

Instructions to the External Examiner

ENG0111 – English For International Students

Course content

ENG0111 is a practical writing course for international students at the University of Oslo. The teaching focuses on basic reading and writing skills, paraphrasing and summarizing techniques, and the importance of proper citations. The course also emphasizes the importance of style convention and punctuation. The teaching is organized as weekly seminars.

Learning outcomes

This is not a beginner's course. The course rather aims at improving the students' proficiency in written academic English. The course aims at raising awareness about how the students use English in written communication. The course focuses on how to use English in an academic setting. The overall goal is to give the students a better chance of success in the various courses that they register for in the different departments of our university. At the end of the course, students are expected to be able to, among other things, write a summary of any given text, know how to write an accompanying text to visual material (tables, diagrams, graphs and charts), and set up a bibliography.

Assignments

The students hand in **two (2) compulsory assignments** during the term. These assignments prepare for the exam but do not count towards the final grade.

Exam form

The exam has the same structure as the assignments and comprises **a visual** (graph or map) for which the students should write a small caption (10 points); **a text to summarize** (20 points), and between 15 and 18 **questions** about the text for summary (16 points): 46 points in all. The exam is written in Inspira, the university's exam software. The students are allowed to use monolingual dictionaries and thesauruses. Inspira should also have a spell-check function that is activated.

Compulsory Reading:

Anne Hogue (2003) *The Essentials of English: A Writer's Handbook*. New York: Longman/Pearson Education

Any handouts or PowerPoints are *only complementary* to the book. Students are supposed to read the indicated sections before each class, but **every section fully on their own**. The exam will test how much students have understood and to what extent they have incorporated what they have read into their own writing. The course book is a good mix of an English course and a style book.

Most students are not students of English. Therefore, they usually need help to improve their English skills. Many students overestimate their own English skills.

THE READING SCHEDULE (Attached)

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WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A STUDENT’S EXAM COPY

The international students at UiO are usually *not* students of English. I do of course take this into consideration. Therefore, the marks will be much higher than for regular Norwegian students of English or native English speakers. I look for **readability** and **functionality** rather than perfection.

However, I do take off points for concord mistakes, the misuse of conjunctions, spelling mistakes, or any other mistake that may confuse the reader. I also take off points for awkward punctuation, as we have spoken rather extensively about punctuation. Errors of S-V agreement will pull down the grade. These are all topics covered by my teaching and the course book.

MODULE 1: THE GRAPHIC MATERIAL (visual + accompanying text): (10 points)

The visual lets the examiner evaluate how students write when their writing is *not* based on a written text. Students have been told to:

1. *Not explain* (or describe) the chart (“This is a map about...”). The reader of a chart, graph or map is able to see the title and understand for themselves what the chart is all about...
2. *Not refer to* the visual or to include themselves (“*In this chart, I/we* see...”)
3. *Concentrate* on the information conveyed, not on the title, author, or source of the visual (this type of information belongs in the citation).
4. *Synthesize and comment on* an interesting or salient feature (parameter), not just make a list of numbers and percentages.

MODULE 2: QUESTIONS (16 points)

The questions in this module are important in terms of positively “correcting” the mark. Students have been told to pay attention to the questions section. Answering the questions before writing the summary allows students to really focus on the source text before writing the summary. The questions should help students glean the main information from the source text, paraphrase it and use it in a summary.

Some students do understand the text, but they are not necessarily able to produce good prose of their own. I take this into account, too.

Marking Grid for the Questions Section (will be specified for each exam set)

- | | |
|------------|---|
| 5. 16 – 14 | A |
| 6. 13 – 11 | B |
| 7. 10 – 7 | C |
| 8. 6 – 4 | D |
| 9. 3 – 2 | E |
| 10. 1 – 0 | F |

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MODULE 3: THE SUMMARY (20 points)

If the word count is set to a certain number of words, Inspira will not allow more than the word count.

In class, students have been told to:

1. Summary/précis: Your words, not your ideas. Students need to paraphrase the information they extract from the source text.
2. Respect the word count. It should be roughly, but not exceeding, the given number.
3. Not comment on the information in the source article.
4. Not include themselves in a piece of academic writing, especially not in a summary [no: *we see that, it is obvious, unfortunately, sadly...*]
5. Not refer to the *messenger* or to the *source* [*according to Y; in an article by Y in X*]. Focus should be on the *core information*, not on who wrote the article, when, and where. But! A summary should be *referenced* according to the *style conventions* when the summary is included in an academic text.
6. Eliminate non-essential information (no specific *examples*, and no “quotes” in a précis). A summary should be more general than the original text, yet specific enough for the reader (who has not read the original) to understand it.
7. Avoid repeating the same words or ideas. Express ideas only once. A term or an expression should, ideally, not be used more than twice in a short précis.
8. Pay attention to paraphrasing. Paraphrasing means finding an alternative starting point or focus; turning sentences around; saying the same but in different words...
9. Avoid lifting *verbatim snippets or whole clauses* from the original text... Points will be deducted for verbatim passages, as such snippets of ST show that the student has not understood the importance of paraphrasing and making the text his or her own [we have talked extensively about *plagiarism*].
10. Ensure S-V agreement [*people *is, the news *are*], but also watch out for the wrong use of conjunctions, spelling mistakes, or misunderstandings related to the text.
11. Pay attention to punctuation.

However, in the end **readability** counts the most. Will a random reader understand the student text? Is the writing **functional**?

Usually, unless errors of vocabulary, concord, etc. do not make the text completely nonsensical, the student will pass.

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THE GRADE

Students are allowed to bring monolingual English dictionaries, thesauruses, usage books, etc.

An **A** student has a decent level of English and a very good understanding of the visual and the text. An A student is able to formulate sentences that are clear and precise [albeit with minor errors of language], and give good answers to the questions. An A student has also been able to give a good paraphrased summary and write a caption for the visual that is clear and to the point. An A student has a good understanding of the main style conventions and punctuation.

A **B** student has shown a good grasp of the English language and has understood both the visual and the text, but may have some minor errors of language and idiomatic usage in his or her own writing. A B student has produced a fairly good caption and summary and shown that he or she has understood the main style conventions. The writing is very readable.

A **C** student has understood most of the text but may have misunderstood certain passages. A C student may have difficulty expressing him- or herself clearly. A C student may have produced a fairly weak summary, yet have answered most of the questions correctly [albeit with quite a number of language errors]. A C student may struggle somewhat to compose well-structured sentences; nevertheless, what has been written is understandable.

A **D** student struggles to fully understand the source text or has great difficulty writing sentences that are logically constructed. A D student may not have understood the basic rules for summary or caption writing, or may have understood the principles, but is unable to apply them to his or her own writing. The D student's writing is difficult to understand.

E-F students have not understood the source text and fail to convey a meaningful caption or summary. The writing of an **E-F** student is difficult to read, at times quite nonsensical. However, if possible, I try to avoid failing international students. I try to give E, not F.

INSPERA

Inspira has been set to allow spell-checking. The system has its own way of calculating the final grade based on the individual mark for the three sections, usually to the benefit of the candidate. The visual has a total of 10 points, the summary 20, and the questions 16.

The examiner enters the mark as a **letter** for each module, and then Inspira calculates the total.

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