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## **A REVISED GENRE-BASED APPROACH TO TEACHING BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE AT TERTIARY LEVELS: PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES**

Being able to write in English for business purposes is the key to functioning effectively in the modern workplace. In order to equip their students with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet this demand, ESP teachers across the globe have integrated business correspondence into their undergraduate ESP courses by relying on a plethora of approaches, one of them being a genre-based approach. This paper aims to propose a revised genre-based approach to teaching business correspondence to first-year students of ICT and Management as part of an ESP course at a business-oriented university in Belgrade, Serbia. The basis of the present research is the analysis of the lesson plan for teaching business letter writing that is currently being followed, the analysis of the effectiveness of the lesson plan and the analysis of the students' performance in the letter writing task as part of the final exam. The insights obtained will then be taken as starting points for proposing a revised approach and offering practical guidelines and activities for course designers and language instructors. Ideally, the revised approach would not only foster students' understanding of writing as an act arising from a real communicative purpose and a concrete goal but also encourage them to work collaboratively, focus on the process, work at home and self-assess among others. However, all suggestions, teaching techniques and activities have yet to be tested in the real learning environment, so this leaves room for further research in the area.

*Key words:* ESP, revised genre-based approach, business correspondence, guidelines, teaching techniques

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## 1. Introductory remarks

There has been a significant shift in the perspective on writing during the last few decades. In the 1960s and early 1970s, written discourse was analyzed primarily in terms of grammar and lexis. Consequently, this surface-level orientation influenced the practice of teaching writing in the second language classroom, so the tasks students did focused on writing for the sake of practicing grammar (Reid in Carter & Nunan 2001: 28) and specific use of vocabulary. At this point it was clear that in order to be an effective writer, it is not enough to have grammatical and lexical knowledge of the language, which generated a deeper interest in the writing process and the way discourse is organized and embedded in a context beyond the sentence level. Although this was a huge development compared to the initial view on writing, it was generally acknowledged that it still failed to prepare students for communicative demands they would encounter in different social contexts. Evidently, this approach overlooked the fact that English as a global language had shaped the way people communicate in the business and academic settings and to enable students to function effectively in them, a different approach was needed – one that would inspect the nature of texts that students are likely to encounter in real life.

This is how genre-based approaches have emerged. The notion of 'genre' was first introduced in the field of English for Specific Purposes (hereafter ESP) in the 1980s and it has attracted a growing interest ever since (Paltridge 2013: 347; Hyland 2004:1). Most genre theorists and researchers agree that genres refer to how members of the academic and professional community use language to communicate in a conventionalized, highly structured and socially recognized way to achieve their goals and develop relationships (Swales 1990: Martin 1985: Hyland 2003, 2004: Bhatia 2004: Hammond & Darewianka 2001: Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson 2014). Communicative purpose, context and form are, hence, paramount to this approach. Translating the definition of genres into the context of teaching writing for specific business purposes, Hyland (2003, 2004) and Gillaerts & Gotti (2008) see student-writers as having certain goals (e.g. applying for a job) and they are trying to communicate with their readers in order to achieve them. To that end, they follow a set of writing conventions regarding format, content, register and language to produce a written discourse that will be easily understood by their readers (Hyland 2003, 2004: Gillaerts & Gotti 2008). Working toward the same goal, ESP teachers should prompt students to recognize communicative purposes, patterns and formal language found in various genres that they will find in the course of their studies or work (Swales 1990: Hammond & Derewianka 2001). That said, genre-based approach to writing teaching assists ESP teachers in organizing their writing courses to meet students' needs on the one hand and students in

building language and skills necessary to communicate effectively in writing to achieve their academic and professional goals on the other.

Despite its tremendous influence in the area of ESP, genre-based writing instruction is not without criticism. To begin with, situated learning theory presupposes that learning should take place in naturalistic contexts, which is a condition that the genre-based approach cannot meet because “genres are too complex and varied to be removed from their original contexts and taught in the artificial environment of the classroom” (Hyland 2004: 17). In other words, students cannot learn how to write specific genres because they are not situated in the real, authentic setting that creates the need to write (ibid.). However, this theory overlooks the fact that students from non-English backgrounds rarely have the chance to interact in English and genre-based instruction can thus replicate naturalistic contexts in the classroom and provide them with the necessary language, skills and confidence (Hyland 2004: Tardy 2009). Another argument against the genre-based approach is that it restricts writers’ creativity and self-expression by prescribing what format, structure, language and register to use in writing, so students see genres as ‘molds into which the content is poured’ (Hyland 2004: 19) or ‘unthinking application of formulas’ (Swales 1990: 33). While acknowledging that genres *do* impose certain constraints, Hyland (2004, 2003) and Bhatia (2013) assert that they do not dictate what students write and how, but offer an abundance of choices that help students convey their intentions and accomplish their purposes through writing. The choices of grammar, vocabulary and register are made on the basis of students’ communicative purposes and the settings in which they are writing (Hyland 2004). Finally, genre-based instruction is criticized for shifting the focus on the final product and, as such, it is neglected in favor of the process-based approach (ibid.). However, research suggests that process and genre are not mutually exclusive but complementary (Hyland 2004, 2003: Tribble 1996: Dirgeyasa 2016). Process-based instruction presupposes that students are already familiar with different genres and the conventions embodied in them (Hyland 2004), but teachers should not expect them to possess such knowledge without previous instruction and practice. Process and genre should therefore work in unison to compensate for what the other is lacking. Instead of the quest for the perfect approach, genre researchers and writing teachers suggest a synthesis of approaches in writing instruction – product, process and genre – that will ensure that students understand the processes involved in writing texts, the communicative purposes they want to achieve, the linguistic resources and patterns they need to accomplish them and the way the text is embedded in a wider social context which influences their choices in writing (Badger & White 2000: Dirgeyasa 2016: Hyland 2003, 2004: Bhatia 2004: Reppen 2001).

The continuing interest in genres has led to the identification and exploration of different genres, business letters being one of the major

professional genres (Hyland 2013; Nickerson 2005) and central to this paper. As reflective ESP practitioners, we have decided to re-examine the current practice employed in teaching business letter writing at a business-oriented university in Belgrade, Serbia, as part of the course English for Specific Purposes 1. The paper is based on the analysis of the lesson plan that is used for teaching business letter writing, the analysis of the lesson delivery, and the analysis of the students' performance in the letter writing task as part of the final exam that took place in September 2022. On the basis of those analyses, the goal of the paper is to propose a revised genre-based approach to teaching business letter writing with some practical guidelines and activities that language instructors can use to help students tackle the most common problems associated with writing for business purposes.

The present paper is divided into eight sections. After the Introductory remarks, Section 2 presents the body of literature pertaining to the genre-based approach to teaching writing and business letters as teaching materials. Section 3 looks at the writing task in the final exam and the criteria against which students are assessed. Section 4 then outlines our current genre-based approach and the procedure for teaching business letter writing and is followed by the analysis of the lesson delivery and the students' performance in the final exam in Section 5. Sections 6 and 7 present the revised genre-based approach to teaching business correspondence along with some practical suggestions and activities. Finally, concluding remarks are stated in Section 8.

## 2. Literature Review

Recent years have seen the exploration of different approaches to teaching business correspondence and one that has received considerable attention is a genre-based approach. The origins of genre-based teaching trace back to Swales' publication of *Genre Analysis* in 1990 and its influence is still felt after four decades. He defines genres as 'a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes' (Swales 1990: 58). He explores the notion of genres in academic and research settings, while Bhatia (2013) takes his definition as a starting point and extends it to encompass business settings. Both researchers study genres in the context of writing and the following principles apply in both cases (Hyland 2004: 5-6):

- Genre-based teaching sees writing as an attempt to communicate with the target audience and achieve some purpose.
- Genre-based teaching enables writing teachers to select the kinds of texts that students will be required to write in their target contexts and organize their courses to meet those needs.

- Genre-based teaching combines content, language, contexts and instructions regarding how to communicate effectively in writing.
- Genre-based teaching is not meant to be taken as a set of prescriptive writing techniques to be followed blindly in every classroom, but rather as an abundance of choices that students have at their disposal.

According to this, genre-based writing instruction requires students to use specific language and formats that show awareness of their readers and the communicative purposes they are trying to achieve. Genre-based writing instruction is hence explicit as teachers give clear descriptions of how language patterns combine to shape meanings; systematic as it links texts and contexts to show students that what they write and how they write depends on their message, purpose and audience; needs-based; supportive; empowering; critical and conscience-raising (Hyland 2004: 10-11).

### **2.1 Business letters**

As a result of considerable research in the field of genres and written business discourse teaching in general, business letters have emerged as one of the major professional genres (Hyland 2003, 2004; Bhatia 2013; Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson 1999). According to Bhatia (2008), “business letters are one of the most predominant instruments for initiating, establishing, negotiating, maintaining and terminating business relationships and as such they often form the basis of any ESP or business communication programme” (as cited in Gillaerts & Gotti 2008: 38). Not only are they widely available, varied in terms of sub-genres, relevant to students and motivating (Maley in Burbidge et al. 1996: foreword) but they also serve to satisfy a real communicative purpose and contain a wide range of lexico-grammatical resources (Bahtia 2004), persuasive style (Bahtia 2013) and useful rhetorical strategies (Bargiela-Chiappini 2014), as well as the notions of politeness and formal register. Furthermore, they show students how to organize their business communication by following appropriate writing conventions related to layout, content and register to satisfy their immediate goal (Bhatia in Gillaerts & Gotti 2008). Since they are traditionally reliable, authentic, interactional and easy to manipulate if sent in the electronic form, business letters prevail over the use of email communication and remain the most widely used and richest genre (Bhatia in Gillaerts & Gotti 2008). Additionally, writing business letters is a skill transferable to other contexts so students will be able to apply them in writing emails or if they plan to take the IELTS exam (General Module) or FCE. Finally, knowing how to write effective business letters guarantees future usefulness in real life, which gives students an added incentive and motivation.

Genres guide pre-service members of the business community by defining sequenced events that occur as part of a broader social context referred

to in literature as *genre colonies* (Bhatia 2004). For example, when seeking employment, an individual goes through a set of events such as browsing job advertisements, writing and sending a curriculum vitae and a job application letter, which is followed by an invitation to a job interview, a letter of acceptance or rejection and, in case of the former, a job offer (Bhatia 2004; Gillaerts & Gotti 2008: 10). During the entire process, the individual encounters a variety of genres but knows how to act because of the awareness of different conventions that apply in each. Though small, job application letters are an indispensable part of applying for a job and are hence the focal point of this paper.

## **2.2. Job application letters**

Job application letters are promotional genres characterized by persuasiveness as writers try to promote themselves and persuade their readers to call them for an interview (Bhatia 2013: 118). A job application letter should offer a favorable, positive and relevant description of the abilities of the candidate (ibid.). So a job letter should be persuasive but not reveal all the details about the candidate, only the most salient ones (ibid.). Finally, the success of a job application letter depends on the readers' response (ibid.) and that is why it is difficult to address in the artificial context of the classroom.

Writing a letter of application is a job- and culture-specific task. Nevertheless, many authors have suggested practical guidelines for writing it along with useful phrases, layout, formatting, style, tone, grammar, punctuation and spelling (Bloomsbury Business Essentials), a seven-part structure of a job application letter (Bhatia 2013: 122) and some general principles such as gaining the reader's attention, providing proof of one's competence and requesting an interview (Sigband 1984: 63; Love & Tinervia, 1986: 158). Since this paper is not concerned with the genre analysis of job application letters but with instructing students how to write them effectively, it will not delve into letter elements or language found in them any further. Instead, here follows the description of the text students are expected to produce in the exam and how it is assessed.

## **3. Writing task in the final exam as part of the ESP1 course, testing and assessing**

English for Specific Purposes 1 (ESP1) is a mandatory two-semester course in the first year of studies of ICT and Management at University of Belgrade, Faculty of Organizational Sciences which focuses largely on business correspondence. The groups are quite large and heterogenous considering the fact that 800-900 students register for the course each year.

In order to complete all the prerequisites for the course ESP1 and receive a grade, the students must take the midterm exam in January worth 40 points and the final exam in June worth 50 points, while the remaining ten points are

awarded based on the participation in class and the completion of additional tasks. The midterm exam is computer-based and there is a prerequisite of scoring at least 21 points in order to pass.

The final exam is paper-based and tests the students' theoretical and practical knowledge of business letters as a genre - their ability to recognize the genre of the given letter, its communicative purpose and format, and insert the letter elements and the given words correctly and in the appropriate places (Task 1), correct the spelling, punctuation and grammar mistakes and the issues of wrong register in the given letter (Task 2), insert the correct words to complete the sentences (Task 3) and circle the correct answers to theoretical questions about business letter writing (Task 4). The genres that the students expect to see are letters of request, inquiry, complaint, thank you or congratulation - a different type of letter for each task.

Task 5 is the most important and the most difficult task in the final exam, which is why we have decided to focus on it exclusively. It is worth 20 points out of 50 and requires students to write a letter (job application, motivation or recommendation) adhering to the following:

- the letter format to be used;
- the number of words the letter should contain;
- a note about the aspects they should pay attention to: format, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and all mandatory elements of the letter;
- five keywords to use and
- prompts to include in the body paragraphs.

Students should first identify the type of business letter they need to write based on the first and final sentence in the letter that they are given. They are also given some space for their draft before writing the final version in ink on the next page (see Table 1 in the Appendix for a sample business letter that the students should be able to produce in the exam).

Students' letters are assessed based on:

- whether all the mandatory elements are written correctly and in the appropriate places;
- whether the letter contains approximately 100 words and all the five keywords;
- the extent to which grammar and spelling mistakes impede understanding and
- whether the information is organized into paragraphs in a logical, coherent way and responds to every given prompt through context and examples (see Table 2 in the Appendix for details about the assessment criteria).



We have decided to focus on the final exam on the course ESP1 that was administered in September 2022 for the purposes of the present paper. The reason for the selection of the September exam period is due to the fact that the majority of the students who take the exam in September are average students, so we are more likely to uncover the usual problem areas than, say, in June, when advanced students usually take the exam, or October, when the weakest students take it. Out of the total number of 877 students who registered for the course ESP1 in the school year 2021/2022, 187 students registered for the final exam in the September exam period, while 168 took it. Out of those 168 students, 68 of them failed the exam, but their exam paper was still taken into account provided that they had completed Task 5. It is also worth mentioning that students were given two different exam papers, one required them to write a motivation letter and the other asked them to write a job application letter. We have decided to focus on the latter since more space has been given to it in literature than motivation letters and because students will doubtlessly need it more when they graduate. The sample selected for the analysis comprises 60 job application letters written in the final exam. Having presented the writing task in the final exam and the assessment criteria, the next section looks at how we prepare the students for it.

#### **4. Lesson plan for the job application letter writing instruction**

As mentioned before, the course ESP1 is designed specifically for pre-service students of intermediate level of English and above and focuses mainly on business correspondence. The order of topics is as follows: introduction to business letter writing, on the way to work, a letter of inquiry and request, a motivation letter, job hunting and a recommendation letter, writing a CV, a job application letter, a thank-you and congratulation letter, on the job, a complaint letter, emails and telephoning, and meetings. One session covers one topic lasting for 90 minutes every week. The topics that are relevant for the present paper are the introduction to business letter writing and a job application letter.

It is worth mentioning here that the procedure for instructing students how to write job application letters described below is the one that we are currently following, not the revised one. In addition, the procedure is more or less the same for teaching all other genres, so all the guidelines and activities provided in Section 6 and Section 7 could be used for teaching not only job application but also all other types of business letters.

In the first session of the course, the students are introduced to the basics of letter writing. They are expected to grasp the elements of a business letter and the basic rules for letter writing, and understand the difference between formal and informal register. The procedure is as follows:



- 1. General information:** Students are given general information about the course, midterm and final exam.
- 2. Warmer:** Teacher introduces the topic and asks students about their experience with writing business letters.
- 3. Introduction to the topic:** Teacher introduces the elements of a business letter (letterhead, date line, inside address, attention line, subject line, salutation, body, complimentary close, signature, name and title lines, enclosure line, copies line, postscript) and shows them a letter sample with the elements clearly identified.
- 4. Presentation:** Teacher explains every element separately including how to write it, some common mistakes, tips to remember, what information to include in every paragraph, etc.
- 5. Practice:** Students decide whether the statements on the PPT slides about letter writing are true or false.
- 6. Presentation:** Teacher explains some important points to remember when writing a business letter (plan your letter before you start writing, use a simple but polite style, write just enough information).
- 7. Presentation:** Teacher gives some important tips about the style of the letter (avoid jargon, be brief, give short but clear explanations, be positive, use full forms).
- 8. Presentation:** Teacher explains some basic rules of letter writing related to capitalization, punctuation, spelling and numerals.
- 9. Practice:** Students work individually to correct mistakes in a sample letter referring to punctuation, capitalization, spelling and numeral use.
- 10. Practice:** Students transform informal sentences into formal ones.

If there is still enough time, the students discuss the letter formats (block, full block, semi-block, official, simplified) by looking at sample letters in their coursebooks, comparing them and reporting on their distinctive features. If not, they devote some time to the topic in the first half of the next session. In subsequent sessions they cover the types of letters in the order mentioned earlier.

In week 7, the students learn about the job application letter. They are expected to grasp the content and the structure of it by referring to the given sample letter. They are also expected to produce a job application letter following the given information. The procedure is as follows:

- 1. Introduction:** Teacher presents the topic and explains the difference between a job application and a cover letter by referring to a side-by-side comparison on the PPT slide in the form of bullet points.
- 2. Discussion:** Students discuss which of the points on the slide they would include in an application letter.

- 3. Presentation:** Students are given a five-level structure of an application letter that comprises an introductory paragraph, a value-selling paragraph, a background summary paragraph, action statement and a statement of appreciation, including the information each paragraph should contain.
- 4. Task:** Teacher shows students a sample letter and asks them to analyze it.
- 5. Presentation:** Teacher gives some guidelines about writing (adapt the letter carefully to the conditions of the job opportunity and end your letter with a request for an interview).
- 6. Practice:** Students insert vocabulary in the correct blanks for every paragraph on the slide.
- 7. Practice:** Students match the given phrases from job advertisements with the phrases that applicants can put in their letter such as 'You must be PC literate' and 'I have good computer skills'.
- 8. Practice:** Students transform informal sentences into formal ones.
- 9. Independent writing:** At the end of the class, students do a vocabulary exercise and write an application letter for the position advertised in the exercise. They are told to use full block letter format and the information provided in the exercise.

Having discussed the relevant lesson plans, the following section provides reflective insights into the lesson delivery and the observation of the students' performance in class.

## **5. Analysis of the effectiveness of the lesson plan**

There are several recurrent problems that we have encountered while delivering this lesson to different groups following the previously mentioned lesson plan. Naturally, some students are very excited about letter writing, so we stayed an hour longer waiting for them to finish and giving feedback. However, the following scenario is a lot more common. There is a lively discussion, the students are actively participating, listening, answering questions and doing exercises but no sooner had we explained the writing task than the students' facial expressions changed into disinterested or bored. Within a few minutes the majority of them is either talking or using their phones. Soon, most of them have given up, put their pens down, closed their notebooks or just pretend to be writing. As we monitor and assess on the spot, we notice that they have issues with spelling and content. As one student reported, 'I cannot write because I do not have anything to write about'. So they say they will do it at home and only few students manage to complete the task by the end of the class. Writing business letters for homework is another issue. This year only few people sent their writing assignments for feedback via Microsoft Teams. This shows that

students do very little or no practice at home during the semester. It is also worth mentioning that even though a surprisingly high number of students registers for the course, as many as 900 students, the attendance rate drops dramatically as the course progresses. Student participation rate drops, too. So does their motivation. The question is why.

There is an abundance of possible explanations for such low attendance, poor student engagement and poor task accomplishment in class or for homework. Writing for real purposes, such as writing a job application letter, often poses challenges for English-language students as their ability to compose the letter largely depends on their knowledge and previous experience of the genre (Hyland 2004). Naturally, if they have not had any, the task will be all the more daunting. Writing becomes even more difficult if we consider the fact that it requires complex, higher order thinking skills such as brainstorming, selecting ideas, planning, developing ideas and sequencing them logically while paying attention to lower level skills such as correct grammar, vocabulary and appropriate style (Hedge 2005; Raimes in Richards & Renandya 2002: 306-314). This is bound to demotivate students, especially if their overall knowledge of English is not at a satisfactory or expected level. Moreover, students are often aware of their problems in writing and already have certain feelings and attitudes toward it (Hedge 2005), which may put a damper on their confidence and motivation to even try knowing that they will not do it well. In addition, although technology is used in the classroom, writing the letter relies on the traditional pen-and-paper method, which is too far-fetched and uninteresting. So is the frontal way of teaching and a lack of variety in terms of interaction and stimuli. Besides, it is an overly ambitious plan to expect the students to grasp the notions of the given sub-genre and produce it the same class of ninety minutes. Based on the lesson analysis it is also plausible that:

- First-year students have had very little or no work experience and hence lack material to write about.
- Students fail to recognize the relevance of the subject matter and the task for their wider lives because it is removed from the authentic context.
- Students find rules about format and structure complicated and difficult to apply.
- Students do not like to be given rules explicitly but rather apply their analytical skills and creative thinking to derive them based on examples.
- The task is not real or purposeful as students write to an imaginary person about an imaginary job position so they do not have any personal gain. They will get neither the points nor the job. They are taught in the artificial setting, which proves the theory mentioned earlier (Hyland, 2004).

- Students find it hard to put themselves in the shoes of another imaginary character and write about their education, character and experiences.
- Students have very little possibility of individual expression and creativity, so writing seems rather mechanical with imposed grammar and vocabulary to use.
- Students did not do any guided or joint writing, so it is difficult for them to start writing by themselves on the first try.
- Students' expectations about the course might have been different and the course involves too much writing and too many business letters.

Finally, the accomplishment of the learning objective 'By the end of the class, the students will be able to write a job application letter' is questionable as most of the students do not manage to produce one in class. In that sense, it seems that the students were not properly prepared for the writing task.

### **5.1. Analysis of the students' performance in Task 5 as part of the final exam**

The insights obtained from the lesson analysis prompted us to conduct an error analysis of the students' job application letters written as part of the final exam (Task 5) and investigate the extent to which they managed to apply what they had learned and identify common problem areas. However, this aspect will be briefly discussed as the focus of the paper is not the error analysis itself but suggestions for improving the writing instruction and hence students' learning process and exam performance.

According to the first criterion – letter format – 20 students wrote all elements correctly and in the right places scoring the maximum of four points, while 33 students scored below four points, which means that they misspelled the date, address, omitted names in addresses, used the inappropriate complimentary close or wrote the elements in the wrong places. English and Serbian follow different conventions for writing dates and addresses, so the interference between Serbian and English might have been the reason for misspelling them. Seven students did not write any element of the letter.

Regarding the second criterion – word number – the majority of the students, as many as 29 students, wrote the required 100 words, which indicates that word number is not an issue. However, only five students used all five keywords correctly, which is surprising, given that the words were studied in class and included in the PPT presentations. The other staggering majority used the word 'greatly' inadequately, left out or misspelled the other keywords, which can be attributed to their poor focus and the lack of attention in the exam.

Spelling and grammar mistakes are not that easily quantifiable but, generally speaking, the majority of 48 students out of 60 scored three points or less. The most frequently made grammar mistakes are related to articles and

plural forms (*a new skills*), prepositions (*graduate at, come up of new ideas, seek for*), -ing forms and infinitives (*enjoy to work*), tenses and word order. There were issues of spelling, such as letter addition (*possitive, gratefull, limitted*), letter omission (*adition, belive, knowlege, personally, progres*), while the most commonly misspelled words turned out to be 'experience', 'professional', 'appreciate', 'career' and 'colleagues'.

Finally, as regards the content, not one student scored the maximum of eight points. A small number of them (8) got six or seven points, while the majority of them (33) scored between three and five points. The most common mistakes were failing to address every prompt by contextualizing it and supporting it with examples, inadequate paragraphing and listing ideas with no logical organization or cohesion. One possible explanation for such a low number of points for this criterion is the fact that most students did not use the space devoted to drafting, which means that they spent very little or no time brainstorming, selecting, developing and organizing their ideas.

It is clear that the majority of the students struggled with every assessment criterion, which provides useful insights into what can be addressed with more attention in class so that the students can be prepared better. The next section offers practical guidelines and activities to that end by relying on the insights obtained from the analysis of the lesson plan, the lesson delivery and the students' performance in the writing task.

## **6. Practical guidelines for a revised genre-based approach to teaching business letter writing**

On more meticulous inspection of our approach, we can conclude that it is largely traditional, frontal, product-oriented, deductive and rule-driven. It is assumed that the students possess the knowledge of the language in terms of spelling, syntax, coherence, cohesion and the writing process altogether. They mostly work individually and the communication is from teacher to student. Scaffolding is done insufficiently. Too much attention is devoted to the format of the letter; too little to the content. Critical and analytical thinking skills are not fostered in the classroom, neither is student autonomy or taking responsibility for their learning. Besides, students are required to assume the identity of a fictive character and write about their education and personality traits, which may be hard for some students. They also need to write the letter to apply for a position they might not know much about, nor who a good candidate for that position would be, so that might be the reason for their poorly written content. Most importantly, the students are taught that letters are decontextualized, independent texts. For this reason, they cannot understand how cohesion and register change with each letter they send as part of the correspondence and

how the relationship between a writer and a reader develops in the process among others. In the light of this, some changes in our current genre-based writing teaching are presented below.

*1. Writing should be interactive, contextualized and embedded in a social context with a real communicative purpose.*

We write business letters with an awareness of who we are writing to and why. We are also aware that writing is an interactive, two-way process. We send letters and get responses. Our students do not get responses because the task itself is not situated in the relevant social context. Besides, letters are presented to them as decontextualized and independent texts rather than interdependent entities. As a result, they fail to notice how register changes from more formal to less formal in every subsequent letter, how referring to previous letters influences cohesion and how the type of letter they send as part of the correspondence changes with the communicative purpose. If they assume the role of a customer, they might first send an inquiry, then a request for the quotation, and finally a complaint about a late delivery. Instead of having students compose a single decontextualized letter in class with no real communicative purpose, which is how we can describe the task of writing about a fictive character applying for a fictive vacancy, there are two possible options.

The first teaching strategy is proposed by Littlejohn in his coursebook (2005) and involves defining the purpose and context for writing and then dividing students into two groups – group A sends the application letter; group B responds to it. Building on this technique, group B will then shortlist a few candidates from group A and send them a call for an interview, while unsuccessful candidates will get a rejection letter. The shortlisted candidates from group A will then prepare for the job interview, attend it and send follow-up letters. Group B will then work with the teacher to select an agreed number of candidates and send them a job offer. As it happens in real life, the process is interactive and the two groups send a series of letters consecutively in a ping-pong fashion while communication is given priority over grammatical accuracy.

The other option is to partner with the faculty or any other organization that has open programs for business students, or find an appealing internship that will offer freshmen an opportunity to gain practical experience and mentorship, which is going to be the final outcome at the end of the writing course. They will get to analyze the advertisement, fill in their CV and send an application letter. After receiving the response, a few of them will also have the chance to attend job interviews and send follow-up letters. In this way, writing is interactive, has a real, achievable goal and it is relevant for the students' professional lives. Since there is a lot at stake, it will be motivating and challenging at the same time.

*2. Writing conventions of the genre should be taught inductively rather than deductively.*

According to the genre approach, descriptions about a job application and any other type of letter should be explicit (Hyland 2004). We adhere to that. However, the learning process would be a lot more engaging, memorable and effective if students had to discover the principles themselves by following the inductive approach which is said to contribute to learner-centered teaching (Smart et al. 2021: 392-401). Instead of showing students the slides of the recommended structure and key vocabulary or grammar, students could work collaboratively in groups to analyze the formal elements of the letter; many possible structures, target audience, communicative purpose, desired objective, style, examples of formal language, key vocabulary and grammar structures, which falls into Feez's (1995) deconstructing stage of writing. This type of instruction is purposeful, collaborative and it fosters critical thinking, analytical and problem solving skills.

*3. Learning to write should be group-based and collaborative.*

As a result of social constructivism and the need for student-centered methodologies, group-based learning has become a dominant mode of instruction as it allows students to collaborate and communicate in order to learn (Knapp & Watkins 2005). The teacher's role has changed therewith from one of instructor to one of facilitator (ibid.) who provides the necessary conditions for learning and enough scaffolding. In our context, that means that students should work together to solve genre and language problems and complete writing tasks rather than individually. They could use ICT tools such as shared whiteboards for brainstorming ideas. They could also engage in peer assessment and provide feedback on each other's letters.

*4. Students should be encouraged to focus on the process as much as on the final product, if not more.*

Since one of the lesson objectives is to be able to write a job application letter and produce it by the end of the class, the students are led to think of writing as a product. Instead, teachers should implement process writing that involves group brainstorming, drafting, responding, revising, editing and evaluating (Seow 2002: 315-320). For example, the students can be instructed how to use the drafting space provided in the final exam. They should be told not to write full sentences which they would then copy in the place meant for the final version of the letter, but to brainstorm, develop and organize ideas, which will not only make their writing more coherent but also lead to an increase in the number of points they get, especially for content. Teachers should also provide



clear models so that students are aware of the kind of product they need to produce at each stage (ibid.), which will give them a sense of accomplishment and motivation after every stage. In addition, "teaching genres as processes, rather than products, enables them to be applicable to all text types" (Knapp & Watkins 2005: 28), so instead of memorizing the structures of every business letter type, students will hold onto what applies to all of them. Computers and user-friendly programs can be exploited in the process rather than the pen-and-paper method as it makes drafting, editing and revisiting a lot more efficient (ibid.).

*5. Focus should be shifted from the format to the content of the letter.*

During the course, students learn about five different letter formats (full block, block, official, simplified and semi-block). They stress too much over the positioning of the letterhead, inside address, date and complimentary close. The truth is that they do not need to know that many formats as they will convey their message effectively even if they know only one. Nobody is going to pass their application letter to the 'rejected' pile because they have put the complimentary close on the left instead of right. But they will do so if the content leaves a lot to be desired. Instead of teaching the five formats, students should learn about how to develop their ideas, support them with examples, organize them logically into paragraphs that show understanding of their reader, communicative purpose they are trying to achieve and their ultimate goal. They should learn about cohesion, coherence, persuasiveness and politeness in speech and how to make their letters stand out. This will not only increase their number of points in the writing task but also help hone their writing skills for life.

*6. Teachers should encourage asynchronous learning rather than doing everything in class.*

Students cannot be expected to learn about the structure of the letter, key vocabulary and write the letter in one 90-minute class, especially without a prior collaborative construction. Instead of doing it all in class, students should be given the chance to study the key concepts independently at home as learning is the result of iteration and sustained application (Knapp & Watkins 2005). For example, teachers could use online platforms such as Canvass, Google Classroom or Microsoft Teams where students would be able to access the lesson materials, complete exercises, post their work, get peer feedback, connect with the course instructors and track their progress. This creates an online student community, fosters learner autonomy and makes use of computer-assisted learning and technology.

*7. Students should be trained to self-assess and reflect on their writing.*

Self-assessment has been somewhat neglected in the classroom but research shows that it is very useful in the language classroom in that it empowers students to be more autonomous, self-sufficient and independent (*Peñaflorida as cited in Richards & Renandya 2002: 344-353*). Our students could work in groups and with the teacher to make a checklist and refer to it after every stage of the writing process. They can also be asked reflective questions about their piece of writing, for instance, what they did well and what they can improve.

Combining all the suggestions would mean that writing teaching would be a lot more learner-centered as students would be encouraged to interact, make decisions, assess themselves, have more control over their learning inside and outside the classroom and learning would be more personally relevant to them (*Benson as cited in Burns & Richards 2012: 32*). It would also incorporate all the approaches – genre, process and product, and make students understand that writing is inclusive of all those approaches. They would understand that letters are contextualized and linked texts that the participants in interaction send to achieve a particular communicative purpose and they develop their relationship and change their register as the interaction unfolds. Finally, memorizing templates and mechanically reproducing them in the exam would be discouraged and that is only possible if students understand the relevance of the writing task for their lives. The next section attempts to provide descriptions of activities that rely on the aforementioned suggestions.

*8. Suggested activities embodying the revised genre-based approach to teaching business letter writing*

There are many different ways of organizing a writing lesson around business letters. The one that is used in this paper is proposed by *Feez (1995)* and involves developing the context, modeling and deconstructing the text, joint construction of the text, independent construction of the text and linking related texts (*as cited in Hyland 2004: 129*). It is conducive to teaching business letter writing because students examine the purpose and common features of the genre before engaging in a guided and independent writing task, which also provides just the right amount of support and scaffolding. Within the stage of joint construction, students follow the process writing approach comprising planning, group brainstorming, drafting, responding, revising, editing and evaluating with the teacher (*Seow as cited in Richards & Renandya 2002: 315*). The activities below target job application letters but may be adapted for teaching any other sub-genre of business letters.

Before the start of the writing course, students are asked to reflect on their understanding of the writing process, their assumptions and attitudes about writing, including their strengths and weaknesses as writers. They are

also instructed how to approach genres and writing as a process as opposed to product. It is assumed that their level is intermediate and above.

## 1. Developing the context

### *Exercise 1: Setting the context*

Procedure:

1. Students watch a movie insert about a person applying for a job and answer questions about it. They discuss cross-cultural comparisons of similarities and differences between their home and target culture.
2. Students discuss their experiences with and assumptions about job hunting. They are asked about the process and stages of a job application process (browsing ads, researching the company, writing a CV, application letter, job interview, thank you letter, getting the offer).
3. Students are told about the course and course objectives. They analyze what they will be required to do in the exam (see Table 1 in the Appendix for details) and discuss how they will prepare for it, for example by interacting with other groups to send and respond to business letters. They are given a real, achievable goal that will motivate them such as getting an internship at the faculty.

### *Exercise 2: Understanding the sub-genre*

Procedure: Students are divided into groups and each group gets a job application letter. Their task is to read and answer the following questions (adapted from Hedge 2005; Hyland 2004):

- a) What is the text about?
  - b) What purpose does it serve?
  - c) Who produced the text?
  - d) Who is the text written for (intended audience)?
  - e) What is the writer's desired effect (change their opinion, convince them)?
  - f) What is the relationship between the writer and the reader?
  - g) What are the current reader's and writer's roles and relationships? What is their relative status and power?
  - h) What kind of relationship does the writer want to establish with their reader?
  - i) What register, tone and style is used in the letter?
- After the group discussion, each group reports to the class.

## 2. Modeling and deconstructing the text

Students are told that there are a few stages to go through in order to fully understand any sub-genre. These are layout, content, register and lexicogrammatical features.

### *Exercise 1: Understanding the layout and letter elements*

Procedure: In groups, students read the same text again and this time, their task is to:

- a) Identify the genre: academic article, memo, biography, business letter. How do you know?
- b) Identify the elements every business letter is likely to contain: date, letterhead, inside address, salutation and complimentary close.
- c) Each group then investigates one element in terms of correct writing, common mistakes, comparisons between English and Serbian.
- d) Each group reports to the class as a way of peer teaching.

### *Exercise 2: Understanding the content*

Procedure:

- a) As a whole class, students are asked about what information a job application letter should contain.
- b) In pairs, they analyze the information given in the letter, the structure of the letter and draw its skeleton, but they are also asked about any alternative ways of organizing information into paragraphs.
- c) They discuss the notions of coherence, cohesion, developing ideas and organizing them into paragraphs by watching a video and doing a quiz. Then, they analyze the given text in terms of those aspects (paragraphing, cohesive devices, main ideas and supporting examples).

### *Exercise 3: Understanding tone, style and register*

Procedure:

- a) In the same groups again and using the same letter, students analyze and make notes of the tone, style and register of the letter (persuasive, formal, polite).
- b) They write tips using the structure 'a job application letter should/should not'.
- c) Each group shares their tips with the class.

### *Exercise 4: Understanding lexico-grammatical features*

Procedure:

- a) Since each group has a different job application letter, students now need to mingle with other groups to write down more vocabulary and grammar structures commonly found in job application letters.

- b) In the same groups again, students report on the common lexicogrammatical features and their tips to their peers.
- c) Students discuss grammar and vocabulary as a whole class.

*Exercise 5: (Running) dictation for spelling practice*

Option 1: Teacher dictates the text of a job application letter and students work individually to write it down. After they have finished, they swap their work with their peers for peer assessment.

Option 2: Students are divided into groups. One student has the task to write while others take turns to run down the board, read, memorize sentences and come back to report to the writing student. They should have the entire letter written by the end of the exercise and swap it with other groups for peer assessment and correction. They should be provided with a checklist for what to look for in peer assessment. They may also self-assess (acknowledgments to the TESOL methodology course).

**Activities for practice**

*Exercise 1:* In pairs, students are given cutouts of a job application letter. Their task is to:

- a) reorganize paragraphs and elements of the letter;
- b) choose adequate titles for each paragraph;
- c) state main ideas and supporting examples;
- d) discuss how paragraphs and sentences are structured and organized to achieve cohesion;
- e) analyze the lexico-grammatical features.

*Exercise 2:* In pairs, student A dictates the text of the letter and student B writes down keywords they hear and then reconstructs the text. Student B may ask their partner questions about the text if needed. Student A corrects (adapted from Burbidge et al. 1996: 41).

*Exercise 3:* One half of the class is given one letter, the other half another letter structured differently. Working in pairs, they need to list all verbs/verb phrases in order of occurrence, then all nouns/noun phrases. Students working on one letter swap lists with students working on the other. Using a new list but working in the same pairs, they need to reconstruct the text using the new list. They compare their versions with the original ones (taken from Burbidge et al. 1996: 43).

*Exercise 4:* Students work individually to correct errors in a job application letter. They check with their peers.

*Exercise 5:* Students rewrite an informal letter into a formal one.

*Exercise 6:* Students complete a gap-fill letter.

### **3. Joint construction**

According to Hyland (2004), students engage in teacher-led scaffolded collaborative writing in this stage and his suggestions are adapted to the given context and presented below.

*Exercise 1:* Working as a whole class, teacher and students work together to construct the application letter by following the procedure outlined in the task sheet (see Table 4 in the Appendix). Teacher writes students' ideas and sentences on the board/computer. For the sake of time, some of the stages might be skipped but it is important that students learn how to edit, proofread, use the checklist to self-assess and reflect on the process. They are told that they would be using the same task sheet for independent writing.

*Exercise 2:* In pairs, students complete unfinished letters and then compare them with their peers' letters or the original.

*Exercise 3:* In pairs, students edit a letter for content, layout, meaning and structure.

*Exercise 4:* In small groups, students are given prompts for constructing the letter (visual stimuli, questions or key vocabulary and grammar to use). They:

- a) Write the letter;
- b) Present it to other groups and explain their writing process;
- c) Other groups follow the assessment checklists and note down main ideas, supporting examples, grammar, vocabulary and cohesive devices used;
- d) They provide feedback in a friendly manner by referring to the checklist.

### **4. Independent construction**

In this stage, students work independently to construct the letter, bringing together their knowledge about the writing process, context, genre, content and language (Hyland, 2004).

*Exercise 1. Independent writing following a task sheet*

Procedure:

- a) Students are presented with the task and given visual stimuli (brochure, video) about the company and open vacancies/internships along with the job descriptions.
- b) Students refer to the task sheet (see Table 4 in the Appendix) and their CV. They use their computers to write the text of the email and job application letter, following the guidelines in the task sheet.
- c) At this point, the teacher monitors and provides feedback.
- d) Having completed all the steps in the task sheet, they send their application form, letter and CV.

Depending on the technique used, they either submit their application to the selected company or another group of students. In the case of the former, they await the company's response and act accordingly. In the case of the latter, the two groups enter into correspondence and the goal is to select a few candidates who excelled at writing letters and job interviews. Those students get a reward.

#### *Exercise 2: Reflection*

Procedure: In groups, students reflect on the writing process and answer these and the questions from the task sheet (see Table 4 in the Appendix).

#### *Exercise 3: Presentation*

Procedure: In groups, students give presentations on how to write an effective business letter to their classmates, other groups or the next freshmen taking the course.

### **5. Linking related texts**

In this stage, students get to investigate how this sub-genre relates to other related sub-genres, (Hyland 2004) and the following ideas have been adapted from his book.

*Exercise 1:* In pairs, they explore how job application letters are written in different countries and cultures and examine cross-cultural differences. They make notes and report to the class.

*Exercise 2:* Students transform the text into spoken versions in the form of job interview questions.

*Exercise 3:* Students rewrite the text to meet the requirements of another culture.

*Exercise 4:* Students interview their HR professors to find out what they are looking for in job application letters.



## 8. Conclusion

This article has examined our current genre-based approach to teaching writing at tertiary levels, revealed some of its pitfalls and proposed a revised approach that compensates for the pitfalls of the previous one. On close examination, the previous approach is largely traditional, teacher-directed, deductive, rule-driven, product-oriented, decontextualized, and prioritizes individual work instead of collaboration and letter format instead of content. Most importantly, it does not discourage mechanical writing or memorization of ready-made letters and fails to communicate to students that writing should always arise from the need to truly interact with others, establish relationships and accomplish goals in a real social context (Swales 1990: Martin 1985: Hyland 2003, 2004: Bhatia 2004: Hammond & Darewianka 2001: Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson 2014; Gillaerts & Gotti 2008). These pitfalls are some of the potential reasons for students' low attendance and engagement in class. Another reason is the students' lack of experience with the genre and without the chance to construct the text with the teacher before working independently, the task is all the more daunting and demotivating. It has also been made manifest in the exam that students have issues with organizing information into paragraphs, linking their ideas and supporting them with examples, using the keywords correctly and spelling. The most plausible explanations for these recurrent mistakes are that students were not given proper instruction how to self-assess, they focused too much on the format and the final product. The fact that the majority of the students did not write anything in the space devoted to drafting speaks in favor of their not knowing how to use that space and why, thinking that brainstorming ideas and vocabulary is a waste of time. Those who *did* write in that place wrote at least half the letter, so they copied it in almost the same manner on the page for assessment. This finding proves that genre and process not only supplement one another (Hyland 2004, 2003: Tribble 1996: Dirgeyasa 2016) but they must coexist together as drafting would probably contribute to more quality letters among others.

The revised genre-based approach to teaching business correspondence compensates for the disadvantages of the previous one in the following way. Firstly, it shifts the focus from the format to the content and from the product to the process. It also instructs students how to self-assess, fosters their critical, analytical and problem solving skills by allowing them to take an active role in their learning, derive conclusions themselves and work together to solve problems inside and outside the classroom. Above all, they are made aware of the intertextuality of letters as texts and are given tasks that have a real communicative purpose and a real goal to accomplish, so it is an added incentive for them to attend sessions, engage in tasks and perform better in class and the final exam. To that end, they need to grasp the principles of the genre by

analyzing the context, modeling and deconstructing the text, engaging in a joint construction, writing it independently and linking it to other genres and sub-genres (Hyland, 2004). Following these stages and doing exercises that embody the revised approach and target the students' problem areas, we believe that students would become more effective business letter writers.

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**PREDLOG UNAPREĐENE METODE ŽANROVSKE PEDAGOGIJE U IZVOĐENJU  
NASTAVE POSLOVNE KORESPONDENCIJE U KONTEKSTU VISOKOG OBRAZOVANJA:  
PRAKTIČNE SUGESTIJE I AKTIVNOSTI**

S u m m a r y

Poslovna korespondencija na engleskom jeziku je preduslov za uspešno funkcionisanje u savremenom poslovnom svetu. U nastojanju da pruže studentima potrebno znanje i veštine kako bi dorasli ovom izazovu, nastavnici engleskog jezika struke širom sveta su uvrstili pisanu komunikaciju na engleskom jeziku kao deo silabusa u okviru svojih predmeta u kontekstu visokog obrazovanja, oslanjajući se na brojne pristupe i metode pri izvođenju nastave, a jedna od njih jeste metoda žanrovske

pedagogije (*genre-based approach*). Cilj ovog rada jeste da predloži unapređenu metodu žanrovske pedagogije koja bi se primenjivala u izvođenju nastave poslovne korespondencije studentima menadžmenta i informaciono komunikacionih tehnologija u okviru predmeta Engleski jezik struke 1 na prvoj godini osnovnih studija na jednom fakultetu u Beogradu. Rad je baziran na analizi planova za izvođenje nastave poslovne korespondencije koje autori rada trenutno koriste u nastavi, analizi uspešnosti planova i analizi rezultata koje su studenti ostvarili na poslednjem zadatku na ispitu u kom se od studenata zahtevalo da napišu pismo prijave za posao. Zaključke dobijene na osnovu ovih analiza bismo potom uzeli kao polazne tačke prilikom osmišljavanja unapređene žanrovske metode, smernica i aktivnosti koje bi bile korisne kako onima koji osmišljavaju kurseve i programe tako i nastavnicima jezika. Unapređena metoda bi, idealistički posmatrano, ne samo doprinela tome da studenti usvoje stanovište da pisanje uvek proizilazi iz stvarne komunikativne namere i određenog cilja koji želimo da postignemo, već bi ih nagnala da sarađuju sa vršnjacima, da se fokusiraju na proces pisanja umesto na finalni proizvod, da rade kod kuće i da nauče kako da ocene pismo koje napišu između ostalog. Ipak, sve sugestije, nastavne tehnike i aktivnosti je potrebno testirati u učionici, što otvara vrata daljem istraživanju u ovoj oblasti.

*Ključne reči:* engleski za posebne namene, unapređena metoda žanrovske pedagogije, poslovna korespondencija, sugestije, nastavne tehnike

## Appendix

IT Company  
48 Westbourn Road, Borehamwood Leeds, UK  
+434543435453, www.itcompany.com

International Computing Services  
38 West Street  
London, UK

March 19, 2016

Dear Sir or Madam,

I would like to apply for the vacancy advertised in the Guardian on March 16, 2016 for a Personal Assistant to the Sales Director.

As you will see from my enclosed CV, I am currently working as a Personal Assistant in a small engineering company. In addition to day-to-day administration work, I represent the Sales Manager on some occasions and am delegated to take certain policy decisions in his absence. My most recent experience was implementing a new strategy which increased our sales by 40%. On another occasion, we managed to meet a very tight deadline due to my effective delegating skills and ability to motivate my team. I speak French and Italian fluently and use both languages in the course of my work.

I am particularly interested in this post as I would like to become more involved with an IT organization and am very familiar with many of your software products. As a Personal Assistant to the Sales Director, I would develop and implement new sales strategies and ensure that the team is always motivated and on track.

If you feel that my qualifications meet your requirements, note that I am available for an interview at your convenience. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Yours faithfully,  
Carol Louis  
Personal Assistant

Table 1. A sample letter students should be able to produce in the exam

Criteria	Description	Points
Form	Does the letter have all the mandatory elements? Does the complimentary close match the salutation? Are the date and the numbers written correctly? Are the elements written in adequate places based on the given format?	4
Spelling & Grammar	To what extent do spelling and grammar mistakes impede understanding? Are they basic or more advanced mistakes?	4
Word Number	Is the letter of the recommended length (80-110 words)? Are all the keywords used correctly?	4
Content	Is the letter divided into paragraphs? Are the paragraphs arranged logically? Is there enough information on the character's education? Is there enough information on the candidate's character? Is there enough information on how the company can benefit from the candidate?	8
Total number of points: 20		

Table 2. Task assessment criteria

Write the letter in SEMI-BLOCK LETTER FORMAT using around **100 words**. You lose points if you ignore the following: **format of the letter, spelling, grammar, punctuation**, etc. Insert **all mandatory elements** of the letter. (20 points).

- You **must** use all of the following words (do not change the form of the words; you may change the tense of the verb):

**to appreciate    in addition to    inventive    leader    greatly**

- You **must** say something about the **educational background** of the candidate; describe the **candidate's character** and how the company can **benefit** from the candidate. (20 points)

WRITE YOUR DRAFT HERE AND THE FINAL VERSION ON THE NEXT PAGE.

Dear Ms. Daniels,

My name is Maria Johnson and I would like to apply for the position of Senior Software Engineer.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

I look forward with enthusiasm to an opportunity for an interview.

Table 3. Writing task in the September exam period 2022 used to conduct error analysis



### **Writing instructions**

Look at the brochure about the open vacancies/internship programs. Read the descriptions and search for videos and testimonials online. The following questions might help you decide:

How will this internship be useful for me?

Are there any potential disadvantages or challenges?

What is the location of the company? Are there any cultural differences to be aware of in writing or any advisable formats to follow?

Pay attention to the application details (deadline for application, documents needed).

Once you have decided which internship/vacancy you want to apply for, work with your partner and follow the steps of the process writing.

You will be given feedback and points upon completing all the steps. But rather than focusing on the number of points, focus on the position you might land and new experiences it might bring you.

Good luck!

---

### ***Step 1: Brainstorming***

Look at your CV and reflect on your personality, experience, knowledge, skills and aspirations. Think about how they link to the internship/vacancy you selected. Make a mind map by referring to the following prompts:

Have you chosen two academic accomplishments relevant for the position?

Do you have any relevant working experience to include?

Have you chosen personality traits and skills relevant for the position?

Can you think of personal examples, stories or situations as proof of your skills?

Have you explained what you hope to get from this experience?

Have you explained how the company will benefit from you using specific examples?

Have you included any information that shows that you have done your research?

Is your letter unique? How?

Have you brainstormed grammar/vocabulary structures to use?

Step completed

**Step 2: Planning**

Draw a skeleton of your letter in the form of headings (for main ideas) and bullet points (for supporting ideas).

Organize the information logically into paragraphs.

Think about the number of words in each part of the letter.

Example:

Paragraph 1 is about \_\_\_\_\_ (my education / work experience / traits)

Supporting idea 1 (proof of skill and competence)

Supporting idea 2

Number of words in the paragraph should be \_\_\_\_\_

Step completed

**Step 3: Drafting**

Start writing your letter on your computer.

Focus on the bigger picture – communicative purpose, goal, style, ideas, examples and structure.

Do not worry about spelling and grammar at this point.

Step completed

Well done!

Now it is time for a break and working from home.

**Step 4: Getting feedback**

Upload your draft version on the platform and wait for the peer and teacher feedback.

Post a comment to your peers' work by referring to the checklist below and following the PQP method:

Praise – tell your peers what is good about their writing

Question – ask questions to prompt them to think about what they need to work on

Polish – offer suggestions in a friendly manner by referring to the checklist

Acknowledgements: I learned about this technique from the TESOL course given by the U.S. State Department.

Step completed

**Step 5: Revising and editing**

Working at home, incorporate teacher and peer feedback. Also, self-assess by referring to this checklist:

- Is your reader easily going to identify your communicative intention and goal?
- Is your letter formal, persuasive and polite?
- Does your letter have the matching salutation and complimentary close?
- Is the letter divided into paragraphs adhering to the required paragraphing conventions (indentation)?
- Are the paragraphs arranged logically?
- Have you included enough information about your education, personality and reasons for applying?
- Have you thought of any personal examples and stories to support your ideas as proof of your competence and skill?
- Is the letter of the appropriate length?
- Have you written the date?
- Have you written the letterhead and inside address?
- Have you used grammar and vocabulary typical of the genre?
- Are there any grammar and spelling mistakes?

Step completed

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**Step 6: Final correction**

Let the letter sink in. After a few days, re-read it again and check your content, spelling and grammar.

- Can you improve anything?
- Are you confident that this is THE letter that will help you achieve your goal?

Step completed

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**Step 7: Final feedback**

Post your final version on the platform along with the text of the email. Incorporate teacher comments, if any.

Step completed

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**Step 8: Application**

Submit your application to the company. Do not forget to attach your application letter and CV.

Step completed

**Step 9: Reflection and assessment**

Write a reflection paper by addressing the following questions:

Was the task sheet useful? If so, how?

Did you follow every stage or did you skip any (why)? Was that the right thing to do?

Did you repeat any stage more than one time?

Did you do anything that is not on the list?

Did you find anything challenging? How did you go about it?

What was the most important step in the process? Why?

How would you assess your task performance? Refer to the assessment criteria and checklist.

How has your view of writing changed based on this experience?

Will you continue to write in this way?

Step completed

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Congratulations! You have come to the end of the road.

Now let's wait for the happy news!

Table 4. Task sheet designed for students to use during joint and independent writing based on the revised genre-based approach and following the stages of the process writing proposed by Seow (as cited in Richards & Renandya 2002)