

# Enhancing Business English Writing Skills: A Qualitative Study Based on Student Documents

*Tran Thi Ai Huong\**

*Faculty of Foreign Languages, Ho Chi Minh City Industry and Trade College, Vietnam*

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**Abstract:** *This study examines the development of business English writing skills through a qualitative analysis of student-produced documents, including essays, reports, and correspondence samples. By analyzing a corpus of 50 student submissions, the research identifies recurring challenges such as inconsistent tone, improper use of technical terms, and grammatical errors. Findings reveal that students benefit significantly from structured practice and exposure to authentic business writing formats. The study emphasizes the role of self-correction and peer feedback in improving writing outcomes. These insights contribute to understanding effective strategies for fostering business English writing proficiency in academic and professional contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Business English, writing skills, a qualitative study, student documents*

## 1. Introduction

The ability to write effectively in business English is a critical skill for students preparing to enter the global workforce. Business English differs from general English in its formal tone, use of technical vocabulary, and structured formats, such as memos, reports, and proposals. Developing proficiency in this domain is particularly challenging for non-native speakers due to linguistic and cultural barriers (Flowerdew, 2016).

Vietnamese students face specific difficulties, including limited exposure to authentic business contexts and a reliance on theoretical instruction rather than practical application. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of integrating task-based learning and authentic materials into English writing instruction (Hyland, 2003). However, limited research has focused on analyzing student-produced documents to identify common writing challenges and effective strategies for improvement.

This study addresses this gap by analyzing a corpus of student-written business documents to uncover recurrent challenges and recommend strategies for enhancing writing proficiency. By focusing on real-world student outputs, the research provides actionable insights for improving teaching methodologies and materials in business English courses.

## 2. Literature Review

Business English writing has been the subject of numerous studies, often emphasizing its distinct

features and pedagogical approaches. Hyland (2003) argued that effective business writing requires mastering genre-specific conventions, including clarity, conciseness, and audience awareness. Similarly, Flowerdew (2016) highlighted the importance of intercultural competence in crafting business communications that resonate across diverse contexts.

Research on second-language writing suggests that non-native speakers often struggle with grammatical accuracy, lexical richness, and rhetorical appropriateness (Silva, 1997). In the Vietnamese context, studies have pointed to a lack of exposure to authentic business writing as a key barrier (Nguyen & Tran, 2020). Nguyen et al. (2021) proposed integrating more practical activities, such as case studies and peer-reviewed tasks, into English writing curricula.

While these studies provide valuable insights, most rely on surveys or interviews with educators and students. Few have systematically analyzed student-produced documents to identify specific writing issues and evaluate their progression. This study adopts a document analysis approach, offering a detailed examination of student submissions to provide empirical evidence on common challenges and effective strategies.

## 3. Methodology

This qualitative study utilizes document analysis to examine the writing proficiency of business English students. A sample of 50 documents,

including essays, reports, and emails, was collected from undergraduate students enrolled in business English courses at a Vietnamese university.

Each document was analyzed using thematic coding to identify recurring challenges in grammar, vocabulary, structure, and style. Key themes included tone consistency, technical vocabulary usage, and adherence to business writing conventions. To ensure reliability, the coding process was independently verified by two researchers.

#### 4. Findings

This section provides an in-depth exploration of the key findings based on the analysis of 50 student-generated business English documents. Each challenge and strategy is elaborated to offer a comprehensive understanding of the issues faced and the effective interventions identified.

##### 4.1. Common Challenges Identified

###### 4.1.1. Inconsistent Tone and Style

One of the most recurrent issues was the inability to sustain a professional and formal tone throughout the documents. For instance, business emails often began with phrases such as “Hi buddy” or “Hope you’re fine,” which are overly informal for workplace communication. In reports, students frequently included casual expressions, such as “it’s a no-brainer” or “we gotta fix this,” demonstrating their lack of familiarity with appropriate business etiquette.

A further observation was the inconsistent application of politeness strategies, particularly in emails requesting actions or providing instructions. For example, one email stated, “Send the report by tomorrow,” which came across as overly directive. Effective business writing requires balancing clarity with courtesy, an area in which most students underperformed.

###### 4.1.2. Limited Use of Business Vocabulary

The misuse or omission of business-specific vocabulary significantly affected the clarity and professionalism of the documents. In marketing reports, terms such as “target demographics” and “value proposition” were either misapplied or replaced with vague alternatives like “people we’re selling to” or “what makes us good.” Similarly, financial analysis reports showed frequent confusion between terms such as “gross profit” and “net profit.”

Students also struggled with collocations commonly used in business writing, such as “conduct

a survey,” often opting for incorrect phrases like “do a survey.” This lack of lexical precision diminished the quality of their arguments and made their writing appear less authoritative.

###### 4.1.3. Structural Weaknesses

Another prevalent issue was the absence of logical organization and coherence within documents. Reports frequently lacked clear headings or subheadings, making it difficult for readers to navigate the content. In essays, paragraphs were often underdeveloped, with ideas being introduced without sufficient explanation or evidence. For example, one essay on workplace communication challenges stated, “Emails are important because they save time,” without elaborating on how or why this is significant.

###### 4.1.4. Overreliance on Literal Translations

The influence of Vietnamese linguistic structures was evident in many submissions. Direct translations often resulted in awkward or nonsensical phrasing. For instance, the phrase “We will be hard to avoid mistakes,” intended to mean “It will be difficult to avoid mistakes,” reflected a literal translation of Vietnamese syntax. Such errors disrupted readability and often led to misinterpretation of the intended message.

#### 4.2. Effective Strategies Observed

##### 4.2.1. Use of Authentic Business Materials

Students who engaged with authentic business texts, such as company profiles, professional emails, and annual reports, demonstrated significant improvements in their writing. For example, one student group tasked with analyzing real-world emails exhibited a 25% reduction in tone-related errors in their subsequent assignments. Exposure to authentic materials helped students internalize genre conventions and appropriate language use.

##### 4.2.2. Iterative Writing and Self-Revision

The process of drafting and revising was shown to be particularly effective in enhancing writing quality. Students who submitted multiple drafts demonstrated marked improvements in organization and grammatical accuracy. For instance, one report’s initial draft contained fragmented sentences and inconsistent formatting. By the third revision, these issues were resolved, and the document adhered more closely to professional standards.

Self-revision also fostered greater linguistic awareness. Students were more likely to notice and correct common errors, such as subject-verb

agreement and article usage, during subsequent drafts.

#### 4.2.3. Collaborative Peer Review

Peer feedback emerged as one of the most impactful strategies for improving writing. Students often benefited from external perspectives, which helped them identify issues they had overlooked. For example, feedback such as, “*This sentence is too vague; what do you mean by ‘it’s important’?*” prompted students to refine their arguments and provide more specific evidence.

In one case, a student revised their conclusion to include actionable recommendations after peers pointed out its lack of substance. Such collaborative efforts not only improved individual writing but also cultivated a shared understanding of quality standards.

#### 4.2.4. Contextual Practice Assignments

Assignments simulating real-world scenarios, such as drafting a client proposal or responding to a customer complaint, enabled students to practice applying theoretical knowledge to practical situations. Documents produced in these contexts were more coherent and demonstrated greater alignment with professional norms. For instance, in one assignment, students were required to draft an internal memo announcing policy changes. Most submissions adhered to the appropriate structure and tone, with minimal guidance from instructors.

#### 4.2.5. Use of Technology

The integration of writing tools, such as Grammarly and business correspondence templates, proved beneficial. Students who utilized these tools produced documents with fewer grammatical errors and more consistent formatting. However, reliance on such tools without adequate understanding occasionally led to over-correction, such as replacing contextually appropriate phrases with overly formal alternatives.

### 5. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the multifaceted challenges faced by students in mastering business English writing. While linguistic and cultural barriers play a significant role, the lack of exposure to authentic materials and real-world practice exacerbates these difficulties.

The strategies identified—authentic material use, iterative writing, peer review, contextual practice, and technology integration—align with previous research emphasizing the importance of task-based and experiential learning (Hyland,

2003; Nguyen & Tran, 2020). These methods not only address linguistic deficiencies but also help students internalize professional standards and genre conventions.

However, the findings also highlight the limitations of over-reliance on tools like Grammarly and the risks of literal translation, emphasizing the need for foundational instruction in grammar and syntax. Moreover, collaborative activities, while effective, require careful facilitation to ensure constructive and actionable feedback.

### 6. Conclusion

This study offers valuable insights into the challenges and effective strategies for improving business English writing skills among Vietnamese students. Common issues, such as inconsistent tone, limited vocabulary, structural weaknesses, and literal translations, hinder students’ ability to produce professional-quality documents.

The integration of authentic materials, iterative writing practices, peer feedback, contextual assignments, and technological tools proved effective in overcoming these barriers. These strategies not only enhanced linguistic accuracy but also helped students internalize the conventions of professional business writing.

Based on the findings, several recommendations emerge:

Incorporate more authentic materials into writing curricula to expose students to real-world standards.

Encourage iterative writing processes to allow for continuous improvement.

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