	3			1 (IV) 3
E	1 (I, II, III, IV) 2 (I, II, III, IV)	1 (I, II, III, IV) 2 (I, II, III, IV)	1 (I, II, III, IV) 2 (I, II, III, IV)	1 (I, II, III, IV) 2 (I, II, III, IV)	1 (I, II, III, IV) 2 (I, II, III, IV)	1 (I, II, III, IV) 2 (I, II, III, IV)

Table 5 displays the components of the distinctive assignments. The different components are listed horizontally on top, and then assignments that include the specific component are listed below. For example assignment A3I (school A, assignment set 3, task I) is comprised of *framing*, *writing instruction*, *formal criteria*, *preparation material* and *images*, but no *assessment criteria*. It should be noted that all the writing assignments are registered as being comprised of minimum one component, except assignment B3, which is not made up of any of the components that I operate with, and thus it stands out from the rest of the assignments. Another interesting issue is the fact that the only component featured in all the assignments, except B3, is *writing instruction*. Below, two assignments are displayed in Figure 7 and Figure 8, where Figure 7 shows assignment B1, visualising four of the components, while Figure 8 shows assignment B3.

p 7

Hand-in English week 42

1 Write a text with a focus on mysteries. Choose whether you want to write a ghost story, a crime story or a news article.

2 Write about a 1000 words (about two pages).  
 -Font size 12  
 -1,5 spacing  
 -Times New Roman

Deliver before midnight Thursday October 15th

3

4 Fokus ved vurdering:  
 - tydelig sammenheng og struktur i teksten (leservennlig, oversiktlig, godt planlagt)  
 - klare å skape spenning i teksten som passer til teksttypen du har valgt  
 - variert språk med god flyt (uttrykk, synonymer, tekstbindere)  
 - korrekt setningsoppbygging, tegnsetting og rettskriving

Figure 7: Assignment B1, Mysteries, highlighting four components of writing assignments

Assignment set B1, Mysteries (appendix E) is displayed in Figure 7, in order to show an example of, and provide a visual image on the distinctive components of an assignment set. The black circles numbered 1, 2, 3 and 4, and the yellow markings, are added by me in order to highlight the components featured in assignment set B1. Circle 1 highlights the component entitled *writing instruction*, circle 2 highlights *formal criteria*, circle 3 highlights *images*, and circle 4 is highlighting *assessment criteria*. The tasks in assignment set B1 did not include the components *framing* and *preparation material*.

07

Task: Name: \_\_\_\_\_

The world 's best chocolate

- Which one did you choose?
- Put the chocolate on the table in front of you
- Describe how it looks in front of you. The wrapping, size, form, color, how is it wrapped?
- How do you unwrap the chocolate?
- How does it look naked? Describe
- Put the chocolate between your thumb and index finger. How does it feel and smell?
- You should taste it now. Take one bit and describe.
- Eat the whole piece. How does it feel and how did it taste like?

Figure 8: Assignment B3, Chocolate

Figure 8 shows assignment B3, Chocolate (appendix F), and is an assignment that stands out from the rest of the assignments that were analysed. The reason being that B3 did not include any content that made it fit into the criteria emphasised for the six components. The assignment does not include *framing*, *formal criteria*, *preparation material*, *assessment criteria* or *images*, which is not especially noteworthy, but the fact that it does not include any form of *explicit writing instruction*, which is a component included in all the other assignments analysed, is what makes it stand out. A student might understand what to do from reading the text in the assignment, but the instruction is not explicitly stated in the text.

#### 4.3.1 The three main components of the writing assignments

Starting with the different components of writing assignments described above, I decided to discard two of the categories and merge four of them into one. This was done in order to simplify the analysis and make it more accessible and comprehensible to the reader. A few of

the categories shared some basic characteristics and thus they were merged into one category. This procedure reduced the number of categories from six to three, and remodelled six general components of writing assignments into three main components of writing assignments.

When decreasing the number of components from six to three, one category was discarded completely, *images*. The reason behind removing images is because it is component applied with various degrees of substance in the different writing assignments. The role of images in the assignments is mainly to support the students and to visualise aspects of the text in a different mode than the textual. But the utilisation of images in the assignments are of such various levels that I have decided not to include the component as a part of the three main components of the writing assignments. The usage of images spans from being applied as simple decorations of an assignment, to tasks using images as specific starting points for the student's text.

The three main components, which I ended up with, are *background*, *task expectations* and *assessment criteria*. *Background* includes information on framing and preparation material. *Task expectations* covers the features specified in the writing instruction, and formal criteria-category, and the final component *assessment criteria*, is a registration of whether assessment criteria is included in the writing assignment or not. Table 6 is a presentations of a quantitative registration of the writing assignments according to the three main components of writing assignments.

The only assignment sets that featured characteristics of all three main components were the tasks from set B2, C2, E1 and E2 (appendix E, G, J and K), where set E1 and E2 are the two exam sets. The four sets included a total of 12 tasks. It should be noted that the assessment criteria is not written directly on the assignment set for set E1 and E2, but there is information on the assignment sets regarding where the student can find assessment criteria for the assignments. As mentioned earlier, assignment set E1 and E2 have many similarities with set A3 and A4, but in regards of informing the students about the assessment criteria, they differ slightly. Set A3 and A4 are the sets created by a publisher of English textbooks, where assessment criteria were made available to the teacher, but there was no info regarding assessment criteria on the documents intended for the students. Another discovery was that all the tasks featured the *task expectations*-component, except for the previously mentioned assignment B3.

Table 6: The main components of the writing assignments

THE MAIN COMPONENTS OF THE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS			
School / exam	Background	Task expectations	Assessment criteria
A	3 (I, II, III, IV) 4 (I, II, III, IV)	1 (I, II, III, IV) 2 (I, II) 3 (I, II, III, IV) 4 (I, II, III, IV)	1 (I, II, III, IV) 2 (I, II)
B	2 (I, II, III)	1 (I, II, III) 2 (I, II, III)	1 (I, II, III) 2 (I, II, III)
C	2	1 2	2
D	3	1 (I, II, III, IV) 2 (I, II, III, IV, V) 3	
E	1 (I, II, III, IV) 2 (I, II, III, IV)	1 (I, II, III, IV) 2 (I, II, III, IV)	1 (I, II, III, IV) 2 (I, II, III, IV)

The reason for merging framing and preparation material into one category, is because the two categories both serve and present information that helps the student getting started in the writing process. These features provide a starting point and guidelines on who to write for, which perspective to write from, and necessary background information needed in order to answer the assignment in a suitable manner. Together these categories comprise a *background* for the students when planning and writing their texts, and a task has to include a minimum of one of these categories in order to be placed in the category entitled background. From a total of 41 tasks, 21 included background information.

*Task expectations* is the information that usually is found in the category labelled as writing instruction. This is the information in the assignment focusing on what is expected to be included in the student's response and it can be identified through studying which *type of text* or *genre* the students are asked to write their response in, and the usage of *verbs* in the task. Together these elements provide directions on which *acts of writing* the students are asked to do when responding. These acts of writing will be analysed further, in chapter 4.4.3, through the features presented in the Wheel of Writing-model.

Task expectations also includes assignments registered as including *formal criteria*, but formal criteria alone is not sufficient information for an assignment to be included in the *task expectations* category. The assignments registered with *task expectations* in Table 6, are assignments registered as including *writing instruction* and *formal criteria*, or only *writing instruction* in Table 5. But not the assignments only registered under *formal criteria* from



Table 5. 40 of 41 tasks had clear task expectations, and the one that did not, was assignment B3, which is an assignment that will be discussed further in chapter 5.

Presenting the *assessment criteria* in a writing assignment is necessary in order to ensure transparency and validity according to the curriculum. Assessment criteria can be presented by using assessment rubrics or through bullet points highlighting the elements that are significant and that will be the centre of attention when assessing the student response. 21 of 41 tasks included assessment criteria.

The intention behind analysing the components of the writing assignments, was to deconstruct the assignments and analyse the pieces or components they were comprised of, and finally organise these findings into the three main components of writing assignments. The initial six components were inspired by literature and earlier research on writing assignment design, while the next step, merging these six into three main components, was based on my assessment. Fewer components made the analysis more coherent, and it became easier to see which type of information the different tasks included.

## **4.4 The text features of the writing assignments**

In the next step of the analysis, when analysing the *text features* of the writing assignments, the main focus is on the wording applied and content of the writing assignments, i.e. what the assignment is asking the student to do. I analyse the assignments, looking for specific prescriptions on *content*, *type of text* and *writing act*. This information is generally found in the main component entitled task expectations.

### **4.4.1 Content**

Practising general writing skills is an aim in itself in the curriculum, which means that students can be asked to write about almost any topic, as long as they are practising and working on issues such as orthography, grammar and text structure. This analysis, however, contains a registration of the *content* of the various writing tasks, i.e. what the tasks ask students to show knowledge of, and write about in their texts.

The analysis operates with three main categories, where the first one is entitled *culture, society and literature*, which is a registration of the tasks that ask for content related to the

curriculum's main subject area, culture, society and literature. The second category is entitled *student interest / opinion*, which registers the tasks that specifically ask for students' opinion on a topic, and tasks that open up to letting students write texts where they can act as experts on a topic. This category is inspired by the views that assignments should appeal to students' interests, and that students should be able to share their opinion in writing assignments (Newmann et al., 2001; Ruth & Murphy, 1988; Smith & Swain, 2011; Weigle, 2002).

The third category is entitled *text production*, and are the assignments that neither explicitly ask students to give their opinion and act as experts, or to show knowledge on subjects related to the learning aims in culture, society and literature. *Text production* tasks, are the tasks that do not fill the criteria for *culture, society and literature* or *student interest / opinion*, and thus are tasks that ask students to write about various topics, but not content related to the first two categories.

The fact that several tasks are gathered in one assignment set does not necessarily mean they all focus on the same type of content. In assignment set A3 – Equality, task II, and III focus primarily on topics related to culture, society and literature, while task I and IV opens up to letting students share their opinion on other topics.

To distinguish between the primary content of the different tasks is not easy, and where to place the respective tasks in Table 7 is not always obvious. As a result of this, some tasks that show features of more than one category are placed, and can belong in several categories. The tasks registered under student interests / opinion are the tasks that specifically request the student's opinion on a topic, and the fact that some tasks are registered under both culture, society and literature, and student interest / opinion, shows that there is not necessarily any dichotomy between those two categories.

In terms of the tasks registered under text production, the content asked for ranges from tasks where the students can use their imagination, to tasks focusing on topics related to social studies. Since there are only 11 tasks registered under text production, I will briefly explain my reasoning for placing these tasks in this third category. The three tasks in assignment set B1, and task B3 and C2 (appendix E, F and G) are tasks asking for students to use their imagination, and write tasks related to fiction and fantasy and are thus not related to the first two categories.

Task I, II and IV from assignment set D1 (appendix H), are fact-based texts, where one can argue that task I and II could be categorised under culture, society and literature, given that the topic is the Second World War. However, the learning aim from the curriculum focusing on English history, is formulated in the following way: The aims of the studies are to enable pupils to “explain features of history and geography in Great Britain and the USA” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013, p. 9). I have chosen to interpret the preposition “in”, in this context as predominantly focusing on topics geographically in Great Britain and USA, and not issues related to the dropping of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima or events in Auschwitz, which are topics more related to the social studies subject. Task I and IV from assignment set D2 (appendix I) are asking students to write news from Byåsen, and news from a school field trip. Finally, task IV from set E1 (appendix J), could be placed under *student interest / opinion*, but the task specifies that the topic has to be centred around social media, which is a topic that might interest some students, but not all. The task is neither explicitly asking for the student’s opinion or personal thoughts on a topic, and is thus placed in the *text production* category.

Summarised, the tasks categorised as *text production* focus on a wide range of topics, but are still tasks not directly relevant for the first two categories. But where to place the tasks in terms of content, is not always uncomplicated, which the description above hopefully has exemplified.

Table 7: The content of the texts students are asked to write

CONTENT			
School / exam	Culture, society and literature	Student interests / opinion	Text production
A	1 (I, II, III, IV) 2 (I, II) 3 (II, III) 4 (I, II, III, IV)	3 (I, IV) 4 (I, IV)	
B	2 (I, II, III)	2 (III)	1 (I, II, III) 3
C	1	1	2
D	1 (III) 2 (II, III, V) 3		1 (I, II, IV) 2 (I, IV)
E	1 (I, II, III) 2 (I, II, III, IV)		1 (IV)

Table 7 displays which content students are asked to write about in their texts. An interesting discovery here is how the majority of the writing assignments ask students to show

knowledge on issues related to the curriculum's main subject area *culture, society and literature*, while only six assignments focus on the students' interests or opinion on matters.

The first category, *culture, society and literature*, is the title of one of the four main subject areas in the English subject curriculum. This area focuses on cultural understanding, and aims at covering key topics connected to developing student knowledge about English as a world language, as well as focusing on social issues, literature and other cultural expressions in mainly English-speaking countries, but also to “communicate and converse about contemporary and academic topics” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013, p. 8).

The aims in the other main subject areas in the curriculum are more concerned with strategies, working methods and communication in general, and do not prescribe any specific guidelines on the content of the teaching, and are thus not typical topics to ask students to write texts about. The only aims that provide any form of explicit prescription on the content of the teaching are the competence aims listed under culture, society and literature, and thus it is relevant to study whether these aims have a tendency to be included in writing assignments.

The four tasks in assignment set A1 – Fight for Your Rights (appendix B), are all examples of tasks where the content is applicable to the learning aims from the main content area culture, society and literature. Task I asks students to “write a letter to the Montgomery Police Department in year 1955 where you request Rosa Park’s freedom.”, and task III asks students to “write a letter to the British Government in year 1900 where you request that women *are provided the right to vote*”. One of the learning aims says that students are to explain features of history and geography in Great Britain and the USA, and task I and III comply well with that. Note that the part written in italics from task III has been added by myself, since the original sentence from the assignment set is incomplete.

Task II and IV from A1 – Fight for Your Rights do not share the same obvious link to the learning aims listed under culture, society and literature, in the sense that they do not focus on Great Britain or the USA, which are the only places specified in the learning aims. Other than that, the only reference to other geographical places in the curriculum is *English-speaking countries*. Task II does not even focus on an English-speaking country, where it asks students to “write a letter to the Russian government today where you request gay equality by law.”,

but this topic is still related to the learning aim stating that students are to “communicate and converse about contemporary and academic topics”.

Task IV asks students to “write a letter to the South African Government in year 1989 where you request Nelson Mandela’s freedom.”, and thus its focus is on an English-speaking country. The curriculum though, does not provide any specific focus on history other than in Great Britain and the USA, but it asks students to “discuss and elaborate on the way people live and how they socialise in Great Britain, USA and other English-speaking countries and Norway”. Initially, this task focuses on South Africa’s history, but one could argue that knowledge of Nelson Mandela and his impact on the history of South Africa is related to how people live and socialise in the country today. Another point to make in this regard is that parts of British and South African history is connected through Britain’s colonization of South Africa.

Determining where to place certain tasks in regards to whether they fit the learning aims in culture, society and literature or not, is not always that straightforward. The curriculum asks students to explain features of history and geography in only Great Britain and the USA, but includes Norway and *other English-speaking countries* when stating that students are to discuss and elaborate on the way people live and socialise. A clear distinction between *explaining features of* history and geography of a country and *discussing and elaborating on* how people live and socialise in a country is not always obvious or clear, but overall, in addition to focusing on contemporary and academic topics in general, most issues related to English-speaking countries are valid. However, the curriculum prescribes that an extra attention should be given to issues related to Great Britain and the USA.

The second category, *student interests / opinion*, covers the tasks that explicitly ask for the student’s knowledge on a topic where s/he can act as the expert, something Smith & Swain (2011) highlighted as a way to initiate a whole range of responses. The tasks that only are registered in this category are the tasks that have no explicit or direct connection to the aims in culture, society and literature, but where students are asked to produce texts where they share thoughts and opinions related to other various subjects or their everyday lives outside of school.

There are six tasks registered under this category, however, only two of them appear in this category only. Four tasks are also registered under culture, society and literature, which means that these tasks ask students to give their opinion on a topic related to the learning aims listed there. Task III from B2 – the British Isles, is an example of this, where it asks students to “Write a letter to David Cameron where you reflect and come with your opinion about the British school system. Compare with the Norwegian school system”. In this task the student is asked to show knowledge on the school system in Britain and Norway, but is also explicitly invited to share his/her own opinion and thoughts on these systems.

Task I from A3 – Equality, however, asks to “create a text examining the things you can do to treat people with equality and fairness. Choose a suitable title and type of text.”. This task wants the student’s opinions and thoughts on a topic, thus the student can act as an expert because there is no key answer when a task is formulated like this. It asks the student to come up with ideas on how to treat others fairly, which can initiate a wide range of responses from different students, and this is registered as focusing on student interest and opinion. The task is displayed in Figure 9, which is an excerpt from assignment set A3 (appendix C). The yellow markings are made by me in order to highlight the writing instruction for task I. Task 3A in the excerpt is registered as task I in my thesis

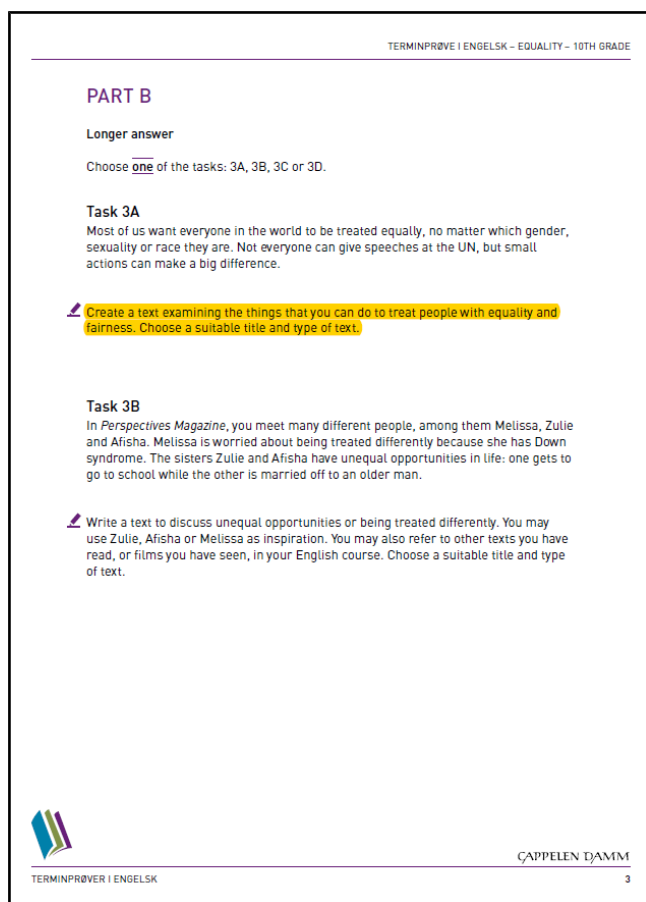


Figure 9: Excerpt 1 from assignment set A3, Equality – task 1 is highlighted in yellow

Task I, II and III from set B1 – Mysteries, are categorised as *text production*-tasks, and are all examples of tasks that do not ask for students' opinions on a subject, nor topics related to English-speaking countries or other contemporary issues. It asks students to “write a text with a focus on mysteries. Choose whether you want to write a ghost story (task I), a crime story (task II) or a news article (task III).”. In this task students are asked to produce a text focusing on mysteries. Furthermore, they are provided three options on how to write this text through directives on type of text. This is a type of task where students get to practice writing skills, with a general focus on content, structure and language. In the curriculum, the main subject area written communication, has learning aims that focus on form, thus the text production tasks are still valid in terms of the content of the English subject curriculum, even though they are not necessarily relevant to the learning aims in the main subject area culture, society and literature.

#### 4.4.2 Types of text

I have further categorised what types of text or genres students are asked to write in their texts. This analysis focused and distinguished between two major types of text; *factual* and *fictional* texts. The latter is defined as texts with the purpose of entertaining, e.g. stories and poems, whereas factual texts include a broad range of types of texts that focus on facts and argumentation skills, e.g. newspapers reports, articles and formal letters. The categories derive from the theories presented in chapter 2, regarding genres and types of text, where the focus was on the distinction between if the students are asked to write texts related to factual or fictional texts.

In the analysis process, the assignments labelled as factual or fictional texts were the assignments that asked students to write either genres related to fiction or related to fact-based texts, either explicitly or through the wording applied in the assignment. The assignments labelled as *optional*, were the assignments with no specific demands on type of text, and thus left it for the student to decide which type of text to write.

Table 8 lists the writing assignments according to which type of texts they ask the students to write. An obvious feature here is that out of a total of 41 writing assignments, only four ask explicitly for fictional texts.

*Table 8: The type of texts students are asked to write*

TYPE OF TEXT			
School / exam	Factual text	Fictional text	Optional
A	1 (I, II, III, IV) 2 (I, II) 3 (II, III, IV) 4 (I)		3 (I) 4 (II, III, IV)
B	1 (III) 2 (I, II, III) 3	1 (I, II)	
C	1 2		
D	1 (I, II, III) 2 (I, II, III, IV, V) 3	1 (IV)	
E	2 (I, II, III)	1 (I)	1 (II, III, IV) 2 (IV)

In most of the cases, the type of text in which the student is expected to answer is not specified. Thus, assessing the type of text can be an equivocal affair, since identifying which



type of text the students are asked to write their response in, is not always obvious. Still, there are some features of the distinctive tasks that provide indications on in what way the students are encouraged to answer the tasks. Assignment set A3 – Equality (appendix C), exemplifies this, where task I can be answered both as a factual and a fictional text, where it asks the student to “create a text examining the things that you can do to treat people with equality and fairness. Choose a suitable title and type of text.”. Task II, III and IV, on the other hand, guides the student more towards writing a factual text. An example of this is task IV that asks the student to “write a text where you discuss boys and gender equality. We want to hear your personal thoughts on the matter! Choose a suitable title and type of text.”. Even though both tasks leave it to the student to choose type of text, the choice of words, especially the verbs in the tasks, play a role in forming which type of text the student is encouraged to write. In the case of task IV the verb *discuss*, prescribes an expectation of writing a factual text.

Task I can be answered through writing a story dealing with equality and fairness, while *discussing* gender equality, and including personal thoughts on the matter, has more characteristics of factual texts. Task IV is highlighted in Figure 10, which is the second excerpt from assignment set A3. In this figure the yellow markings have been added by me, in order to highlight task IV, as an example of a task that requests a factual text. Task 3D in the excerpt is registered as task IV in my thesis.


TERMINPRØVE I ENGLSK – EQUALITY – 10TH GRADE

**Task 3C**  
 In *The Secret Life of Bees*, you meet Lily and Rosaleen who deal with issues of inequality and limited opportunities. Choose either Lily or Rosaleen and compare her with another person or character you have learned about in your English course.

✎ Write a text to compare their stories and discuss how they deal with inequality and limited opportunities. What choices do they make, and what kind of consequences may come from these choices? Make sure you describe each character or person and their challenges before you compare them.

**Task 3D**  
 In her speech, Emma Watson tells boys that gender equality “is your issue too”. She believes that boys often are expected to be strong and tough, and because of this they may find it hard to show weakness or express their true feelings. She believes that boys also need gender equality, so they can be free to be themselves.

✎ Write a text where you discuss boys and gender equality. We want to hear your personal thoughts on the matter! Choose a suitable title and type of text.

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*Figure 10: Excerpt 2 from assignment set A3, Equality – task IV is highlighted in yellow*

Assignment set B1 – Mysteries (appendix E), provides examples of clear-cut fictional and factual tasks. There are three options for the student in this set, where task I and II ask for a literary response, while task III asks for a factual text. The three options are all included in two sentences that are formulated in the following manner: “Write a text with a focus on mysteries. Choose whether you want to write a ghost story (task I), a crime story (task II) or a news article (task III).”. Task I and II are examples of fictional texts, while task III asks the students to answer this task through a genre with the characteristics of factual texts.

Summarised, there is a tendency in the material towards requesting factual texts, either explicitly or through the wording in the assignments. This shows that, even in tasks that might seem optional, in the sense that type of text is not explicitly stated, there are other features in the assignments that prescribe an expectation of factual texts.

#### 4.4.3 The acts of writing

The final analysis studies the writing assignments in light of the theories presented in the Wheel of Writing. The model is presented and described in chapter 2.2, and Table 9 shows the registration of the different writing assignments according to the *acts of writing* presented in the *Wheel of Writing-model*, which represents a functional view on writing (Berge et al., 2016). According to the model there are six different acts of writing, namely *to interact*, *to reflect*, *to describe*, *to explore*, *to imagine* and *to convince*, and in this analysis each writing task has been studied in regards to which writing task they are asking the students to carry out.

When analysing this, the words applied in the text are vital to understand which writing act the student is requested to carry out, and then especially the verbs applied, e.g. request, discuss, compare, and if there is a specific request to genre or type of text, e.g. letter, review, essay. The part of the writing instructions that indirectly prescribed a certain writing act is included in the table below, and the cases where a verb or genre was applied in the specifications, is marked in bold letters. The Wheel of Writing is displayed in Figure 2, and in that figure there are keywords below each writing act, which explains further what types of writing each writing act is comprised of. For example, in the figure *to explore* is defined as including *to investigate*, *compare*, *analyse*, *discuss*, *interpret*, *explain* and *reason*. I have applied these further definitions of each writing act, in the work of analysing each task.

It should be made clear that, similarly to identifying *content* and *type of text* asked for in the assignments, identifying the *acts of writing* in the respective tasks, is not a straightforward thing to do either. First of all, the definition of which writing act the student is asked to carry out in the different assignments, is my interpretation of the wording applied in the respective tasks. Some of the tasks were more obvious than others, in the sense that they used the same verb as the ones applied in the Wheel of Writing, e.g. task B3 asked the students to *describe*, and task E2I and E2II asked students to *reflect*. In other cases the tasks did not include verbs directly linked to the acts of writing, and I had to assess the assignment's relation to the different acts. One example is assignment D3 that asks students to “create a text where you focus on race relations and integration in the US”, which is a task I have defined as related to the acts of *reflecting* and *exploring*. For some of the tasks, I discovered that one writing act

was not sufficient to cover what the assignment asked for, but I decided do apply no more than two writing acts for each task, in order to make the analysis as coherent as possible.

Table 9: The acts of writing featured in the writing assignments

Acts of writing according to the Wheel of Writing				
School / exam	Set	Task	Instruction	Main writing act(s)
A	1	I	“Write a <b>letter</b> ...” “...where you <b>request</b> ...”	To interact, to convince
A	1	II	“Write a <b>letter</b> ...” “...where you <b>request</b> ...”	To interact, to convince
A	1	III	“Write a <b>letter</b> ...” “...where you <b>request</b> ...”	To interact, to convince
A	1	IV	“Write a <b>letter</b> ...” “...where you <b>request</b> ...”	To interact, to convince
A	2	I	“Write a film <b>review</b> ...”	To reflect
A	2	II	“Write an <b>essay</b> ...”	To imagine
A	3	I	“Create a text <b>examining</b> the things you can do to...”	To reflect
A	3	II	“Write a text to <b>discuss</b> ...”	To reflect, to explore
A	3	III	“Write a text to <b>compare</b> ...”	To reflect, to explore
A	3	IV	“Write a text to <b>discuss</b> ...”	To reflect, to explore
A	4	I	“Write a text where you <b>discuss</b> ...”	To reflect, to explore
A	4	II	“Write a text about meeting a new culture.”	To reflect, to imagine
A	4	III	“Write a text inspired by the poem “Refugee Blues”.”	To reflect, to imagine
A	4	IV	“Write text about preserving and protecting your boundaries.”	To reflect, to imagine
B	1	I	“Write a text with focus on mysteries - <b>ghost story</b> ”	To imagine
B	1	II	“Write a text with focus on mysteries – <b>crime story</b> ”	To imagine
B	1	III	“Write a text with focus on mysteries – <b>news article</b> ”	To imagine, to describe
B	2	I	“Write an <b>article</b> for a <b>journal</b> or <b>magazine</b> ...”	To describe
B	2	II	“Write a text about a British historical topic for an <b>English school book</b> .”	To describe
B	2	III	“Write a <b>letter</b> to David Cameron where you <b>reflect</b> and come with <b>your opinion</b> on...”	To interact, to reflect
B	3		“ <b>Describe</b> how it looks...”	To describe
C	1		“(The task) is supposed to be an opinion piece, where <b>your opinion</b> is what is most important.”	To reflect

C	2		"...present one of the new species that you have discovered."	To describe, to imagine
D	1	I	"Write a <b>factual</b> text about..."	To describe
D	1	II	"Write a <b>factual</b> text about..."	To describe
D	1	III	" <b>Discuss</b> one of the following statements:"	To explore
D	1	IV	"Write a <b>short story</b> or a <b>poem</b> ..."	To imagine
D	2	I	"...write your own <b>newspaper report</b> – <b>News from Byåsen</b> "	To describe
D	2	II	"...write your own <b>newspaper report</b> – <b>Environmental issues</b> "	To describe
D	2	III	"...write your own <b>newspaper report</b> – <b>Online safety</b> "	To describe
D	2	IV	"...write your own <b>newspaper report</b> – <b>A class field trip</b> "	To describe
D	2	V	"...write your own <b>newspaper report</b> – <b>Refugees</b> "	To describe
D	3		"Create e text where you focus on race relations and integration in the US..."	To reflect, to explore
E	1	I	"Write a text about leaving your homeland and starting all over again."	To reflect, to explore
E	1	II	"Which challenge or challenges mentioned in the preparation material do you think need most attention in today's society?"	To reflect, to explore
E	1	III	"Create a text inspired by one or more texts in the preparation material. Your text must include a challenge and a change."	To reflect
E	1	IV	"Create a text where you describe a challenge and how you would use social media to deal with it."	To reflect
E	2	I	"Create a text where you <b>reflect</b> ..."	To reflect
E	2	II	"Create a text in which you <b>reflect</b> on the <b>differences</b> and <b>similarities</b> ..."	To reflect, to explore
E	2	III	"Create a text in which you <b>describe</b> and <b>reflect</b> ..."	To reflect, to describe
E	2	IV	"...create a text about <b>your experience</b> of traditions and lifestyles in the country you have chosen."	To reflect,

Table 9 lists the different writing assignments and displays my interpretation of which acts of writing they ask the students to do. 22 of the assignments are registered as incorporating only one writing act, while 19 are registered as incorporating two writing acts. Table 10 provides an overview of the frequency of the different writing acts present in the writing assignments

studied, which show that many of the assignments ask the student to reflect on issues, while quite few focus on task related to interacting and convincing.

Table 10: Frequency of writing acts in the data material

The acts of writing – frequency in data material					
To interact	To reflect	To describe	To explore	To imagine	To convince
5	20	13	9	9	4

The different writing acts are described in chapter 2.2. In my material, the writing act with the highest frequency of registrations is *to reflect*. This act is registered 20 times. It is also spread out quite evenly in the material and is the only act that appears at least once in the material from each of the respective schools and the exam sets. To reflect is described as focusing on personal experiences, thoughts and feelings, while the writing acts *to convince* and *to interact*, are described as focusing on texts that have an aim of either persuading readers, or to keep in touch with others (Berge et al., 2016). These writing acts are not represented much in the material, furthermore and even more interestingly, it is striking to discover that all the four tasks focusing on *to convince* are the four tasks in assignment set A1 (appendix B). The same applies to the writing act *to interact*, with five registrations, where four of them are from assignment set A1. The last one is task III from assignment set B2 (appendix E).

The tasks in assignment set A1 (appendix B) are good examples of where I have made my own interpretation of which acts the students are asked to carry out, and I will explain my reasoning here in order to make the process as transparent as possible. In terms of applying interacting to the four tasks, the reason is because all the four tasks ask the student to write a letter, which is a type of text based on communication with others, i.e. *to interact*. In regards of convincing, all the four tasks ask the students to request something from an institution. Task I asks students to request Rosa Parks’ freedom, and send it to the Montgomery Police Department, task II asks students to request gay equality by law from the Russian government, task III asks students to request that women are provided the right to vote, and send it to the British government in 1900, and finally task IV asks the students to request Nelson Mandela’s freedom, where the recipient is the South African government in 1989. These writing instructions ask, in my opinion, students to practice acts of convincing, in order to answer the tasks properly.

There have been some interesting discoveries when analysing the assignment sets, e.g. that relatively few tasks focus on student interests, and ask for content focusing on fictional texts. The same applies to the distribution and frequency of the different writing acts. Finally, it has been interesting to discover the features of the exam sets, and compare them to the features of the assignment sets from the schools. The findings that have been briefly presented in this chapter, will be further discussed in chapter 5.





## **5.0 Findings and discussion**

This chapter will discuss the results of my analyses in relation to, first, earlier research and theory, and then in relation to the English subject curriculum. I will also compare the exam sets to the assignment sets from the schools, in order to see if there are any characteristics or distinctive features exclusive to the exam sets. Finally, there is a summary and a conclusion where I will try to highlight the main findings of my study, and point out the relevance of my study to teachers and designers of writing tasks.

Because of the size of the study, and the limited number of assignments in my analysis, it is not possible to generalise and state that my findings apply to all ESL classrooms. It is, however, a presentation and discussion of what I found in my material, which might be an indication of a tendency in writing assignment design for the ESL classroom. I also comment on different components and features of writing assignments that might be applicable and useful to task designers, when designing, discussing and evaluating writing assignments in general.

Without studying student texts, and seeing how they have responded to the different tasks, it is impossible to comment on which type of assignments that prove to be good, effective, ineffective or bad. But the discussion below is concentrated around answering my main research question; what characterises writing assignments for lower secondary Norwegian ESL classrooms?

### **5.1 What is the relationship between research, theory and classroom practice?**

In chapter 1 and 2, several aspects from earlier research, and theory related to writing and writing assignments, are identified. Below is a presentation and discussion of the most relevant parts according to the results presented in chapter 4. I will discuss and comment on a selection of the results in light of earlier research and theory. Research specify the importance of designing assignments that appeal to students' interests, and provide support and information with clear descriptions on what is expected from the students' texts. Comparing these ideas with my findings presented in Table 4 and Table 6 can reveal how my material

complies with these ideas. It is also interesting to study the distribution of writing acts presented in Table 9, in comparison with the perspective on writing as a functional tool.

Starting with research conducted on writing assignments, one major point is that assignments should appeal to students' interests, and focus on topics where the student can act as an expert (Gardner, 2008). As described in chapter 1.4.1, and as Ruth & Murphy (1988) have pointed out, the ideal writing assignment should attract attention, interest and initiate thought. Weigle (2002) supports this by claiming that topics for assignments should be interesting to students, and make the students so engaged that they feel they have something to say about the subject.

When designing writing assignments, one approach that can be applied in order to reach out to as many students as possible, is to provide students with options on how to answer, and thus they can choose the assignment they find the most interesting. This can be achieved through providing students with *writing assignment sets*, which include several tasks or specific options on how to answer, e.g. in terms of *content* or *type of text*, which in turn will provide students with a choice or several options on how to answer and which type of text to write. Designing an assignment that will attract the attention of a wide range of students, and each individual in a classroom, is challenging, but designing writing assignment sets can accordingly, be a way of reaching out to as many students as possible.

When analysing the assignment sets and how they facilitated student choice, I uncovered that the relationship between sets categorised as *free*, *controlled* and *combination* was quite evenly distributed in the material in terms of number of sets within each category. Four sets were labelled as free, four labelled as controlled, and six labelled as combination, as shown in Table 4. A closer look, however, revealed something interesting. The short definition of *free* sets, was that the sets provided students the chance to choose between several tasks, and provided flexibility in terms of choosing type of text. Out of the four sets categorised as free, two were the sets created by the English textbook publisher and the other two were the exam sets. In other words, none of the assignment sets categorised as free, were created at the respective schools. A closer look at this will be presented later in this chapter, when comparing the exam sets with the assignment sets collected from the respective schools.

Another issue pointed out in earlier research is that assignments should provide students with the support and information needed to successfully complete a writing task. Gardner (2008)

has stated that a writing assignment should offer considerable support, detail and include information that makes it easy for students to understand the setting and background for the text they are asked to write. According to Gardner, expectations for writing assignments should also be clarified for students by providing students with assessment criteria. This view is also supported by Weigle (2002) who points out the importance of providing students with information on how the texts will be assessed, and that instructions are sufficiently detailed for students to know what is expected of them.

Inspired by the issues pointed out by Gardner (2008) and Weigle (2002), Table 6 displays the three main components of the writing assignments. The idea behind the table was to provide an organised representation of what type of information each task was comprised of. One way for a task to provide students with sufficient information to successfully complete a writing task, is to include all three components presented in Table 6; *background*, *task expectations* and *assessment criteria*. The 12 tasks from assignment set B2, C2, E1 and E2 (appendix E, G, J and K) were the only four that included all three components, and out of these four, set E1 and E2 are the exam sets. The role of the exam sets will be discussed later in this chapter, when looking closer at the characteristics of the exam sets.

All the tasks included clear task expectations, except assignment B3 (appendix F), which did not feature any of the components presented in Table 6. Assignment B3 is special in this sense, and a valid question in this regard is whether this assignment has a value in itself. The ideas behind categorising and analysing these main components derives from the research underlining the importance of that tasks provide sufficient support, information and clear descriptions on what is expected from the student (Gardner, 2008; Smith & Swain, 2011; Weigle, 2002). Providing sufficient support and information is related to including background information and clear task expectations in the assignment, in addition to assessment criteria, which also is related to descriptions of what is expected from the students. Assignment B3, still fills one criteria highlighted as a means for students to successfully complete an assignment; it lets the student act as an expert, by asking for the student's own experiences when unwrapping and tasting a chocolate.

Summarised, whether a task should include some or all the main components of writing assignments or not, is relative according to which type of task it is and its usage. In some cases, as with assignment B3, there are other ways of encouraging students to write.

Consequently, how much support and information that is necessary is relative according to which type of task it is, and what the teacher wants the student to learn, or practice through working on the assignment. I still argue that the level of support and information a task includes, should be based on conscious choices by the task designer. The role of the different components, and level of support and information according to different types of tasks, will also be discussed further when comparing the exam sets with the sets from the respective schools.

The functional approach to writing presented in chapter 2, incorporates the basic view on writing, and main perspective, behind the analyses conducted in my study. From this perspective, writing is a functional tool used as a means to communicate, something that was visualised through the Wheel of Writing and its focus on acts of writing in chapter 2. When analysing the respective tasks in light of the different writing acts, I discovered that only four out of 41 asked students *to convince*, and only five asked students *to interact*. This discovery is interesting in several ways. First, since both acts are obvious ways of communicating with others. To convince aims at persuading others through expressing opinions, arguing and discussing, while to interact focuses on being in dialogue and cooperating with others (Berge et al., 2016). In addition, authenticity is highlighted as an important feature of writing assignments, in the sense that the audience of an assignment preferably should be an authentic group of readers, or at least the audience should be specified in order to provide a full rhetorical context and to create a more realistic writing problem (Gardner, 2008; Newmann, Bryk, & Nagaoka, 2001; Smith & Swain, 2011). Way, Joiner and Seaman's (2000) study also supports this, by stressing the importance of using real-life interactive tasks with native speakers in order to produce proficient FL writers. Obvious ways of creating assignments that will encourage students to engage with others in an authentic setting, i.e. producing discourse with value beyond school, is to ask students to interact and to convince, since these are acts that focus on being in dialogue with others.

Communication with *others*, is in itself a topic for discussion in designing writing assignments, and creating assignments meant for authentic communication is challenging in a classroom setting. If an authentic group of readers only refers to people outside school, it is a challenge finding people who are available of receiving, and maybe responding to, texts from an entire class. One possibility is connecting with peers abroad, but there are also other ways

of encouraging authentic communication within the classroom. The teacher can be an authentic receiver through formulating tasks asking students to write texts where they should try to convince the teacher of why homework is unnecessary, for example. Summarised, and in my opinion, specifying an audience, authentic or not, can help the students in the writing process, because it helps creating a purpose for the writing.

In addition to the acts of convincing and interacting, the four other acts of writing; *to imagine*, *to explore*, *to describe* and *to reflect* could, of course, also end up as texts that are meant for others to read, but that are not directly connected to communicating with others, as when convincing and interacting. As an example, *to reflect* is described as focusing upon own experiences, thoughts and feelings (Berge et al., 2016). To reflect is the writing act appearing most times in the material, thus many of the tasks are asking students to reflect on a variety of issues. This discovery shows that a majority of the tasks are not presented in a manner that opens up for authentic communication with others.

On the other hand, when students are asked to reflect on issues, it opens up for them to write texts about their interest and share their opinion on topics. When looking at the relationship between Table 7, focusing on content, and Table 9, which is the presentation of how the writing acts are distributed in the material, it becomes apparent that from the six tasks asking for students' interests or opinion, five of them ask students *to reflect*. Furthermore, from the 28 tasks registered as focusing on topics from the curriculum's main subject area, *content, society and literature*, 17 ask students to reflect, and finally out of the 11 tasks registered as *text production*, only one ask students to reflect. These numbers show that when asking students to reflect on issues, it opens up to letting students share their opinion on topics, or to write about topics that interest them, but students are also often asked to reflect on content directly linked to the curriculum.

Asking students to reflect in a writing assignment can be useful in the sense that it asks students to show and share their own experiences, thoughts and knowledge on a variety of topics. This could be topics directly related to the curriculum, which in turn can provide useful information to the teacher when assessing the student's level in the subject. However, given that the type of writing that will be most useful to students in life outside and after school, is as a functional tool used to communicate with others, tasks that ask students to interact and to convince should not be neglected.

In my opinion, presenting a variety of writing tasks to students where they get to practice all six acts of writing is important, which is in compliance with the curriculum's prescription that students should practice writing different types of texts. The reason, however, for putting this extra focus on *to interact* and *to convince*, is, as mentioned above, that these were the two acts appearing the fewest times in the tasks, and also apparent in very few of the assignment sets. *Interacting* only appeared in four tasks, limited to one assignment set (A1), and *convincing* only appeared in five tasks, divided over merely two assignment sets (A1 and B2). In addition, these are also the two writing acts with the most obvious link to communication with others, and should thus be applied in writing assignments, if the overall aim is get students to practice writing acts related to authentic communication.

## **5.2 What is the relationship between the English subject curriculum and classroom practice?**

Table 7 displays that 28 of 41 tasks are linked to the aims in the curriculum's main subject area; culture, society and literature. The tasks focusing on issues related to this subject area are also quite evenly distributed in the data material. This indicates that writing tasks are often used as a means and an opportunity for students to share their knowledge and thoughts on topics mainly regarding history, culture and literature of English speaking countries.

Tasks that focus on issues related to the aims in culture, society and literature, thus can provide teachers with texts where they can assess and evaluate their students on these topics. But, as described in chapter 1.3, many of the curriculum's aims are quite generic in their form, with descriptions such as "write different types of texts with structure and coherence", and "understand and use a general vocabulary related to different topics" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013, p. 9). This opens up for letting students work on all six writing acts, write texts about almost any subject, and topics other than issues only related to English speaking countries, but still have value as useful units for assessing students' writing skills, through focusing on issues such as grammar, orthography, structure and coherence. This, in turn, allows teachers to create assignments that can focus on topics related to students' interests and opinions, where students can write texts acting as experts, which as mentioned earlier, can be a key issue in order to make students succeed when writing

(Gardner, 2008; Smith & Swain, 2011). This is also a point that legitimises the usage of an assignment such as B3 – Chocolate. It can encourage students to write, which in itself has a value in order to develop general writing and language skills.

The curriculum prescribes that students should write different types of texts, however there are no specifications on which types of texts students are expected to write. Again, teachers are provided flexibility in terms of which type of texts they can ask students to write, when creating writing assignments. Nevertheless, it is important that students are provided the opportunity to write different types of texts. As described in chapter 2.3, Lee (2001) has pointed out the confusion surrounding terms such as genre and text type, which in turn led me to distinguish between factual and fictional texts in my analysis. When analysing my material, I found that only 4 of 41 writing assignments asked students to write fictional texts, 29 asked specifically for factual texts, while 8 were registered as *optional*, where the students had the opportunity to choose between writing a factual and fictional text. When considering the curriculum's statement that writing is an important skill to learn in order to be able to "express ideas and opinions in an understandable and purposeful manner" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013, pp. 4, 5), working on writing factual texts seems relevant and obvious. But working on fictional texts also has a value, in terms of working on general language learning, linguistic features and developing knowledge on different literary genres within the realm of fiction. There are also other ways of combining fictional texts with facts, e.g. asking students to step into the role of characters relevant to the curriculum, and then write a text acting as this character. Example of characters in this sense could be; a soldier during the American Revolutionary War, James Cook when arriving in Botany Bay or a task asking to continue the story of Bilbo Baggins after the story ends in *The Hobbit*.

### **5.3 What are the characteristics of the exam sets compared to the assignment sets collected from the schools?**

The exam sets, E1 and E2 (appendix J and K), were included in my study because they are centrally standardised assignments, designed and created by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, and used as exams for all lower secondary schools in Norway. Thus, they provide an insight into which type of writing tasks students are expected to understand

and work with in the English subject, after 10 years of compulsory education, and are in that sense interesting to compare to the assignment sets collected from the schools.

There were especially three issues that emerged when comparing the exam sets to the school sets. First, both exam sets were categorised as *free*, in terms of choice, meaning they provided students with options on how to answer. This was not the case in any of the sets collected from the schools, except set A3 and A4 (appendix C and D), which were the sets designed by the textbook publisher. Second, all the tasks in the exam sets were comprised of all three main components of the writing assignments, and third, all the tasks in the exam sets asked students *to reflect*, but none were specifically asking students to write on topics where they could act as an expert. Writing as an expert, can be, as mentioned above, a key issue in order to make students succeed when writing. Summarised, the exam sets were *free*, included all three main components, and were asking students *to reflect*.

The fact that the exam sets are comprised of all the main components complies well with the ideas that assignments should provide sufficient support, detail for students to understand what is expected of them, and information on how the text will be assessed. The occurrence of all three components was only present in two other assignment sets, which shows that that the majority of assignments have not included all this information in their tasks. The exam sets stands out in comparison with the school sets in this regard, but the reason why might be obvious.

As mentioned earlier, the exam sets are centrally standardised assignments, provided to all lower secondary schools in Norway. In order to make sure that all the students are provided the same information and equal opportunities for performing well at an exam, a *high information load* is necessary. According to Gordon Brossel, tasks can be divided into three main categories; low, moderate and high information load, in which each aspect describes the level of information available in different tasks (Otnes, 2015). A task with a high information load is also a task that provides students with a lot of support and information.

Exams require a high information load because of the necessity of making sure that every student is provided the same information, and thus are provided equal opportunities for performing well. But a high information load might not be necessary for all assignments provided to students during a school year. In school assignments, information on *background*



and *assessment criteria* could be presented to students in class or in other documents, and is thus information that can be omitted from the writing assignments. Assignments created by teachers locally, can be more specific on content and type of text, because they know what the content of the teaching has been, and they might want students to practice certain aspects of their writing. Since I did not conduct any interviews with the task designers, it is not possible to know whether this is normal practice or not. But it is worth noticing that *task expectation* was the only component featured in all the tasks, except assignment B3 – Chocolate.

The ideas behind designing *free* assignments, and content focusing on students' interests and opinions both derive from the concept that assignments should appeal to students' interests, and ask for issues related to personal experiences and everyday life outside school. Due to the fact that both exam sets are characterised as *free* is positive in the way that they provide the student with options on how to answer, and is in compliance with the ideas presented by Gardner (2008), Smith and Swain (2011), and Weigle (2002).

The fact that both exam sets were categorised as free, something which was not the case for any of the sets created at the schools, can be explained with the same reasoning as to why exams are assignments with a lot of support and information. One can assume, that at the respective schools tasks are designed with the school syllabus in mind, and thus the tasks are related to the content of the teaching at the respective schools. Because the exam sets are free, they provide students from different schools and at different language levels the opportunity to write texts they feel most comfortable with writing, and in that manner, equal opportunities regardless of which school the student is from.

None of the tasks from the exam sets focus on content directly linked to students' interests and opinions. 7 of 8 tasks from the exam sets are related to issues from the curriculum's main subject area, culture, society and literature. The students are in some cases asked to give their opinion on topics, but the topics are then mostly based on issues related to this main subject area. This is done through asking students to use texts and images from the preparation material as a starting point, which might not be topics in which the student can act as an expert, even when provided choices.

The exam sets' balance between free assignment sets, and tasks focusing on issues related to English speaking countries, is interesting in the sense that they provide the students with a

certain degree of choice, but at the same time they have to show knowledge and opinions on issues directly linked to some key elements of the curriculum.

## 5.4 Summary and conclusion

To summarise my findings into clear points, I have below presented the main discoveries in bullet points in order to visualise as clearly as possible what the **main components** of the assignments, and **key text features** asked for in the specific task expectations were.

- Findings regarding the **main components** of writing assignments included that:
  - All the tasks, except one, included clear *task expectations*
  - 12 of 41 tasks, included all three main components of writing assignments
  - The two exam sets, which comprised 8 tasks, included all three main components
  
- Findings regarding the **key text features** asked for in the writing assignments, included that:
  - Very few of the tasks asked students *to interact* and *to convince*
  - *To reflect* was the writing act asked for most frequently in the material
  - 5 of 6 tasks focusing on student interest and opinion, asked students *to reflect*
  - 28 of 41 tasks, asked students to write texts related to the curriculum's main subject area; culture, society and literature
  - 29 of 41 tasks, asked students to write factual texts
  - All the exam tasks asked students *to reflect*

In addition to the findings presented above, a finding not related directly to *main components* or *key text features* were, in terms of **choice**, that both the exam sets were *free*, something in which was not the case for any of the sets designed at the respective schools.

Looking at the findings related to main components of writing assignments, few of the tasks included all three main components, which puts them in the moderate to low information category. Earlier research highlights the importance of how writing assignments should provide students with sufficient support and information. The fact that only 12 of 41 tasks included all three main components could be regarded as something not compliant with the ideas of sufficient support and information. As mentioned above, for the school assignment sets, additional info regarding the assignments could have been presented in the classroom or in other documents. This could mean that students could have received information regarding an assignment, than what is included in writing, on the assignment papers.

Focusing on a selection of the features, revealed that most of the tasks asked students to reflect, while very few asked students to convince and to interact. Asking students to reflect might be valuable for receiving information on the students' knowledge on various topics related to the curriculum, while convincing and interacting are acts directly related to communication with others. There should be a balance between the different acts, and students should get tasks that ask them to write texts focusing on all of them, something that also includes the three remaining acts, *to explore, to imagine, to describe*.

Making sure that students gets to practice all six acts, is in agreement with the views on writing presented by the CEFR, and the English subject curriculum, where general linguistic competences are identified as important elements of a language learner's communicative competence, and writing is regarded as a tool for language learning through writing different types of texts (Council of Europe, 2011; Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013). Outside school, and later in life, students will have to use writing from the basic skills required to be able to participate in a twenty-first century world, to the level required for academic writing, and thus all the acts of writing are relevant to learn and practice.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, my material might be too small to draw any general conclusions regarding the current status of writing assignments in the ESL classroom. However, even if I do not present a recipe for the perfect assignment, I have hopefully contributed to producing a meta language for teachers and task designers to be able to discuss, analyse and evaluate writing assignments. In my opinion, a writing assignment should be perceived as a text of its own, where the recipient is the student. Recognising the writing assignment as a text with its own content, form and purpose might create a higher awareness

on the implications the assignments can have on the student's text, and what might encourage students to write. The components, features and categories I have presented in my thesis, might help teachers make conscious choices when planning and designing writing assignments, the most important text in writing education.

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## **Appendix A – Letter of request for getting access to writing assignments**

### **Hvordan lage gode skriveoppgaver i engelskfaget?**

#### **Forespørsel om å få tilgang til skriftlige oppgavebestillinger**

I anledning min masteroppgave i fag- og yrkesdidaktikk, engelsk ved NTNU ønsker jeg å få samlet inn oppgavebeskrivelser som gis til elever for skriftlige oppgaver i engelsk. Dette gjelder oppgaver som er laget lokalt på skolen, og ikke nasjonale prøver eller eksamensoppgaver. Jeg er mest interessert i oppgaver som gis til elever på 10.årstrinn og da helst alle oppgavene som i løpet av skoleåret danner grunnlaget for vurdering av elevenes skriftlige kompetanse.

Grunnen til at jeg ønsker å samle inn disse oppgavebeskrivelsene er fordi jeg i min masteroppgave vil se på hvordan oppgaver best kan formuleres for å inspirere elevene til å skrive, samtidig som kompetansemålene i læreplanen for skriftlig kommunikasjon dekkes. Jeg er selv engelsklærer på ungdomsskoletrinnet i Trondheim, men ønsker å samle inn oppgaver fra andre engelsklærere for å oppnå et bredt datagrunnlag, ideer og inspirasjon. Arbeidstittellen på oppgaven min er «How to get the best out of your students – designing writing assignments for the EFL classroom» og skal etter planen være ferdig våren 2017.

Denne forespørselen sendes ut til flere ungdomsskoler i Trondheim kommune, og jeg håper så mange som mulig kunne tenke seg å delta i denne studien. Det praktiske rundt hvordan jeg får tilgang til oppgavene kan vi ta etter hvert, men det letteste er muligens å sende oppgavene til meg på mail, eventuelt at jeg får tilgang til den digitale læringsplattformen ved din skole.

Dersom du deler oppgavebeskrivelsene dine med meg, er det mulig at jeg ved et senere tidspunkt vil ta kontakt for å gjennomføre et intervju for å få en bedre forståelse av tankene dine bak oppgaveformuleringen, men i første omgang er dette bare en ren dokumentanalyse.

Håper å høre fra dere!

Med vennlig hilsen

Øyvind Øverås Moland

[Overmoland@gmail.com](mailto:Overmoland@gmail.com)

Tlf: 99264274

# Appendix B – Writing assignment set A1 and A2

7/1

**Assignment Set A1**

## Formal letter – fight for your rights

You are going to write a formal letter. Choose ONE of these tasks:

- Write a letter to the Montgomery Police Department in year 1955 where you request Rosa Parks' freedom.
- Write a letter to the Russian government today where you request gay equality by law.
- Write a letter to the British Government in year 1900 where you request that women
- Write a letter to the South African Government in year 1989 where you request Nelson Mandela's freedom.

Here is the list of criteria you will be assessed by:

- The structure of your letter (see example and useful phrases on it's learning)
  - Place, date
  - Name and address of sender
  - Name and address of receiver
  - Headline
  - Introduction
  - Main part
  - Conclusion
  - A polite closing
- Content
  - Describe the current situation
  - State your request
  - Argue why they should consider your request
- Formal language and appropriate vocabulary
- Grammar (focus on verbs: concord and tense)

A2

**Assignment Set A2**

Romeo and Juliet

**1) Write a film review of *Romeo & Juliet*.**  
The review should include the following:

- Title, release year, genre, actors and director.
- A plot synopsis. What is the movie about? What happens? When and where is it set? What is the main conflict?
- A description of the main characters. Who are they? What are their motivations? Are there any important supporting characters?
- Your opinion. Did you like the movie? Why? Why not? What parts of it were good? What parts did you not like? Who would you recommend this movie to?

Write one paragraph of at least seven lines for each topic.

Use the uploaded template (if you want). I have also uploaded an example of a film review that you can use for inspiration.

**2) Write an essay about *Romeo & Juliet*.**  
Write an essay of at least five paragraphs about *Romeo & Juliet*. Use the "Five-paragraph essay" method (see TL for details) if you want to. Choose your own topic/angle.

The focus of this assignment is for you to practice your essay-writing skills. I will assess your written English as always, but I will also focus on how you structure your text and paragraphs.

You should plan your text thoroughly, so please write an outline (disposisjon)

	Assessment scheme		
	Lav måloppnåelse	Middels måloppnåelse	Høy måloppnåelse
Oppgavekrav			
Språk			
Struktur			
Innhold			

# Appendix C – Writing assignment set A3

TERMINPRØVE | ENGELSK – EQUALITY – 10TH GRADE

**Assignment Set A3 - page 1 of 2**

**PART B**

**Longer answer**

Choose one of the tasks: 3A, 3B, 3C or 3D.

**Task 3A**

Most of us want everyone in the world to be treated equally, no matter which gender, sexuality or race they are. Not everyone can give speeches at the UN, but small actions can make a big difference.

✍ Create a text examining the things that you can do to treat people with equality and fairness. Choose a suitable title and type of text.

**Task 3B**

In *Perspectives Magazine*, you meet many different people, among them Melissa, Zullie and Afisha. Melissa is worried about being treated differently because she has Down syndrome. The sisters Zullie and Afisha have unequal opportunities in life: one gets to go to school while the other is married off to an older man.

✍ Write a text to discuss unequal opportunities or being treated differently. You may use Zullie, Afisha or Melissa as inspiration. You may also refer to other texts you have read, or films you have seen, in your English course. Choose a suitable title and type of text.

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TERMINPRØVE | ENGELSK – EQUALITY – 10TH GRADE

**Assignment Set A3 - page 2 of 2**

**Task 3C**

In *The Secret Life of Bees*, you meet Lily and Rosaleen who deal with issues of inequality and limited opportunities. Choose either Lily or Rosaleen and compare her with another person or character you have learned about in your English course.

✍ Write a text to compare their stories and discuss how they deal with inequality and limited opportunities. What choices do they make, and what kind of consequences may come from these choices? Make sure you describe each character or person and their challenges before you compare them.

**Task 3D**

In her speech, Emma Watson tells boys that gender equality "is your issue too". She believes that boys often are expected to be strong and tough, and because of this they may find it hard to show weakness or express their true feelings. She believes that boys also need gender equality, so they can be free to be themselves.

✍ Write a text where you discuss boys and gender equality. We want to hear your personal thoughts on the matter! Choose a suitable title and type of text.

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# Appendix D – Writing assignment set A4

TERMINPRØVE | ENGBELSK – BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES – 10TH GRADE

**Assignment Set A4 - page 2 of 2**

**Task 3C**

W. H. Auden's poem "Refugee Blues" was written in 1939, and is about Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany before the Second World War. The poem focuses on how the refugees were received when they tried to seek help in other countries.


People still flee war and persecution, as they have been doing ever since Auden wrote his poem. Vietnam, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Congo, Syria: the wars have been many, and the refugees have kept crossing borders to save their lives.

✍ Write a text inspired by the poem "Refugee Blues".

**Task 3D**

As a teenager, it may often seem like you need to break boundaries and push your limits in order to experience life and grow up. However, might there be something to be said for keeping some boundaries intact?

✍ Write a text about preserving and protecting your boundaries.



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TERMINPRØVE | ENGBELSK – BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES – 10TH GRADE

**Assignment Set A4 - page 1 of 2**

**PART B**

**Longer answer**

Choose one of the following tasks: 3A, 3B, 3C or 3D.

**Task 3A**


In the magazine, you have read texts about people breaking boundaries in different ways. Some try to break down the boundaries between different cultures. Others break boundaries to make a friend happy or because of peer pressure.

✍ Write a text where you discuss positive and negative aspects of breaking boundaries. Make sure you include your own opinions on the topic. Feel free to use texts from the magazine as inspiration.

**Task 3B**

Crossing borders, whether as a colonist, immigrant or tourist, means that you will meet a new culture in the place you travel to. The borders and boundaries you know will be challenged and you may feel rootless, homesick or misunderstood.

✍ Write a text about meeting a new culture. Feel free to use texts from the magazine as inspiration.

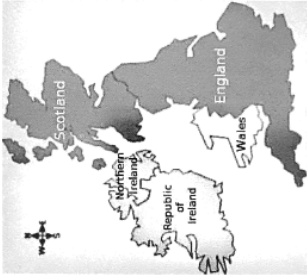





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# Appendix E – Writing assignment set B1 and B2

<p style="text-align: right;">D 2</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Assignment Set B2</b></p> <h2 style="text-align: center;">The British Isles – individual task</h2> <p>Choose one of these tasks:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write an article for a journal or a magazine about             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The British monarchy</li> <li>The Irish Question</li> </ol> </li> <li>Write a text about a British historical topic for an English school book (10<sup>th</sup> grade). Decide whether you focus on a historical British person, specific period or event.</li> <li>Write a letter to David Cameron where you reflect and come with your opinion about the British school system. Compare with the Norwegian school system.</li> </ol> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Write 2-3 pages (1000 words).</li> <li>-Feel free to include pictures, statistics or other relevant illustrations.</li> <li>-Refer to sources in the text and in a source list</li> <li>-Use at least three different sources. Avoid using Wikipedia as a source.</li> </ul> </div> <p>The evaluation will have a main focus on the usage of sources in addition to content, genre and language.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Hand in on It's Learning Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> of February.</b></p> 	<p style="text-align: right;">D 1</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Assignment Set B1</b></p> <h2 style="text-align: center;">Hand-in English week 42</h2> <p>Write a text with a focus on mysteries. Choose whether you want to write a ghost story, a crime story or a news article.</p> <p>Write about a 1000 words (about two pages).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Font size 12</li> <li>-1,5 spacing</li> <li>- Times New Roman.</li> </ul> <p>Deliver before midnight Thursday October 15th.</p> <div style="text-align: center;">    </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p><b>Fokus ved vurdering:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- tydelig sammenheng og struktur i teksten (leservenlighet, oversiktlig, godt planlagt)</li> <li>- klare å skape spennning i teksten som passer til teksttypen du har valgt</li> <li>- variert språk med god flyt (uttrykk, synonymmer, leksikondere)</li> <li>- korrekt setningsoppbygging, tegnsætning og rettskriving</li> </ul> </div>
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# Appendix F – Writing assignment set B3 and C1

<p><b>Assignment Set B3</b></p> <p><b>Task:</b></p> <p><b>Name:</b> _____</p> <p><b>The world's best chocolate</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which one did you choose?</li> <li>• Put the chocolate on the table in front of you</li> <li>• Describe how it looks in front of you. The wrapping, size, form, color, how is it wrapped?</li> <li>• How do you unwrap the chocolate?</li> <li>• How does it look naked? Describe</li> <li>• Put the chocolate between your thumb and index finger. How does it feel and smell?</li> <li>• You should taste it now. Take one bit and describe.</li> <li>• Eat the whole piece. How does it feel and how did it taste like?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Assignment Set C1</b></p>  <p>This is a joint English and Social Studies task. You have been learning about Northern Ireland in English and terrorism and extremism in general in Social Studies. Use what you have learned in these lessons in this written assignment. I do <u>not</u> want this to be a summary of facts and figures. It is supposed to be an opinion piece, where <u>your opinion</u> is what is the most important. Still, remember to base your arguments on facts and reliable sources (remember to write down <u>all</u> your sources), not hearsay or things you've "read somewhere".</p> <p>The questions you should address are the following:</p> <p><b>"What is a terrorist?"</b></p> <p><b>"How does someone become a violent extremist?"</b></p> <p><b>"What can be done to prevent radicalization of individuals in a society?"</b></p> <p><b>Criteria:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I have written one page. Not much more, not much less.</li> <li>- I have used font and size Calibri/Times/Arial and size 14.</li> <li>- I have answered all three questions.</li> <li>- I have used my own opinions when answering all three questions.</li> <li>- I have used reliable sources and included these in my assignment.</li> <li>- I have emailed the assignment to Sigurd before the holidays.</li> </ul> <p><b>Good luck!</b></p>
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# Appendix G – Writing assignment set C2

C2

## Assignment Set C2

### Your very own Hybrid animal

A *hybrid animal* is an animal that is a mix between two different species. Some hybrid animals are quite common, like the *mule*, which is a hybrid between a donkey and a horse, while others are more rare, like the *liger* (lion+tiger), *zorse* (zebra+horse), *grolar bear* (grizzly bear+polar bear) or the *donkra* (donkey+zebra). Some hybrid animals, however, are so rare that they have never been spotted before.

As a zoologist, you specialize in rare hybrid animals and you have been invited to the annual *Hybridian Conference* to present one of the new species that you have discovered.

Your presentation should:

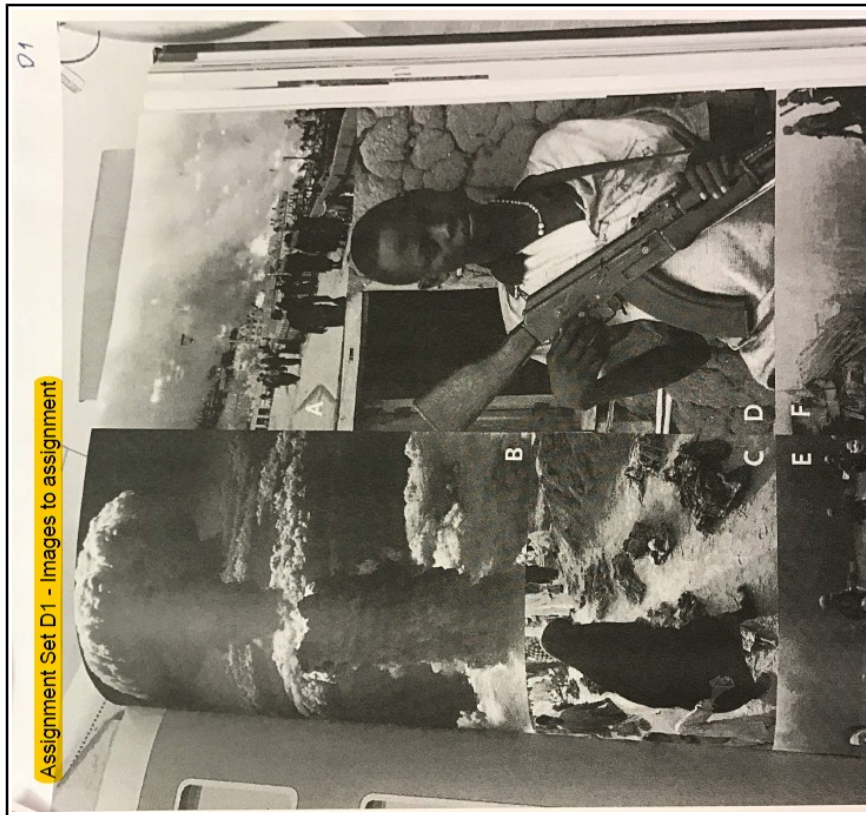
- ✓ Be about a previously undiscovered animal which is a cross between two or three species
- ✓ Last for 1-2 minutes

The audience will probably be interested in:

- ✓ What the hybrid animal is called
- ✓ What it looks like
- ✓ What it eats
- ✓ Where it lives
- ✓ What it says ("Ring-ding-ding-ding-ding-dingding!")



# Appendix H – Writing assignment D1



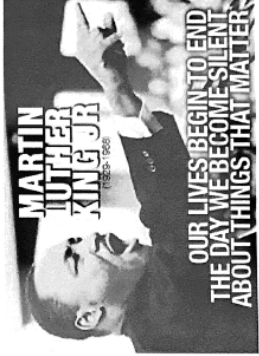
D1

**Assignment Set D1**

Factual/Argumentative text ble iast direkte fra boka, der de kunne velge mellom disse fire oppgavene:

1. Write a factual text about the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.
2. Write a factual text about the Jews before or during World War II. Explain why the events in Auschwitz and the concentration camps should never be forgotten.
3. Discuss one of the following statements:
  - Military service in Norway should be compulsory for women.
  - Norwegian troops should not fight abroad.
4. Write a short story or a poem to with one of the pictures on page 179 (Searching 10).  
Legger ved bildet som vedlegg.

# Appendix I – Writing assignment set D2 and D3

<p>D3</p>	<p><b>Assignment Set D3</b></p> <h2>Special assignment</h2> <p>Over the past few years, several instances of violence have caused strained race relations in the US, such as the shootings of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, and the Charleston Church shootings.</p> <p><b>Create a text where you do a research on these shootings and focus on race relations and integration in the US, and answer the following questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Has Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream come true in today's America? Why/why not?</li><li>-Which role did race play in the incidents of the "racial murders" mentioned above, and are there any other factors than racism which can explain them?</li></ul> <p><b>Criteria</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- You can choose if you want to present it as a PowerPoint presentation, or if you want to hand it in as a text. A PowerPoint presentation should be about 5-7 minutes. The text should be about 1000 to 1500 Words.</li><li>- The presentation/text should critically examine the topic and tackle the question directly</li><li>- The presentation/text needs a foundation for its content (substance), and not just personal opinions.</li></ul> <p>Good Luck!</p> 
<p>D2</p>	<p><b>Assignment Set D2</b></p> <h2>NEWSPAPER REPORT</h2> <p><b>School Writing, Monday 21 September</b></p> <p>The newspaper report is the most used, and possibly the most common journalistic genre. A newspaper report informs about an actual event.</p> <p><b>The report consists of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- A title</li><li>- Ingress</li><li>- Main body (brødtekst/hovedtekst)</li></ul> <p>Very often it also includes a picture with caption (bilde tekst).</p> <p><b>The form of writing</b></p> <p>It can be imagined as a reversed pyramid, where the most important facts come first. In the Ingress, which gladly is put in a bigger or bold font, we find the focus point of the story. The Ingress should not be more than 20 words. Then the facts in the actual story follow, where the most important one is followed by the second most important fact and so on.</p> <p><b>Having this in mind, you are going to write your own newspaper report. It can be a report about something that has actually happened (fact), or it can be a report you create from your own imagination (fiction).</b></p> <p><b>The topics to choose from are:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- News from Byåsen</li><li>- Environmental issues</li><li>- Online safety</li><li>- A class field trip</li><li>- Refugees</li></ul> <p>Feel free to include a picture in your newspaper report to make a greater impression of your focus point.</p>

# Appendix J – Writing assignment set E1

**Assignment Set E1 - page 1 of 2 (part 1 is not included in my analyses**  
In your answers, you can use information, ideas, useful words and phrases from the texts you worked with during your preparation day and from other material that you have worked with in your English class. You may also use information from other sources.

## **Part 1 Short answers Answer both 1a and 1b**

### **Task 1a**

In the preparation material you have read about people who belong to different cultures and speak different languages. Describe two things you could do to make newcomers from abroad feel welcome in your local community.

### **Task 1b**

Read Appendix 1 on page 7 and write a short text where you explain why some Australians celebrate Australia Day while others demonstrate against it. How do you view this situation? Give reasons for your opinion.

## **Part 2 Long answer Choose ONE of the tasks from 2a to 2d**

### **Task 2a**

Leaving your homeland to settle in a new country is a challenge. Imagine you are moving to an English-speaking country. Write a text about leaving your homeland and starting all over again. Focus on some of the challenges you think you would meet in your new English-speaking country and how you would deal with them.

### **Task 2b**

In your preparation material you have read about some challenges in society.

Which challenge or challenges mentioned in the preparation material do you think need most attention in today's society? Give reasons for your answer and say what you could do to help bring about change. Write a text with the title "Yes, we can".

## **Assignment Set E1 - page 2 of 2**

### **Task 2c**

In the preparation material you have studied various texts and pictures related to the theme of this exam.

Create a text inspired by one or more texts or pictures in the preparation material. It should be clear which one(s) you have based your text on. Your text must include a challenge and a change.

### **Task 2d**

Challenged by Mr Nicholls, Nicky in *The One Plus One* wrote a blog entry to let off steam and express his frustration. To his surprise, he received loads of positive comments.

Create a text where you describe a challenge and how you would use social media to deal with it. Include the following quote from the poster on the title page in your text: "You can't spell challenge without change".

# Appendix K – Writing assignment set E2

Assignment Set E2 - page 1 of 2 (part 1 is not included in my analyses)

In your answers you can use information, ideas, key words and phrases from the texts you have worked with during your preparation day. You can also use other relevant sources and material you have worked on in your English class.

## Part 1 Short answers Answer both 1a and 1b

### Task 1a

In the preparation material you have learned about traditions and lifestyles in three English-speaking countries. Describe two things you find interesting about one or two of these countries. Use examples from the texts and give reasons for your opinion.

### Task 1b

Read appendix 1 on page 7 and write a short text explaining what you think the writer's attitude is to the Commonwealth Games. Use two or three examples from the text to illustrate your opinion.

## Part 2 Long answer Answer ONE of the tasks from 2a to 2d

### Task 2a

In the preparation material you have read about Lloyd in *The Dolphin Catcher*. Create a text in which you reflect on his life situation and his relationship to his father and grandfather.

### Task 2b

You have explored traditions and lifestyles in India, Jamaica and Nigeria during your preparation day. Create a text in which you reflect on the differences and similarities between one of these countries and another English-speaking country you have studied in your English class.

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Assignment Set E2 - page 2 of 2

### Task 2c

A Fine Balance and Americanah are both about characters trying to find a balance in their lives. Create a text in which you describe and reflect on their life situations. Include your opinion on what we can learn from these characters when it comes to their struggle between traditions and lifestyles.

### Task 2d

Imagine you are living in one of the three English-speaking countries presented in the preparation material. Using one or more proverbs, texts or pictures from this material as your starting point, create a text about your experience of traditions and lifestyles in the country you have chosen.

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