

# Supporting BSc students' disciplinary writing in two languages

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# Introduction to the project

## The Language Strategy: “More Languages for More Students” 2013-2018

### Needs analysis

- Surveys (students and academic faculty)
- Dialogue with heads of departments, programs (study boards) and curricular advisors, etc.

Strengthen foreign language competencies of students **across the disciplines**

– **in multiple languages**

(English, additional foreign languages, Danish as a second language)

### Pilot projects

- Development grant with funds for 36 pilot projects

# Pilot project at Biochemistry

- **Purpose:** To strengthen students' development of literacy skills in Danish and English by integrating a focus on language into an existing course
- **"Project Course: Biochemistry"** (introduced 2015)
  - project-oriented with existing literacy goals
    - use of correct terminology to describe research in Biochemistry
    - giving constructive feedback on oral presentations
    - writing a well-structured text with a clearly defined topic with adherence to course guidelines
  - Danish as primary teaching language (lectures, classroom interaction); English as the language of the readings
  - Student choice between Danish and English for the course assignment (a biochemical essay); abstract written in both Danish and English

# Development and implementation

## Development

Jan-Apr 2016

- Meetings with content teachers
- Questionnaire to content teachers
- Development of workshops with continuous dialogue with content teachers

## Implementation 1

Apr-Jun 2016

- Presentation of workshops at introductory lecture
- Workshop 1
- Commenting on abstracts
- Workshop 2

## Evaluation

Jul-Sep 2016

- Questionnaire sent out to the students
- Evaluation meeting based on questionnaires and teachers' experiences

## Adjustments

Jan-Apr 2017

- Adjustments are made based on evaluation

## Implementation 2

Apr-Jun 2017

- Presentation of workshops at introductory lecture
- Observation of topic presentation
- Workshop 1
- Commenting on abstracts
- Workshop 2

## Evaluation

Aug-Sep 2017

- Questionnaire is sent out to the students
- Evaluation meeting based on questionnaires and teachers' experiences
- Discussion of future implementation

<b>April 25</b> Introductory lecture	<b>April 25</b> Introduction to topics divided by groups	<b>April 26-27</b> Workshop 1	<b>May 2</b> Student presentations of chosen topics	<b>June 1</b> Discussion and questions to essay	<b>June 12</b> Workshop 2	<b>June 13</b> Student presentations of essays	<b>June 23</b> Deadline for essay
CC, LC	CT, LC	LC CT	CT	CT	LC CT	CT	

**Online discussion and 2 hours of individual supervision (CT)**

CC = Course coordinator

CT = Content teachers

LC = Language consultants

# Contents of workshops

 Postponed  
1 week

## Workshop 1, 2016 + 2017

1. Introduction
2. About the biochemical essay
3. Critical reading and writing
4. Group work I
5. Danish or English?
6. Tools and advice – how to get started
7. Constructive feedback
8. Group work 2
9. Summing up

## Workshop 2, 2016 + 2017

1. About title and abstracts  
+ **metadiscourse and transition**  
+ **creating cohesion**  
+ **comparing findings**  
+ **describing figures**
2. Individual feedback
3. Individual revision
4. Group work: Peer feedback
5. Summing up together
6. Tools and advice – if you get stuck
7. Summing up

# Participating students

## 2016

62 out of 83 participated in workshop 1

31 out of 83 participated in workshop 2

## 2017

75 out of 84 participated in workshop 1

56 out of 84 participated in workshop 2



## Group discussion I

- Form a group of 3-4 people
- Discuss the following questions:
  - 1. Will you be writing in Danish or English?**
  - 2. What are the advantages/disadvantages of choosing one language over another?**



All of the literature in Biochemistry is in English and I would also like to improve my ability to write about my field in English.

My knowledge of terminology is better in English and it is good practice for the rest of the BSc and the MSc.

Survey answers: Reasons for language choice

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Since my proficiency in English is rather weak, I chose to write in Danish – writing in English would be too time consuming. Also, I would be more worried about accidentally copying phrasing directly from the articles and not translating and understanding them properly.

Survey answers: Reasons for language choice

# Example of feedback on abstract

## Title:

The extent and mechanism of microRNA-mediated gene silencing by translational repression in animal cells

## Abstract:

MicroRNAs (miRNAs) are a class of small (~21 nucleotides), non-coding RNAs that is known to regulate gene expression at a post-transcriptional level, either by repressing translation or by degrading messenger RNA (mRNA). As the latter being the most well-understood mechanism according to numerous scientific literature, this essay has sought out to uncover the extent toat which translational repression contributes to the overall microRNA-mediated gene silencing, as well as to discuss some of the proposed mechanisms for translational repression. Using ribosome profiling, researchers have concluded that translational repression contributes with approximately 7-16 % of overall miRNA-mediated gene-silencing, and furthermore it was concluded that repression happens at the stage of translation initiation. As to the mechanism, several competing models have

...



**Sanne Larsen**

The title is rather long. Can this last bit be left out? It is not mentioned in the abstract at least...



**Sanne Larsen**

What does 'the latter' refer back to? Difficult to get that from a very information-heavy sentence before.

I really like, though, that you motivate your focus. But I would rephrase the sentence to make it clearer:  
e.g. As translation repression is the least understood mechanism, this essay....



**Sanne Larsen**

Use simple present here = is



**Sanne Larsen**

I would use present tense. Note also: 'seeks to' (not 'seeks out to')



**Sanne Larsen**

Is 'found' more appropriate?

# Example of feedback on abstract

The title is rather long. Can this last bit be left out? It is not mentioned in the abstract at least...

## Title:

The extent and mechanism of microRNA-mediated translational repression in animal cells

What does 'the latter' refer back to? Difficult to get that from a very information-heavy sentence before.

## Abstract:

MicroRNAs (miRNAs) are a class of small (~21 nt) non-coding RNA molecules that regulate gene expression at a post-transcriptional level by binding to and degrading messenger RNA (mRNA). As the latter mechanism is well established according to numerous scientific literature, this essay focuses on the mechanism which translational repression contributes to the overall miRNA-mediated gene silencing, as well as to discuss some of the proposed mechanisms for translational repression. Using ribosome profiling, researchers have concluded that translational repression contributes with approximately 7-16 % of overall miRNA-mediated gene-silencing, and that this repression happens at the stage of translation initiation. As to the mechanism of translational repression, it is proposed that miRNAs bind to the 5' cap of the mRNA and to the 3' UTR, which leads to the recruitment of the miRISC complex. This complex then binds to the mRNA and inhibits the translation process.

I really like, though, that you motivate your focus. But I would rephrase the sentence to make it clearer: e.g. As translation repression is the least understood mechanism, this essay...

I would use present tense. Note also: 'seeks to' (not 'seeks out to')

Use simple present here = is

## General comments:

Good introductory and final sentence & good with motivation of your chosen focus  
Consider whether you can sharpen

A) your purpose statement

B) the way you report the findings related to the second part of your purpose (i.e. to discuss some of the proposed mechanisms for translational repression).

# Evaluation

# Do you think that Workshop 1 & 2 gave you useful ideas and tools for writing your essay?

## Workshop 1

### 2016 (N = 25)

- To a great extent 72 %
- To some extent 20 %
- To a little extent 8 %

### 2017 (N = 26)

- To a great extent 38 %
- To some extent 50 %
- To a little extent 12 %

## Workshop 2

### 2016 (N = 17)

- To a great extent 71 %
- To some extent 12 %
- To a little extent 6 %
- I don't know 12 %

### 2017 (N = 23)

- To a great extent 70 %
- To some extent 26 %
- To a little extent 4 %



It was great that you made us think about advantages and disadvantages about the two languages

I loved the grid you made in relation to the articles. I mean it helped in terms of which articles to choose and how to analyse them and so on.

It was nice to actually see some examples of how to write the abstract and how not to write it



I think it was great to discuss things in groups and not just work individually. Getting feedback encouraged me to get on with my writing.

I think it was fantastic to get individual feedback on my abstracts! What I had written was just a draft because I had not gotten very far, but when I was writing the final version I could use the notes I'd received on my draft.

I received good help with formulating my abstract and I gained a bigger knowledge of how texts in general should be structured.



I think it has been a really good opportunity and a great help to become more aware of how to approach the linguistic and structural aspects of writing an assignment in the context of the natural sciences. This is something we usually don't get despite the importance of being able to communicate clearly in writing.

# Concluding thoughts

- Quality and sustainability in integrating content & language
  - continuous dialogue and cooperation between content teachers and language consultants central
    - developing relevant activities and materials for students
    - raising lecturers' awareness of and consensus about genre criteria
    - balancing concerns for content and language
- Need for supporting students' development of literacy skills in the languages relevant for their education
  - students are expected to learn to write in their disciplines by osmosis & to be able to make qualified choices regarding language