Section 1 Introduction to Data Commentary

In this first part of the second semester, we will be concentrating on a core writing process, namely data commentary, which is a central factor in the production of numerous types of written documents such as reports, academic papers and articles or, most pertinent to your leaning situation, a final degree thesis. This part of our course builds on the work covered in the first semester, when the basics of understanding text were explored but now, you will now be extending your language ability by learning how to write a particular text type: an academic text based on data. For many students this represents a challenging stage in their language development but it is necessary to be able to feel confident writing a text of this type, as this core skill is further extended in the language courses you will follow in the other two years of your university degree course.

The reasons why data is included in academic texts is clear: the presentation of data lends weight and validity to any claims the writer may make in his/her text. Essentially, the inclusion and the analysis of data in a text is a way of underlining points made and provides the reader with concrete evidence. It is fundamental that all sources must be cited correctly. There are three separate stages involved in data-based research projects:

1. gathering the data
2. organising and presenting information provided in the data
3. drawing conclusions based on the data.

Data commentary is part of the second and third stages of the research process and is essentially the presentation, elaboration, and interpretation of the data gathered during the initial stages of any research project. The data available may be the answers to a questionnaire, the results of experiments or the merging of documents taken form various sources (all of which will be cited in a bibliography). Often data will be presented in various forms: charts, diagrams, tables, pie-charts, brief texts and an academic writer will need to develop the ability to select relevant information from both written text and visual aids, analyse the chosen data, draw initial conclusions and make tentative descriptions of possible future trends. The order in which data is presented and the relationship between results which emerge from the data are other major concerns for the writer of an academic text.

In the second Test of this course, you are given the opportunity to prove that you are able to construct a text based on a limited input of data. To successfully pass this test, you should now aim to acquire a working knowledge of the following aspects of academic writing:

- identifying the features of a data commentary text
- acquiring the necessary lexis used in data commentary
- understanding the sequence in the presentation of data
- being able to extract data from a source
- make connections and comparisons between different sets of data
- learning to construct a new text commenting on data
- understanding the mechanics of writing a text that elaborates a given set of data
- adopting an appropriately academic register in your new text.