Teachers’ Response to Pupils’ Written Work in Year 9

Lärares kommentarer till elevers skrivna texter i år 9

Lejla Dindic Kominlija
Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine how a group of experienced teachers of English respond to pupils’ written work in year nine. Further, this study also examines what kind of responses a teacher of English gives to some pupils’ texts. The methods used combine semi-structured interviews and analysis of one teacher’s response to six texts written by pupils in year nine to gather the data needed. The main findings concern experienced teachers’ of English thoughts about providing feedback to pupils’ written work and the results from the analysis of a teacher’s response to six pupils’ texts. The teachers find it important to maintain a good balance between criticism and encouragement when providing feedback to pupils’ written work. Teachers use different formats and approaches depending on the type of learners and the type of texts and they always use predetermined criteria when responding to pupils’ written work. Further, the results from the analysis of the teacher’s response to six pupil texts show that the teacher focuses on language, content and task-specific requirements when responding to pupils’ written work.

Key words: English, teachers’ responses, assessment, writing
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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

I first became interested in the subject of writing assessment and teachers’ response to written work when one of my teachers at the school of teacher education gave us two different texts written by pupils. We were asked to read and grade the texts. In view of the fact that this was the first time throughout the entire teacher education that we were given the opportunity to give response to written production in class, this was a rather difficult assignment. Also, the fact that we were not given any background to the texts made it quite difficult to assess them. This made me think about real teaching situations and teachers that deal with different types of writing assessment every day. In their book *Theory & Practice of Writing* (1996), Grabe and Kaplan (1996) say that:

Responding to writing and writing assessment has important consequences for students as well as for teachers. Responding to students’ writing can greatly influence student attitudes to writing and their motivation for future learning. Students can be easily confused by unclear, vague, or ambiguous responses and can become frustrated with their writing progress. Alternatively, students can be positively motivated to explore many areas of knowledge and personal creativity through supportive and constructive responses to their writing. Unfortunately, there is no clear set of universal guidelines that will guarantee such a supportive and positive experience for all students. (p. 377)

As mentioned above, there is no clear set of universal guidelines that will guarantee a positive experience for each and every pupil. How do teachers deal with this challenge? How do teachers go about giving responses to their pupils’ written texts? Do they find it difficult or does it become easy with time? I realised that I do not know as much as I would like to know about assessment and responding.

Today most teachers provide helpful informal and formal feedback to pupils during the writing process. I hope that by looking at how experienced teachers of English respond to pupils’ written work and how they look at feedback in general, I will gain a better understanding of the nature of providing feedback and of writing assessment. Furthermore, I hope that this study will lead to a better understanding of what challenges teachers of English are faced with when responding to pupils’ written work.
1.2 Purpose statement and questions

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate what kinds of responses teachers give to pupils’ written stories in year nine. I aim to look at six texts written by pupils in year nine where the teacher has already made her comments. I am interested in seeing what kinds of responses this teacher of English gives to her pupils. I also aim to find out what a group of experienced teachers of English have to say about responding to pupils’ written texts. Knowledge and understanding of writing assessment and response to pupils’ written texts are very important cornerstones of English teaching.

My research questions are as follows:

- What kind of feedback does a group of experienced teachers of English give to pupils’ written work?

- What types of responses does one teacher of English give to some pupils’ written work in year nine?
2 Literature review

Writing assessment and response to writing have important consequences for pupils but also for teachers. Further, there are no clear guidelines for responding to pupils’ written work that guarantee that teachers provide every individual student with the best possible feedback. However, there has been some research about response and writing assessment which I will include in this section. I will also present opinions of various authors about responding to writing and writing assessment. In addition I will describe different types of assessment.

2.1 Assessment

Assessment is an important part of the educational system. The term assessment refers to a variety of ways of collecting information on a learner’s language ability or achievement. There are two main types of assessment, formative and summative assessment. According to Brown (2004), most of classroom assessment is formative assessment. Brown defines this concept as follows:

Formative assessment: evaluating students in the process of “forming” their competencies and skills with the goal of helping them to continue that growth process. (p. 6)

Further, all kinds of informal assessment should be formative, since the focus here is the ongoing development of the learner’s language. This means that when you give a student a comment or a suggestion, or call attention to an error, that feedback is offered in order to improve the learner’s language ability (Brown, 2004).

Summative assessment primarily aims at measuring and summarizing the pupil’s knowledge, usually at the end of a course or unit of instruction. This form of assessment implies looking back and estimating how much a pupil has grasped but does not necessarily point out the way to future progress. In my opinion, teachers must use both formative and summative assessment in their teaching. Further, there is analytic assessment and holistic assessment. Analytic assessment concentrates on independent aspects of the task while holistic assessment addresses the whole performance. However, analytic assessment is essential when providing formative feedback.
Brown (2004) also brings up the difference between informal assessment and formal assessment. Informal assessment can take a number of forms, all from unplanned comments and responses to feedback and coaching. Formal assessments, on the other hand, are more planned and systematic techniques of sampling that aim to give the teacher and the pupil an appraisal of the pupils’ achievements. However, according to Brown (2004) it is important to separate the terms assessment and testing. Tests are prepared administrative procedures that measure and evaluate a pupils gathered knowledge, while assessment is a much wider notion. Brown (2004) points out that assessment is an ongoing process and that all pupils’ performances lead to an assessment made by the teacher. According to Grabe and Kaplan (1996), writing assessment involves both teacher responses and more formal mechanisms for student evaluation. Further, evaluation of writing does not necessarily require grading.

2.2 Writing and response

In their book, Theory and practice of writing (1996), Grabe and Kaplan point out that most feedback to students on their writing appeared in the form of a final grade. This meant that the teachers would alert the students to all their mistakes. Today however, it is apparent to most teachers that such an approach would leave many confused students unable to work constructively on their writing skills.

It is important that teachers provide students with appropriate and effective responses since responding to writing and writing assessment have important consequences for students as well as for teachers. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) say that: “responding to students’ writing can greatly influence student attitudes to writing and their motivation for future learning” (p. 377). This can be difficult since there are no clear guidelines for responding that will give each and every pupil the best support. However, I believe that results from research and practice can certainly help teachers to do a better job in order to help every individual pupil during his/her writing process.

Moreover, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) state that one of the major positive impacts of the writing process approach has been the rethinking of responses to student writing.
A direct outcome of multiple drafts and pre-writing activities has been the exploration of ways in which teachers can assist students most effectively in their writing. (p. 378)

Further, student revision and teacher response has become central at all stages of the writing process. This includes pre-writing, first drafting, revising, and final-draft writing.

According to Grabe and Kaplan (1996), the range of possibilities for feedback is broad:

- teacher whole-class discussion of major points for revision
- teacher demonstrations of revisions with specific student essays
- teacher mini conferences in class
- one-on-one conferences away from the class
- written comments on essay drafts (p. 388)

Each of these options can be adjusted to meet the needs of particular groups of students.

Teachers usually respond to student writing through written comments and comments can be offered at any point in the writing process. While responding, a teacher can adapt different approaches and formats. According to Grabe and Kaplan (1996), the most common choices include descriptive written commentary, comments for revising major content and organisation of the essay, and prose-editing responses on major editorial weaknesses. In accordance to Grabe and Kaplan (1996), some researchers believe that written commentary is the least effective form of feedback while others suggest that written commentary is a practical and effective approach when used appropriately.

According to Grabe and Kaplan, when responding to students written texts teachers should:

- find something positive to say about any essay
- raise a number of specific questions which will allow students to carry out revisions
- make suggestions for changing the organisation
- provide a small set of concrete suggestions for improving the structural and mechanical aspects of the text

They also emphasize that comments on a text should avoid

- exclusive attention to surface conventions (e.g. spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, hyphenation)
- vacuous commentary or notation
• comments that overwhelm the students with a sense of failure

Further, Grabe and Kaplan state that students can be easily confused by unclear, vague, or ambiguous responses and can become frustrated with their writing progress.

According to Brown (2004), there are some guidelines for assessing the initial stages (the first draft or two) of a written composition. These guidelines are generic for teacher response but also for self and peer response. Further, every assessor needs to modify the list according to the level of the learner, the context and the purpose for responding.

The initial stages in composing can be assessed as follows:

• Focusing on meaning, main ideas, and organisation
• Commenting on the introductory paragraph
• Making general comments about the clarity of the main idea and logic or appropriateness of the organisation
• Ignoring minor grammatical and lexical errors
• Indicating what appear to be major (global) errors (e.g., by underlining the text in question), but allow the writer to make corrections
• Not rewriting questionable, ungrammatical, or awkward sentences, instead probing with questions about the meaning
• Commenting on features that appear to be irrelevant to the topic (p. 247)

2.3 Assessment in the syllabus for English for year 9

According to the syllabus for English for year 9, assessment of speaking and writing should emphasize the following:

Bedömningen av de produktiva färdigheterna tala och skriva skall inriktas på hur klart och samt med vilken ledighet, variation och språklig säkerhet eleven kan uttrycka och förmedla ett sammanhängande budskap. När det gäller elevens förmåga att skriva engelska inriktas bedömningen också på framställningens klarthet och tydlighet samt på elevens förmåga att binda samman satser och meningar.

Further, when it comes to goals to aim for, the syllabus for English for year 9 states that the school in its teaching of English should aim to ensure that pupils develop their ability to express themselves with variety and confidence in writing in order to relate, describe and explain, as well as give reasons for their views. Further, when it comes to
goals that pupils should have attained by the end of the ninth year in school, the syllabus for English for year 9 states that pupils should be able to ask for and provide information in writing, as well as relate and describe something.

According to the grading criteria for the written production in the National Tests in English in year 9, the pupil’s ability and willingness to express himself/herself in English should be the central criteria when analysing and assessing.

2.4 Teachers’ roles when responding

How do teachers go about responding to pupils’ written work? Do they take on different roles when responding? Tribble (1996) mentions four basic roles that teachers can take on when they respond to texts written by pupils. They can take the role of an audience, the role of assistants, the role of evaluators and the role of examiners. Further, a teacher can take on these roles at different stages in the writing process. As audience, teachers have the same responsibilities as any reader and can therefore not only concentrate on mistakes but also respond to pupil’s ideas and feelings. As assistants, teachers see the writing as work in progress and help the pupils to improve their knowledge. As evaluators, teachers no longer try to improve the text. Instead they comment on the pupils’ overall performance with the aim to help them write more effectively in the future. Evaluation is done when a piece of writing is considered to be finished or at the end of a course. As examiners, teachers have to assess pupils’ writing, as objectively as possible. This assessment is usually based on explicit criteria and at this point a specific grade is given. According to Tribble (1996), different approaches to the teaching of writing can require different types of response from the teacher. Further, another thing that can provide and influence the framework for the comments that teachers make are the four types of knowledge that a writer needs in order to write successfully – knowledge of content, context, language system and the writing process.
3 Method

3.1 Method and process

I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews because I felt that the chosen area of investigation would best be served by using a qualitative approach. What is meant by semi-structured interviews is that although researchers come to the interview with guiding questions, they are open to following the leads of informants and probing into areas that arise during the interview. According to Hatch (2002), the central strength of interviewing is that it provides opportunities for doing what is very difficult or impossible to do any other way and that is finding out “what is on someone else’s mind”. One negative aspect of interviewing is that individuals may be reluctant to share what is on their minds. Further, researchers may lack sensitivity, time or interview expertise. I gave the same questions to all the teachers interviewed, but I also tried to follow up their answers by asking them additional questions. I contacted the teachers to be interviewed by phone and some by e-mail. I explained the purpose of the study and how long the interviews would take. All the teachers received my questions in advance of the interviews (see appendix).

The main interview categories were:

- Student writing in year 9
- Procedures when responding
- Balance between criticism and encouragement
- Teachers thoughts about how students can develop their writing

The interviews were conducted in private in different classrooms. All interviews were transcribed right after the interview which made it possible for me to go back and ask the teachers for further clarifications. I also asked one of the teachers to give me six texts written by pupils in year 9 where she already had made her comments.
3.2 Selection

I chose to interview four teachers, all working at a school with levels 6-9 and the school is situated in south of Skåne. When I selected the teachers to be interviewed I took into consideration how long they had been working as teachers. I needed experienced teachers of English for my research. By that I do not mean to degrade young teachers. I however believe that experience does contribute to a better knowledge and understanding. The gender of the teachers was not of importance. One of the teachers interviewed on the subject agreed to give me six texts written by students in year nine and her comments attached to the texts. All six texts were a result from the same assignment where all pupils received the same information. I chose to look at texts where pupils tell and describe an event. The reason for choosing such texts was mainly because the syllabus for English in year nine states that pupils should, among other things, be able to tell and describe something which the assignment required.

3.3 Ethical aspects

The participants should, according to Johansson & Svedner (2006), receive a comprehensible description of the methods used in the investigation but also a description of the purpose of the study. In addition to the interviews, the teachers received a description of my investigation by e-mail containing the above mentioned parts. Further, the participants should, according to Johansson & Svedner (2006), be sure that their anonymity is protected and it should not be possible to identify school, teacher or the pupil. The teachers taking part in this study were promised anonymity as well as a copy of the final results. The interviewees could at any stage choose to discontinue their participation. The six texts written by pupils were nameless and will be presented in numbers 1-6.

3.4 Discussions of methods

To what extent can this investigation give a “true” picture of what a group of teachers of English have learned about responding to pupils’ written texts? To what extent do the types of responses that a teacher of English gives to some pupils’ written texts in year nine provide a relevant picture of what teacher response is like?
According to Johansson & Svedner (2006), in order to get a true picture of what is on the interviewee’s mind, the interviewer should ask questions that are familiar to the interviewee, i.e. questions about his/her concrete experiences. Another thing that can affect the outcome of an interview, according to Hatch (2002), is the relationship between the interviewer and the informant. Since I only had a relationship to one of the interviewees, who was my supervisor during my teaching practice, I do not believe that it will have a negative affect on the trustworthiness of this study. Further, I followed the seven tips for successful interviews presented in Hatch’s book *Doing Qualitative Research in Educational Settings*. Moreover, I would say that the credibility of my results from analysing the teacher’s responses to the six texts written by pupils in year nine, will be at high level. All six texts resulted from the same assignment and the texts were commented on by the same teacher. Additionally, the texts were written and commented on before I told the teacher about my investigation. In other words, the teacher’s responses were not influenced in any way.

I believe that I received honest and relevant answers to my questions from the four teachers interviewed on the subject. All questions asked were familiar to the teachers and I occasionally received spontaneous comments on the subject. This has a positive effect on the interview and according to Chiseri-Starter and Sunstein (1997), the best interviews sometimes come from a comment, a story, an artifact or a phrase you could not have anticipated. I am, however, aware of the fact that it is not possible to draw general conclusions from my investigation since only four interviews were carried out.
4 Results

This results chapter includes some quotes from the interviews with four teachers of English. I present the results from the interviews with a focus on different opinions under the following headings:

- Procedures when responding
- Balance between criticism and encouragement
- Teachers thoughts about how students can develop their writing and what, in their opinion, is a well written story

The reason I chose to analyse different opinions is because that is, according to Johansson & Svedner (2006), the best approach when all participants have similar experiences which they do in this case. In addition, I will offer a brief presentation of my interviewees and their names have been anonymised.

Sara is 34 years old and she has been working as a teacher of Swedish and English for seven years. During her studies she also worked as a substitute teacher for two years. Sara has been working at the same school during her entire professional career.

Lena is 45 years old and she is a teacher of English, French and Swedish. During her professional career, Lena has worked at both secondary and upper secondary schools. Today she works at a secondary school where she has been working for almost ten years.

Sandra is 33 years old and she is a teacher of English and Swedish. Sandra has been working at the same school since she graduated six years ago.

Per is a teacher of English and German. He has taught English for 40 years at different levels, most of the time in grades 7-9.
4.1 The teachers’ thoughts on responding to students’ written work

Teachers’ procedures when responding
I asked the teachers to describe how they go about responding to pupils’ written work.

Per described the method he uses when responding to proficiency tests;

“To get a global assessment I read the texts without giving any written response three times and put them in three different piles (the best ones to the left, the majority in the middle and the rest to the right) Then I mark the best parts of the texts with “GOOD!!!” And the written criticism is added after the texts.

One of the teachers, Sara, says that, when responding to pupils’ texts, she corrects only obvious mistakes. If there are many errors in the text, she only corrects the big ones. She underlines the mistake and writes the correct word or sentence. However, in cases where the text has only a few mistakes she corrects them all.

Another teacher said:

“Nowadays I make a “matrix” and check how the text corresponds to that. It is important that the aim of the written task is fulfilled, e.g. if the aim is grammatical, past tense, then that is more important than super correct facts or other grammatical things” (Lena).

Sandra explained that she reads the text and then she writes her comment. She also underlines and corrects what is wrong in the text. After she has returned the text, she makes sure that the pupils really understand the mistakes they have made. Sometimes she asks each and every pupil if he/she has any questions about the errors they have made.

All teachers include a written commentary in their responses to pupils’ written texts. One teacher uses + and - -columns and often marked “matrices”. All four teachers state that they always use predetermined criteria when responding to pupils’ written texts. One of the teachers, Per, pointed out that the only time he does not use predetermined criteria is when pupils write personal letters. When it comes to using different approaches and formats depending on the group of learners and the type of text, all teachers said that they adapt their corrections and approaches in one way or another. Per explained that he concentrates on contents and verb forms when responding to texts written by weaker learners. Further, Per explained that his pupils had to write mini-texts every fortnight for 5-10 minutes. They write them on the right-hand side in their exercise books and he adds his response on the left-hand side. In this case, he concentrates on how well they pass on information or give reasons in support of or
against a particular point of view. Another teacher explained that some groups prefer getting their responses written on a separate piece of paper.

**Balance between criticism and encouragement**

All four teachers find it more or less difficult to maintain a good balance between encouragement and criticism when responding to pupils’ written texts. One of the teachers said:

“Sometimes it is difficult. They’re often so focused on what mark they get so that they don’t always care about the comments. They’re not always susceptible. They don’t use them enough for improvements in other, later, tasks” (Sara).

The teachers found it important to give the pupils both positive and negative feedback. It is important to be critical and to make sure that the pupils understand what they have done wrong but the encouragement is also very important so that the text gets even better next time. In other words, it is important that pupils understand and know how to use the comments they get in order to improve their writing.

When I asked the teachers what methods they use when giving written response to their pupils in order to encourage them to improve their writing, I got quite comparable answers. One teacher said:

“I try to lift the positive aspects of the text. What did he/she do well. I try to show and explain my corrections by giving examples on the things they have done wrong in order to make sure that they understand my written response after I returned the text” (Sandra).

All teachers said that they usually start by saying something positive about a pupil’s text in order to encourage him/her. “Too much criticism will not improve their English” (Per).

One teacher said that she avoids using a red pencil when giving written commentary. “You can actually see their faces changing when they receive their paper. They are simply afraid of the “red pencil” (Sara).

**The teachers’ thoughts about how students can develop their writing**

All four teachers agree that pupils need challenge. They need to write as much as possible. English has been given a lot of space in today’s Sweden. Pupils encounter the English language through different types of media, in school and outside of school. This is positive according to the teachers interviewed on the subject because all these factors
contribute to a higher level of knowledge of the English language. According to Sara, pupils can develop their writing by writing, by using their comments actively, by being aware of aims and goals and, by challenging themselves. Another teacher emphasizes the importance of reading activities. She says, “I often let the pupils read each others texts. This way they can see similar problems in their own writing” (Sandra). Another teacher mentioned using peer responding but she stated that it does not work in every group since all pupils can’t handle that kind of responsibility.

According to the teachers interviewed on the subject, the following characteristics and abilities typify a successful year 9 pupil when it comes to writing:

- Good general language knowledge
- That the pupil is secure when it comes to grammar, spelling and fluency.
- Good vocabulary
- She/he dares to use his/her language for different types of texts
- She/he adjusts her/his language for different types of readers.

**The teachers’ description of a good story written by pupils in year 9**

All four teachers gave similar descriptions of what they view as a good story written by pupils in year 9. This is how they would describe a good story written by pupils in year nine:

- Good contents
- Good Fluency and sentence structure
- Good command of words and phrases, e.g. a varied vocabulary
- Good command of forms, e.g. not too many basic grammatical mistakes

One of the teachers put it this way: “A story containing personal reflections, a story that you can easily follow as a reader, without to many grammatical mistakes and with idiomatic expressions” (Sandra).

**A summary of the results of the interviews**

The results from interviews show that teachers respond to pupils’ written work using different approaches and formats depending on the type of learners and the type of text.
Additionally, all teachers interviewed on the subject state that they use predetermined criteria when responding to pupils’ written work and all teachers include a written commentary in their responses. Finding the balance between criticism and encouragement is not, according to the teachers, the easiest thing to do. However, all four teachers agree that it is important to encourage the pupils so that they can improve their proficiency, learn to express their thoughts, feelings and points of view. Some teachers believe that in order to improve their writing skills, pupils need to write something every week. Other teachers emphasize the importance of reading activities and goal awareness. Teachers also agree on the fact that pupils must challenge themselves in order to become successful in their writing.

4.2 A teacher’s written response to some student texts

In this section I present my findings from the six texts written by pupils in year nine and the teacher’s feedback to the texts. As background information, I offer a brief presentation of the teacher, the assignment and the grading criteria for the task.

The teacher who assigned and responded to the six texts is a teacher of English, French and Swedish. She has been working as a teacher for thirteen years. Today she works at a school teaching levels 6-9.

The six texts are a result from a writing assignment called Travel Diary. (see appendix) The pupils in year 9 were asked to write about what they have experienced during a trip. They were asked to write it as if they were writing their diary. The text had to be written in the past tense where the reader could, by reading the text, follow the trip geographically. Further, the pupils had to make the countryside “alive”, visit a famous sight, visit a big city and meet a person or a couple of people. The pupils were asked to make themselves visible in the text and to make the writing personal.

The pupils wrote a first and a final draft. After writing the first draft, the pupils received feedback from the teacher and from their peers and got the opportunity to improve their texts. However, I only present the feedback provided to the final draft (see appendix).
In text 1 the teacher gave feedback by e-mail and that is also presented. For texts 2-6 however, I only present the teacher’s written comments.

In addition, the pupils received the grading criteria for the assignment. The grading criteria are divided into two parts, the task-specific criteria and the general criteria. The task-specific criteria include the content, the personalisation and the grammatical requirements mentioned above. The general criteria include knowledge about life in an English – speaking country, spelling and grammar, and vocabulary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task-specific criteria</th>
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<th>MVG</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The reader can follow your trip geographically.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• You have written about when you visited a famous sight in the country.</td>
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<td>• You tell your reader about your meeting with one or several South African(s) or Canadian(s).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• You have included a big-city visit in your text.</td>
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<td>Personalisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your text is written in the first person (i.e. you use /). At a few occasions you briefly give your opinion on what you have seen or done.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Today I went to the Kruger National Park. It was very interesting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>You use the first person to tell the story as if it were really your trip. You have mentioned how a few aspects of the trip made you feel or react.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Today I went to the Kruger National Park. It was very interesting but also quite scary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grammatical requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your text is mainly written in past tense. There are a few mistakes in the choice of tense.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your text is written in past tense only.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your text is confidently written in past tense and there are no errors in the choice of verb form. You use the present only when the context allows you to do so.</td>
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<tr>
<td>She looked angrily at me and screamed: &quot;What do you think you’re doing?&quot;</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

General criteria

Knowledge about life in an English-speaking country

You show that you know basic facts about the country you have visited. You also know something about what it is like to live there.

A. I ate two hamburgers today.
B. The white guy I met at the beach yesterday seems to have a lot of money. He told me that they have help at home.

You easily bring facts about the country into your text. At a few occasions you use details to show that you have gained an understanding of what it is like to live there.

A. Today I tasted the traditional Canadian hamburger with mushrooms.
B. The white guy I met at the
beach invited me to his house for dinner. I was a bit surprised when a black guy pulled out my chair as we were getting seated. I didn’t know what to choose. Either a traditional Canadian A. hamburger with mustard or the exotic dish with salmon from the Restigouche River.

B. I went to see the white guy I’d met at the beach. When I was at his house I thought about who the black guy who waited on us really was. What was his life really like? Was he one of the many young people who wouldn’t have a place to live if he hadn’t taken this job? I had seen many homeless people from the bus window.

Spelling and grammar

Your language is clear. Spelling and grammar errors do not make it difficult to understand what you mean.

The few spelling and grammar errors do not make your text less clear.

Your confident use of words and structures shines through in your small number of spelling and grammar errors.

Vocabulary

Your vocabulary is simple and correct.

Your vocabulary is varied and adapted to the chosen task. You use a few linking words to make your text clear and easy to follow.

Your vocabulary is varied, nuanced and adapted to the task. You use linking words with confidence to make your text clear and coherent.

I will present my findings from the six texts in a running text using the following categories:

- The focus of the teacher’s response
  I will look at what the teacher focuses on in her comments and how she deals with content and language.

- The use of the grading criteria
  How does the teacher use the grading criteria in her written feedback?

- Teacher’s suggestions
  To what extent does the teacher provide the pupil with suggestions for improving the text?
The focus of the response
In her response to the six texts written by pupils in year nine, the teacher mainly focuses on language, content and the task-specific requirements.

In one of her comments the teacher wrote: “you have managed to include a lot of facts in a fairly short text, and yet made it personal” (text 1). This refers to one of the task-specific requirements. Moreover, the teacher comments on language in all six texts. In her response to one of the texts she wrote: “Your way of writing is full of descriptions, idiomatic expressions, and an advanced vocabulary” (text 4). To another pupil she wrote: “Your way of writing has an advanced vocabulary and advanced built phrases, and you have good use of conjunctions and grammar” (text 5). When providing feedback by email, the teacher clarifies what kind of language errors a pupil has made by using different colours.

Commentary key:
- **Pink**: verb form/tense
- **Yellow**: punctuation marks
- **Red**: spelling mistakes/preposition use/grammar mistakes
- **Green**: Swenglish.

Another conclusion I can draw from looking at how the teacher goes about providing feedback to pupils’ texts is that she starts by commenting on the task specific requirements. In this case, by doing that she also comments on content.

The use of the grading criteria
The teacher uses the grading criteria actively when assessing her pupils’ written texts. She comments on the content requirements for the task when giving feedback to all six texts. In her comments to text 1 she wrote: “when you look at what kind of facts you’ve included, you will notice that by reading your text, you won’t be able to get an overall picture of the country.” Another requirement for this task was to make it personal. In all six comments she points out to what extent the pupil managed to make her/his text personal. In her comments to text 4 she wrote:
“Well personalized and somewhat romantic! You've followed the instructions and you've given the reader a vivid picture of Canada, especially art wise”.

Further, the task specific-criteria included a grammatical requirement. The pupils were asked to write their text in the past tense. In her feedback to text 1 she wrote: “You do however make some serious grammar and verb mistakes”. Grammatical requirements were also included in the general criteria for the task. In her comments to all five texts the teacher comments on how well the pupils use the past tense. In her comments to text 2 she wrote: “It isn’t always easy to understand your English. There are gaps in your knowledge of grammar, which we need to work on together. You need help with a couple of basic grammatical elements”. (my translation) To another pupil she wrote: “Past tense is absolutely fine”(text 6).

**Teacher suggestions**

The teacher provides the pupils with suggestions on how they can improve their text. In her comments to one of the pupils she wrote: “You could have made so much more of the meeting with this Baruti-guy for instance”. In her feedback to text 6 the teacher wrote: “Improvement areas: Uncertainty concerning: there is/ there are/ it is/ that is/it was/there were etc. Challenge your vocabulary”. However, when it comes to spelling and grammar the teacher sometimes only marks the errors without providing the pupils with the correct correspondence when giving feedback by email. This is true for the feedback that the teacher gave to text 1.

**Dear diary**

Today me and my family started our trip to South Africa. South Africa is a medium large country in Africa, there are 44 million inhabitants and they have lots of official languages, like English and nine native African languages. We took the train from Malmoe to Kastrup in Copenhagen, from there we took a flight that stopped in Maroco before it continues to south Africa. When we arrived in Capetown we were pretty tired, so we went to our hotel and took a nap. After the nap I wanted to check out the city so me and my brother went out to go to the beach and such, while my mom went out on a shopping found. We met up at a little restaurant at 19,00 and eat. When it started to get dark my brother Oscar and me went out on city once again to check out the night life, but my mom didn’t thought that it was a good idea so we got back to the hotel about 23,00, and went to bed as fast as we got home.
5 Discussion and analysis

It was very interesting to interview the teachers and to look at the feedback a teacher gives to her pupils’ texts. I believe that I have gained very interesting and valuable information about response to pupils’ written work. Reading the literature also had a beneficial effect. From the data I have gathered, the teachers’ thoughts about responding to pupils’ written texts are rather similar. I was also able to draw parallels between how teachers answered the questions and the kind of feedback a teacher gives to some pupil texts.

5.1 Four teachers’ thoughts

This study shows that teachers respond to pupils’ written work using their own strategies. This is quite natural in my opinion. However, all teachers use different approaches and formats depending on the type of learners and the type of text. It is, according to the teachers, very important to provide pupils with the type of feedback that they need. Here I can only agree. This opinion is also held by Grabe and Kaplan (1996).

Additionally, all teachers interviewed on the subject state that they use predetermined criteria when responding to pupils’ written work. This is positive in my opinion. Also, the fact that the pupils got to see the grading criteria in addition to the assignment, contributed to a better result.

Although some researchers believe that written commentary is the least effective form of feedback, this study shows that written feedback is an effective approach when used appropriately. I would say that this is true for any kind of feedback. However, one of the teachers interviewed explained that the pupils sometimes forget about the comments but only focus on what mark they get. This is, in my opinion, one of many challenges teachers are faced with when responding to pupils’ written work. In this case one could argue that oral feedback is the best approach. According to teachers, finding the balance
between criticism and encouragement, when providing feedback to pupils’ written work, is very important. This opinion is also held by Hoel (2000) and Grabe and Kaplan (1996). One of the teachers said that she sometimes uses peer response groups. However, she stated that it does not work in every group of learners since not all pupils can handle that kind of responsibility. Hoel (2000) also emphasizes the importance of responsibility when it comes to peer response. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) offer a number of arguments that support the practice of peer response groups. Although my literature review does not provide this information, I believe that it is interesting to mention.

Responding to peer work will also involve students in each other’s writing; in that process, students can learn the language of, and uses for, responding to texts. From this experience, students would then begin to see similar problems and weaknesses in their own writing as well as use innovative and creative ideas to which they are exposed. Students also would need to learn to accept reasonable reader responses and to use them constructively in their revisions. (p. 379)

I believe that both pupils and teachers can benefit from using peer group response.

One of the conclusions I can draw from the results of the interviews with teachers is that it is important to encourage pupils in order for them to succeed in their writing. According to Grabe and Kaplan (1996), when responding to students written texts teachers should find something positive to say about any essay. This opinion is also held by the teachers. One of the teachers said that too much criticism would not improve pupils’ English. I can only agree. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) say that comments should not overwhelm the students with a sense of failure. In other words, teachers should avoid noting absolutely every flaw. Teachers should instead offer positive support. One of the teachers said that she only corrects obvious mistakes. If there are many errors in the text, she only corrects the big ones. This is positive in my opinion. Another strong reason for teachers to offer positive support to their pupils, according to Grabe and Kaplan (1996), is because responding to students’ writing can greatly influence student attitudes to writing and their motivation for future learning.

All the informants gave rather similar descriptions of what in their opinion is a good story written by pupils in year nine. A story containing good contents, good fluency and sentence structure, good command of words and phrases, and good command of forms. This is expressed in a similar way in the syllabus for English in year nine. All teachers agreed that there should not be too many basic grammatical mistakes.
5.2 A teacher’s feedback on six texts

One of the conclusions I can draw from the results from looking at the feedback a teacher gives to pupils’ written texts is that the teacher mainly focuses on content, language and the task-specific criteria. Her response to all six texts includes a written commentary. The feedback is well structured. When providing feedback by e-mail, the teacher clarifies what kind of errors a pupil has made by using different colours. This is very positive in my opinion because this makes it easier for the pupil to understand what errors he/she has made.

Another thing that became clear in my study is that the teacher uses the grading criteria when providing feedback to pupils’ written texts.

According to Grabe and Kaplan (1996), when responding to students’ written texts teachers should find something positive to say about any essay. The teacher started by saying something positive to every pupil’s text. It is very important to encourage pupils in order for them to improve their writing skills. This opinion is also held by Brown (2004). The teacher also provided the pupils with concrete suggestions for improving their texts. Further, the teacher made it possible for the pupils to correct their errors by often only pointing them out. I believe that pupils can benefit from correcting their errors and therefore agree with the teacher’s decision. This opinion is also held by Grabe and Kaplan (1996).

Additionally, it is possible to draw parallels between the kind of feedback the teacher gives to pupils’ texts and what the assessment of writing should emphasize according to the syllabus for English in year nine. It is also clear that the teacher considered what is stated in the syllabus for English for year nine when she designed the task.

Tribble (1996) mentions four basic roles that teachers can take on when they respond to pupils’ written work. This study shows that the teacher took on the role of examiner. This is a natural choice since the teacher had to assess the pupils’ texts and the assessment was based on explicit criteria. This is in line with what Grabe and Kaplan (1996) say about different roles that teachers can take on when providing feedback.
6 Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to gain insight about how experienced teachers of English see the nature of providing feedback to pupils’ written work and to find out what types of response a teacher of English gives to some pupils’ texts. I asked the following questions at the beginning of my project:

- What kind of feedback does a group of experienced teachers of English give to pupils’ written work?

- What types of responses does one teacher of English give to some pupils’ written work in year nine?

This study shows that teachers provide their pupils with supportive feedback. Additionally, teachers emphasize the importance of encouraging the pupils in order for them to improve their language skills. Teachers use different formats and approaches depending on the type of learners and the type of texts. Further, my investigation shows that teachers use predetermined criteria when responding to pupils’ written work and their responses to pupils’ written texts always include a written commentary. However, since I only interviewed four teachers, and only got to see how one teacher gives response to pupils’ texts, it is not possible to draw any general conclusions from my study.

In conclusion, this investigation was of great benefit to me. I believe that I have gathered some valuable knowledge about providing feedback to pupils’ written work. It has become clear to me that providing supportive feedback is one of many challenges teachers are faced with in their teaching.
Sources

Printed sources


Oral sources
Interview Sara 2008-12-01
Interview Lena 2008-11-27
Interview Sandra 2008-11-28
Interview Per 2008-11-27
Student essays with teacher comments

Text 1  My Trip to South Africa

Text 2  South Africa

Text 3  My Travelling Journal

Text 4  South Africa

Text 5  My Trip

Text 6  Canada
ATTACHMENT 1

Interview guide
Guiding questions

Background questions

○ Please tell me about your background

What is a good written story?

○ How would you describe a good story written by students in a grade 9?

Procedures when responding; How, when etc.

○ Can you please describe how you go about responding to pupils’ written texts

○ To what extent do you use different approaches and formats depending on

  a) the group of learners
  b) the type of text

  when responding to pupils’ written work?

○ To what extent does your response to a pupil’s written text include a written commentary?

○ To what extent do you use predetermined criteria when responding to pupils’ written texts?

Balance between criticism and encouragement

○ How do you look upon the balance between criticism and encouragement when responding to pupils’ written texts?

○ What methods do you use when giving written response to your pupils in order to encourage them to improve their writing?

Teachers’ thoughts about how students can develop their writing.

○ According to your experience, how can pupils develop their writing skills?
○ What do you as a teacher do in order to help your pupil to develop her/his writing skills?

○ What qualities, characteristics, or abilities typify a successful year 9 pupil when it comes to writing?
APPENDIX 2

Instructions: Travel blog/travel diary

You will write your text in the past tense. You will write about what you have experienced during your trip. The reader must be able to follow your trip geographically by reading your text. Try to make the countryside “alive”.

Among all things you have:

* Visited a famous sight
* Met a person or a couple of people
* Visited a big city

You may add other things of course. You may also insert pictures, films, maps, tickets etc, to support and to add credibility to your text. Never use a picture or similar just because it is nice.

Make sure you are visible in your text. Make it personal.

Ok ex: Kruger park was interesting, but a bit scary.
Better ex: My legs were shivering for fifteen minutes after having exited the park, both from excitement and scare.

Links you might find useful

Travel blog
http://www.travelblog.org
http://www.travelblog.org/North-America/Canada/British-Columbia/blog-335964.html
http://www.travelblog.org/Africa/South-Africa/Eastern-Cape/Grahamstown/blog-344119.html
http://www.resdagboken.se/

South Africa
http://www.southafrica.net/

Canada
http://www.vpl.ca/branches/LibrarySquare/chi/geographylinks.html
http://geo.international.gc.ca/can-am/washington/studies/teacherguide-en.asp
http://www.happychild.org.uk/countries/index.htm

(Alla (?) länder klickbara i bokstavsordning. Klicka på ett, välj sedan en av de tråkigt utformade rubrikerna, så kommer du till fina faktasidor.)
My trip to South Africa!

Dear diary
Today me and my family started our trip to South Africa. South Africa is a medium large country in Africa, there are 44 million inhabitants and they have lots of official languages, like English and nine native African languages. We took the train from Malmoe to Kastrup in Copenhagen, from there we took a flight that stopped in Morocco before it continues to South Africa. When we arrived in Capetown we were pretty tired, so we went to our hotel and took a nap. After the nap I wanted to check out the city so me and my brother went out to go to the beach and such, while my mom went out on a shopping round. We met up at a little restaurant at 19.00 and eat. When it started to get dark my brother Oscar and me went out on city once again to check out the night life, but my mom didn’t thought that it was a good idea so we got back to the hotel about 23.00, and went to bed as fast as we got home.

Dear diary
The second day in South Africa we reserved a boat trip to dive outside the Cape of Good Hope that is often called the southern tip of Africa but that is in fact wrong, the southern tip of Africa is called Cape Agulhas. So we got up pretty early and barrowed a car with which we drove to the place where the boat was. They gave us a quick course in how you dive and use tubes. Then they drove out in the open sea and we jumped in the water. It was wonderful I’d never seen so much beautiful fishes in one place, there where also sharks, I have to admit I were pretty scared. When we got out of the water they lowered a cage in the water and threw in a big chunk of meat, they said that they tried to entice the great white shark to the place. After almost half an hour we saw a great white shark! I putted on my diving equipment and jumped in the diving cage as fast as I could, it was a scary but extremely awesome experience to stare a great white shark in its eyes is a dream I hade since I was a little boy. After that it was my brother Oscar and moms turn they loved just it as much as me! Then we started to drive back to the mainland and the clock hade already turned 17,00.

Dear diary
Today my mom hade planed that we went to a safari trip in one of South Africa's many nature reserves. So we got up around 08.00 ate some breakfast then took the car to Blyde River Canyon Reserve where we met up with a guide named Baruti Nbaye. And we started to talk:
Baruti: so have you ever been in South Africa before?
Me: no this is my first time
Baruti: okey, you have chosen the absolutely best national park you could, even if it’s not the mot famous it’s the one with most vary of nature and animals
Me: sounds good, I love animals and I’m very excited to be here in this beautiful land with all these animals.
Baruti: yes yes I think you’re going to love this then! So let’s get started.

We got in his jeep that hade elevated seats so you could see better. It was an amazing day we saw a spectacular canyon and lots and lots of wonderful animals. We spent a whole our just sitting in the forest just listening and watched the animals. Then we with help of our guide walked around in the beautiful landscape. After the unbelievable trip
to the national park we went back to the city to eat. We got home and took a shower and went out on the city. We ate at a very exclusive restaurant. Then we went home and I was very tired so I went to bed as fast as I came home.

**Dear diary**

Today it’s our last whole day we have in South Africa and we haven’t planed anything special. Our plan was just to take it easy on one of the long beaches here in South Africa. So we ate a little breakfast and head down to the beach. We paid to get three chairs on the beach. Me and my brother got down to the water and saw that you could rent jetskis, so we rented two jetskis for two hours and drove like maniacs but man how fun I was! Then we went home showered and dressed up. We went to the finest restaurant we could find to close our wonderful trip in South Africa.

**Dear Diary**

Today it’s the day of our trip home, we didn’t hade much time to do anything else but just pack and head to the airport. At the airport we noticed that our airplane were delayed three hours so we sat down in some uncomfortable chairs for three very long hours! But the plane finale took of at 15,00 and we were back in Sweden at 02,00 the night after. It were a wonderful trip that I’ll never ever forget!

**Commentary key:**

Pink: verb form/tense  
Yellow: punctuation marks  
Red: spelling mistakes/preposition use/grammar mistakes  
Green: Swenglish.

You have managed to include a lot of facts in a fairly short text, and yet made it personal. Good! When you look at what kind of facts you’ve included, you will notice that by reading your text, you won’t be able to get an overall picture of the country. You could have made so much more of the meeting with this Baruti-guy for instance. And what did I actually get to know of your visit to a big city?

The quality

Your fluency is good, and you’ve used some expressions, ways of writing things, typically English. You communicate well. You do however make some serious grammar and verb mistakes
South Africa

Day 1.
I went to the airport. I am really exited.

I come to my hotel and packed my luggage. When I have done that, I saw a newspaper on the Kruger Park. And the I looked for the time to go there. There stood, 9 o'clock on the morning. So I went to my bed and fall to sleep.

Day 2.
I woke up 7 o'clock. I took on my clothes and go to the breakfast. On the brekfast it was egg and toast. Very good food. I asked the personal for the clock.
- Excuse me, how much is it?
- It is half past eight.
- Ok, thank you so much.

I rushed up to my room and packed my things for a nice holiday. I was going to Port Elisabeth.

Port Elisabeth are well-known for the Sandbeaches. They have 1050 930 inhabitant.

I take the bus to Port Elisabeth outside of the hotel. It is gon to take two ours to come there. I see much of long houses and much of cars and humans. I go to a transaction and buy a soda. It was so hot out here. When I come out so come a man to me. He sed:
- Hello, I see that you are not from here?
- No, i don ' t.
- Anyway. My name is Solololo. And I work on the Kruger Park like a animal keeper. Have you been there?
- No, I haven ' t yet. But I really want to.
- Ok, but there are much of lions and éléphants.
- Ok, but I want to know some fakt for this contry. Are you good at this?
- Yes, I am actually that.
- What do you want to know?
- Everything.
- Ok, it is a very beutiful country. And you can have much of fun here to. South Africa is indiv in niàn province. The climat is half dry. The religon is divid in Christian, Muslim and Hindu. Fotball is the most popular sport in South Africa, among the black people. And cricket are for the whithe people. And aids in South Africa is a big problem here. Most of the black people have aids. And it is very dangerous. So be careful. The middle age is 24,5 year. The tender mortality are around 3 %. South Africa is also a average land. Would you know more?
- Now. It is okey. But then you see låter on the Kruger park.
- Yes. Good bye.

I moved on. I found a compétition in the middle of the city. It was a horse show. A very important compétition for al of the world. There was big horses, small horses and a little bit smaller horses like ponnys. I pat a horse. I have never done that before. And I groom it to. I wish I was a horse. I have wanted all my Life to be free like a horse. It was my dream when I
was little. I always played I was a horse when I was little. My mum always asked me what I am doing and I felt ashamed and pick down the things quickly. But now I am standing here with a horse I just want to ride him like my horse.

I looked for the time and I saw that it was time to go. I run to the bus and go to the hotel. I went up to my room and I was tired. But it was time to go to the dinner and eat. After that I was really tired and I go up to my room and took of all my clothes. And I fall to sleep.

Day3.
I woke up on my bed and I saw the sunshine. It was beautiful. Idress on my clothes and went tho the brekfast. I was thinking what the man sed to my. Maybe today I will go there. I have not decided it yet. But i was so tired from yesterday so I went up to my room and read a book to the dinner.

Day4.
I feel badly today. It must be something I eat on this hotel. I don't understand what I eat wrong. It bust me something. Anyway I went up and take a shower. After that I felt no such better. So I go to my bed again and fall to sleep. I couldn't sleep because I heard much of voices outside the window. It was strenuous. But I'm trying to sleep.

I woke up late in the evening. It was time to go to the dinner. It was roast lamb and potato. It taste good to. I met a person on the hotel, it was a man. He come from USA and was 34 years old. We talked and then he buy me a drink. He was a very nice guy. He asked me if he could bring me a dinner tomorrow. And I sed yes. It was late and I sed good bye and he kissed me on my hand and sed "it was nice to meet you". I went up to ny room and just screem out all plesure. This guy was so wonderful and his name was Greg. But I was tired so it was time to go to the bed.

Day5.
I woke up on my bed. I did me order. But when I shall locked the door he wispear in my ear "godmorning". I blush up in my face. It was embarrassing I think. We went done stairs and in to the brekfast. I took my food and he took it also. We set domwn in same table. He asked me for the dinner tonight if I forgot it. And I sed "no, why would i forgot it?" I was so spend for tonight.
He picked up me in his car outside of the hotel. We are going in to Port Elisabeth to a nice resturant.

Day6.
I woke up with a voice who screaming on my ear. I just imagine my self. It was a bird who screaming. I call the man who told me about the Kruger Park. There is much of animals. So I take the bus to the Kruger Park. When I come there I saw much of animals and much of humans. It was wonderful. I really like animals. I go around and feed a giraffe. He was hungry. I moved on. I met the man e met in Port Elisabeth so I talk to him.
- Hi! You met me in Port Elisabeth. -Hi! Yes, now I remember you.
- How are you? Sed I.
- Yes, I am fine.
- Ok, what are you doing here actually?
- I feed the animals. Sees that the humans are nice to the animals. And that is all.
- Ok! How much serve you / mounth?
- About 30 000. That is allot of money for me.
Ok! But now I have to go to the bus. See you, good bye. -y

- See you!
I walked to the bus. But when I come to the hotel I packed all my things in the luggage for the morning. I go down for the stairs to eat dinner.
I came up to my room and fall to sleep. I was so tired. It happend allot of things today.
And I have a nice weekend in South Africa. Tomorrow I go horn to the cold Sweden.
ATTACHMENT 5

MY TRAVELING JOURNAL

DAY 1

Dear diary now I'm finally here, after several hours on a plane I'm here! I got up early so I wouldn't miss my boat. I had to take the ferry to Copenhagen and take a flight from Kastrup because there were no direct flights from Sweden to Canada. I was really exited but the plane was delayed three hours and I must say I was very annoyed. I mean I took the early plane so I could be there early so I had time to find my hotel and stuff. But then I suppose the time diffèrence will make it possible to get to my hotel quite early, I mean we're six hours ahead of Canada so now I think I kind of over reacted. I only had afford to fly coach but who cares? That's like a one in a life time expérience. So I guess that all those hours in that red uncomfortable seat finally has paid off I was compléter/ knackered when got of the plan. It wasn't quiet for two seconds even! And the food tasted like crap, but when I checked in at my hotel I actually got eatable food. They're so nice here at the hotel and best of all there's a cozy bed to crawl into. Tomorrow I'll start my Canada adventure but right now I need to get some sleep.

DAY 2

Dear diary today I've had a very exiting day. I'm not used to the time diffèrence so I woke up at five o'clock. When I was dressed and ready to hit the streets the dock had only stroke six and the restaurant downstairs had not opened yet. I took my bag and went to find a local supermarket. I bought a readymade sandwich and a juice and sat down beside this guy on a bench outside. We started to talk and he told me his name was Henry Jackson and he was soon of to ice hockey practice. Apparently Henry is playing in a very important team and his already making the big bucks (but what do I know). He is playing in Toronto even though he lives here in Ottawa. I was sorry to hear his dad died a few years ago and his mum struggled to pay the bilis. But also I was glad to hear he wasn't seeing anyone for the moment, I'm not going to lie we hit off well actually. Most importantly he asked me out on a date tomorrow. Well kind of, he wanted to take me on Sightseeing. When he'd gone I found a mal and couldn't help but to go in and take a look around. I must say these boutiques were totally different from back home. The atmosphère were so different, also were the fashion and most importantly the prizes. My wallet wouldn't survive those prizes but you can always take a look. To be honest I'd got something planned for today. That's why I went to Canada at this time of year, well it's because of the art festival in Montréal. It's not that far from Ottawa, that's why I decided to stay here in the capital. The bus arrived to the hotel (There were several of the guests at the hotel who came because of the festival), The dock was a quarter past three when we arrived at the bus station in Montreal. There were loads of différent stands with people showing of their work and trying to get discovered. There were so many différent types of art, there were sculptures, and there were digital work on big screens with short films and photographs. Of course they had my personal favourite paintings; they were painted in oil paint, watercolours, and acrylic and so on. They were all magnificent. I never will forget this expérience it was breath taking. Everything is stuck in my memory, the smells, the colours and of course the people. They were so différent and you could see how the artist was by looking at their artwork. I tasted some kind of veggie foods, there were people who cooked and then they let you taste it. But sadly this was the last day of the festival; otherwise I probably would have stayed in Montréal. This is really something to tell the grand kids.
DAY 3

Dear diary I woke up at seven o'clock, Henry was supposed to meet me at too and pick me up so I wanted to be ready. No that's a lie I wanted to look fantastic and I can't help it but he's just so cute, fun and easy to talk to. Why shouldn't I take a chance I mean while in Canada? I was so excited and nervous at the same time, what if he didn't show up? I'd look very foolish but he met me downstairs a quarter to ten. He didn't tell me where we were going and I didn't mind. I know what my mum would say if she knew what I did. Henry drove his own car; here in America you get your license at sixteen. He wanted to show me Toronto and it took about an hour to drive down there. We went on an ice hockey game, I didn't understand a thing so he explained to me how the game works and afterwards he introduced me to the team players. They were very nice and real jokers all of them. We all went to a new opened mall; Henry was so sweet because he bought me a necklace. Henry said he'd prepared something especially for us to do and it turned out to be Marineland. Well in case you don't know what that is I'll tell you. It is the largest aquarium complex in the whole world. It lies between Buffalo and Toronto. We saw dolphins jumping around catching toys and doing tricks. I was mighty impressed to see how well trained they were. But that's not all we also saw sharks though I was kind of a wimp when I didn't dare go near them. But who can blame me there was no fence around the pool nevertheless I did have the courage to pat the sea turtles. They were ignorant, but turtles have never scared me and I became quite fond of the turtle named Edward. This is a place everyone should visit at least once in their lives. It's a shame we didn't have time to see all of the aquariums but they closed up at six thirty. Later on about seven o'clock we drove to the Niagara Falls because it was so close to the aquarium. We took the sight seen boat and it was absolutely beautiful, there were little lights lit on the boat and they had lighten up the waterfalls too. Later they lit fireworks, the sky bathe in different colors. It was just magical but best of all was Henry. Today we had such a blast and he's free tomorrow too, so we're going on more little trips. I can't wait.

DAY 4

Dear Diary Today I've slept until ten this morning, what a night! It's not what you think Henry was very gentlemanlike. I fell asleep in his car, I'm kind of embarrassed but he just laughed at me and sent me up to my room. I think I've developed a little crush but he seems to see me as a little sister unfortunately. I didn't spend quite as long making myself presentable. Henry said he had to practice until the afternoon, he called the hotel. So I didn't bother myself to get all dressed up. I put on a summer dress and a cardigan because it's not that warm up here. This was almost my last day and I'm sad to know that I'm leaving tomorrow. Anyway I went on a little trip of my own, now I realize how much more time I'd need to have time to see everything! But since I still got time and I didn't want to waste it I went to a local Gallery. This is one of my highest priories, art I mean. I wanted so bad to see Canadian art and I can't say that I was disappointed. I hadn't seen enough to still my hunger on the art festival. The way they've just the brushes when they painted all these fantastic paintings make them more real in my eyes. I felt stunned when I watched painting after painting. I especially liked a deep blue with neon yellow spots; it reminded me of a dark blue night with thousands of shining stars winking down to me. This painting enchanted me. Unfortunately it was all too big and the prise could make a king shiver. There were also art that involved ice hockey, I must say if there's one thing I've learned here it's Canada loves ice hockey. I can't say that it has affected my way of seeing sports but it has affected me to be more open about it. I was surprised when I bumped in to Henry on my way to a café, he asked if he could join me and I said yes of course (I might be blond but I'm not stupid). This city got soul somehow, some of the cites I've been to got soul and other doesn't but this is defiantly one of them. Henry is a sweet guy; he goes t school like any ordinary kid the only difference is that he's an ice hockey star. His mother sounds like a great woman. She has
struggled for a long time with the financially and Henry is happy to be able to help her a little bit. The traffic drives like morons but in which country don't they? Henry showed me his school: West Ottawa High School. It's a very good school from what Henry told me, the principal Kent Henson is very dedicated to what he does and he's very passionate about his job. I'm glad to hear that he's enjoying his school and that it's a good school too. He walked me to my hotel and we decided that we should meet after he was done with his homework.

He took me to a restaurant in Ottawa downtown: Friday's Roast Beef House & Piano Parlour. They had a delicious beef with roasted potatoes.

It's sad that I have to leave tomorrow, but at the same time I'm really glad that I came here. I'm going to miss everything about this country, especially Henry. But nothing romantic ever happened between the two of us, I shall miss him but only as a friend. Who knows we might see each other again sometime.

DAY5

Dear diary woke up to late; I almost missed my bus to the airport. Lucky I'd packed my bags yesterday. Henry came around to say goodbye and he gave me flowers but they didn't pass custom. Once again I sat down in one of those uncomfortable seats. I ended up beside a very fat old lady and a grumpy old chap called Ernie. He had visit his kids in Canada but now he felt home sick (and plane sick because he threw up a couple of times). The fat lady was named Berta and she was on her way to visit her sister and her niece in Copenhagen. I preferred to talk to Berta than to Ernie, he smelt terrible and his breath could put out a whole army. I told Berta about my little trip, she thought I'd seen a lot on so few days.

My family welcomed me home at Kastrup, I must say I was moved that they all came. But I think that they only wanted to know what got them. Well it's time to say home sweet home I guess. I didn't notice but Henry slip me his e-mail address into my purse. This might be the beginning of a great friendship or... who knows.

---

Excellent

Well personalized and somewhat romantic! ;) You've followed the instructions and you've given the reader a vivid picture of Canada, especially artwise.

Your way of writing is direct and uncomplicated, and is distinguished by a very good fluency.
You also use an advanced vocabulary.

Some mistakes absolutely worth noting:

off# off
Two# to# too (haven't we spoken about this MANY times???)
meet# meat
Just# used
He's# his (Hmmm memm...)
on so few days=> IN so few days.
South Africa

This is a travel diary from my holiday in South Africa. Day 1
Right now I'm sitting on a hard, lumpy bed with the clothes still in my suitcase and I'm enjoying the view. I'm in Cape Town and the view consists mainly of the port, beautiful buildings and people of all sorts of colors.

Earlier today I flew for over 12 hours which was quite boring. Luckily for me there was a TV screen belonging to every seat, so I didn't have to get that bored. It really did not happen much more so I'll leave this here and hope for more fun tomorrow.

Day 2
Cape Town really is a wonderful city and I realized this fully this morning. I decided I would skip breakfast at the hotel and instead eat on some café. I had a lovely morning just sitting out in the warmth, watching as people passed by and enjoying my coffee.

Later that day I went searching for souvenirs to bring back home and I found the fiercest dress ever - I even wore it this night when I went out with a friend who studies here! We had a blast but now I'm so tired I can barely keep my eyes open.

Day 3
This morning I settled with a calm breakfast in the dining room at the hotel, then I got dressed and went out to find a tourist office. I had got the (in my opinion) brilliant idea to visit Robben Island. I was just afraid it would be fully booked but luckily for me it wasn't. Though the boat would not leave until three PM, so when I ate lunch I seized the opportunity to read a little about this place. I found out that the first black president in South Africa, Nelson Mandela, had been held prisoner there for 28 years and that Robben Island had been working as a deportation island since way back in 1525. Now it had even been designated to a world heritage by UNESCO. Wow, I didn't know that!

Anyway, at three PM I stepped on the boat and I, along with the other tourists, were taken to the small island just outside Cape Town's coast. It really was interesting to see the small Spaces where the prisoners had been held custody but it was also very frightening and horrible to imagine yourself in their shoes. I feel ashamed but I must admit that I just wanted to get out of there, the cold walls and tense atmosphere gave me the creeps. I was relieved when I once again stood at the solid ground on the mainland. After that it didn't happen much, I went to my room, watched some TV and fell asleep.

Day 4
"God, I'm starved!"
That was my first thought when I woke up this morning and seconds later I realized I had forgotten to eat dinner last night. Well no, I'm not confused at all!

I had no idea what to make of this day, not even the slightest due; therefore I decided to take a trip to the more "alternative parts" of Cape Town. I went back to the tourist office I had found yesterday and asked how one easiest got herself somewhere. It turned out to
be an obvious choice; the bus. It was nothing like London or Malmo's buses, these were more like some old version taken back from the 80's. Anyway, I bought one of those tickets that takes you pretty much everywhere inside the city and stepped on. I was glad I didn't put on anything "fancy", riding the bus here was nothing like riding the bus at home. Here the people looked poor and worn out, but still... they almost seemed happier then many at home and I kind of felt more at home here then what I many times did in my mother's house. My dreadlocks didn't exactly stand out here either.
As I sat there berried in my thoughts a man sat down beside me. He looked at me and smiled.
You look like I nice European. The man stretched out his hand and I shook it. Please, don't get me wrong. I like Europeans! It's just not every day we see tourists travel with local buses, he excused himself and smiled with a glimpse in his dark eyes. Oh, that makes sense!
I smiled back and studied his dark brown, almost black eyes thoroughly. They were very beautiful. Where are you heading?
I don't know yet, I answered and looked out through the window. Old, broken buildings and children playing with handmade toys. It was a little bit sad but at the same time hopeful, that these people with absolutely nothing still knew the art of smiling.
So, where are you heading then? My interest in this man was woken. I'm on my way home, I've been visiting my family. My mother is sick and they think its aids. He stared down at his hands and I didn't really know how to show my compassion, so I laid my hand on his.
Maybe... maybe you would like to show me the parts of town they don't write about in tourist magazines?
I knew it was stupid to let myself rely on a man I had just met and didn't even know the name on, but I had a good feeling about him. I had to trust my instinct and my instinct said that this was a good idea.
Are you sure...? I mean, I would love to! My name is Moeketsi, but you can call me Moe. Hi Moe, my name is Sara. We shook hands again formally and smiled at each other.

We spent the day visiting différent märkets and memorials that he himself found important for the South African history. He took me to the traditional shops with things from the culture and we used my money to buy différent kinds of snacks that were populär. Well, to be honest these snacks were very similar to our chocolaté bars and chips but it was still very tasty! For lunch he took me to a local place and bought a traditional dish for the both of us. It was called "bobotie" and was meatloaf and mango chutney mixed together with whipped eggs on top. Then you put it in the oven and serve rice on side. When we were finished with the lunch we took the bus to his neighborhood. He lived in a place called Bo-Kaap in a violet house with a blue door. Every house had a différent color and it was amazing how happy the colors made you. We spent the rest of the day talking and playing cards with a bunch of his friends. I returned back to the hotel just after midnight.
This morning was my last wakeup in Cape Town; I was now heading for George with train. George is an industrial town about 800 km east of Cape Town and I expected it to take about eight hours to get there. When arriving in George I immediately checked in to a small Bed & Breakfast located in the center of the town. I rented a car for two days and decided to drive to the shopping mall in the east part of George. I found a lot of things and nice food to eat. Then I drove back to the B&B and enjoyed a nice night of sleep.

Day6
I dragged myself up early in the morning. Early morning really isn't my cup of tea, so I decided to drink tea for breakfast. Then I started off on my journey to Bloukrans which is the highest bungyjump from a bridge in the world. Its 216 meters above the river and you fall about 180 meters down, talk about adrenalin! It's hard föran outsider to imagine the feeling of falling to the ground with nothing but a tiny thread keeping you from hitting the ground. Try to imagine yourself flying. Not that easy, ey?

On my way back (from the experience of my life) I stopped in a small seaside town called Knysna and had lunch. I found a lovely, simple Chínese restaurant where I ordered the sizzled duck with rice and sticks. Then I continued back to George. I then passed Wilderness which is a kind of "garden of Edén" lying on the coastline of one of
the most beautiful parts of South Africa. Here I also had to stop for filling the tank for me and the car.

It was late evening when I finally hit the sack.

Day7  
As my flight was an early flight out of George I went to the airport early in time to return the car to the hiring company and to be sure not to miss the flight. I was going to change flight in Johannesburg for the intercontinental flight as this was just a domestic flight.

When we departed from Johannesburg that evening, the sun cast its last, glowing beams on the surroundings and made the world bright red. I will never forget that sight.

Excellent

Well personalized and you've made the most of the instructions. You've succeeded in giving the reader an interesting and varied picture of South Africa. Your way of writing is full of descriptions, idiomatic expressions, and an advanced vocabulary. Of course there are some mistakes (marked in your text). A few of them you can spend some time thinking about:

Held custody # imprisoned  
chips # crisps  
than # then  
it's# it's  
asked how one easiest got herself somewhere => asked for the easiest way to get somewhwere.

to let myself rely on a man I had just met and didn't even know the name on.  
=> ...and didn't even know the name of/...and whose name I didn't even know.
My Trip
Sunday

Dear Diary, today I put my alarm clock at 4 AM because my family and I wanted to be early enough not to miss the flight, which would have been really unfortunate! I'd been looking forward to this trip for months and nothing was going to stop me! I got up and walked down the stairs to make breakfast. I was really hungry as I hadn't eaten anything since my breakfast the day before! I made myself a couple of toasts, it was then I figured that I was the only one who had woken up. I hurried into my parents' bedroom and after some time every single person in the house was pushing each other around in our tiny kitchen. Of course I started to complain about it and upset dad who told me that either I was quiet or he'd take me to the doctor for claustrophobic behavior! Klasrofob-huh? I thought about that the whole day...

After breakfast I made sure that I had everything packed up and done - of course I had, I had checked three times already. I brushed my teeth, got dressed and made my bed. And off we went; I took my big trunk and put in the boot. As always mom and I argued about whose time it was to sit in the front seat, and mom didn't have that much to say, she had always told that I was too short and as you know that's not really a problem for me anymore.

It took us some time to find a good spot to park our car in, not too far away from the entrance but still not close enough for thieves. We decided to park in the closed parking lot, after all we could take that small amount of money in exchange for a safe place. As we'd parked we took our luggage, grabbed our passports and made ourselves ready for the check-in.

Seven hours later I was standing on the airport in Frankfurt waiting for the airplane to refuel. The weather had shifted from the dry weather we had in Malmo to a bit of a drizzle and it had started to clear up.

The airport in Vancouver was a lot bigger than I thought. After we'd landed the stewardess came forward and gave us a map of how we would be able to get out of it. Even though we had this map it took us almost two hours just to get our luggage and yet still one more hour to find the exit. I feared for the day that we had to come back there.

As we came out I put on my jacket and looked around, it felt like I was standing on some sort of plateau as I could see several miles around me, I can tell you that the sight that you got from that airport was incredible, and the area between the airport and the rest of the city felt really unspoiled except from the road that connected them.

On our way to the hotel, which we got escorted to in a limousine, I looked out of the window and just melted of what I saw. High mountains, deep valleys, green meadows, and big shimmering lakes, all of it just outside of my shaded window.

18 PM that evening we arrived at the hotel in Vancouver Downtown named Delta Vancouver Suits. The hotel certainly was a huge sky scrape with over 200 suits, and of course our suit was on the nineteenth and highest floor...

As we came into our suit and put our luggage on the floor I went into what should be my room and looked out the window. I'd never been to a city like this, I was used to
Loddekopinge that barely got a 4th floor and here I was, looking down from the nineteenth floor upon a city approximately eleven times as big as Loddekopinge, I started to feel a little bit dizzy and moved away from the window.

It was almost 20PM when we finally were finished unpacking and went outside to find a good place to eat. It ended with me and my dad eating at McDonalds and my mom and sis not wanting anything at all.

Monday

Today I and my dad decided to go see Vancouver Canucks vs. Ottawa Senators in the NHL. The only requirement for us to go was to give mom and sis free reins to buy whatever they wanted, and we really wanted to see the game...

The game wasn't played until in the evening though, so we made up a day plan consisting of three things:

* - Game at 8PM, only for the men!
* - Shopping all day long, only for the girls... we're going to get ruined!
* - Sleep and read at the hotel, a lot of this!

I read this great book named The Business of Dying written by Simon Kernick. It was about a criminal inspector who was an assassin on his time off to earn some extra money, though he screwed up a murder which he had to investigate as a police, of course without imprisoning himself! That may have sounded a little bit confusing but trust me, it's really good.

At 6PM we ordered a taxi to General Motors Place, the 18,000 capacity home arena for Canucks. To be honest I've never liked Ice Hockey but this was really fun, and the highlight was that five of the players on the pitch were Swedes! The game ended 3-2 for Vancouver and the party was on! You will never understand how big the célébrations are after a win in NHL for Canucks. People dancing in the streets can be seen through the whole night, and the music never stops!

Tuesday

Once again we had to use our map of the airport in Vancouver; the only difference this time was that we needed to catch a flight instead of finding the exit... The flight to Ottawa was going to take off at 3PM and as our taxi was thirty minutes late we had to hasten off to Gate 17. On paper the odds was on our side but with 30 kilos of luggage in each hand it immediately gets a little bit harder. Gate 17 was just about to close when I got there -fortunately for us my soccer career hadn't ended yet so my condition was still at least decent -but as a routine mom had given me the passports and as I was first I gave them to the cashier who then waited. I dropped my bags and saw the red marks that I had gotten from running with them dragged behind me...
I managed to get the window seat and for the last time I was able to see the magnificent view of Vancouver's nature when the plane took off.

The airport in Vancouver may have been big but Ottawa's was HUGE. Again we received a map of it from one of the stewardesses, though this time it only took us one hour to get the luggage and find the exit which was quite astonishing. We grabbed a taxi with destination Chimo Hotel, a 3 star hotel near the Parliament Hill, and therefore close to The Peacekeeping Monument.

The hotel impressed very much on me for being a 3 star, it had very good service and the suits were very fresh-looking. All in all it was more than enough for just one night; we were only going to watch the Monument and maybe talk to some Canadians to get a better picture of how they are and then fly back to Sweden again.

Wednesday

We had to be quick doing what we wanted to do this day as the flight home took off at 4PM. It started with an oversleep for just everyone, as always I had to save the situation and at 11AM we were all dressed and had eaten breakfast.

The last day we wanted to be a little bit luxurious so we decided to call for a Hummer to drive us around for our last couple of hours in Canada. A big yellow Hummer arrived at the hotel a quarter later and with a proud feeling I jumped in, though the step into the car was very high and mom wasn't too lithe and fell. But instead of getting pissed off as I thought that she was going to get she just laughed and tried again; without any mishap this time.

Meanwhile driving the chauffeur spoke a little bit about Ottawa, e.g. that he grew up there and that his grandmother's grandmother and so on had grown up there and that he wouldn't move for a million Canadian Dollars! For him the traditions were more important than some rubbish toilet paper, and he thought that it probably was like that for most of the native Canadians.

The Peacekeeping Monument was a lot taller than I thought at first, only the stones were at least 3 meters high and on top of that those statues that were taller than normal persons! Oswald, as the chauffeurs name was, told me that it was a symbol for Canada's role in international peacekeeping and that its name was Reconciliation. On one of the stones someone had quoted: "We need action not only to end the fighting but to make the peace... my own government would be glad to recommend Canadian participation in such a United Nations force, a truly international peace and police force " and Oswald told me that the quote next to it was exactly the same text but in French.

At 2 PM we left the monument and headed for the hotel to get our luggage and fly home.

The last thing that I saw in Canada was the white wall of the airport in Ottawa, and now the time here in Sweden is 04.51 and I'm going to bed, this may have been a bad ending but I don't really care, bad planning from me made this situation and yesterday I went to bed just as late because of the biology...!
Excellent

Well personalized and you've made the a lot of the instructions. You've succeeded in giving the reader an humorful and a varied picture of Canada.
Your way of writing has an advanced vocabulary and advanced built phrases, and you have good use of conjuctions and grammar.
Of course there are some mistakes (marked in your text). A few of them you can spend some time thinking about: got escorted # were transported, 18PM # 6PM, suit # suite,
chauffeurs # chauffeur's
Meanwhile driving the chauffeur spoke a little bit about Ottowa...=>
While driving, the chauffeur spoke.../Meanwhile, the chauffeur spoke a little bit about Ottowa...
Canada

Resbagb
ok: Day 1:

I am going to Canada. I just can't believe it. Just now I am sitting on the airplane. It is just 2h left on this fliy épisode. The first thing I do when I come to the hotel room is to go to bed and sleep, so I am fresh tomorrow. I'm going to a bear trip tomorrow.

Day 2:

Day 2 in Canada, I woke up early this morning. I was not very useful this morning. I took an American breakfast. 10:00 am I stood at the bus station and waited for the bus. I am on a trip in Prince Edward Island National Park to see Canadian bears (Grizzly bear). After some time more people came to the bus station to wait for the bus, it should have come 10:30 am, but it came 10:50 am. When I came on the bus it was not very much place to sit. I went to a girl who sat alone. - Hello? (me)

Hi, yes you can sit here. (she)

Thank you. (me) She sat and listened to music and looked out of the window.

My name is Cecilia.

What's your name? (Me)

My name is Sofie and I am 17 years old, and I don't want to talk to you. (she) I thought she was not nice.

After almost 10 min I fall in sleep on the bus. The trip with the bus took almost 3h.

We were 15 people in the big group. But we were split into smaller groups with 3 persons in each group. I came with Sofie and a guy, his name was Mac. My first thought about him was that he was like a child. He was very childish first, but when you got to know him better he became very nice. Sofie was still very strange and closed.

We got the task to collect wood for the fire. Sofie refused to collect, so Mac and I went out to do it.

I hear that you are not from here. Are you from Sweden? (Mac)

Yes. And I hear that you are not from Sweden. (me)

Ha ha. Yes I am from Canada. (Mac)

Where in Canada are you from? (Me)

I live in Toronto and I am born in Montréal. (Mac)

Yes, Toronto they have a very famous ice hockey team? (Me)

Yeah that's right. And they are the best. (Mac)

Sorry, I don't care much about ice hockey and sports so much. (Me)
No of cause, you are a girl. Girl's don't understand what's important in life. (Mac)
Oh yes we do. But sports are not one of those things. (Me)

We went back to the camp. We all sat and ate, drank, sang and had very fun. Almost when there was midnight we get into bed, to go to sleep. Tomorrow we hope that we will see grizzly bears.

Day 3:
Sofie and I slept in the same tent. I was really tired that morning. Sofie and some others sat already up and ate breakfast.
We walked almost the whole day. Mac and I had become really good-friends, he was really fun when you got to know him.
Tomorrow this trip is over and we haven't seen any bear yet.
Mac asked me if I want to see more of Canada then only woods. I thought it can be nice so I said yes.
But now I am really tired in my whole body so I am going to sleep. God night

Day 4:
Yes!
Today we have seen grizzly bears. We are really happy just now.
But I haven't the time to write something today. Because we are back in Ottawa and Mac and I are taking the train to Toronto.

Day 5:
I am in Toronto. A really big city, it is a lot of high houses here.
Mac showed me the largest house in the world, The CN Tower. That is 533 meters high. We took the lift to the top of the building and it took only 1 min! It felt like an airplane was starting.
When you stand up there you can see very much. It was wonderful.
After we had been there Mac thought that we should go and take something to eat. So we went to the Waterfront. There it was many shops and restaurants and very big shoppingmalls.
The Waterfront had very beautiful modern architecture and a rich culture life.
Mac said that on the summer ail people in the town come here. Because then it is a big outdoor market
I am very sad that I going home tomorrow. But Mac and I have decided to keep contact, he wants to see Sweden he says.

Well done
I have to say, your dialogue is so very much you:)! It also has contributed alot to the personalisation of your text!
All parts are included in your text, and they are all naturally woven together.
Your language is good without too many mistakes, and I can see that you've made an effort not to write too simple phrases!
Past tense is absolutely fine, and the text is entertaining.
Improvement areas:
Uncertainty concerning: there is/ there are/ it is/ that is/ it was/ there were etc. (ask Aina for such an exercise!)

Challenge your vocabulary.

in this particular text: even more facts; varied and colorful