

# **English Argumentative Writing in Norwegian Lower Secondary School**

Are year 10 lower secondary students sufficiently prepared  
for L2 argumentative writing in upper secondary?

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## Abstract

This thesis studies English language argumentative writing instruction in Norwegian lower secondary schools with an eye towards evaluating year 10 students' academic preparation for argumentative writing in upper secondary. Argumentation is a key skill for academic success and is an important skill for civic life in a democracy. While research is scarce on the topic of academic and argumentative writing in upper secondary school, it is even scarcer in lower secondary. Because of this, the present study is one of the first studies examining argumentative writing proficiency at the lower level. In order to examine the situation in lower secondary, a corpus analysis and a mixed methods research consisting of a survey and four follow-up semi-structured interviews were employed.

The corpus consisted of 13 essays written by year 10 lower secondary students. The corpus analysis alone aimed to assess the degree to which students were mastering the skills they will need in upper secondary. To achieve this, a set of criteria for *the advanced argumentative essay* was developed. A term developed solely for this thesis, *the advanced argumentative essay* describes a text type students in lower secondary need to master in order to be regarded as "prepared" for argumentative writing in upper secondary. In addition, the survey and the interviews aimed to elicit teachers' writing instruction and attitudes in order to provide insight and an opportunity to discuss why or why not year 10 students are prepared for argumentative writing in upper secondary.

The results from the corpus analysis show that year 10 students are not prepared for argumentative writing in upper secondary. The corpus analysis revealed that students struggle with organizing arguments and creating argument coherence. In addition, all essays portray highly expressive and informal language, and instead of referring to external sources, use emotionally based or anecdotal evidence to support claims. The findings from the mixed method research show that the majority of the teachers' regard "structure" as the most important element in argumentative writing and reported of a highly frequent use of the five-paragraph essay in their instruction. This supports the findings of Horverak (2015a) and McIntosh (2017) and suggests that teachers may focus more on overall structure than on argument quality.

The findings also suggest that there is a narrative culture in lower secondary school, especially at the beginning of students' learning course. Though there also seems to be a capable focus on argumentation, the findings reflect that how often argumentative writing is incorporated into teachers' instruction is highly individual. It is also unclear how frequently

the argumentative essay text type is integrated into lower secondary English instruction. However, the findings from the interviews suggested that there is a more prominent focus on the argumentative essay in year 10. Interestingly, some of the informants in the interviews reported of having received insufficient training in argumentative writing in higher education.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introducing the present study

Many researchers suggest that argumentation is a key skill for academic success. Hillocks (2011) for example, claims that argumentation is not only the essence of academic discourse, but also of critical thinking (p. xvii). The importance of argumentation is readily summed up by Andrews et al. (2009), who makes large claims for argumentation's centrality:

The ability to argue in writing (as well as in speech and other modes) is essential not only in primary and secondary schools, and in further and higher education, but also in the real world of engagement in a democratic society (p. 306)

Despite having an important role in academic discourse and higher education, argumentative writing often seems to be neglected in primary and lower secondary school. According to Igland (2009), narrative modes of writing have dominated writing instruction at primary and lower secondary levels in Norway, while the writing and reading of argumentative texts have been targeted towards upper secondary (p. 498). Remarkably, studies by Lehmann (1999) and Hellekjær (2005) found serious weaknesses in Norwegian university students' English writing and academic reading proficiency. The latter study disclosed that two thirds of Norwegian senior upper secondary students were below the minimum requirements for admission to universities in English speaking countries. This concerning weakness in academic writing proficiency in higher education may suggest that there also are L2 writing problems in lower levels. Also, it suggests that writing instruction in secondary school may be insufficient.

In Norway, there are only a few recent studies that have studied whether upper secondary students are sufficiently prepared for English academic writing in higher education. These studies are both master's theses written by Sparboe (2008) and Shirazi (2010). By examining former national curricula, R94 and L97, studying final examinations and textbooks, and finally, conducting interviews with teachers, Sparboe (2008) confirmed that students in upper secondary school were not being well enough prepared for academic writing at university level (p. 108). On the other hand, Shirazi (2010) found that LK06's guidelines did prepare upper secondary students for academic writing in theory, however he was inconclusive about whether this also was the case in practice (p. 117).



While there are a few studies examining upper secondary school writing, even fewer look at writing in lower secondary. An older study from 2004 revealed that that lower secondary students in Norway have more difficulty with writing English texts than with understanding and speaking English (Bonnet, 2004). However, whether students in lower levels are prepared for higher levels has not been investigated. Explicitly, Horverak (2017) claims that “there is also a need to investigate what the situation is on lower levels, to find out how lower secondary school pupils are prepared for the requirements they will meet in later English studies” (p.135). With a focus on argumentative writing, this is exactly what this thesis aims to investigate. Thus, by examining student texts, this thesis will aim to uncover whether year 10 students are prepared argumentative writing in upper secondary. In addition, this study will elicit teachers’ attitudes and writing instruction habits in an attempt to provide insight into why or why not year 10 students are prepared for argumentative writing in upper secondary.

## **1.2 The aims of the study**

It can be argued that lower secondary English teachers in Norway are to a reasonable extent responsible for preparing their students for further English studies in upper secondary. How teachers “prepare” students, is reflected in their classroom instruction. One could also say that teachers’ attitudes towards a phenomenon are reflected in how they utilize it in their instruction. Therefore, to examine whether year 10 students are prepared for argumentative writing in upper secondary, it is productive to also elicit teachers’ instructive methods and attitudes towards argumentative writing in lower secondary. The methods employed in this study will be divided into two perspectives: “the teacher perspective” and “the student perspective”. The method employed in “the student perspective” will assess and determine whether year 10 students are sufficiently prepared for upper secondary. In addition, the methods used in “the teacher perspective” aim to elicit teachers writing instruction and attitudes towards argumentative writing. In the end, connections will be drawn between what the students *produce* in writing, and how teachers *prepare* in order to discuss why or why not year 10 students are prepared for argumentative writing in upper secondary. This thesis will employ the following research question:

- “*Are year 10 lower secondary students sufficiently prepared for argumentative writing in upper secondary school?*”

### 1.3 Key definitions

In this thesis, argumentation is seen as a *genre* in writing, and the essay as a *text type*. Even though the distinction between genre and text type has been disputed for decades, it is as Knapp & Watkins (1994) argue “productive [from a teaching/learning perspective] to use the term genre as a process that produces a particular product or text type” (p. 20). This is productive because it facilitates a developmental approach to writing instruction, where students of all ages build on and develop from their existing knowledge of the different genres. In this view, the genres available are *social processes that: describe, explain, instruct, argue, and narrate*. Additionally, under the argumentation genre, some of the common text types are *essays, expositions, discussions, debates, reviews, interpretations and evaluations*. This thesis will mostly focus on the argumentative essay, sometimes referred to as “argumentative writing”, or just the essay, as the three terms are often used interchangeably as shown in section 2.4.

Alike this thesis, McIntosh (2017) argues that persuasive writing, or argumentative writing, may function as an introduction to academic writing in higher education (p. 45). In another view, Graff & Birkenstein (2016) assert that “broadly speaking, academic writing is argumentative writing” (p. 3). For this thesis, the term *the advanced argumentative essay* has been developed to describe a text type students in lower secondary need to master in order to be regarded as “prepared” for argumentative writing in upper secondary (see 3.4.1). This term is inspired by another term; *the intermediate academic paper*, introduced by Sparboe (2008) and further developed by Shirazi (2010). *The intermediate academic paper* describes the minimum requirement for academic papers in higher education, and its criteria assesses whether students at the end of upper secondary are prepared for academic writing in higher education. Thus, the *advanced argumentative essay* is seen as being a forerunner to *the intermediate academic paper*.

On another note, researchers disagree on the difference between the persuasive essay and the argumentative essay, however, in this thesis, the two terms are used interchangeably. In addition, references to the competence aims in the English curriculum refer specifically to the competence aims after year 10. Additionally, the term “student” is used both for secondary school and higher education. However, at what “level” the student is, is usually defined. Despite this paper being written in American English, it was from the beginning decided to utilize the British word “year” instead of the American “grade”. Also, the British terms for the different school systems: *primary school*, as well as *lower and upper secondary*

*school*, are used throughout the thesis. The reason for this is due to the Norwegian school system being more similar to the British than the American.

#### **1.4 History of EFL writing instruction in Norway**

As background knowledge, it is fruitful to examine the history of English writing instruction in Norway as it laid the foundations of today's contemporary approach. Notably, English was not introduced as a school subject before the 1939 curricula after centuries of teaching Latin, Greek, Hebrew, German and French (Drew & Sørheim, 2016, p. 28). However, English was not a compulsory school subject until the 1959 curriculum, and when the Education Act passed in 1969, students regardless of class were expected to learn English before they entered lower secondary school. Moreover, the 1974 curriculum, M74, introduced English in the fourth grade with the possibility of starting in the third. Later, the 1997 curriculum, L97, made English compulsory from the first grade, and in 2004 English became one of the core subjects to be assessed in national tests (Munden & Sandhaug, 2017, p. 77).

For centuries, the *Grammar-Translation Method* was taken for granted as the correct way to teach a foreign language (Munden & Sandhaug, 2017, p. 76). In this approach, students never expressed themselves in writing or in speech. Hence, communication in both written and spoken form was neglected. Most of what the students produced of written work was through translating sentences to and from Norwegian. According to Drew & Sørheim (2016), this method of language learning was the most utilized in Norway until the 1960s (p. 23). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of the reform movement, a new method of language learning was introduced in Norway called the *Direct Method* or *Natural Method* (Munden & Sandhaug, 2017, p. 77). Here, communication was paramount to learn English, and the use of Norwegian was forbidden. Translation was not allowed anymore, and words were directly linked to real objects, pictures, and actions. Written communication was regarded as less important than spoken communication, depriving students of practicing written skills at all in English.

A new method of language learning called the *Audio-Lingual Method* was promoted in Norway during the 1950s and 1960s (Drew & Sørheim, 2016, p. 25). In this approach, written skills were not regarded as necessary for learning language as one of the slogans for this method was "language is speech, not writing". The goal of the method was instead to sound like a native speaker and was largely dependent on listening and speaking drills (Munden & Sandhaug, 2017, p. 78). Later, in the 1970s and 1980s, *communicative methods* were

prominent in learning English, with the idea of learning L2 in the same way that one has learned L1 (Munden & Sandhaug, 2017, p. 79). Developing written skills was not a big priority in this method either.

Drew & Sørheim (2016) assert that written communication and written skills were not priorities at all until the 1997 curriculum, L97 (p. 30). They further explain that this curriculum, for the first time, encouraged students to explore reading and writing in multiple genres and text types like “fairy tales, stories, excerpts from books for young people, plays, fables, legends, songs, ballads, pop texts, and newspaper articles”. In today’s curriculum, Kunnskapsløftet (LK06), written communication is one of the main areas of learning (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013a). Thus, writing is regarded more important than ever before.

## 2 Theory

### 2.1 English in the Norwegian school system

In Norway, English is a compulsory subject from year 1 in primary school to year 11 or 12 in upper secondary school (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013a, see Table 1). When students graduate from lower secondary and move on to upper secondary school, they can either choose between general studies (3 years), to prepare for a higher education, or vocational studies (2 years), to prepare for a specific job. English is only compulsory in the first year of the general studies program, allowing students to decide for themselves if they wish to continue learning the subject into the following years. However, the vocational studies program requires English as a compulsory subject both years. Students may be selected to have a final examination in English in year 10 of lower secondary, year 11 (general studies) and year 12 (vocational studies) of upper secondary school. The students do not receive grades in English or any other subjects before grade 8.

Table 1

*English teaching hours in the Norwegian educational system*

Primary school	Year 1-4	138 teaching hours	
	Year 5-7	228 teaching hours	
Lower secondary school	Year 8-10	222 teaching hours	
Upper secondary school	Year 11 (general studies)	140 teaching hours	
	Year 11 (vocational studies)	84 teaching hours	Total: 140 teaching hours
	Year 12 (vocational studies)	56 teaching hours	

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of teaching hours which are required in the national curriculum. The table shows how many teaching hours of English the different grades receive. Throughout the three years of lower secondary school, students receive 222 teaching hours of English. In year 11 of general studies, students receive 140 teaching hours of English, whereas students in year 11 and 12 of vocational studies receive the same amount but distributed between both years. Remarkably, in lower secondary school, 9 hours of English a week is distributed between year 8, year 9 and year 10.

### **2.1.1 The Knowledge Promotion (LK06)**

The Knowledge Promotion (LK06), or Kunnskapsløftet in Norwegian, is the central document for everyone involved in teaching from year 1 to year 13 in Norway. It is the national curriculum in the Norwegian school system. LK06 consists of five components: The Core Curriculum, The Quality Framework, The Subject curricula, The distribution of teaching hours, and individual assessment (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013a). In the English subject curricula, *written communication* is included as one of the four main areas in English along with *language learning*, *oral communication*, and *culture, society and literature*. The curriculum is goal-driven which indicates that competence aims are included for each subject. The competence aims describe what students should have learned throughout the different years of schooling. The ways to achieve these goals are though never specified. It is therefore useful for an English teacher to carry a wide repertoire of learning activities and to be academically competent.

The Subject Curricula in LK06 provides competence aims after year 2, 4, 7, 10, and Vg1/2. (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013a). This means that there are one set of competence aims for year 1 and 2, one set for year 3 and 4, one set for 5, 6 and 7, one set for year 8, 9 and 10, and finally, one set for year 11 of general studies, and both years of vocational studies. With one set of competence aims in English for the whole of lower secondary school, it is up to the teacher, the school or sometimes the municipality where the school is located, to make decisions on how and when to utilize the aims (Munden & Sandhaug, 2017, p. 50). In the English lessons, it is the teacher's task to present the competence aims to the students, often by breaking them down into smaller and more specific learning objectives to make them more comprehensible. The competence aims are built on the ideals of continuity and progression. As a result, many of the aims are therefore represented throughout the different years of school though adapted to the respective years. The idea is to develop one's skills and become increasingly competent with time.

### **2.1.2 Writing in the English curriculum**

In the curriculum, the competence aims reflected underneath written communication demonstrate the writing skills the students should attain in the different years of school. Notably, after the revised version of LK06 was published in 2013, the English subject curriculum no longer explicitly mentions genre or text types (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2017). Instead, the curriculum now focuses on the purpose of a text, and that it is adjusted to its

recipient and medium. Rather than stating genre or specific text types, the curriculum suggests students learn to write “different types of texts” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013a). This implies that students must learn to write a wide repertoire of texts where it is the teacher’s task to decide which ones should be in focus. As a result, there are no exact references to argumentative writing or writing essays in the curriculum. However, some competence aims may suggest a focus on the genre. For instance, after year 10, students must “write different types of texts with structure and coherence”, a common feature in argumentative writing. After year 10, there is also for the first time a focus on using sources in a “verifiable” way, another common feature in argumentative writing (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013a).

Along with the competence aims in the subject curricula, LK06 also defines five basic skills that are to be integrated into the students’ learning. These are oral skills, being able to express oneself in writing, being able to read, numeracy, and digital skills (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013a). All subjects build on basic skills, so the teacher is responsible for teaching all the skills in English. The English curriculum explains that being able to express oneself in writing indicates “express[ing] ideas and opinions in an understandable and purposeful manner [...] planning, formulating and working with texts that communicate and that are well structured and coherent” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013a). These elements, particularly “expressing ideas and opinions” and “structure and coherence” are associated with argumentative writing (see 2.4).

### **2.1.3 Written examinations**

Lower secondary students complete the final written exam at the end of year 10 before they graduate. However, not every student in year 10 takes a final written exam in English but may be selected to do so. The students are selected centrally for the written exam, and the exams are assessed by an external examiner. The written exam tasks are predominantly based on the competence aims in the English curriculum (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2017). The written exam, which lasts for five hours in total, includes two sections with tasks where the students are asked to write two short answer texts and one longer text. As references to specific genres or text types are no longer explicitly included in the curriculum, this is also the case for the written examinations. As a result, the students’ ability to choose a suitable text type to the specific task is therefore also a part of the assessment (Utdanningsdirektoratet,

2017). The examiner is thus aware that the tasks may be interpreted differently depending on the individual.

When assessing a written exam, the examiner must use the assessment matrix; an official written exam rubric describing characteristics of goal achievement within three levels (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2018). The matrix is also largely based on the competence aims in the curriculum. In addition to the assessment matrix, the examiner also uses professional judgment when assessing a students' competence. Also, how the examiner assesses content, structure, and language in a students' text is determined by the written exam's task instructions.

## **2.2 Writing research**

This section includes three subchapters: 2.2.1 Research on L2 writing in Norway, 2.2.2 Research on L1 writing in Norway, and 2.2.3 International research on L1 and L2 writing. This section focuses mostly on studies on lower secondary students' proficiency in argumentative writing. However, section 2.2.1 mostly includes studies on upper secondary or higher education students' academic or argumentative writing skills, solely due to the lack of research on this topic in lower secondary in Norway. Additionally, section 2.2.3 highlight some of the differences between L1 and L2 writing. This section also gives some insight into English teachers' attitudes to writing instruction in Norway.

### **2.2.1 Research on L2 writing in Norway**

Previous research shows that Norwegian lower secondary students struggle with English writing in general. Supporting this, an extensive assessment project conducted in eight European countries in 2002 revealed that lower secondary students in Norway have more difficulty with writing English texts than with understanding and speaking English (Bonnet, 2004). Regarding lower secondary students' L2 argumentative writing proficiency, there is simply insufficient research. However, much more is known about argumentative and academic writing proficiency in upper secondary and higher levels. As the Norwegian school system is based on gradual academic development, conclusions may consequently be drawn about lower secondary writing instruction by examining upper secondary writing instruction. These studies, despite being small-scale, suggestively support the belief that argumentative texts are a bigger focus in upper-secondary schools in Norway.



An older study by Lehmann (1999) affirmed that university students' L2 writing skills were inadequate. Later, Hellekjær (2005) found serious weaknesses in Norwegian university students' English writing and academic reading proficiency. In upper secondary, Sparboe (2008) found that academic writing was "overlooked and under-communicated" (p. 2). In another upper secondary study, Shirazi (2010) found by examining LK06's guidelines, that students were prepared for academic writing in theory, but he was inconclusive of whether this was the case in practice. On the contrary, Horverak's (2015a) study showed that teachers in upper secondary generally focus on teaching students to write argumentative texts, usually 5-paragraph essays, to prepare them for exams and higher education. In another study conducted by Horverak (2017), she found that students in upper secondary expressed low confidence about being able to write argumentative texts and expressed uncertainty of whether they had previously been taught how (p. 135). Additionally, teachers employed in Horverak's (2015b) study noted that the common struggles upper secondary students have with argumentative writing are structuring their arguments, using sources, and adjusting the language to the right formality level (p. 86).

The English curriculum requires students to learn to write a wide range of text types within different genres throughout the years and since there are no concrete guidelines provided, heavy demands are placed on the teachers' competence and writing instruction. Studies show that newly educated English teachers in Norway feel unprepared for teaching written text production (Rødnes, Hellekjær, & Vold, 2004; Lund, 2014). Rødnes et al. (2004) found that some English teachers feel insecure if their students are skilled language learners because they feel unsure of how to further develop their students' writing skills (p. 180). Additionally, Lund's (2014) findings show that many English teachers find teaching writing the most challenging thing about being an English teacher, and despite many years of experience still find it challenging. Based on her findings, Lund (2014) asserts that there clearly is a need for a greater focus on student teachers' language development, their own writing skills, and on how to teach writing.

### **2.2.2 Research on L1 writing in Norway**

In Norway, narrative modes of writing have dominated lower secondary school, while the reading and writing of argumentative texts has been more common in upper secondary. (Iglund, 2009, p. 498). Research shows that students are generally good at writing narrative,

or creative texts when they graduate from lower secondary school but have problems with argumentative texts (Berge & Hertzberg, 2005, p. 390). The QAL project, a large-scale evaluation of writing tasks, students' texts, and teachers' assessments based on the final Norwegian examination in lower secondary school, was implemented in the period of 1998-2001 (Berge et al., 2005, p. 11). This study revealed that during the three-year-period, only 21,2% of the students chose to write non-fictional texts for their final examination. Instead, the majority of the students chose narrative text types.

Argumentative writing in L1 also seems to be challenging in lower secondary. In a longitudinal study, year 10 students were asked to write an article or an opinion piece on the topic of "global injustice", which had been worked with for two months prior (Øgreid & Hertzberg, 2009, p. 458). In a corpus of 37 articles and opinion pieces, the prevailing features were that the students' texts were oversimplified, lacked elaboration of arguments, used expressive style, and lacked scientific terms. Øgreid & Hertzberg (2009) further explain that despite discussing a problem drawn out from the social sciences curriculum, the students still used "emotionally based arguments" because of the text types employed (pg. 464). They suggest the reason for this is because the Norwegian subject has accepted the use of humor, irony, and free associations in the writing of argumentative texts due to traditions of writing causeries, literary essays and other non-fictional genres. Overall, the main challenges with argumentative texts seem to be writing structured and coherent texts with profound and structured arguments (Berge & Hertzberg, 2005, p. 391). The same study also raised concerns about Norwegian lower secondary teachers' knowledge about argumentative writing.

### **2.2.3 International research on L1 and L2 writing**

Internationally, argumentative writing in L1 has also been regarded as challenging in lower secondary levels. For instance, an older large-scale survey in England initiated by the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) from 1979 to the mid 1980s, found that non-fictional writing was inadequately represented in schools, and that students aged 11-15 lacked argumentative writing skills compared to other modes of writing (Andrews, Torgerson, Low & McGuinn, 2009). Also, an American survey study from 2009 raised some concerns about the quality of high school writing instruction. These findings revealed that most teachers felt unprepared to teach writing after graduating from university (Kihara, Hawken & Graham, 2009). Another, highly influential study conducted by Freedman & Pringle (1988) evaluated 500 argumentative texts produced by year 7 and 8 students in Canada. Their findings revealed

that students' main challenge in argumentative writing, is the "organization of argumentation".

According to Hyland (2003), L2 writing is strategically, rhetorically, and linguistically different from L1 writing (p. 31). He asserts that there is clear evidence that written texts produced by L2 writers are generally "shorter, less cohesive, less fluent, and contain more errors" (p. 34). This is also confirmed by Silva (1993) who in his study examined 72 reports of empirical research comparing L1 and L2 writing, affirming that L2 writing is clearly less effective and a more difficult process (p. 661). Hyland (2003) further explains that one of the main problems L2 writers have are related to language difficulties, particularly having insufficient knowledge of vocabulary and grammar (p. 34). This, he says, often results in L2 students not being able to fully convey their ideas in appropriate and correct English. Furthermore, Connor (1996) explains (as cited in Hyland 2003) that the reason for this difficulty is that: "linguistic and rhetorical conventions do not always transfer successfully across language, and many actually interfere with writing in the L2" (p. 35).

Examining existing research, Silva (1993) found that L2 writers' argumentative texts exhibited less paragraphing, less coherence, a looser structure, less variety and more errors in the use of transition words, and less explicit formal closure than L1 writers' argumentative texts (p. 664). Additionally, L2 writers seemed to use more mixed arguments; arguing both sides equally, more argument alternations; shifting repeatedly back and forth between both sides of an argument, and often ended their argument in a different direction than it began. Moreover, Silva (1993) examined that L2 writers often use emotional appeal instead of ethical appeal when arguing in their texts. (p. 665).

### **2.3 Defining argumentative writing**

The definition of argumentative writing is disputed amongst researchers and differs from culture to culture. However, the most widespread definition seems to be that the purpose of argumentation in writing is to convince an audience of the validity of a claim. The Norwegian Center for Writing Education and research (The Writing Center) states that an argumentative text intends to influence or convince a reader about something (Skriveresenteret, 2014, p. 3). Similarly, Hillocks (2011) formulates the definition in the following way: "the goal of making an argument is to convince an audience of the rightness of the claims being made using logical reasoning and relevant evidence" (p. xvii). This appears to be the goal of argumentation in general, both written and oral.

Andrews et al. (2009) views argumentative writing as versatile, having the ability to be expressed in many different text types. He argues that “non-fiction” is the overall genre which includes different text categories, one category being texts that “persuade, argue, advice”. Further, he asserts that these kinds of texts may come in the form of “essays, reviews, opinion pieces, or advertisements” (p. 292). Similarly, the Norwegian subject normally distinguishes between “fictional” and “non-fictional” writing and has long traditions of writing essays, articles, letters to the editor, and causeries in the latter (Aase, 1993, p. 104). These text types all contain traces of argumentation. However, many of the more recent teaching resources on argumentative writing published by The Writing Center follows a typical “English essay” structure (Skrivesenteret, 2014). This structure normally follows an introduce-develop-conclude format, adopts the classic argumentative elements, and promotes the utilization of external sources as evidence to make own claims more credible (Del Longo & Cisotto, 2014, p. 20). Also, traditionally in the English subject, Andrews (1995) asserts that argumentative writing is largely seen merely as the “persuasive essay” or the “literary essay” (p. 101).

### **2.3.1 The term “essay”.**

According to Andrews (1995), there is no clear agreement on the definition of the term “essay”, yet it is often associated with argumentation. When discussing the term, he writes: “students have to learn that combining their subjectivity with an apparent objectivity is one of the hallmarks of a ‘good essay’ ... many students find the argumentative and rhetorical skills required for essay-writing a recurrent – sometimes insurmountable – problem” (p. 12). In this statement, it is clear that Andrews (1995) largely associates the “essay” with argumentation. Similarly, Fabb & Durant (2014) states that the underling purpose of writing essays, especially in literary studies, is to “argue a case” (p. 67). Also, in the article “How to Write an Essay” written by Skifjeld & Dwankowski (2009), the authors promote an introduce-develop-conclude structure to essay writing in English while also highlighting the typical argumentative elements. To a reasonable extent, it seems that the “essay” in the English subject is often naturally perceived as being argumentative.

However, the Norwegian “essay” is quite different from the English “essay”, which can lead to confusion. In the Norwegian subject, the “essay” is more of an experimental text type without any strict requirements (Federl, 2009). According to Riksmålsforbundet, the goal of the “Norwegian essay” is not necessarily to arrive at a specific conclusion but instead to

wonder and ask important questions (Riksmålsforbundet, 2017). Objectivity is not required, and the author may argue own personal views. The “Norwegian essay” may follow the author’s thinking process, and aims to interest the readers, not necessarily to persuade them. Nonetheless, the author’s intention is to convey an idea (Riksmålsforbundet, 2017). The most comparable text type in Norwegian to the English “essay”, is the “academic article” or sometimes just referred to “article”. The “article”, similar to the “essay”, follows the introduce-develop-conclude structure and requires the use of sources to support arguments. The “article” acknowledges more than one perspective, and the tone can be both subjective and objective.

### **2.3.2 The five-paragraph essay**

The five-paragraph essay is a writing format which organizes ideas into an introduction with a main argument, often called a claim or a thesis statement, three body paragraphs with topic sentences developing the argument, supporting the thesis, and a conclusion that restates the thesis and sums up the main points, sometimes advancing the argument a step further (Smith, 2006; Nunes, 2013). This format, Nunes (2012) says, has deep roots in English education and classical rhetoric (p. 295). In a study in Norway, Horverak (2015a) found that the most common type of model texts English teachers at one upper secondary school use are different variants of the five-paragraph essay. A more recent study by McIntosh (2017) also confirmed the frequent use of this format in English writing instruction in Norway.

The five-paragraph essay has for decades received major criticism, yet the writing format is still supported by many researchers. With its rigid form, Campbell (2014) argues that the focus of the five-paragraph essay solely becomes “fitting sentences into the correct slots”, restricting students from exploring their own thoughts (p. 61). Wiley (2000) asserts (as cited in Campbell 2014) that the writing formats’ “emphasis on organization over content squelches complex ideas that do not fit neatly into three boxes” (p. 62). Smith (2006) on the other hand, suggests that the three body paragraphs are meant as just a guideline, explaining: “it is that introduce-develop-conclude structure that gives the form its integrity, not the three ‘example’ paragraphs in the middle” (p. 16). The writing format of the five-paragraph essay is simply seen as a building block to other, more sophisticated writing forms, which prepares students for college-writing (Smith, 2006, p. 17). Hence, the five-paragraph essay is in some views seen as a more flexible format than some of its critics.

Some argue that the five-paragraph essay benefits novice writers, whereas others believe it to be counterproductive. Seo (2007) supports the belief that the five-paragraph essay helps less skilled students to write coherent essays because it gives them a tool to organize their thoughts and ideas (p. 16). She asserts: “It is important for the students to have a sturdy framework for their writing. Once the framework has been established, they can employ structural and organizational creativity” (Seo, 2007, p. 16). This view is defended by Horverak (2016) who also emphasizes the importance of learning the basic structure of writing before going any further with creativity (p. 58). Brannon et al. (2008) on the other hand, argue (as cited in Campbell, 2014) that the five-paragraph essay teaches students that writing means following a set of instructions and filling in blanks (p. 18). This kind of writing they say mirrors working-class life, associated with monotony and following orders, limiting creativity and individual thinking (p. 18). Instead of training students to be obedient citizens, Brannon et al. (2008) suggest (as cited in Campbell, 2014) providing them with “opportunities to develop their thinking as individuals, making meaning through the act of composing” (p. 18). This they suggest is more authentic writing and not limited to skilled writers only. Campbell (2014) also suggest that the focus should be on what the students are trying to say (purpose and authority), before organizational structure (p. 63).

### **2.3.3 The Toulmin Model of Argumentation**

The Toulmin Model of argumentation is a method of reasoning created by British philosopher Stephen Toulmin. The model offers organizational structure to make an argument more successful. The model consists of the following argumentative elements: *claim*, *evidence (data)*, *warrant*, *backing*, *qualifications*, and *rebuttal*. According to Toulmin (2003), a *claim* is an assertion one makes about a particular issue (p. 11). In an essay, a claim is also sometimes called a “thesis statement”. *Evidence* provides support or rationale for the claim. Further, a *warrant* is an implicit connection between the claim and the evidence (Toulmin, 2003, p. 92). However, the warrant may be directly stated as well. Hillocks (2011) adds that a warrant may simply be “common sense rules that people accept as generally true, laws, scientific principles or studies, and thoughtfully argued definitions” (p. xxiii).

Moreover, *Backing* is additional logic or justification to support the warrant (Toulmin, 2003, p. 96), strengthening the overall argument. Simply put, *qualifications* state how sure the arguer is about their claim. Qualifications are necessary because arguments involve probabilities as statements cannot be demonstrated to be absolutely true (Hillocks, 2011, p.

xxv). Lastly, a *rebuttal*, or in other words a counter-claim, considers the opposing view or acknowledges limitations to the argument. Considering the use of these elements in Norway, an online argumentative writing teaching resource published by The Writing Center predominantly seems to focus just on the main argument (the claim) and supporting it with evidence or examples (Skrivesenteret, 2014). Additionally, the teaching resource mentions the providing of counterclaims as an approach to make the main argument more credible. Thus, the focus does not seem to lie on specifically teaching all individual argumentative elements, but on the essence of successfully supporting one's own arguments by providing evidence and considering opposing views.

## 2.4 The young writer

From an early age, students are exposed to; even some would say inundated with, material which encompasses narrative structure (Freedman & Pringle, 1988, p. 237). What children first hear read and later read themselves follows the narrative structure, and so do the movies they watch on television. Even though children have early exposure to stories and narrative structure, this is not the case for argumentative structure. They do, however, hear and take part in oral argumentation from an early age, though it is quite different from written argumentation. For instance, Freedman & Pringle (1988) compare the pattern of oral argumentation to a tennis match; “each shot is parried by one's partner, and each shot may change the direction of the argument so that the end may be played on very different territory” (p. 239). This shows that oral argument does not require internal logical consistency or patterning. Further, Andrews (1995) describes oral argumentation as “dialogic” and written argumentation as “monologic”, which indicates that students, when moving from oral to written language, need to learn how to integrate two or more voices into one univocal piece of writing (p. 7).

According to Freedman & Pringle (1988), it takes less effort to transfer oral skills developed from telling stories into writing narratives, than transferring oral argumentation into written argumentation (p. 238). To achieve the latter, they affirm that children need to develop a new set of cognitive and rhetorical strategies. Specifically, they assert that learning to successfully write arguments requires “the ability to discover and/or create a rigorously logical structure which will unify and order to individual points generated” (p. 239). This ability encompasses the skill of being able to abstract and conceptualize; a skill assumed to be underdeveloped in children under the age of 13 (Andrews, 1995, p. 18). Considering

Vygotsky (1962), Freedman & Pringle (1988) specify the cognitive steps to concept formation:

Having generated a series of separate points all relating to the central topic, we must group together those that are like, that is first perceive their similarity, then analyze that similarity in order to discover the abstract common bond, formulate that commonality in language, and then interrelate that formulation with other such abstract formulations derived from other similar groupings (p. 239).

Freedman & Pringle (1988) further explain that this is exactly what is needed to develop a concrete thesis statement and an organizing pattern or structure for an essay (p. 239). They suggest that teachers should not expect their students to succeed in written argumentation if they have not cognitively matured which usually corresponds with reaching puberty (Freedman & Pringle, 1988, p. 241). Despite this, they strongly promote practice in written argumentation before puberty anyway, as an introduction to the form. Another theory on why young writers perhaps struggle with argumentative writing is because children are in some views seen as progressively “decentering” (Andrews, 1995, p. 18). Narrative writing is seen as a more expressive and self-centered than argumentative writing, which to some may seem more suitable for younger children.



### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Choice of method**

The goal of this thesis is to examine whether year 10 lower secondary students are sufficiently prepared for argumentative writing in upper secondary. To achieve this goal, it is as established earlier, productive to consider both “the teacher perspective” and the “student perspective”. However, it is “the student perspective” alone that will answer the thesis’ research question. In addition, “the teacher perspective” will provide insight and an opportunity to discuss why or why not year 10 students are prepared for argumentative writing in upper secondary. Considering these factors, it was decided that a mixed methods research (survey + semi-structured interview) would determine the “teacher perspective”, and that a corpus analysis would be suitable for assessing “the student perspective”. The survey was conducted to elicit lower secondary English teachers’ writing instruction and attitudes towards argumentative writing. In total, 70 teachers across Norway participated in the survey. Secondly, a semi-structured interview was employed to get a deeper understanding of the gathered survey data. In total, four English teachers stationed at different schools in the county of Agder were interviewed. Finally, the corpus consisted of 13 essays written by year 10 students at one lower secondary school in the county of Agder.

##### **3.1.1 Quantitative and qualitative research**

By definition, quantitative research refers to “a range of methods concerned with the systematic investigation of social phenomena, using statistical or numerical data” (Watson, 2015, p. 1). This type of research includes standardized procedures and techniques for collecting, organizing, and analyzing the data, and allows the researcher to “collect data that is sufficiently general and make the results of the investigation generalizable” (Kuada, 2012, p. 104). Qualitative research on the other hand, is an inductive methodological approach that allows the researcher to examine a phenomenon openly through one’s own lenses (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2014, p. 41). Mertens (2005) adds that qualitative research implies “studying things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 229). In other words, a quantitative method allows the researcher to collect more accurate and standardized data, while a qualitative method provides a more diverse and rich dataset.

### **3.1.2 Mixed method research**

Mixed method research includes both qualitative and quantitative research components in the design, data collection, and analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p.11). According to Mertens (2005), the intent of using mixed method research is usually “to seek a common understanding through triangulating data from multiple methods, or to use multiple lenses simultaneously to achieve alternative perspectives that are not reduced to a single understanding” (p. 292). Additionally, Patton (2002) states (as cited in Martens, 2005) that using mixed methods may provide breadth, depth, and numerical data that can give a more thorough idea of the phenomena under study (p. 234). By combining numeric trends from quantitative data and specific details from qualitative data, one may gain a better understanding of a complex phenomenon where “words can add meaning to numbers and numbers can be used to add precision to words” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 45).

The quantitative method, the survey, was initially chosen as a starting point to get a general idea of what lower secondary English teachers in Norway think of argumentative writing and how they work with in their instruction. The survey aimed to provide a large set of numerical data setting the standard for “the teacher perspective” of this research. Subsequently, the interviews were conducted with an attempt to add depth to the preceding quantitative method. The interview guide was thus largely based on the analyzation of the data collected in the survey, though included more specified and open questions than the survey to enhance breadth and depth to the research. Lastly, although not part of the mixed methods research, a qualitative corpus analysis was included to determine whether year 10 students are prepared for argumentative writing in upper secondary by assessing their written essays.

### **3.2 The survey**

According to Creswell (2014), a survey “provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population” (p. 155). Based on the sample results, the researcher is able to generalize and draw conclusions that attribute to the population. Regarding its definition, Brown (2001) defines surveys (as cited in Dörnyei, 2003) as “any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers” (p. 6). Further, Dörnyei (2003) explains that surveys can elicit three types of data regarding the respondent: *factual*,

*behavioral*, and *attitudinal*. *Factual questions* are those questions which aim to uncover who the respondent is, e.g, their age, gender, religion or socioeconomic status. *Behavioral questions* aim to determine what the respondents are doing or have done in the past. These types of questions may, for instance, ask about the respondents' actions, lifestyles, habits, or personal history. Lastly, *attitudinal questions* target what the respondents think concerning their attitudes, opinions, beliefs, interests, and values.

The survey program "Surveyxact" was exploited to make an electronic survey. It was chosen because of its simplicity, but also because it did not record IP addresses of respondents and thus conformed to the guidelines established by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data. The survey questions were thoroughly evaluated before their inclusion. The intention was to make the questions simple but profitable for the study. Having simple questions, Dörnyei (2003) says, is necessary because the amount of time the respondents are usually willing to spend on a survey is often short (p. 10). To avoid having the respondents perceive the survey as long and monotonous, which could impair the accuracy of the data; only 13 questions were included. The questions consisted of five behavioral questions, seven attitudinal questions, and only one factual question, mainly because this research is concerned with teachers' own practices and opinions. The program used to create the survey did not allow tracking of specific respondents but presented the data arbitrarily. Because of the large number of respondents, it was thus redundant to ask too many personal or factual questions. This was instead incorporated into the interviews.

The 13 questions consisted mostly of three types of survey elements: Likert scales, rank order items, and checklists (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 37). The five Likert scale "questions" were formulated as statements, asking the respondents to identify to which extent they agreed or disagreed with the statement from a scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree. All of the Likert scale questions were attitudinal questions and gave a clear percentage overview of teachers' attitudes towards the targeted topic. The three rank order item questions in the survey asked the respondents to rank items from one to five according to, for example, their importance, the amount of focus received in class, and their occurrence in student texts. The four checklist questions consisted of a list of items that the respondents were asked to mark if they applied to the particular question. Lastly, the single factual question in the beginning was multiple-choice.

The survey was published in two existing teacher groups on Facebook called "Undervisningsopplegg", with approximately 50,000 members, and "Engelsklærere" with around 8,000 members. After having been in contact with and getting the approval of the

administrators of the two groups, the survey link was published along with a short text explaining who the target audience were and information related to time and anonymity. Despite the groups' large number of members, it was assumed that only a small fraction were English teachers in lower secondary school, specifically. It was therefore not assumed that the equivalent number of respondents would take part in the survey. The survey link was open for eleven days, but most of the respondents completed the survey in the first five days. In total, 70 respondents contributed to the data, where 64 respondents completed all questions, whereas six respondents only gave some answers, presumably overlooking some questions.

### **3.3 The interviews**

The interview is the most commonly used method in qualitative data (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 134). The typical qualitative interview intends to “obtain descriptions of the lifeworld of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (p. 134). There are different interview types depending on their level of control. A highly structured interview, for instance, is a tightly controlled interview with little flexibility regarding the questions asked to the informants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 102). One could say that highly structured interviews share similarities with surveys as they often aim to elicit specific answers to specific questions. A semi-structured interview, on the other hand, adopts a milder form of control. Despite using pre-prepared guiding questions, the interviewee is encouraged to elaborate on certain issues if perceived as interesting by the interviewer, even though not directly linked to the guiding questions (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 136). Nevertheless, the interviewer ensures that the interviewee focuses on the topic of the interview, providing guidance and direction.

A semi-structured interview was exploited for this research. Dörnyei (2007) asserts that this type of interview is suitable for cases when the researcher has “a good enough overview of the phenomenon or domain in question” (p. 136). The survey which was conducted prior to the interviews provided some insight into the phenomenon under study, which led to the inclusion of more open-ended questions in the interview guide. The interview guide, which is “a set of topical areas and questions that the researcher brings to the interview” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 103), was constructed before conducting the interviews. The interview guide consisted of seven main questions, where each question had several bullet points with a keyword or a short sentence attached to it. The bullet points were categorized underneath the questions because they corresponded in topic. It was assumed that

asking the main questions would to some extent elicit answers that related to the bullet points, but if not, the bullet points could function as reminders.

Four English teachers working at three different lower secondary schools in the county of Agder agreed to participate in the interviews. Prior to the interviews, the informants were sent a consent form via e-mail that needed their signature. This document also contained essential information about the interview. The informants were informed about anonymity and confidentiality related to their participation and were told the interview’s topic of conversation. In addition, the informants were notified that the interviews would be audio-recorded and conducted in Norwegian. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian because it was assumed that the teachers would feel most comfortable with using their first language and would be able to express themselves fully that way. All interviews were completed in November 2017 at the respective schools where the teachers were employed. The interview guide was brought to every interview but not used in a consecutive manner. The interviews being semi-structured allowed for a looser structure which resulted in similar in topic, but diverse data from each informant. The shortest interview lasted 15 minutes, whereas longest 25 minutes. After having carried out all four interviews they were thoroughly transcribed.

**3.3.1 The informants**

All informants were stationed at three different lower secondary schools in the county of Agder. Two of the informants (A and B) were colleagues, while the two others were based at different schools. All informants were similar in age, had similar English educational backgrounds, and their years of teaching experience ranged from 8 to 17 years. In total, the informants consisted of three female teachers and one male teacher. Table 2 gives an overview of information about the informants employed in the interviews.

Table 2  
*Information about the interview informants*

<b>Informant (age)</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Credits in English</b>	<b>Years of experience</b>
Informant A (37 years)	Female	60 credits (1 year)	8 years
Informant B (40 years)	Female	60 credits (1 year)	10 years
Informant C (43 years)	Male	90 credits (1,5 years)	17 years
Informant D (43 years)	Female	60 credits (1 year)	12 years

### 3.4 The corpus analysis

This study adopts the definition of a corpus developed by Weisser (2016) as “a collection of spoken or written texts to be used for linguistic analysis and based on a specific set of design criteria influenced by its purpose and scope” (p. 23). There are multiple ways in which a corpus analysis can be implemented, however, in this thesis the focus was on analyzing written texts. In addition, the corpus analysis was implemented in a qualitative manner. Scales (2013) points out properties of qualitative research as relevant to this particular method: “rather than test data for validation or negation of a theory, the qualitative researcher analyzes and interprets data for emergent patterns and theory present within the data” (p. 135). Similarly, the corpus analysis aimed to seek patterns and common occurrences in the corpus. In the results and analysis chapter, the data is presented as quotes drawn out from the student essays and analyzed in the light of *the advanced argumentative essay* criteria.

The texts that make up the corpus for this study were collected through the corpus linguistic project ESIT (Elevspråk i Transitt) lead by Ingrid Kristine Hasund at the Department of Foreign Languages and Translation at the University of Agder. The researchers within this NSD approved project collect students’ texts in English, Spanish, German and French from year 8 in lower secondary schools to year 13 in upper secondary schools from around the county of Agder. The aim of the project is to build a corpus of anonymized texts in different genres and at different levels which researchers may use to study questions related to language development, teacher feedback, different linguistic practices, and how Norwegian students develop written competences in foreign languages over time. The corpus utilized in this thesis consists of 13 essays written by year 10 students at one lower secondary school in the county of Agder. Notably, the collected essays are written in the first semester of year 10 as texts written in the second semester were unavailable. This is a potential limitation of the study as the students would perhaps have been more proficient in argumentative writing towards the end of year 10. Furthermore, the 13 essays deal with different topics but derive from the same task<sup>1</sup>. The task explicitly asks for an “essay” and a word count ranging from 450 to 600 words (see Appendix 3).

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<sup>1</sup> There is more information about the writing tasks in section 4.2.

### 3.4.1 Developing criteria for *the advanced argumentative essay*

To assess whether the students' essays in the corpus are of "upper secondary standard", in other words, if students are prepared for upper secondary argumentative writing, a set of criteria for *the advanced argumentative essay* was created. *The advanced argumentative essay* is a term which describes a student-authored text, written in lower secondary which students need to master in order to be regarded as "prepared" for argumentative writing in upper secondary. This term is inspired by another term *the intermediate academic paper*, introduced by Sparboe (2008) and built on by Shirazi (2010), which describes a transitional paper between the papers written in higher education and the original English essay (or the argumentative essay) written in lower secondary (Sparboe, 2008, p. 11).

Sparboe (2008) asserts that "after having mastered *the intermediate academic paper* genre in upper secondary, the pupils are prepared to make the transition to the slightly more complex academic paper expected at university level" (p. 24). Later, Shirazi (2010) developed a set of criteria for the *intermediate academic paper*, specifying them to hold "the minimum criteria needed for a paper to be qualified as an academic paper [in higher education]" (p. 29). This indicates that the criteria for *the intermediate academic paper* are too advanced for assessing year 10 students' essays, as they aim to assess whether upper secondary students are prepared for academic writing in higher education. Sparboe (2008) supported his idea of *the intermediate academic paper* on the fact that the school system is based on how students are expected to gradually progress academically (p. 11), which is reflected in the competence aims' foundation of being built on the ideals of continuity and progression. Because of this gradual academic progression, it is also likely that there is a paper written between argumentative essays in lower secondary and *the intermediate academic paper* at the end of upper secondary. This paper will be referred to as *the advanced argumentative essay*.

By combining criteria from the end of upper secondary (*the intermediate academic paper*) with criteria from the end of lower secondary (the assessment matrix), the idea is to attempt to create a set of new criteria that is targeted towards the beginning of upper secondary; *the advanced academic paper*. One could perhaps think that the assessment matrix for the final written exam would be adequate criteria for assessing whether year 10 students are prepared for upper secondary. However, the assessment matrix solely contains general criteria to assess all possible text types incorporated into the written exam answers, not just for the argumentative essay. Thus, by combining the assessment matrix with the criteria for *the intermediate academic paper*, the final criteria for *the advanced argumentative*

*essay* aims to specify a focus towards the essay at a more suitable level. To specify this focus further, elements from Del Longo & Cisotto’s (2014) “Writing to Argue: Writing as a Tool for Oral and Written Argumentation” will be incorporated.

### 3.4.2 The final criteria

The table below displays the final criteria for *the advanced argumentative essay* which will be used to assess the student essays in the corpus. The elements drawn from the assessment matrix are those within the highest goal achievement level. The table is structured similarly to the assessment matrix by including the main assessment categories: language, structure, and content. Within these categories, four new sub-categories are incorporated: *tone and language*, *coherence and structure*, *argumentative elements*, and *sourcing*. These sub-categories specify the criteria towards the argumentative essay. As explained, the final criteria for the *advanced argumentative essay* portray the similarities drawn out from comparing Shirazi’s (2010) criteria for *the intermediate academic paper* to the assessment matrix. The terms *thesis statement*, *introduction*, *conclusion*, *topic sentences*, and *counterclaim* have been adopted from Del Longo & Cisotto (2014).

Table 3

*The final criteria for the advanced argumentative essay*

		<b>The intermediate academic paper</b>	<b>The assessment matrix</b>	<b>The final criteria for the advanced argumentative essay: <i>The essay must ...</i></b>
<b>Language</b>	<b>Tone and language</b>	The writing must be reader-oriented based ...the language and tone must lean towards formal.  Formalities attached to the academic and scientific register.	Is adapted to purpose, [and] recipient(s) ... based on the task instructions.  Uses a broad vocabulary and academic terms in a variety of topics.	Use formal language and tone.  Include academic vocabulary.
		Cohesion in the text itself and coherence between the already existing knowledge about	Contains central text structuring patterns adapted to the circumstances and is	Use topic sentences.  Include an introduction and a conclusion.



<b>Structure</b>	<b>Coherence and structure</b>	the studied subject.	constructed with good structure and coherence.	Make a claim/thesis statement.  Incorporate in-text coherence and argument coherence.
<b>Content</b>	<b>Argumentative elements</b>	Knowledge transformation.  Reflect, display and discuss acquired knowledge, inform and try to persuade the reader, and apply critical thinking with regard to text.	Evaluates content and justifies responses with arguments and examples.  Has relevant content and independent reflections.	Support claims/argument(s) with evidence.  Consider opposing viewpoint (counterclaim).
	<b>Sourcing</b>	The formal recognized way for citing the sources and references must be applied to avoid plagiarism.	Has a verifiable reference to the used sources.	Includes verifiable sources.

With respect to using “formal language and tone” as represented in the criteria, it is implied that the students must avoid using contracted forms, abbreviations, colloquialisms, or everyday language, slang, and personal style. These requirements are also consistent with what Horverak (2016) regards as informalities of language. Using colloquial words such as “stuff” or “kind of”, or contractions like “can’t” or “isn’t” are associated with everyday informal speech and usually considered inappropriate in an academic text. Although the appropriateness of the first-person pronoun “I” in academic texts is debated, this thesis regards it as an informality in writing. Additionally, personal style in writing involves the use of expressive language; expressing one’s own feelings and thoughts about an issue. Using expressive language is also often regarded as inappropriate in academic writing.

Regarding “coherence”, Del Longo & Cisotto (2014) describe it as “not only as the appropriateness of logical relations between argumentative elements but also as the continuity of topic and consistency of meaning” (p. 20). Because of this, coherence will be divided into

two sections: in-text coherence and argument coherence. To achieve in-text coherence, transition words such as “although”, “however, and “as explained” can be used to bind the text together in a logical order. This can also be achieved by using topic sentences at the beginning of each paragraph. In-text coherence allows a reader to move easily and clearly from one idea to the next. Referring to Toulmin (1958), Del Longo & Cisotto (2014) explain that to achieve argument coherence, the writer must create a logical relationship between “stance, claims, evidence, and rebuttals, and connect them with appropriate chains of interference” (p. 20). Argument coherence is in other words the organization and structure of an argument.

### **3.5 Reliability and validity**

According to Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen & Walker (2014), *reliability* refers to the “degree of consistency with which it [the instrument] measures whatever it is purported to measure” (p. 253). Adding to this, Dörnyei (2007) suggests that a study would be considered reliable if the same results would be obtained if it was to be carried out again (p. 57). On the other hand, *validity* is defined as “the extent to which a concept is accurately measured” (Heale & Twycross, 2015, p. 66). In other words, if the findings are accurate. One of the methods used for this study was a quantitative survey. Regarding threats to validity in a survey, Ary et al. (2014) claim that there is a possibility that some respondents give “safe” responses if they are unsure if their anonymity is assured (p. 436). Additionally, respondents may sometimes give responses that they believe the researcher wants to hear. To prevent potential invalidity in the survey findings, the respondents were made aware of their anonymity. On the other hand, it is difficult to know whether the respondents answered truthfully. However, a follow-up semi-structured interview was conducted later which aimed to strengthen the study’s validity.

Regarding the semi-structured interview, Ary et al. (2014) assert that some effective ways to establish reliability in qualitative research are through documentation, consistent findings, and triangulation (p. 536). As described earlier, all interviews in were audio-recorded and thoroughly transcribed. In addition, the findings show that many of the informants in the interview gave comparable responses. Regarding triangulation, Ary et al. (2013) assert: “if multiple data sources or multiple methods result in similar findings, it enhances the reliability of the study” (p. 537). Dörnyei (2007) also explains that this is also the case for validity (p. 165). As reflected in the findings of this study, many of the same results reoccurred in both the survey and interviews. In total, the triangulation as a result of

using a mixed methods research has contributed to enhancing the research's validity and reliability.

As a third method, a qualitative corpus analysis was utilized in this research. Thus, the study included two qualitative research methods. According to Ary et al. (2013), research bias is a source of invalidity in qualitative research explaining that "bias may result from selective observations, hearing only what one wants to hear, or allowing personal attitudes, preferences, and feelings to affect interpretation of data" (p. 534). In a corpus analysis, Baker (2006) explains, (as cited in Haider, 2017), that bias is reduced when one looks at dozen texts rather than just one or two selected texts (p. 8). When using a larger corpus, he asserts that "overall patterns and trends are more likely to show, and this reduces the opportunity for the conscious or unconscious manipulations of the analyzed texts" (Haider, 2017, p. 8). Also, during the analysis of the corpus, a set of pre-created criteria were used. Thus, during the analyzing-process, only elements that corresponded with the criteria were looked for which arguably reduced bias. Another strategy for controlling bias is through *reflexivity*: "the use of self-reflection to recognize one's own biases and actively seek them out" (Ary et al., 2013, p. 534). Although it is difficult to eliminate research bias completely in qualitative studies, self-reflection and awareness was pursued before conducting the interviews and analyzing the corpus.

*Transferability* in qualitative research or *external validity* in quantitative research refers to the extent to which one may generalize findings to a larger group, to other contexts or to different times (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 52). In the survey the target group was considerably specific: only lower secondary English teachers in Norway. With its specified target group and large number of respondents, the findings from the survey may be regarded as relatively externally valid. Furthermore, Ary et al. (2013) explain that generalizability is not typically a goal for qualitative research, but that transferability may be strengthened if the researcher provides sufficiently rich, detailed, and thick descriptions of the context (p. 535). It can also be argued that the triangulation itself enhanced the transferability of the interview findings as many of the findings corresponded with the survey data. Regarding the corpus analysis, it is difficult to say if the findings are generalizable. The analysis only encompassed 13 students essays which questionably is not sufficient to represent a population. However, most of the findings from the corpus analysis are consistent with previous research which arguably strengthens the study's generalizability.

## 4 Results and analysis

### 4.1 The teacher perspective

This section includes an analysis of the results that represent “the teacher perspective”, the survey and the semi-structured interviews. The results will be organized topic-wise. Only the most relevant results are drawn out from the findings; thus, the results that are not relevant to this research are excluded. In addition, the informants from the interviews responded in Norwegian. Therefore, all utterances and quotes are translated from Norwegian to English.

#### 4.1.1 Students’ difficulties

This section examines English teacher perceptions of the difficulties students confront when writing argumentative texts. Both findings from the survey and the interview will be compared and analyzed simultaneously. In survey question 10, which explicitly dealt with students’ difficulties, the informants were provided with a list of common difficulties students have regarding argumentative writing and asked to rank them from 1 to 5 according to how common they are in student writing. Rankings 1-2 indicate that the difficulty is “not common”, 3 is “neutral”, and 4-5 represents “common”. The results from question 10 are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4

*Common difficulties lower secondary students have with argumentative writing*

<b>Ranking:</b>	<b>1-2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4-5</b>
Improper use of sources	24 %	21 %	54 %
Lack of structure	23 %	35 %	42 %
Weak arguments	12%	29 %	59 %
Informal language	31 %	32 %	37 %
Weak vocabulary	24 %	29 %	47 %

As depicted in Table 4, “weak arguments” is the highest ranked difficulty with 59% of the informants ranking it either as 4 or 5. The perception that students struggle to create strong arguments in their texts is supported by the material from the interview, where the informants also reported similar attitudes. Informant C, for example, said: *one of the challenges is that they [the students] do not provide enough depth. They fail to provide strong arguments that support their claims, and it can get a little one-sided.* Informant A and D

agreed with this and referred both to “thin arguments” as a common occurrence in their students’ argumentative texts. These teachers also mentioned that students often use personal responses like “I think” and “my opinion is” when presenting their arguments. This could indicate that these teachers regard subjectivity as an element of weakness in argumentation. Regarding this subjectivity, informant A believed that students in lower secondary find it difficult not to include too much of themselves as they are relatively self-centered around their age. Both informant A and D agreed that this improves with age.

Further, the majority of the informants in the survey, 42% in particular, claimed that “lack of structure and paragraphing” is a common problem in students’ argumentative texts. Not far off, 35% also rated in as “neutral”. In the interviews, informant D asserted: *It is very important with linking words and starters ... dividing the text into enough paragraphs to create structure.* She also explained that many students tend to “get lost” in an unstructured and messy text once they start including more than one perspective. Informant A and B noted that students sometimes forget to include a conclusion to summarize their main points at the end. In addition, informant D said that students often immediately start their text with “I think that” instead of providing a proper introduction. Another issue raised by the informants was low proficient students’ inability to write long enough texts. Regarding “informal language”, the survey displays insignificant results as there is a relatively equal distribution between the rankings. Also, none of the informants in the interviews commented on formality levels of language.

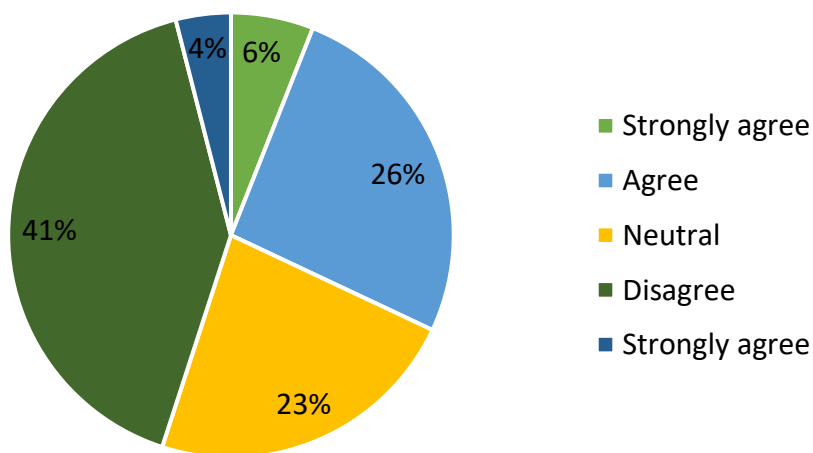
The results also show that 54% ranked the “improper use of sources” as the second most common difficulty. In the interview, it was only informant A who referred to sources, yet she associated it with maturity and not with improving arguments. Finally, regarding “weak vocabulary”, 47% ranked it as a common difficulty. Notably, in survey question eleven, 53% of the informants either agreed or strongly agreed that the main reason for why students struggle with argumentative writing is because they lack English proficiency. Being less proficient in a language is often associated with having a less extensive vocabulary. Thus, the results show that teachers believe students have language difficulties which presumably may inhibit argument quality. On the other hand, none of the informants employed in the interview made any remarks about vocabulary.

#### 4.1.2 Maturity and suitability

This section considers English teachers' attitudes towards lower secondary students' maturity and of what age they regard argumentative writing to be most suitable. In survey question seven, the informants were given the statement: "argumentative writing is difficult for lower secondary school students because they lack maturity" and were instructed to rate to which extent they agreed with the statement. The results are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

*Argumentative writing is difficult for lower secondary school students because they lack maturity.*



As illustrated in Figure 1, the majority of the informants, 45%, either disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. Also, 30% of the informants either agree or strongly disagree, and 23% have a neutral opinion. It is possible that the informants who agree or strongly agree with the statement believe that argumentative writing is more suitable in upper secondary school. Regarding the neutrality, it could either suggest that the informants are unsure of their own opinion, or that they believe it depends on different factors. It could also suggest that some teachers believe the statement depends on what year the student is in, as specification to a particular year in lower secondary was lacking. Regardless, the results indicate that there are mixed opinions about this topic.

The interviews, however, allowed a more thorough examination of the phenomenon. Informant A along with the others favored a type of writing instruction that is adapted to the respective levels in lower secondary. She explained: *a letter to the editor can be used in year 8 because it is simple and based on your own thoughts. The argumentative article [essay]*

which requires more factual and objective language is perhaps more suitable in year 10. Yet she admitted that there is a greater focus on creative writing and particularly writing stories especially in the early stages of lower secondary. Regarding maturity, Informant B argued that students in lower secondary lack experience and perspective which may restrict argumentative quality. Additionally, Informant C argued that quality gradually improves with age, especially the students' ability to support their arguments as well as structuring their texts using topic sentences. Also, informant D justified her students' difficulties towards argumentative writing with saying: *They are not older than 15 or 16 when they graduate from here*, implying that age restricts argumentative writing proficiency.

#### 4.1.3 Teachers' writing instruction

This section deals with how and in what ways argumentative writing is employed in lower secondary English teachers' writing instruction. In survey question two, the informants were asked to rank the different genres below from 1-5 according to how much focus they received in their classroom instruction. The rankings 1-2 indicates a "low focus", 3 implies an "adequate focus", and 4-5 a "high focus". The results are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5

*Genre frequency in teacher instruction*

<b>Ranking:</b>	<b>1-2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4-5</b>
Narrative	16 %	26 %	58 %
Descriptive	22 %	33 %	45 %
Argumentative	25 %	29 %	46 %
Expository	38 %	23 %	39 %
Instructive	55 %	25 %	20 %

As Table 5 depicts, over half of the informants, specifically 58%, ranked the narrative genre as either 4 or 5. This indicates that the majority of the informants mostly focus on narrative writing in their classroom instruction. Additionally, 46% of the informants claimed that the argumentative genre receives a high focus in their instruction. Interestingly, 45% also believe that descriptive writing receives a high focus. The expository and instructive genre received the least amount of focus.

In the interviews, informant D asserted that the two types of texts utilized the most in her year 10 English class were "opinion piece" and "story". Also, informant C mentioned: *There is now a much stronger focus on non-fictional writing than before ... texts that respond*

*factually and objectively using arguments and so on.* He claimed to have noticed a big change of focus in the last five to ten years. He referred to the written exam tasks as either being “non-fictional” or “fictional”, noticing that the occurrence of non-fictional texts in the written exams is more frequent than ever. He also claimed that he focused on responding to the writing tasks, and not necessarily on distinguishing the different non-fictional text types. Informant D also reported a notable increase in non-fictional and argumentative tasks in the written exams. As a result, both informant C and D said that there has been a change in writing instruction where fictional writing has been “toned down”, especially in the last 8-10 years according to informant C.

The results from the survey show that how often argumentative writing is incorporated into the writing instruction heavily depends on the individual teacher. Yet, the majority of the informants, 27% in particular, reported that their students wrote argumentative texts in class or as homework once every semester. In second place, 24% claimed to assign argumentative writing tasks once every month. And thirdly, 17% reported of doing the same once every second month. In addition, 13% said they assign these texts once a year, and another 13% said the same is done once every second week. Interestingly, in question 12, 61% of the informants reported to either agree or strongly agree that there should be a bigger focus on English argumentative writing in lower secondary than it already is. Similar to the survey results, the informants in the interview also gave diverse answers regarding how often they incorporated argumentative writing into their writing instruction. For example, Informant A described it as a once a year occurrence, whereas informant C claimed to assign “non-fictional texts” to his students three times a semester where two of them were assessed. He sometimes also assigned shorter tasks as practice that resembled the ones in the written exam.

Notably, Informant D expressed frustration about scarce English teaching hours saying: *It is ridiculous that we only have two hours a week in year 8.* She also noted that three hours a week in year 9 and 10 was not enough either and conveyed a wish for incorporating more argumentative writing in her English lessons. Informant A and B also signified time as a problem. On the other side, informant C believed to have adequate time available. However, it was later revealed that the school where informant C was employed at had an internal arrangement of including nine English teaching hours a week instead of the regular eight as communicated in the English subject curriculum.



#### 4.1.4 Strategies

This section deals with the different strategies English teachers in lower secondary employ to teach argumentative writing. When provided with lists of strategies and sources used for teaching argumentative writing in questions six and nine, the informants in the survey reported of using many of them. Notably, the informants could select more than one strategy and had the option of adding in and specifying other strategies and sources. The results are depicted in Table 6.

Table 6

*Overview of strategies and sources used by the teachers*

Strategies used:	Sources used:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Five-paragraph essay (77%)</li> <li>- Oral argumentation (73%)</li> <li>- Sample texts (69%)</li> <li>- Pre-writing sheet (66%)</li> <li>- Drafts with feedback (60%)</li> <li>- Power point presentation (49%)</li> <li>- Others (6%)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Tasks focused on the use of formal transitions</li> <li>o Discussion on “It’s learning”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internet websites (81%)</li> <li>- School textbooks (70%)</li> <li>- My colleagues (35%)</li> <li>- Others (16%)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o The Writing Center</li> <li>o Textbooks from own studies</li> <li>o Own experiences</li> <li>o Text written by former pupils</li> <li>o Text written by me</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

As depicted in Table 6, the most frequently used strategy was the “five-paragraph essay” selected by 77% of the informants. In addition, “oral argumentation” was selected by 73% of the informants, thus the second commonly used strategy. Also, 69% also used “sample texts” to model the writing process. These strategies along with “using drafts with feedback” were among the strategies that were selected by over 50% of all the informants. As there are no direct guidelines for teaching in the curriculum, heavy demands are placed on teachers to find inspiration from other sources. Regarding these sources, the results show that 81% of the informants claimed that they take inspiration from internet websites. In addition, 70% reported of using school textbooks, and 35% said that they talked to their colleagues. Some of the informants also mentioned other sources they used for inspiration, for example, The Writing Centre, textbooks from their own studies, own experiences, or previously written texts.

In the interviews, the informants were also asked about which strategies they used to teach argumentative writing. Informant D explained that for her, the most important aspect of argumentative writing was good structure. She referred to the five-paragraph essay as a “recipe” and claimed to use it a lot in her lessons, also with narrative or creative writing. She said that “recipes” undoubtedly help students in the writing process. Informant B also praised the five-paragraph essay, especially addressing it as beneficial for low proficient students. She explained: *The strong students can write without the strict structure [the five-paragraph essay], but for the weak students it is easy just to fill in ... this way they can at least write a coherent text.* In addition, many of the informants agreed that students often find it difficult to come up with arguments if they were not particularly engaged in the topic. Informant B and C also highlighted “brainstorming” as a good way to start; first discussing in groups or pairs, and after listing arguments and counterarguments on the board together with the class.

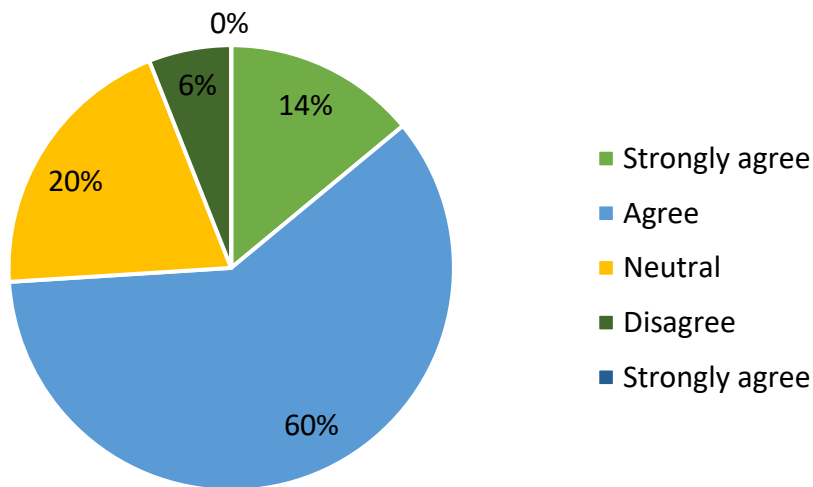
In the interview, informant C said: *We often tend to model by reading texts that are argumentative and use it as a starting point.* Giving students sample texts was also a popular strategy with informant D who recognized any type of “modeling” as beneficial. Informant A and B mentioned writing outlines and drafts as a constructive strategy before producing a final text. Informant A explained: *They [the students] will fail to write a good text if they have not given it some thought beforehand.* She and informant D also pointed out the possibility of providing “written feedback” on their students’ drafts so they could improve their writing and submit a new draft. When creating writing tasks, Informant B claimed to use the topics in the English textbook. She gave examples of using controversial topics like “Native Americans” and “slavery”; topics that often evoke strong interests amongst students. Finally, three of the informants advocated an interdisciplinary approach to argumentative writing. Informant A asserted: *To my advantage, I am also a Norwegian teacher ... if we are learning about a specific genre in Norwegian class, I sometimes try to work with it in English class as well.*

#### **4.1.5 Prepared for upper secondary?**

This section considers lower secondary teachers’ opinions of whether students in lower secondary school are being sufficiently prepared for argumentative writing in upper secondary. In survey question 13, the informants were asked to rate to which extent they agreed with the following statement: “I think I as an English teacher have contributed to develop my pupils’ argumentative writing skills and have therefore prepared them for further argumentative text writing in upper secondary school”. The results are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2

*I have prepared my students for further argumentative writing in upper secondary school*



As illustrated in Figure 2, the results show that 74% of the survey informants either agree or strongly agree with this statement. Thus, the majority of the informants are relatively confident that they have sufficiently prepared their students. None of the informants strongly disagreed, but 6% disagreed with the statement. Also, 20% reported of having a neutral opinion about this topic. In the interviews, the statement was transferred into a question. Here, informant D said that teachers would never know whether their former students were sufficiently prepared for upper secondary writing because they are not informed about it. However, when asked about what she personally thought she said:

The academic standard in the year 10 written exam has become so high, we could not possibly raise it [the standard] any further. So if what we do is not good enough, I think upper secondary should look into things ... the level is very high compared to the English teaching hours we have available in lower secondary ... everything we do from year 8 is technically practicing for the final exam, so the people who create the written exam should know if it [the content] corresponds with upper secondary levels. It is our job to prepare them for the final exam (Informant D).

When asked the same question, informant A said: *Maybe not well enough prepared. No ... but they have at least been given an introduction to it [argumentative writing].* Similarly, informant B claimed: *The reflection-part improves with age ...they at least know*

*how to structure it [an argumentative essay].* She later added that the most important aspect of lower secondary is to “get everyone to pass”, whereas upper secondary allows students to “hone their skills”. On the other side, informant C confidently explained that in addition to largely focusing on non-fictional text writing, his school also received good exam results. He added: *From what we know, many students lie on the same grade-level in upper secondary as they did here. So, I think we are doing quite well and know what is required of the students at upper secondary.* Informant C also shared that his school arranged internal meetings with one upper secondary school in the same district where the teachers would meet and discuss subject-related topics. This he insinuated, made the transition from lower secondary to upper secondary smoother.

#### 4.1.6 Other remarks

In survey question five, the informants were asked to rank elements according to how important they considered them to be in argumentative writing. Ranking 1-2 imply that the element is “not important”, 3 is “neutral”, and 4-5 is “important”. The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

*Teachers’ opinions of how important the different elements are in argumentative writing*

<b>Ranking:</b>	<b>1-2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4-5</b>
Formal language	15 %	40 %	45 %
Structure	11 %	3 %	86 %
Reliable sources	13 %	14 %	73 %
A strong thesis	16 %	22 %	62 %
Audience awareness	14 %	23 %	63 %
Varied vocabulary	12 %	26 %	62 %

As shown in Table 7, the majority of the informants ranked all the elements as either 4 or 5; however, some seem to be more important than others. For example, 86% of the informants ranked “structure” as either 4 or 5. This shows that most teachers regard “structure”, as compared to the other elements, to be the most important element in argumentative writing. Second, 73% ranked “reliable sources” as either being most important. Also, between 62-63% of the informants also ranked “a strong thesis”, “audience awareness”,

and “varied vocabulary” as either 4 or 5. Lastly, 45% of the informants ranked “formal language” as either 4 or 5.

Interestingly, in the interviews, informant A and C claimed not to have received training in argumentative writing when enrolled in higher education. The other informants did not acknowledge if they had or not. Informant C suggested that knowing how to teach argumentative writing was “expected knowledge”. On the topic of students’ problems with regard to argumentative writing, Informant C questioned the criteria in the assessment matrix. He said: *They [the students] forget to back their claims ... but can we expect more from them? If you look at the assessment matrix which is based on the competence aims, not a lot is really expected.* He explained that his writing instruction is heavily influenced by the written exam requirements and he claimed to train the students in interpreting and answering the specific exam tasks. Also, as earlier mentioned, informant C explained that his school had an internal arrangement of nine English teaching hours a week instead of the regular eight. He expressed gratitude for this extra hour a week and gave it the most credit for the school’s successful English exam results.

## **4.2 The student perspective**

This section includes an analysis of the corpus, the 13 student essays, representing “the student perspective”. The results will be analyzed with respect to *the advanced argumentative essay criteria* represented in Table 3 and organized sub-criteria-wise in the following order: *tone and language, structure and coherence, argumentative elements, and sources*. The essay task instructs the students to: “choose one of the tasks [sub-tasks] below and discuss arguments for and against” (see appendix 3). The sub-tasks the essays employ are: a) it is wrong to kill animals for food, b) it is ok to keep animals in zoos, c) lower secondary school should be a grade-free zone, d) it is ok to put nine-year-olds in prison if they break the law, and e) 16-year-olds should be allowed to drive cars. None of the students chose sub-task f) schools ought to buy a laptop for all students. The majority of the essays employ sub-task a). Notably, the two criteria: *make a claim/thesis statement* and *consider opposing viewpoints* had to be disregarded when analyzing the corpus because of how the writing task is formulated.

### 4.2.1 Tone and language

An overall examination of the corpus discloses that most of the students use informal language and tone. All essays contain first-person pronouns, and many use contracted forms. Generally, most of the essays contain spoken everyday language and colloquialisms. Additionally, many of the essays also enclose incorrect use of grammar and vocabulary. However, the wide-ranging factor in the essays is the use of highly oral and expressive language. Reflecting this, student 9 writes: “...*it would be weird if we stopped eating it [meat] ... I think its okay to kill animals for meat, I don't think it a big deal*”. Here, especially using the word “weird” and “big deal”, as well as using contracted forms is what makes the text informal. Another example of using oral language is when student 5 writes: “...*I mean that we need to kill the animals for food. It sounds bad, but we really need meat in our body*”. Here, “it sounds bad” makes the text informal. Lastly, student 3 writes:

You could say that if you kill a cow you're involved to kill someone's life, so why kill it just because you want to eat some meat when you've got other delicious, healthy things that you also could eat? (Student 3)

In the text above, student 3 uses the first-person pronoun “you” and uses the contracted form “you're”. Amongst many others, student 11 also writes “you” when referring to the audience, often perceived as an informal element in writing: “*I know that everyone have different opinions and maybe you are completely disagree whit me*”. Another example of this is when student 8 writes: “...*I have tried to give some opinions for and against killing animals for food. I have talked about the animals and the humans I hope you get help to decide your conclusions, and mine opinion is for*. Student 4 also writes: “*I hope you can understand the way I see*” in their conclusion. In a sense, it may seem like the students are writing a personal “letter” but it is unclear if it aimed towards one reader or a bigger audience as “you” can apply to both. None of the essays are genuinely formal; however, a few of the students incorporate formal elements. For example. Student 1 has a more sophisticated vocabulary using words like “prosperous” instead of “rich”, and “mistreat” instead of “treat badly”. Student 3 who mostly writes informally also includes one sentence with a more sophisticated vocabulary: “*I think we could decrease the consumption of meat*”.

Surprisingly, many of the essays contain grammatical errors and misuse vocabulary. For example, student 2 writes: “*I mean that a little bit of meat is very important for us*”. The

use of “I mean” instead of “I think” or “I believe” is a recurrent phenomenon in the corpus, doubtlessly a result of the direct translation of the Norwegian phrase “*jeg mener*”. Translating directly or calquing<sup>2</sup> from Norwegian appear in multiple places. Student 5 for instance, writes: “*It sounds weird, but I mean that it’s better to be killed and then you can get used to help instead of be killed and then get in the trash*”. Here, despite being somewhat unclear, the student is suggesting that it is better for an animal, once killed, to be exploited for food instead of being disposed of. The phrases “and then get in the trash” and “get used to help” sound familiar to the Norwegian expressions “og så gå i søpla” and “å bli brukt til noe”. The word “help” is unfitting. Lastly, regarding killing animals, student 13 writes: “But then the question is, where goes the line to too many?”. Here, “where goes the line” is apparently translated from “*hvor går grensen?*”. Many of the essays portray incorrect use of grammar and vocabulary, seemingly as a result of the frequent use of calque.

#### 4.2.2 Structure and coherence

The essays in the corpus all encompass adequate structure, most following the introduce-develop-conclude framework. Even though the task instructions do not ask for a specific number of paragraphs, many of the essays still include five. This suggests that the students have been taught the five-paragraph essay. However, some students structure their essays with more paragraphs, then often being shorter. The task instructs the students to choose one of the six listed sub-tasks, formulated as claims, and then discuss arguments for and against. Because of this, most essays do not give an explicit claim or thesis statement in the introduction but merely outlines the structure of the essay. Further, many of the essays attempt to provide “objective” for and against arguments in the middle paragraphs before giving their own personal opinion in the concluding paragraph. Thus, many essays provide introductions similar to this:

In this task I’m going to discuss about “It is wrong to kill animals for food!”. First of all I want to give some arguments why and why not it is wrong to kill animals for food. At least I will give my own opinion. (Student 3)

Despite being short, student 3’s introduction outlines the structure of the essay, but like many of the other students fails to provide context or background information to the

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<sup>2</sup> Calque: another term for “loan translation” (English Oxford living dictionary)

audience and a clear thesis statement. The latter is seemingly a result of how the task is formulated. Similarly, student 8 writes in their introduction: *“Hello. In this text I am going to talk about animals, and is it right to kill them for food?”*. After this sentence, student 8 also outlines the essays’ structure. In another example, student 6 writes: *In this text we will look at some reasons not to kill animals for food and some reasons why we should kill animals for food”*. These introductions also reflect the tendency of using oral and language as student 8 starts their essay with a greeting and student 6 writing “we”. As mentioned earlier, the use of oral and expressing language is also reflected in the conclusions (see 4.2.2). Some of the conclusions sum up the essays’ content well, but others are relatively short or introduce new arguments. Also, many students seem to give their own final opinion in their conclusions alike student 11:

I have now discussed the theme “Lower secondary school should be a grade-free zone”. I know that everyone have different opinions and maybe you are completely disagree whit me. But, my conclusion, despite all the pressure, is that I don’t want a grade-free school. I like to have grades because I feel that grades is a fair and great way to progress. Everyone is getting what they are working for. (Student 11)

However, a complication with many of the essays is that there is not a clear distinction between the students’ arguments and their own concluding opinions. This also makes many of the essays non-coherent as there is not a logical connection between the arguments. An example of this is when student 13 writes: *“Think about the animals that are breed. What is the point for them living when they live and get fed just to get killed, so we can get food?”*. Student 13 further writes: *“Think about the cows that are giving birth to a calf and seeing them been taken away from you. This is actually happening ...”*. Yet, in a subsequent paragraph, student 13 writes: *“Now I am going to tell you my opinion about killing animals for food. It was a lot of good arguments against it. However, some of the arguments were radical”*. It seems like student 13 attempts to objectively state arguments for and against when asserting that “some of the arguments were radical”. However, all arguments were voiced in a subjective way which makes the distinction between the students own opinions and objective arguments difficult to make.

Examining the corpus, it is clear that the students have been taught transitions words and phrases, as well as having been trained to use topic sentences to create coherence. Many essays employ transition words such as “firstly, secondly, on the other hand, however,



whereas, and in conclusion” either to start a new paragraph or to bind their sentences together. Student 1, for instance, writes: “*Whereas some places mistreat the animals, that is not the case for the rest of the world*”. Similarly, student 2 starts a paragraph with “*secondly, I mean that human eat too much meat than we need*”. Regarding topic sentences, they are rarely used in the students’ essays. In some cases, instead of using topic sentences and focusing on one argument at a time, it seems like some students write their arguments in a stream of consciousness. For example, in a paragraph, student 7 writes:

We all can remember when we were little and or mum said “no, don’t do that” We learned, we were on a progress and still we are. When we have grown, our brain has become smarter. We should have an age limit. A more grown person knows what they have done. They can sit alone in prison and really feel sorry for what they have done, but I don’t think it will have the same effect on a child. We need to teach the children to do the right things. Normally people and children do bad things if they live under pore conditions. The best thing we can do is support them, show them love, be there for them. Mistakes are mistakes. We can’t change what we have done, but we can learn and feel sorry. (Student 7)

Instead of clearly and coherently developing one argument, student 7’s paragraph almost seems anecdotal. Many of the sentences are short and have no clear transition between them, and there is neither a clear argument. Notably, very few essays utilize topic sentences consistently and successfully. Regardless, multiple students still attempt to create coherence and structure by including headings over each paragraph, breaking the typical essay format. Student 6 for instance, includes questions over each paragraph. The paragraphs discuss and answers the question and stay on topic, but this does not follow a typical essay structure. Similarly, student 8 simply writes “for:” and “against:” above the paragraphs. However, some of the paragraphs only contain one or two sentences. Also, student 3 writes as a heading: “*On the first hand, I am agreeing with the argument [the sub-task claim]*”, elaborating on a new line underneath.

### **4.2.3 Argumentative elements**

As explained, the task instructions ask the students to consider both sides of the argument of the sub-task claims provided. Because of this, none of the essays clearly

considers the “opposing viewpoint” as all of the essays review both perspectives anyways. As explained earlier, many of the students additionally do not make a “claim” because of how the task is formulated. However, all of the students give their own personal opinions towards the end after having argued both sides. Amongst few, student 9 writes in their introduction: “*I think both yes and no, in some cases it’s a good thing and in others it is a bad thing*”. This assertion resembles a thesis statement as it indicates that the student will be looking at advantages and disadvantages. The only problem is that student 9 expresses a different opinion in the conclusion, which makes the arguments incoherent. Students mostly attempt to support their claims with evidence. However, the evidence is often personal or based on emotions. As an example, student 11 writes:

Grades can handle to a lot of hard pressure. Personally, I feel an extremely big grade pressure at school. At school there is always a “competition” for getting the best results on the tests. Unfortunately, the pressure does not stop when I come home from school. Almost every day when my family and I eat dinner, we talk about school and grades we have received ... (Student 11)

Here, student 11 provides a topic sentence, claiming that “*grades can handle to a lot of pressure*”. Subsequently, the student supports the claim by giving anecdotal evidence, describing their daily routine at school and at home. Contrastingly, some of the students do not provide evidence for their claims. Student 8, for example, writes: “*We are meat-eating creatures and it’s the nature that is like that, it’s just how we are*”. Here, the student is arguing against whether it is wrong to kill animals for food, asserting that humans are a carnivorous species. However, instead of justifying this assertion with further evidence, student 8 merely suggests that it is indisputable when writing “*it’s just how we are*”. Student 12 also fails to support own claims, writing: “*I think that a lot of 16 year old would drive over speed limit why I don’t know I just have a feeling*”. The student does not give any evidence but simply writes “I just have a feeling”. Noteworthy, student 12’s essay was the most poorly written in the corpus. Further, student 6’s text displays adequate argumentation:

Why does an animal’s life have less value then a human’s life. Humans have evolved from monkeys and there are many things that are more or less the same between humans and animals. The big difference is our brain and the fact that we have more or less taken over the world. This is one of the reasons why I think we are not wrong for

killing animals for food ... nature has always consisted of predators and prey, and since we are more or less animals I think it's ok for us to kill animals. (Student 6)

Student 6's argument is less personal and emotionally based than many others. However, from the beginning of the paragraph, it seems as if student 6 is arguing that it is wrong to kill animals for food when stating the similarities between monkeys and humans. Yet, as the paragraph proceeds, it becomes apparent that the student, in fact, argues that it is not wrong to kill animals for food. This is simply an organizational problem as student 6 does not provide adequate evidence to support their claim. The student asserts that "*nature has always consisted of predators and prey*" and suggests that since humans are superior and on top of the food chain, it is not wrong to kill animals for food. For comparison, this is a more thorough argument than simply saying "*it's the nature that is like that, it's just how we are*" as student 8 wrote. The problem with organizing arguments is prevalent in many of the students' essays. When arguing a side, many of the students also seem to list all thinkable arguments in a row, without developing them. For example, student 10 writes:

Lots of peoples mean that it is ok to kill animals for food, because they like the taste of meat. Some people also say that if one animal is old, it is better to kill it and the humans get better food. Somebody will also say that it is unpassable [impossible] to not eat meat, and just eat vegetables. It is very hard to change the food habits. Which you have grew up with. Meat is also important to humans. Humans need the proteins and the vitamins from the meat ... (Student 10)

In the text above, student 10 is arguing the "against" side regarding whether it is wrong to kill animals for food. Despite in some cases coming off topic, student 10 proposes multiple arguments but does not develop them. First, the student states that many people enjoy the taste of meat, then rather illogically asserts that some people believe that old animals should be killed for food. Further, student 10 claims that for some, food habits are difficult to change. And lastly, the student describes the health benefits of consuming meat. Within one paragraph, these are all individual points and do not clearly relate to one another. None of the assertions are provided with any evidence either. After a thorough examination of the essays in the corpus, it is clear that multiple students struggle with organizing their arguments in a logical order similar to student 6. In other words, the essays generally contain

argument incoherence. Reflected in the corpus, there seems to be insufficient knowledge of how to thoroughly develop arguments.

#### **4.2.4 Sourcing**

In the corpus, none of the essays used citations or explicitly employed sources. However, the task did not instruct the students to do so either. It seems as the students were not expected to do research beforehand as student 2 writes: *“In conclusion, I want to say that I think it is difficult to write good arguments when I don’t know a lot about this theme, but I tried my best to give my own meanings and arguments”*. Most of the arguments written in the essays are based on the students’ personal emotions and thoughts, yet, some of the students include facts. Student 6 for instance, writes: *“Even though it is not necessary for humans to eat animal products, it is recommended”*. However, student 6 does not provide any further information on who “recommends” this. Similarly, student 9 writes: *“The carbon footprint is very high. When we kill the animals, it goes very much CO2. It takes also big land areas to do this ...”*. Many of the students also argue the health benefits one gets from consuming animal products but do not refer to sources.

## **5 Discussion**

### **5.1 Is there a narrative culture in lower secondary school?**

As asserted, Igland (2009) states that in Norway, narrative modes of writing have dominated writing instruction in primary and lower secondary, while argumentative writing has been more prominent in upper secondary (p. 498). Based on the findings in this study, there still seems to be an extensive focus on narrative writing in the English subject in lower secondary. In the survey where 70 lower secondary teachers participated, 58%, the majority, claimed to commonly employ the narrative genre into their writing instruction. However, it was not specified in which year in lower secondary school the teachers focused most on narrative writing. The interview gave further insight into this. According to informant A, creative writing and particularly the writing of stories is more dominant in the early stages of lower secondary school.

Even though narrative writing was overrepresented, the findings also show a capable focus on argumentation. In the survey, in second place, 46% of the teachers claimed to commonly employ the argumentative genre into their writing instruction. However, the survey did not specify in which year of lower secondary the focus was strongest. Notably, informant C asserted that he had detected a reduction in the number of stories and other types of fictional texts in the last 5-10 years as a result of the written exam incorporating more non-fictional writing tasks. Informant D also claimed to notice this reduction and said that she herself employed the text types “story” and “opinion piece” the most in her English instruction. Notably, she did not seem to distinguish an opinion piece from an argumentative essay throughout the interview. Considering all these results, it could be argued that despite narrative writing perhaps still being more dominant in lower secondary, the focus on argumentation and other non-fictional writing gradually increases towards the end of lower secondary because of the final written examination.

### **5.2 Are year 10 students prepared for upper secondary argumentative writing?**

With regard to *the advanced argumentative essay's* criteria, this section will discuss whether year 10 students are prepared for upper secondary writing. Firstly, concerning *tone and language*, none of the essays incorporate thorough formal language or tone as the majority of the students use highly oral and expressive language and colloquial vocabulary, and contracted forms. Also, there is a frequent use of first and second-person. These findings

support the findings of Øgreid & Hertzberg (2009), who found that year 10 students, though in L1 argumentative writing, used expressive style. Remarkably, none of the informants in the interviews mentioned language formality. The survey results also suggest that teachers do not regard formal language to be a common problem amongst their students and it was also ranked as the least important element in argumentative writing. This is not consistent with Horverak's (2015b) findings, where one of the main difficulties upper secondary teachers claimed their students to have when writing argumentative essays was adjusting language to right formality level. This could perhaps indicate that upper secondary teachers are more aware of formality levels in language.

Secondly, regarding *structure and coherence*, an overall examination of the essays in the corpus suggests that students, for the most part, do utilize an introduce-develop-conclude structure. However, very few students successfully incorporate topic sentences to their essays, and none of the essays contain a clear thesis statement. The latter is a result of how the writing task is formulated, which after presenting the students with multiple claims, asks the students to pick one and discuss both sides of the arguments. As a result of this, the criteria: *make a claim/thesis statement*, and *consider opposing viewpoint*, had to be disregarded when assessing the essays. Despite all of the essays incorporating the introduce-develop-conclude structure, the majority of the students struggle to create coherence or logical relationships between their ideas. For example, in some cases, there is not a clear distinction between students' developing arguments and their own concluding points. This supports the findings of Silva (1993) who found that L2 writers more often used argument alternations than L1 writers. In this study, it seems like this problem arises from many students' inability to present for and against arguments, that they do not necessarily agree with, in an objective tone.

Considering the third sub-criteria *argumentative elements*, many students do support their claims or arguments with evidence. However, the evidence that is provided is mostly emotionally based or anecdotal. For example, when proving a point, some students provide examples from their own day to day lives. Other students simply support a claim by stating how they personally feel about an issue. There are also cases in which students do not provide evidence at all simply stating "that's just how it is". An interesting finding of this study is that many of the essays in the corpus correspond with what Freedman & Pringle (1988) refers to as "focal" and "associational" essays. They state that a *focal essay* is one in which "each point individually relates back to the central focus although the points themselves are not logically related to each other" (p. 236). This resembles a few of the essays where the students seem to

list all thinkable arguments and not further developing them. An *associational essay* is where “each succeeding argument or proposition relates to the one immediately preceding but is in no way tied to a central argument” (p. 236). These essays resemble a stream of consciousness, comparable to many of the essays in the corpus. This reflects the students’ struggles with creating argument coherence.

In the interview, informant D asserted that in some cases when students start to incorporate more than one perspective, their structure becomes messy. As the writing task asks the students to discuss both sides of their chosen claim, all of the students incorporate at least two perspectives. Reflected in the corpus, most students use the introduce-develop-conclude structure, but the content within this structure is in many cases unstructured. Perhaps this is what informant D was referring regarding “messy structure”. Also, the majority of the teachers employed in this study, both in the survey and interviews, asserted that many of their students struggle with providing strong enough arguments. It could be that this weakness in argumentation is a result of many students’ inability to structure their ideas and arguments. In Horverak’s (2015b) study, upper secondary English teachers also claimed argument structure to be a difficulty amongst their students (p. 86). If this is a difficulty amongst upper secondary students, it is not unexpected that it also is a problem amongst lower secondary students.

Lastly, regarding the last sub-criteria *sourcing*, it is reflected in the corpus that none of the essays use sources. However, the writing task does not instruct the students to do research beforehand. One of the students even states in their essay that they do not have much knowledge about their chosen topic but will instead attempt to give their own opinions. Because of this, it may seem as if the writing task is encouraging the students to give their own personal reflections. Simultaneously, the task instructs students to “discuss arguments for and against”, which often requires an objective presentation of different viewpoints than one’s own. It is thus unclear whether the creator of the task desired objective or subjective arguments. Researching and citing external sources is an essential part of academic writing in higher education. Thus, if students in lower and upper secondary school are to be prepared for writing in higher education, it is necessary that they are trained in how to use sources. According to Horverak’s (2015b), teachers in upper secondary claim that one of their students’ main struggles in argumentative writing, is how to use sources (p. 86). Also, this study’s survey results show that 54% of the lower secondary teachers consider using sources to be a difficulty amongst their students too. In the interviews, none other than informant A mentioned sources although in relation to maturity. With all results combined and considering

how essential the use of sources is in upper secondary and higher education writing, it is clear that there needs to be a bigger focus on sources in lower secondary.

An overall examination of the corpus with respect to the criteria of *the advanced argumentative essay* demonstrates that the majority of the students' essays fail to meet most of the requirements. However, it is important to again point out that the essays were written in the first semester of year 10. The findings could perhaps have been different if the essays had been written in the second semester of year 10. At the same time, the findings show that how often argumentative writing is incorporated into teachers' instruction is very individual. Even for some, argumentative writing was only focused on once a year. Further, the only two criteria most essays seem to fulfill is supporting claims or arguments with evidence, and including an introduction and a conclusion. Despite most of the evidence either being anecdotal or personal and based on emotions, it still qualifies as evidence. However, it can be argued that the students in the future will need to learn how to support their arguments with sources to make them stronger and more credible. Academic papers in higher education do not solely accept the use of emotionally based and anecdotal arguments. Additionally, although all essays incorporate an introduction and a conclusion, thus meeting the criteria, they are almost never well written. As a result, the essays in total only meet two of the seven criteria for *the advanced argumentative essay*. To sum up, the majority of the essays in the corpus portray informal language use, a lack of academic vocabulary, a lack of in-text coherence and particularly argument coherence, unsuccessful use of topic sentences, and absence of sources. Based on this, it appears that year 10 students are not sufficiently prepared for argumentative writing in upper secondary.

### **5.3 Do teachers prepare students for argumentative writing in upper secondary?**

This section will discuss if there are any correlations between lower secondary English teachers' attitudes and writing instructions, and why the student essays in the corpus seem very far from the standard required by upper secondary students. First of all, the competence aims in the English curriculum specify that students ought to learn how to write different types of texts although without explicit reference to which genres or text types. The ways to achieve this is never mentioned which implies that much of the writing instruction is depended on the teachers own writing competence. In the interviews, informant A and C claimed to not recall having received training in how to teach argumentative writing or writing at all in higher education, whereas the two others did not acknowledge whether they



had or not. Informant C even felt that knowing how to teach argumentative writing was “expected knowledge”. Because of this, it appears that many teachers have the need to seek information from outside sources. In the survey for instance, a vast amount of the informants claimed to use material from internet websites and school textbooks as inspiration when working with argumentative writing.

As earlier mentioned, studies show that newly educated English teachers in Norway feel unprepared for teaching written text production (Rødnes, et al., 2004; Lund, 2014). Though the informants in the interview were not directly questioned of whether they felt prepared to teach argumentative writing when graduating from higher education, their lack of training seems to answer the question. It can thus be argued, by also considering previous research, that few teachers in the beginning of their teaching careers are prepared for teaching argumentative writing themselves. Regardless, it can be argued that novice teachers become more competent with experience and perhaps use their own earlier acquired competence from secondary school. After all, many of the teachers in the study provided relevant teaching methods and strategies for working with argumentative writing in class. The findings, for instance, show that the majority of the teachers employ the five-paragraph essay. This finding supports the previous findings of Horverak (2015a) and McIntosh (2017) in upper secondary.

The widespread use of the five-paragraph essay among all informants may correspond with how 86% of the survey informants considered “structure” to be the most important element in argumentative writing. Also, some of the informants in the interview seemed to be more concerned with the structure of the written text than the quality of the actual argument. Suggestively, this could be analogous with how many of the corpus’ essays incorporated the introduce-develop-conclude framework but struggled to structure and write profound arguments. In the interviews, some of the informants promoted the five-paragraph essay’s benefit for less proficient writers. Informant B, for instance, claimed that less proficient writers could easily “fill in the blanks” whereas more proficient writers could write essays without the format. This attitude is concerning as the students’ focus should be on developing and structuring their arguments and getting their opinions across in a successful manner, not just fitting sentences into slots. The aim of written argumentation as established earlier is after all to convince an audience of the validity of a claim, which requires good argumentation.

Though it perhaps may be beneficial for less skilled writers to establish a framework to organize their thoughts and ideas before adding structural and organizational creativity as Seo (2007) argues (p. 16), it seems unfair to only direct the five-paragraph essay towards the less proficient students. After all, as Smith (2006) argues, it is the introduce-develop-conclude

structure that is essential. This structure is ultimately fundamental in academic writing in higher education and is necessary for learning to successfully write academic papers. Thus, all students should be presented with the opportunity to learn how to structure their essays, not only the less skilled writers. However, if the focus regarding structure is to solely fit in sentences to create in-text coherence, and not on creating a foundation for structuring one's ideas and thoughts, the focus may be ill-advised.

Further regarding teaching methods and strategies, 73% of the informants in the survey also claimed to use oral argumentation as practice for written argumentation. As Andrews (1995) asserts, oral argumentation is different from written argumentation in the sense that it is “dialogic”, occurring between two or more parts (p. 7). Thus, when moving from oral to written argumentation, students need to learn how to incorporate two or more voices into one univocal piece of writing. Reflected in the corpus, it is apparent that many students struggle with this. All the student essays include at least two perspectives, or voices, but many fail to present and structure them successfully. Occasionally, it is also not clear whether the student includes their own voice or an objective voice. As mentioned, this is also comparable with what informant D said in the interview; that when students start including more than one perspective it usually results in a chaotic and messy structure. On another note, if the students are uninformed of the difference between oral and written argument, and if they frequently practice oral argumentation in class, it is perhaps not unexpected that many of their essays are orally written as well.

How often English teachers in lower secondary integrate argumentative writing into their writing instruction is shown in the findings as truly individual. For some of the teachers it is a once a year occurrence, whereas others assign argumentative writing tasks once every month. The survey questions did not specify in which year the focus on argumentative was more prominent, but the informants in the interview gave some insight into this. For example, some of the teachers asserted that the focus on argumentative writing gradually increased towards the end of lower secondary. However, all of the informants suggested that argumentative writing could be incorporated into all years in lower secondary if adapted to the respective proficiency levels. Informant A for instance, noted that the “argumentative article”<sup>3</sup> was more suitable in year 10 and onwards, whereas a “letter to the editor”, an easier argumentative text type, was more apt for lower secondary because they get to express their own opinions. Regarding argumentative text types, informant D asserted that she mostly used

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<sup>3</sup> Norwegian variant of the English “argumentative essay” (see 2.4.1)

“opinion piece”<sup>4</sup> in year 10, which together with “letters to the editor” are highly expressive text types. It is also reflected in the corpus that many of the essays are written expressively where arguments are based on the students’ own opinions. It is essential that the students are made aware of the differences between the text types and not solely associate argumentation with expressing and arguing their own opinions.

The findings of the survey show that 74% of all informants either agree or strongly agree that they have sufficiently prepared their lower secondary students for upper secondary argumentative writing. The answers were diverse in the interviews. Informant A noted that the students had at least been given an introduction to argumentative writing but were perhaps not prepared. Informant B claimed that when entering upper secondary, the students would know how to structure their essays but that their ability to reflect and as a result write stronger arguments would improve with age. This again supports the idea that some teachers believe that structure is more important than the actual arguments in an argumentative essay. The two other informants referred to the written examinations in relation to sufficiently preparing their students for upper secondary. They suggested that the main focus in their writing instruction was preparing their students for responding to the written examination tasks. Informant C reported of good exam results in year 10 and believed this to be a sign of quality. Although high grades in the written exam could indicate a “preparedness” for upper secondary, the written exam encompasses many different genres and text types, not just the argumentative essay. Thus, it is questionable if the written exam alone prepares year 10 students for argumentative writing in upper secondary.

Despite the corpus analysis employed in this study shows that year 10 student essays do not meet the criteria for *the advanced argumentative essay*, it is arguable whether this is sufficient evidence for stating that English teachers in lower secondary do not prepare students for argumentative writing in upper secondary. The reasons for this is due to the corpus being relatively small and not as transferable as if a larger corpus was employed. At the same time, some of the findings from the corpus analysis are consistent with previous research which makes it more reliable. As discussed, some of the problems students have with argumentative writing as reflected in the corpus analysis is consistent with what the teachers reported of in the survey and interviews. For example, the essays demonstrate informal, expressive and oral language, which arguably correlates with the teachers’ frequent use of oral argumentation as practice for written argumentation. Additionally, the teachers seemed to

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<sup>4</sup> An *opinion piece* is defined as “an article in which the writer expresses their personal opinion, typically one which is controversial or provocative, about a particular issue or item of news” (Oxford Living Dictionaries)

disregard informal language as important in argumentative writing. Also, many essays embody a lack of in-text coherence and argument coherence which may be consistent with how important the teachers regarded structure to be in argumentative writing. These findings, among others, may suggest that there is a correlation between what students “produce”, and how teachers “prepare”.

#### **5.4 Do year 10 students’ difficulties derive from insufficient L2 proficiency or a lack of maturity?**

The essays assessed in this study demonstrate that year 10 students have difficulties especially related to language use, in-text coherence, and argument coherence. Considering language use, many students express themselves in a Norwegian manner, often seeming to calque sentences from Norwegian to English. As a result of extensive use of calques, the essays contain grammatical and vocabulary related errors. This finding is comparable with Hyland’s (2004) statement; that insufficient knowledge of vocabulary and grammar is one of L2 writers’ main difficulties which may prevent them from successfully conveying their ideas in English. Similarly, Silva (1993) found that L2 writers’ argumentative texts exhibited less coherence than L1 writers. Based on this, it can be argued that the students’ deficiency in creating coherence perhaps is harmonious with difficulties in communicating in English.

Previously, studies have disclosed that students have difficulties with structuring arguments (Freedman & Pringle, 1988; Silva, 1993; Berge & Hertzberg, 2005; Horverak, 2015b). In their study, Freedman & Pringle (1988) specifically relates this difficulty to maturity claiming that the ability to abstract and conceptualize, a skill required to successfully structure arguments, is underdeveloped in children under the age of 13 (p. 240). According to this statement, year 10 students being 15-16-year-olds should then already have developed cognitively and possess the necessary tools for successfully structuring arguments. Yet, the corpus reflects the contrary. It could thus be argued that the students perhaps have not received sufficient training in how to structure arguments. Also, it may be that this is comparable with the sense that many teachers see “structure” as one of the most important factors in argumentative writing, reflected in the findings. In the interview, some of the informants seemed to agree that the capability to write stronger arguments improves with age. Informant A also claimed that students in lower secondary are self-centered and often struggle to not include themselves too much in their writing, resulting in expressive language. This corresponds with how Andrews (1995) says some believe children are “progressively

decentering” (p. 18). However, it is unclear whether this self-centeredness applies to year 10 students.

### **5.5 Is the Norwegian essay interfering with the English essay?**

As earlier described, the Norwegian essay is relatively different than the traditional English essay. As argued in section 2.4, the English essay is often perceived as being purely argumentative with the aim of arguing a claim, employing the introduce-develop-conclude structure. Also, Hillocks (2011) argues that argument requires logical reasoning and relevant evidence (p. 15), which often involves doing research in advance as well as creating good argument coherence and structure. On the contrary, the Norwegian essay is more of an experimental text type where the goal is often to wonder and ask important questions in order to evoke the readers’ interest (Riksmålforbundet, 2017). The Norwegian essay may also follow the writers’ thinking process and express the writers’ personal views. Øgreid & Hertzberg (2009) also adds that the essay in the Norwegian subject values emotionally based arguments as long as they are well formulated (p. 458).

During the analysis and assessment of the corpus, it was apparent that most of the essays were expressive, and in some cases “letter-like”. Many students expressed their own views and personal opinions when arguing a claim and as reflected in the findings, sometimes asked rhetorical questions. When one asks questions in a text, it can be argued that the aim often is to evoke interest in the readers and causing them to think. Also, many of the student essays demonstrated arguments similar to a stream of consciousness, as if following their thinking process. Due to these findings, it could suggest that the writing skills the students acquire when writing essays in the Norwegian subject transfer to writing essays in the English subject. If this is the case, it is essential that teachers outline the text types’ differences in their classroom instruction.

## 6 Conclusion

### 6.2 Further research

Most of the teachers employed in study believed to have prepared their students for argumentative writing in upper secondary. However, the findings from the corpus analysis show the contrary. At the same time, it is difficult to draw a definite connection between “the teacher perspective” and “the student perspective” in this study because of the relatively small corpus that was utilized. Despite many of the findings from both perspectives correlate, it is still difficult to clearly say, based on the teachers’ responses, why the year 10 students used in this study are not prepared for argumentative writing in upper secondary. For future research, an idea would be to elicit upper secondary students’ opinions about whether they believe lower secondary prepared them for argumentative writing in upper secondary, through interviews or a survey. Asking the students directly would allow the students to give their subjective opinion on the matter and point out what was inadequate about the writing instruction. To strengthen the corpus analysis findings, a larger corpus could have been used. Also, collecting essays written in the latter semester of year 10 would also strengthen the research’s validity. Additionally, an idea would be to conduct a longitudinal study where a group of students’ argumentative writing proficiency were assessed in both lower and upper secondary.

The findings from the interviews showed that some teachers simply follow the written examination requirements in their writing instruction and regarded this as sufficient preparation for upper secondary writing. Whether scoring high on the written examination in year 10 qualifies one as being prepared for argumentative writing in upper secondary is questionable. After all, the students have the option of choosing fictional tasks over non-fictional tasks. An interesting study would thus be to examine the non-fictional written exam tasks for elements of argumentation.

### 6.1 Implications of the findings

In this study, it is concluded that year 10 students are not sufficiently prepared for argumentative writing in upper secondary. This was disclosed by assessing 13 student essays with regard to a set of criteria for *the advanced argumentative essay*, a term created to represent a transitional paper between argumentative writing in year 10 and the beginning of upper secondary. The findings from the corpus analysis show that students’ written language

is highly informal. Not only do the students use expressive and oral language, but also fail to use academic vocabulary. Also, many of the essays show students struggling with English grammatical conventions, notably formulating English sentences in a Norwegian manner. Another important finding from the corpus analysis is the students' struggle with creative in-text coherence and argument coherence, which often result in unstructured and chaotic arguments. Additionally, the essays do not cite and employ sources.

The findings from the survey and interviews suggest that lower secondary teachers commonly perceive their students' arguments to be weak. The interviews gave further insight into this belief, where many teachers claimed that students' arguments improve with age as they become more reflected and gain knowledge and experience. Though there might be some truth to this, the corpus analysis demonstrated that it often is not the support or the evidence that is weak, but the overall structure of the students' arguments. The teachers also collectively expressed the importance of structure in argumentative writing and claimed to use the five-paragraph essay most frequently in their instruction. These findings suggest that there needs to be an increased focus on how to build and structure successful arguments in teachers' writing instruction, and not just on how to structure text. In addition to this, it is essential that students from an early age are trained in how to cite external sources and incorporate them into their writing as this is an important aspect of academic writing in higher education. Utilizing sources would also decrease personally based and anecdotal arguments and make the overall argumentation more credible.

The findings from the survey and interviews suggest that the frequency of how often teachers employ argumentative writing in their instruction is highly individual. On the whole, the findings show that most of the essay writing is done towards the end of lower secondary. It can be argued that if teachers wish to prepare their students for upper secondary, it is important that they prioritize argumentative writing at all levels of lower secondary. Notably, previous studies such as Horverak (2017) and Horverak (2015b), revealed that students in upper secondary do not feel confident about writing argumentative essays and that they struggle with many of the same aspects as found in the corpus analysis of this study. This clearly demonstrates that argumentative writing needs to be prioritized in lower levels as well. Some of the teachers in this study advocated an interdisciplinary approach to argumentative writing. Though this may be beneficial, students must be made aware of the text type differences in both Norwegian and English in order to avoid confusion. Further, previous research and some of the informants' assertions suggest that there is insufficient training in writing in general in higher education. This might indicate that teachers are not receiving the

sufficient training that is required for them to teach argumentative writing. Importantly, one of the informants asserted that his school arranged meetings with a local upper secondary with the aim of making the transition from lower to upper secondary easier. Perhaps this is something all schools should be obligated to do. In this way, lower secondary teachers would become aware of what is required of their students in upper secondary regarding argumentative writing and thus adjust their instruction accordingly.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

Survey questions:

1. How long have you been teaching English?
2. Rank the following text types according to the amount of focus they receive in your class (1 being the least amount of focus, and 5 being the greatest amount of focus)
3. Select the text genres that you frequently ask your pupils to write in English class, as homework or for tests.
4. Practicing written argumentation/argumentative texts is more suitable for older pupils (10<sup>th</sup> grade/upper-secondary)
5. Rank the elements below according to their importance in argumentative writing (1 being least important and 5 being most important)
6. Select one or more strategies you have used to teach argumentative writing in English class
7. Argumentative writing is difficult for lower secondary school students because they lack maturity
8. How often do you ask your pupils to write argumentative texts in English class or as homework?
9. There are few national models of argumentative writing. What source(s) do you use when teaching argumentative writing?
10. Rank the most common problems amongst pupils when writing argumentative (1 being least common and 5 being most common).
11. The main reason for why lower secondary school students struggle with argumentative writing is because they lack English proficiency.
12. There should be a bigger focus on English argumentative writing in lower secondary school than it is now.
13. I think I as an English teacher have contributed to develop my pupils' argumentative writing skills and have therefore prepared them for further argumentative text writing in upper secondary school.

## Appendix 2

Interview guide:

1. Hva er din største utfordring som engelsklærer i ungdomskolen?
  - Utfordringer i skriveopplæringen
  - Sjanger – hva jobber dere med mest?
2. Hvilke tanker har du om argumenterende skrijving?
  - Hvordan skrive argumenterende essay
  - I din utdanning – fikk du opplæring?
    - Hvis ikke, hvordan har du lært det?
3. Hvor ofte i løpet av et år underviser du argumenterende skrijving på de ulike trinnene?
  - Trinn mest passende?
  - Har du nok tid?
  - Skulle du ønske du hadde mer tid?
4. Hvilke strategier tar du i bruk i klasserommet når du lærer vekk argumenterende skrijving?
5. Hva opplever du som de vanligste problemene blant elever når de skriver argumenterende tekst?
  - Hva er vanskelig?
6. Synes du at det fokuseres nok på argumenterende skrijving i skolen?
  - Er det viktig?
7. Føler du at du får forberedt elevene dine til argumenterende skrijving på videregående?

### Appendix 3

Students' writing task:

(All student essays in the corpus employed task 2)

Essay

Write at least 450-600 words.

Week 37 2017

**1: You are going to explain/talk about the British colonization of the world to a friend of yours.** Include two advantages and two disadvantages due to the British colonization.

Remember title.

**2: Choose one of the tasks below and discuss arguments for and against:**

Remember title.

A ) It is wrong to kill animals for food

B ) It is ok to keep animals in zoos

C ) Lower secondary school should be a grade-free zone

D ) It is ok to put nine-year olds in prison if they break the law

E ) 16-years-olds should be allowed to drive cars

F ) Schools ought to buy a laptop for all students

**3: Write a text about people's desire for fame and popularity.** Use examples from the various contests and reality programs on TV.

Remember title.