Of all the new features of the new English syllabus one of the most conspicuous is that two of its three main areas concern language skills, and only one concerns content (culture, society and literature). This alone suggests that the syllabus involves a strengthening of the requirements for language competence. There is certainly no doubt that the requirements for language competence are more explicit than before, including, as they now do, definite aims for accuracy in spelling, grammar and vocabulary choice among the goals for communicative competence. It is also clear that the language competence objectives are inspired by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF).

The main areas
In the English translation of the syllabus for primary and lower secondary school and Vg1, the main areas “language learning” and “communication” are formulated as follows:

Language learning
The main area language learning focuses on knowledge about the language, language usage and insight into one’s own language learning. Being able to assess one’s own language use, define one’s own needs and select strategies and ways of working are requirements for attaining this. The main focus is on seeing what is involved in learning a new language and seeing relationships between English, one’s native language and other languages.

Communication
The main area of communication focuses on using the English language to communicate. Communication is achieved through listening, reading, writing, prepared oral production and spontaneous oral interaction, including the use of appropriate communication strategies. It also includes participation in various social arenas, where it is important to train to master an increasing number of genres and forms of expression. Good communication requires knowledge and skills in using vocabulary and idiomatic structures, pronunciation, intonation, spelling, grammar and syntax of sentences and texts.

Note that ‘language learning’ includes strategies for learning, in addition to the expected mastery of language components. Furthermore, the ability to assess one’s own language use and define one’s needs is emphasized. Hopefully this ability will stimulate pupils to progress in their language learning, as studies show that pupils now often stagnate at a certain level.

Interestingly, the term ‘communicative competence’ is not used at all in the new syllabus — possibly because the term lacks precision in spelling, grammar and vocabulary choice among the goals for communicative competence. It is also clear that the language competence objectives are inspired by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF).

The competence objectives are formulated in “can-do terms”. Thus the important thing is that pupils can demonstrate and apply their skills. In principle, each of the objectives should state a measurable competence or skill. The objectives are ambitious, and it is quite clear that not everybody is going to reach them. The final assessment (the marks, or grade) will show the extent to which the objectives have been reached. Among the competence objectives listed under “Communication” for Vg1 are:

The pupil shall be able to
- express himself/herself in writing and orally with fluency, precision and coherence
- write formal and informal texts with good structure and coherence on personal, interdisciplinary and social topics
- select appropriate listening, speaking, reading and writing strategies adapted to the purpose, situation and genre

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These competence objectives, and how to deal with them, can be illustrated by looking at a sample text, taken from www.skoleforum.com, one of the websites where pupils upload their own essays. This text has the title 'Crime – our responsibility'. The paragraphs quoted below open the essay.

Crime

Crime is a major problem in modern society and not many are aware of that everyone is responsible for preventing it. Lots of people think that the police is taking care of the crime problem, but how can they take care of such an enormous plague to our community. If everyone would be participating in stopping most of the crime in their neighbourhood, wouldn't we then prevent a lot of crime? At least, I thing so. Because every normal citizen hate to see his or her vicinity get crushed by crime, I think most people would gladly join a crime-preventing program. If someone just took the initiative to start such a project. What if the government could make a comity, which each year could do something to help the youth get better environment. My guess is that most of criminals is young people who haven't a very good home or maybe not a good home at all. Those could easily be helped if someone just would do something about it. It is very easy to say that someone else could do something. In fact, that is how everyone reacts each time crime take place.

The communication objectives for Year 1 require a fairly advanced level of language awareness. This pupil is fairly successful in regards vocabulary, in spite of the occasional glitch, such as the misused 'plague' in the first paragraph. He or she has also created a text with relatively good structure and coherence. Furthermore, the pupil shows an ability to 'use the forms and structures of the language in a written presentation.' The text is somewhat less successful when it comes to accuracy in spelling and grammar, and especially in the choice of – or consistency in – style level.

Many studies of learner language (e.g. Granger 1998) show that pupils generally carry informal features from conversation over to their written output, so it is mostly the more formal registers that have to be taught. Some linguistic features give the sample text an informal, conversational character – for example its incomplete sentences, contracted forms and question-answer sequences. These features can, it is true, be used to good rhetorical effect, but are easily overused in writing. Moreover, two of the questions are not followed by a question mark, which makes it slightly difficult for the reader to understand them correctly. The text is thus somewhat deficient as regards precision, and to some extent as regards sentence structure. Furthermore, the writer does not seem to have chosen a writing strategy appropriate to genre and purpose. It seems that the over-arching purpose has been to write enough on the topic to fill an essay, rather than to think about how the topic and the arguments can be presented in a convincing manner in the relatively formal genre an argumentative essay.

The sample text does not demonstrate selection of an "appropriate" strategy, or use "content from different sources independently, critically and responsibly". That is, there is no evidence that sources have been used at all – on the contrary, there are markers of uncertainty, such as "I think, my guess is", which suggest that the writer is no authority on the topic. Moreover the essay – the extract and the remaining paragraphs – is almost completely lacking in facts or other evidence to support opinions and in examples of how people could "do something" to prevent crime. Clearly, in successful communication, the speaker/writer should have something to communicate, and in this genre there ought to be some facts or evidence to back up the arguments, if the text is to be effective.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF)
The way the main areas “Language learning” and “Communication” have been formulated and elaborated in the competence objectives is, as we pointed out above, clearly inspired by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The CEF was developed by the Council of Europe in order to provide “a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively” (CEF, p.1).

Unlike the Norwegian syllabuses for English, the CEF does not specify content, but is very
explicit in defining communicative skills at different levels. There are three main skill levels: A (basic user), B (independent user), and C (proficient user). Each level is divided into two, spanning from beginner (A1) to a competent native speaker (C2). By comparison, the competence objectives in language and communication for Vg1 roughly correspond to the CEF levels B2 or C1. Below are brief descriptions of these levels (CEF, p. 24).

**Independent user (B2)**

Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

**Independent user (C1)**

Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.

The above quotes are from the so-called "global scale", which summarises language competence at each level. The requirements are specified and sorted according to skills in chapter 4 of CEF. For instance, the requirements for "vocabulary range" and "grammatical accuracy" at B2 and C1 are as follows:

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**Sources**


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<th><strong>B2</strong></th>
<th><strong>C1</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Vocabulary range</strong></td>
<td>Has a good range of vocabulary for matters connected to his/her field and most general topics. Can vary formulation to avoid frequent repetition, but lexical gaps can still cause hesitation and circumlocution.</td>
<td>Has a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions; little obvious searching for expressions or avoidance strategies. Good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grammatical</strong></td>
<td>Good grammatical control; occasional ‘slips’ or non-systematic errors and minor flaws in sentence structure may still occur, but they are rare and can often be corrected in retrospect.</td>
<td>Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare and difficult to spot.</td>
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