



## Faculty of Humanities

# New ways of developing students' academic writing skills at the Faculty of Humanities

Pernille Rattleff, MSc, PhD (educational science), E-mail: [rattleff@hum.ku.dk](mailto:rattleff@hum.ku.dk)  
Specialkonsulent i skriftlighed

Constructive alignment

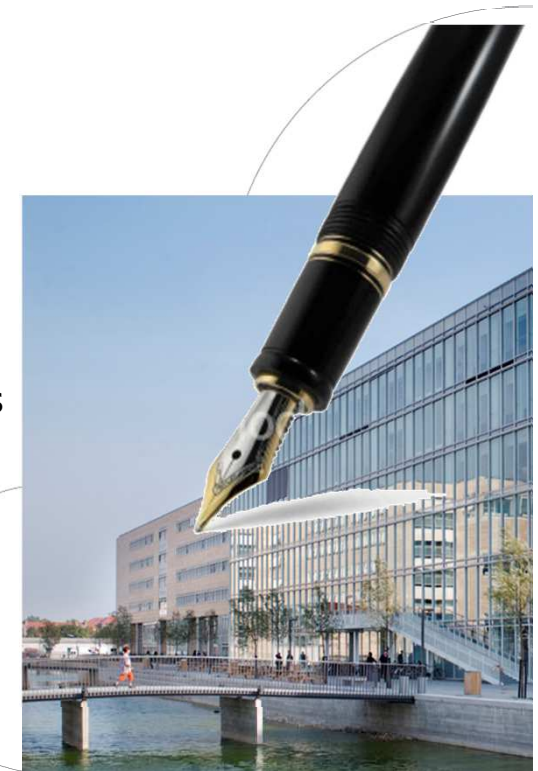
Students' leftovers from high school

My experience from the Faculty of Law

How to scaffold for students to develop academic writing skills

[www.cip.ku.dk](http://www.cip.ku.dk) • +45 35 32 86 39 • [cip@hum.ku.dk](mailto:cip@hum.ku.dk)

CIP SYMPOSIUM 2015 - Academic literacies: Writing in the Disciplines



## Constructive alignment: Exams at The Faculty of Humanities

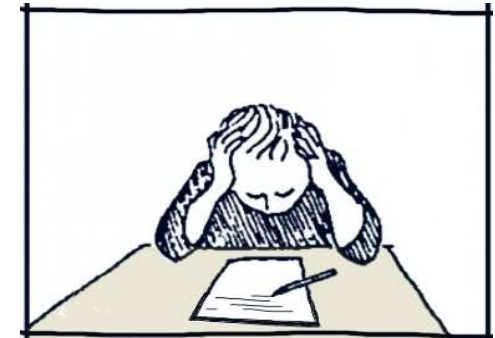
Summer 2015: Total number of students 11,000

Total number of exams 41,532

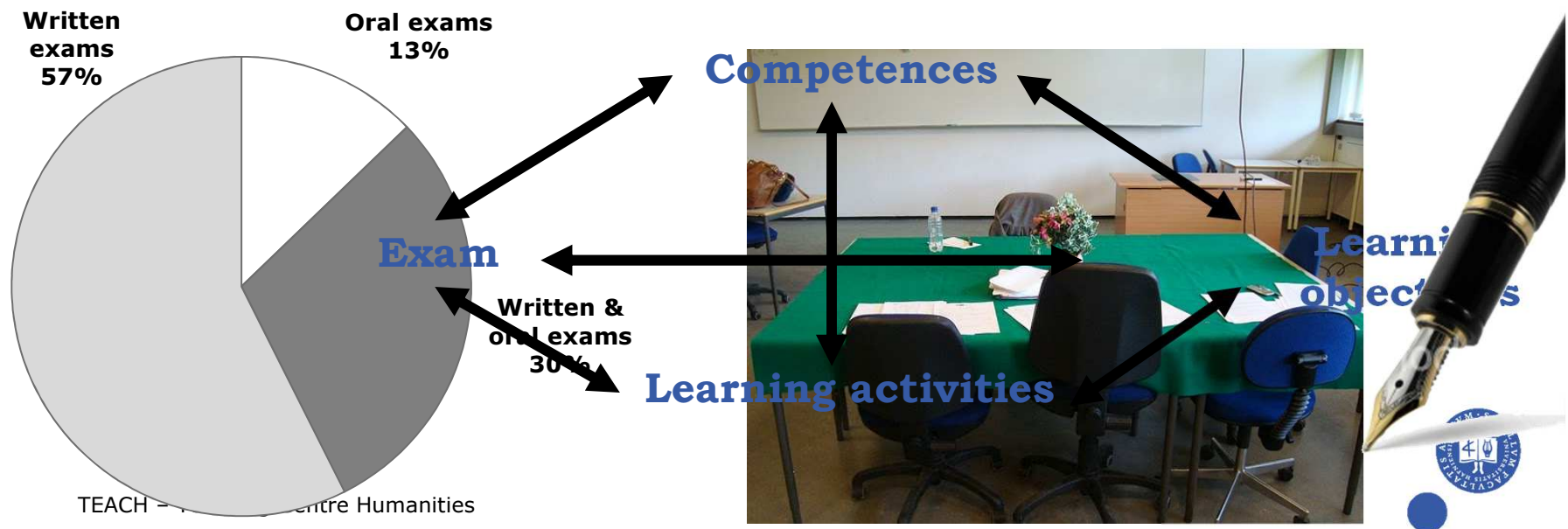
Only oral exams: 13%

Only written exams: 57%

Exams with both an oral and a written element: 30%



In short: 90% of all exams contains an element of writing!!



## The high school leftovers – the social science template

- Social science ('samfundsfag')
- The social science template for the written report/assignment:
  - Description ('Redegørelse')
  - Analysis ('Analyse')
  - Discussion ('Diskussion')
  - Evaluation ('Vurdering')
  - Conclusion
  - Contextualisation ('Perspektivering')
- Academic style: Passive instead of active form of the verbs, no I ('Der skrives ikke 'jeg' ...')
- High school pupils discuss and practice a lot of different genres in different subjects (e.g., Danish, math, social science, physics, etc.)
- Pupils hand in written homework that is corrected and graded by the teacher



## The thing about learning ...

David Ausubel, educational psychology:

*If I had to reduce all of educational psychology to just one principle, I would say this: The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him accordingly.*

Ausubel, D. P., Novak, J. D., & Hanesian, H. (Eds.) (1978), p. vi.



## My experience from the Faculty of Law

"You need only turn to any page of most legal briefs, judicial opinions, or law review articles to find convoluted sentences, tortuous phrasing, and boring passages filled with passive verbs."

Stark, 1984, p. 1389: "Why Lawyers Can't Write" in *Harvard Law Review*.

- The language is one of the jurists most important tools (Blume, 2011, p. 265)
- However, students get little or no explicit feedback on writing, language or style
- Thus, law students learn how to write by reading and imitating text-books
- Hence: The language paradox! Students spend 5 years learning the traditional legal language. Employers afterwards spend time and money to make the graduates forget all about that way of writing (Rosenmaier, 2013, p. 608)
- My experience: A lost cause – if teaching for students to acquire appropriate writing skills is not integrated in traditional legal courses
- My recommendations:
  - Integrate feedback on writing with academic feedback
  - Practice what you preach 😊



## How to scaffold for students to develop academic writing skills

- Students are offered a remedial course on linguistic correctness (to help with the mechanics of writing)
- Students are encouraged to form study groups and make use of peer-feedback on writing
- Teachers are encouraged to combine the traditional teaching in subject matters with ongoing feedback on students' writing:
  - More written assignments/short and easy exercises
  - More feedback on writing (from both peers and teachers)
  - Practicing the different parts of the academic paper (introduction, research question, theory, methodological design, analysis, etc.)
  - Introducing students to the writing process and different kinds of writing
  - Presenting samples of model texts to students
  - Discussing the purpose and the craftsmanship of academia with students



## References

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