

Practical language work and reflective practice

The University of Edinburgh
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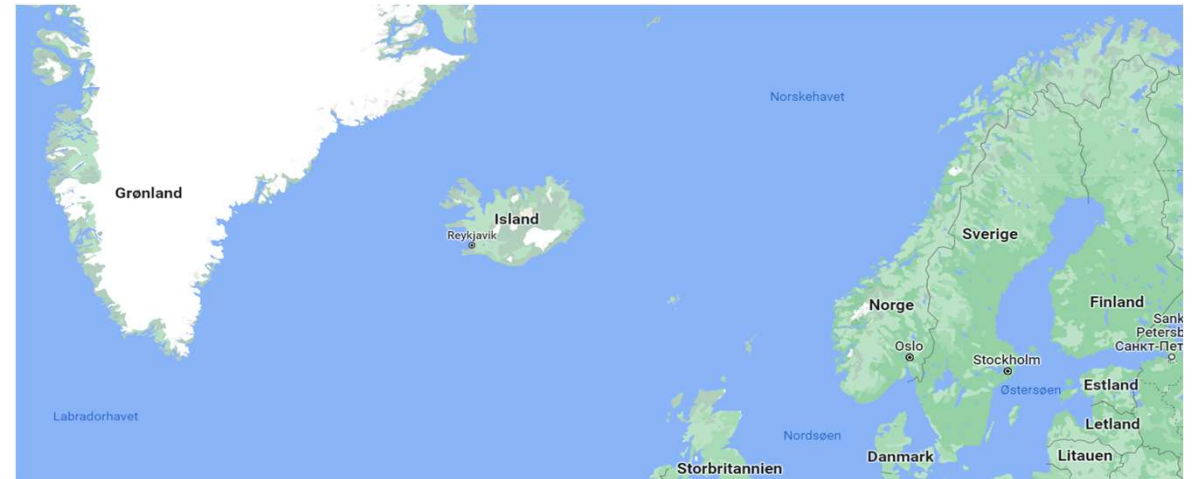
Julie Larsen, Lecturer in Danish, Scandinavian Studies
Department of European Languages and Cultures
School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures
CAHSS



[Young people](#) in the North by Mats Bjerde/norden.org is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Scandinavian Studies

- A degree in single-honours or joint honours Scandinavian Studies
- Students choose ONE language to specialise in
 - Danish, Norwegian OR Swedish
- (normally) ab-initio > CEFR C1+/C2
- Scandinavia (and by extension, the wider Nordic area) as a field of study: language, literature, history, culture...
- Students to gain an understanding of the other two main Scandinavian languages
- Compulsory 3rd year abroad in Denmark, Norway or Sweden



The course module

'Communicating Across the Scandinavian Languages' (10 credits) S2

2nd year students at Scandinavian Studies*

Aims:

- To increase understanding of the 3 main Scandinavian languages
- To help students reflect on their language learning journey and choice of Programme
- To facilitate belonging with Scandinavian Studies at Edinburgh
- To equip students with transferable skills and relevant graduate attributes

Solution:

1. Language input
2. Cross-language discussion
3. Reflective blog posts
4. Final summative academic reflective essay
5. (Translation module)

Introduction to reflection

A definition from the [Reflection Toolkit](#):

“(Critical) reflection is the conscious examination of past experiences, thoughts, and ways of doing things. Its goal is to surface learning about oneself and the situation, and to bring meaning to it in order to inform the present and the future. It challenges the status quo of practice, thoughts, and assumptions and may therefore inform our decisions, actions, attitudes, beliefs, and understanding about ourselves.”

Definitions and points from the [Reflection Toolkit](#) by Dr Gavin McCabe, Tobias Thejll-Madsen and others, licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#)

Introduction to reflection – writing and blogging

Writing is ideal for reflection (Bassot 2016:20)

- It slows down our thought processes
- Makes us think about what we are writing
- Helps us process and phrase our thoughts

[Research on blogging as assessment](#) shows increase in:

- Capacity for independent thoughts
- Writing technique
- Motivation
- Applied knowledge of the whole course content

(Learning Outcomes and Assessment)

On completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- Demonstrate a deeper understanding of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish;
- **Show awareness of their own and others' communicative strategies when operating across the Scandinavian languages**, and when translating from Scandinavian languages into English;
- **Communicate, present and interact with growing confidence** across a range of media, and across the mainland Scandinavian languages;
- **Present** research and **reflections in different formats**;
- **Demonstrate self-reliance, reflective abilities, initiative and the ability to work flexibly with others as part of a team.**

Module 1 → 40% Reflective Essay 1,000 words

Module 2 → 60% Translation project

(Graduate skills (from the DRPS))

- You will apply **knowledge, skills and understanding** in using a range of professional skills, techniques and practices associated with the subject (**intercommunication between the Scandinavian languages**, and translation from Scandinavian languages into English), a few of which are advanced and complex.
- You will develop skills to practise in ways that **show awareness of your own and others' roles, responsibilities and contributions** when carrying out and evaluating communicative tasks across the Scandinavian languages.
- You will learn to **work with others towards a common project**.
- You will develop your ability to **convey complex information** to a range of audiences and for a range of purposes, in a structured and coherent way.

Where students are

- 1½ year into learning a new language (Danish, Norwegian or Swedish)
- 6 months before compulsory Year Abroad
- Just after having learnt about the differences and similarities between Danish, Norwegian and Swedish (in the course 'Nordic Languages: Diversity and Historical developments')

Context and challenge

- The differences between the languages are so small that speakers of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish usually can understand each other with a bit of effort and practice
- Intercommunication in Scandinavia has been decreasing for a variety of reasons
- How to help students gain an understanding of the two other Scandinavian languages and how to assess the extent of this 'understanding'?

Format

Week 1:

2 introductory sessions: course info, reflective writing, the context and the theory (How well do the Scandinavians understand each other? Why would intercommunication be important?)

Weeks 2-4:

2 sessions each with a Danish-, Norwegian- and Swedish speaking tutor

- Tutor introduction → text/video → comprehension Qs
- Mixed groups (2-4 students) discuss the topics in their respective specialist languages
- Students write a reflective blog post (250-400w) about their experience and expectations for the next session. Tutor comments on each one*

Week 5: Feed-forward session, Q&A about 1,000 word reflective essay**

Week 6: Submit 1,000 word reflective essay

(Workflow)

Week	Topic	After class
1	Course introduction Introduction to reflective writing Detailed instructions in how to set up WordPress blog Intercommunication in Scandinavia in numbers, patterns, policies & strategies	Blog entry 1, 250-400 words on their own foreign language learning + individual feedback
2	Danish and group conversation x 2	Blog entry 2 + individual & group feedback
3	Norwegian and group conversation x 2	Blog entry 3 + individual feedback
4	Swedish and group conversation x 2	Blog entry 4 + individual feedback
5	Feedforward on blog posts and Q&A on summative assessment*	
6		Submission of 1,000 word reflective essay

Introducing and supporting reflective writing

How reflection was introduced to students

- Definition of reflection and possible benefits* and the idea of writing-as-thinking**
- How reflection aligns with the Learning Outcomes of the course
- Two examples of a personal blog entry: one descriptive and one reflective; students to discuss the difference
- Students' own first reflective exercise in class with optional sharing

* [Reflection Toolkit](#) by Gavin McCabe, Tobias Thejll-Madsen and others, licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) & Barbara Bassot: The Reflective Journal (2016)

** A report: PTAS Project Report: Every student a researcher: supporting the use of blogging as a form of student assessment, by Dr Nina Morris and Dr Hazel Christie.

[Blog](#) post on Teaching Matters

Introducing and supporting reflective writing

How students were supported

- Detailed description of how to set up their blog using WordPress + first short reflective piece to be posted before next class
- References to further resources
- Question prompts
- Individual feedback on all blog posts (up to 4 per student)
- Feedforward session with Q&A ahead of the final submission for 23-24*
- Marking criteria available

Engaging with reflective writing (1)

- "Despite having limited exposure to Scandinavian languages beyond my own specialist language I was eager going into this task. The intercommunication aspect of the Scandinavian languages was one that has interested me, and I was excited to get into it and understand the process."
- "The second session on Norwegian proved to be easier than Danish. The listening task was hard initially but with a second listen it was easier to understand."

Reflective writing is **not** characterised by:

- Description only
- Repetition
- Superficiality

Engaging with reflective writing (2)

“When in [Norway] over the summer I felt quite disheartened at the fact that I couldn’t understand [language standard B] that was around me such as road signs or information posters and **had to remind myself that I had no reason to understand it** as I am learning [language standard A]. Since then I have learned about the differences that I can now point out, and am now able to understand a significant amount more than I could before. **I felt quite proud of myself when** we were given a reading to do that was written in [language standard B] and I was able to understand most of it.

Some characteristics of reflective writing:

- Concrete details
- Examination of thoughts
- Evidence, rather than merely description, of development

Engaging with reflective writing (3)

”My expectations for Norwegian were limited, and having previously watched several hard-to-understand films in Norwegian (...), I assumed I would have difficulties. However, as soon as our teacher began speaking to us, I was surprised that I could follow the teacher’s pronunciation and distinguish individual words (...). Research does indeed point to higher understanding of Norwegian in Danish speakers than of Swedish (Frøshaug & Trende 2021). (...) Unfortunately however, as we moved onto a listening exercise, this mirage of confidence was somewhat broken by the colloquial, fast and complex Norwegian in the video. It was clear to see that my understanding was very person specific. Perhaps a naturally clear voice with the addition of useful hand gestures made our teacher easy to understand, but fast spoken colloquial Norwegian speech was another challenge altogether.”

Some characteristics of (academic) reflective writing:

- References the relevant literature
- Articulates and assesses own understanding

Engaging with reflective writing (4)

“Ultimately, I found this experience challenging at times with plenty of mistakes and difficulty in understanding much of the content for the Danish and Swedish weeks. However, I also learnt many valuable lessons which as a result will help me to be more confident. **I can now make use of strategies that will help me when I’m struggling to comprehend languages instead of being harsh on myself like I was in [Norway] and at the beginning of this course.** The benefits of this course also means that I can understand more Nordic Noirs without having to use English subtitles as this is something that I have always enjoyed. **I am also looking forward to speaking more confidently with my Swedish and Danish friends that I have as well as next year on my year abroad as I am hoping to visit my friends who will be in Denmark and Sweden.**”

Some characteristics of reflective writing:

- Demonstrates the ability to learn from mistakes or less positive aspects of experience
- Continues to reflect on what has been learned from the experience and how that might be applied elsewhere and in the future.

Assessing reflective writing

Analysis & application

1. How does the research on intercommunication contribute to your understanding of your own experiences with Scandinavian intercommunication in the classroom (or when engaging with the reading and listening materials autonomously)? Give examples, and remember to use references and give a bibliography at the end.
2. Which strategies did you choose to use, and to what extent did they work? Why did/didn't they work? Why did you choose them? Which strategies did others use, and how effective were they? Will you choose any other strategies next time, and why? Refer to strategies from one or more texts on the reading list. Give examples.
3. How effective was your understanding of the other Scandinavian languages, and what influenced your understanding? How did your understanding of the two other Scandinavian languages develop over time? What assumptions did you have beforehand? Which gaps in understanding did you have? Give examples.

Evaluation

1. Continue to critically reflect upon and evaluate your own approach to communicating and learning. Give examples.
2. Continue to articulate and critically assess your own understanding of the two other Scandinavian languages. Where relevant, demonstrate your problem-solving skills and/or the ability to learn from mistakes or less positive aspects of your experience.
3. Through your blogging, continue to reflect on what you have learned from your experience with Scandinavian intercommunication and how you might apply it elsewhere and in the future.

* Adapted from the [SLICC courses](#) and are used in conjunction with the DELC Common Marking Scheme

Reflecting on reflective writing: how did students 'do'?

Weekly blogs

- **High engagement** (250-400 words per piece)
(Tutor access only (no peers))

1,000 word final essay

- Marks from **50-76**
- Average **67**
- Median **68.5**

Reflecting on reflective writing: student feedback

Student responses to the question: What did you find most valuable [about the module]? (multiple answers allowed)

Highest score (80-100%)

- Feeling an increased degree of belonging to [the programme section]
- The opportunity to try intercommunication in practice in discussion groups
- Learning about the patterns of intercommunication in Scandinavia

Mid-score (40-60%)

- Learning about strategies I can use to improve intercommunication
- Learning about what it means to write reflectively

Low score (0%)

- The opportunity to practise blogging

*n=5

Reflecting on reflective writing: high points

- Accessibility and Inclusivity e.g. students can choose to participate in class and/or engage with material on their own via the VLE
- Good alignment with the [University's Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities](#), e.g. assessment not only **of** learning, but **as** and **for** learning
- Low risk of academic misconduct (for now) e.g. use of generative AI
- Good alignment with [CEFR: Mediation & plurilingual skills](#) (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – see slidenotes)

Reflecting on reflective writing: my tips

- Where does it fit into the programme you teach on? Consult Section colleagues and your L&T Director (mind the submission deadline to Board of Studies)
- Think the whole module through. What is the context? What's the theory you want students to apply?
- Make space in the beginning to introduce the theory, context and provide examples
- Use and provide internal and external sources on how to write reflectively
- Give 'something' of yourself. One initial example can be personal (but not private)
- Make informal, weekly blogposts formative – students **need** regular practice and feedback, and tutors should get recognition for providing feedback. Make sure students start reflecting right away!

References

- Bassot, Barbara: The reflective journal. Palgrave. 2016
- [DRPS 'Communicating Across the Scandinavian Languages'](#)
- McCabe, Gavin, Tobias Thejll-Madsen and others: The [Reflection Toolkit](#)
- Morris, Nina and Hazel Christie: [PTAS Project Report: Every student a researcher: supporting the use of blogging as a form of student assessment](#), 2018
- [SLICC courses](#)
- [The CEFR Companion](#), The Council of Europe, 2020
- [University's Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities](#), the University of Edinburgh, 2022

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Thank you!

Julie.Larsen@ed.ac.uk