

National English Language Competition 2015/2016

Hosted by the University of Tartu

Last posting date: 18 January 2016

Address: Anglistika osakond, Ülikooli 18, Tartu 50090

Important dates:

- 18 January 2016 – Last posting date for the research paper
- 15 February 2016 – The names of the finalists will be disclosed
- 26-27 February 2016 – Final competition at the University of Tartu, oral presentations of the projects

General topic: ‘Mind the Gap’: Cross-cultural communication

The aim of the National English Language Competition is to create interest in topics concerning the English language and the societies and cultures of the UK, USA and other English-speaking countries, such as Australia, Canada, India, etc. We seek to develop students’ understanding of different cultural phenomena and intercultural links, but especially to guide them to see the points of connection between the English and Estonian culture through independent research and analysis. The general aim is to encourage students with academic interests in their first scholarly endeavours and to offer them an opportunity to hone their skills of research, analysis and writing in English. This not only meets one of the requirements of the Estonian National Curriculum but also improves analytical and writing skills that students will need on entering the labour market.

This year we specifically invite students to think about issues related to cross-cultural communication in our multicultural and multilingual reality – an important topic in Estonia as well as the rest of the world today. Cross-cultural communication takes an interest in how people from various cultural backgrounds communicate, the similarities and differences in their ways, and issues that arise when people interact across cultures. We invite students to think about the cultural as well as political side of cross-cultural communication as a vehicle for building relations, resolving conflicts and constructing cultural identities.

We suggest that students concentrate on a specific issue that is manifested through a text, be it then a written text (literary texts, essays, a corpus of media texts) or a film text (TV shows, commercials and news included) that expresses an aspect of intercultural communication or -relations, and study the actual discussion and the consequences emerging from it. In this way, the research paper also develops the students’ skills of textual analysis and close critical engagement with the text (more details below).

We expect independent student research papers (10-15 double-spaced pages in 12-point Times New Roman font) on some question of intercultural communication (for general guidelines see *How to write a research paper*). The papers are supposed to show some background research but also to contain a clear section of independent analysis by the student. The paper should focus on one subject

area and clearly formulate a narrower research question within the area (some suggestions are given below). In view of the length of the paper, the topic should be relatively narrow to enable its in-depth analysis. The list below is not exhaustive but rather seeks to demonstrate the wealth of topics available and to stimulate students' imagination and creativity.

Students are not expected to copy topics from the list below but rather to choose a topic in accordance with their interests and wishes. We want to see students' ability to select an appropriate topic area, define a research question or hypothesis, gather information about it, analyse the information and draw conclusions from it.

Assessment

The papers will be assessed by the jury of the competition in one round and two stages. In the first stage the jury will assess the written paper, its content and its accordance to the requirements set for the projects (see How to Write the Research Project). The analytical side of the paper will be the main focus. Up to 15 best papers will advance to the second stage of assessment. The second stage will take place at the University of Tartu in the form of a mini conference where all participants will present the results of their research orally (the use of visual aids is permitted). This stage will assess the students' command of the topic of their paper, their ability to present the results in an oral presentation and to respond to spontaneous questions on the topic of the paper.

Possible research topics within the general theme '*Mind the Gap*': *Cross-cultural communication*:

The suggestions below are only suggestions and you may also choose to pursue other alternatives, as long as you stay grounded in the description and analysis of specific cases/texts. Although critical reading of previous work done in the field is central to any research, you should not forget your own empirical analysis.

- **English as *lingua franca* of the 21 century**

You may want to:

- take up an investigation into the patterns of communication involving English as an intermediary language between people of different ethnicities in social media,
- research a particular aspect of language teaching in Estonian schools as preparation for intercultural communication,
- take up an observation of the historical position and function of English in Estonia (as a language of business, education, etc.) as compared to other historically important languages, such as German or Russian,
- analyse a film/TV series where the (in)ability of people from different cultures to communicate effectively with each other is a central issue,
- etc.

- **Building intercultural intelligence and competence through communication**

You may want to:

- take a look at norms and values shaping the mind-set and behaviour of people coming from a specific culture as represented in a work of literature, film, TV series, a corpus of media/social media texts,
 - investigate the preparations made or efforts taken (by the government or any other party) to ease (or hinder) the encounter with another culture (think of laws concerning immigration and tourism, different public awareness campaigns or political slogans),
 - ability/inability to adapt the verbal and non-verbal expressions to the concrete culture involving translation, interpreting or any other form of transmission (e.g. the analysis of the translation of some work of fiction, film, TV series where culture is a central element),
 - etc.
- **National cultures and globalizing world**
 You may want to:
 - monitor how national cultures react to the cultural ‘other’, how they deal with newness and change, for example by analysing a corpus of media texts, political campaigns or different works of art (from literature to painting) or examples of popular culture,
 - take a look at a certain aspect of the national language and weigh the gains and losses of the phenomenon of foreign loans, ‘domestication’ of different foreign language words, investigate the national language policy and the effects it has had,
 - etc.
- **Cross-cultural communication as a form of constructing identities and creating or abolishing stereotypes**
 You may want to:
 - take a look at the many-sidedness of cultures and identities and research a certain aspect of the effect of communication or the lack of communication on constructing identities or stereotyping people (e.g. through literary texts, films, media texts, national symbols, political campaigns, etc.),
 - explore other aspects of cultural identities besides ethnicity/language like gender, regional background, class or age (e.g. through literary texts, films, media texts, national symbols, political campaigns, etc.),
 - etc.
- **Any other subject that resonates with the general topic ‘Mind the Gap’: Cross-cultural communication**

For writing guidelines see the general instruction sheet *How to write a research paper*

For further information please contact:

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