



The Use of MAF and BLAF Analytical Tools in Assessing Business Communication Texts

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Abstract

This paper provides a vivid explanation of two analytical frameworks I designed for grading business communication texts. These frameworks are Memorandum Analytical Framework (MAF), and Business Letter Analytical Framework (BLAF). The paper, furthermore, provides a pedagogical guide about how MAF and BLAF are applied in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) classrooms, and in the world of business. It is my hope that these two frameworks will not only serve as potent benchmarks for assessing business communication texts that learners generate in SLA classrooms but frameworks that regulators of businesses can depend on for maintaining standards in terms of presentation styles for letter and memo writing. The paper is segmented into four sections. The introduction presents the background information about the problem, grading of business communication texts (*i.e.* memos and business letters), and my justification for propounding these frameworks. The next section, analytical tools—MAF and BLAF, projects graphical representation of the frameworks, and explanation of the variables used. The third section, pedagogical application of MAF and BLAF, explains how MAF and BLAF are used in assessing business communication texts. The conclusion section summarizes the paper, and presents a statement of expectation concerning how stakeholders in SLA can utilize MAF and BLAF.

Subject Areas

Education, Linguistics

Keywords

Business Letters, Memoranda, Business Communication, GTEC, Corrective Feedback, Pre- and Post-Tests

1. Introduction

In the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) classroom, the teaching and learning

of Business Communication texts are not all-inclusive if texts generated by learners are not graded. Grading provides an opportunity for learners to receive feedback from facilitators. This is especially so if the SLA teacher uses pre-and post-corrective feedback techniques. Thus, corrective feedback (particularly the one done through written pre-and post-test items) serves as breeding grounds for fine-tuning of formats and ideas needed in writing Business Communication texts. This exercise is imperative since it helps the SLA graduates to write effective business correspondence in the world of business. However, sometimes, the grading of some texts (for example, business letters and memoranda) is confronted with the challenge of nonexistence of a comprehensive standard or marking scheme which highlights the rubrics needed for writing such texts. This situation usually leads to inconsistencies in the issuance of marks for learners. I identified this gap between 2015 and 2016 when I did pilot studies in Ghana about written corrective feedback of students' texts—letters and memoranda. So, in 2017, I developed Memorandum Analytical Framework (MAF), and Business Letter Analytical Framework (BLAF). These frameworks were used in grading the pre-and post-primary data I collected from student participants for my Ph.D. studies.

Business organisations increasingly want to use the Intranet as an information-giving medium [1]. However, in the business world, especially in the Ghanaian context, a lot of traditional media are still deployed in disseminating both written and oral communication in the organisation, and between the organisation and the outside world. In most organisations, face-to-face media such as staff meetings, one-on-one meetings, committee meetings, management meetings, and the intercom and telephone are used in transmitting oral communication. However, e-mails, notices, reports, letters, memoranda, and proposals, just to mention a few, are usually used in sending written communication.

Every business has a regulator that ensures that standards are met, and directives are followed. In Ghana, for example, the Bank of Ghana is responsible for regulating the activities of financial organisations. The National Insurance Commission is, also, mandated to manage the activities of insurance companies. In academia or the educational sector, Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) and Ghana Education Service are two regulators that are mandated to regulate the activities of tertiary institutions and secondary/basic education correspondingly. By law, these regulators work in the best interests of the government of Ghana in streamlining issues of infrastructure, programmes, policies/documentation, and general administration of educational institutions. However, in terms of regulating formats or layouts for writing business communication tasks (*i.e.* letters and memos) little has been done. Most institutions, therefore, rely on the direction of Quality Assurance Units in fashioning or coming out with house styles or style sheets in documenting written business communication texts of letters and memos. Sometimes, Human Resource Units conduct training and re-training for staff on diverse issues including business communi-

cation texts.

The grading of texts has been seen as a major issue in the field of teaching and learning Business Communication [2]. At the tertiary level, the absence of comprehensive frameworks or analytical tools for assessing business communication texts generated by students, usually results in situations where language teachers adopt marking schemes that are not able to comprehensively assess all parts of the business communication texts. Though some of the frameworks some language teachers use are potent in assessing the content, organisation, coherence, expression, and mechanical precision of texts, the lack of a methodical format (with focus on the rubrics of the text), typically leads to an exclusive way of vetting most business communication texts of students. It is for this and other reasons that I propounded Memoranda Analytical Framework (MAF) and Business Letter Analytical Framework (BLAF). These two tools were used in analyzing the contents of the primary data (letters and memos) I collected from student participants for my Ph.D. studies in 2017.

2. The Analytical Tools—MAF and BLAF

2.1. Memoranda Analytical Framework (MAF)

Figure 1 presents the diagram and the variables in the diagram. The tenets of MAF are made up of three independent variables—the rubrics, language and formatting, and grading. The traditional rubrics of every memo will include the heading notations of *From*, *To*, *Date*, and *Subject*. Apart from these, other heading notation items that are sometimes found in some memos are *Reference*,

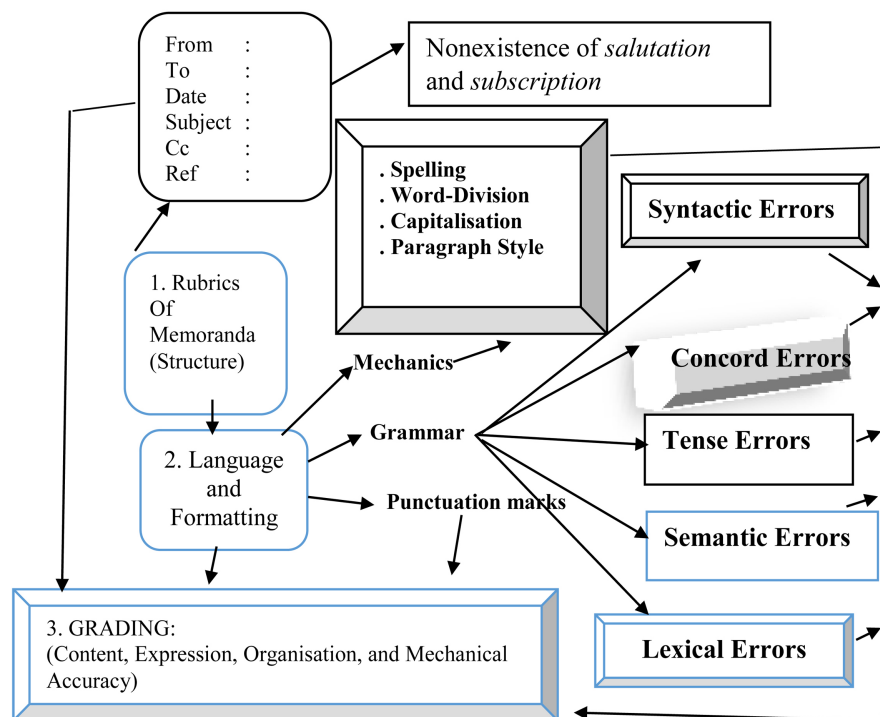


Figure 1. Memorandum Analytical Framework (MAF) [3].

Cc, *Department of Sender*, *Department of Receiver*, *Day*, and *Time*. In using MAF to assess memos, one key thing to note about the rubrics is the nonexistence of salutation and complimentary close.

The three dependent variables that emanate from *language and formatting* are mechanics, grammar, and punctuation marks. Mechanics are matters of spelling, word division, capitalization, and paragraph style. While grammar looks at syntactic, concord, tense, semantic, and lexical issues, grading takes into consideration the *content*, *expression*, *organisation*, and *mechanical accuracy* of the text. In assessing the text content, the examiner has to check whether or not the topic in question has been well-developed. *Expression* evaluates the sufficiency of ideas developed in the paragraphs of a given text. *Organisation* considers consistency of styles used and the existence of text coherence. *Mechanical accuracy* is dedicated to grammatical and punctuation errors committed.

2.2. Business Letter Analytical Framework (BLAF)

In **Figure 2**, there are four independent variables—layout, rubrics, language and formatting, and grading. Except for the layout of the business text, the explanation of the three other variables in **Figure 2** is the same as what has been explained in section 2.1 (**Figure 1**). Usually, the sender's signature, name, and identification appear in all capital letters and set four spaces beneath the last paragraph of the business letter [4] [5]. The rubrics of the business letter include

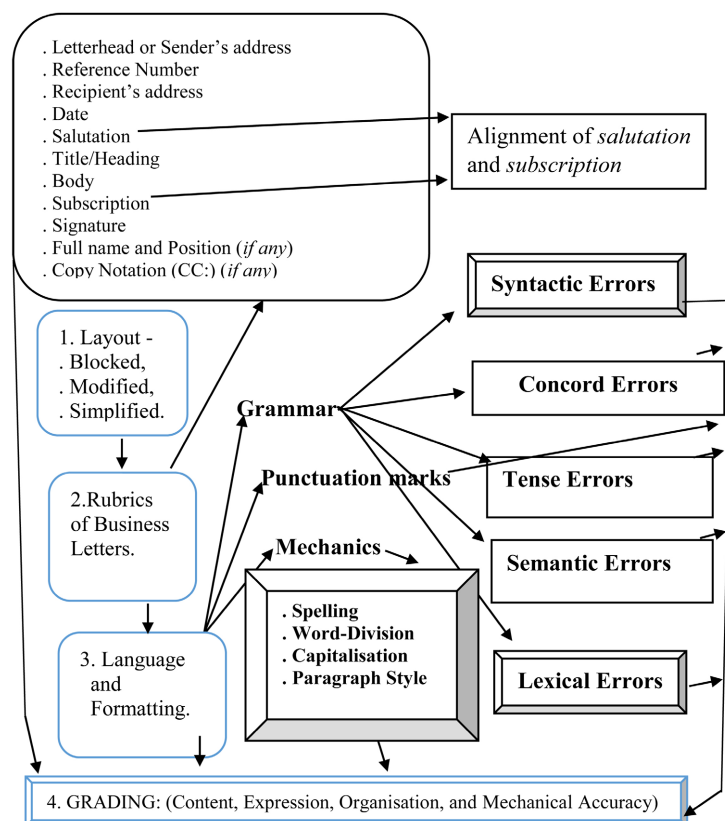


Figure 2. Business Letter Analytical Framework (BLAF) [3].

all, but not limited to:

- Letterhead or Sender's address
- Reference Number
- Recipient's address
- Date
- Salutation
- Title/Heading
- Body
- Subscription/Complimentary close
- Signature
- Full name and Position (*if any*)
- Copy notation (Cc:) (*if any*)

One important aspect of the rubrics of the business letter is an alignment of salutation and subscription/complimentary close. That is, a recipient address that begins with the official title and name of the recipient should be aligned with the complimentary close, *Yours sincerely* (or *Sincerely*), and a salutation that uses the title, and the name of the recipient (for example, *Dear Prof Mike York*). However, a recipient address that begins with only the office/position of the recipient should be aligned with *Dear Sir* or *Dear Madam*, and the complimentary close, *Yours faithfully* (see **Figure 3**). For business letters, the comma after the salutation could be substituted with a colon. However, these marks could be omitted entirely.

Writers of business letters are usually expected to maintain consistency in using either the fully blocked, modified, or simplified layout. For the block layout, all lines in the text start from the left-hand margin, and paragraph divisions are marked by line spaces instead of indentations [1] (please see **Figure 4**). The popularity of this format is so huge that most typists and business people see it as a convention [1]. With the modified layout, the date, complimentary close, signature block, full name, and the position of the sender are displayed in the centre of the paper [4] [5]. Sometimes, the date, complimentary close, signature, and the writer's full name in a modified layout, are also displayed on the right-hand margin of the paper (please see **Figure 5**). In the case of the simplified format, the salutation and the complimentary close are omitted (please see **Figure 6**).

3. Pedagogical Application of MAF and BLAF

Pedagogical studies provide methodical procedures for facilitating a particular content in a particular context. In SLA, they help in internalizing information given to learners. Instruction needs to ensure that SLA learners develop both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and a rule-based competence [6]. This is achieved when a guide is provided for learners. Consequently, this section of the paper is dedicated to how MAF and BLAF can be applied in assessing memoranda and business letters.

Option A	Option B
Dr Bright Adams The Managing Director ABC Company Limited Ghana	The Managing Director ABC Company Limited Ghana
↓	↓
Dear Dr Bright Adams	Dr Sir
↓	↓
Yours sincerely	Your faithfully
<i>Signed</i>	<i>signed</i>
Mrs Monica Kumah	Mrs Monica Kumah

Figure 3. Options for aligning the recipient's address with the salutation and subscription.

<p>KUTRUKAMPE INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES <i>Accra</i></p>
<p>KIMS/FLA/45</p> <p>Mr. Edwin Ampah The SRC President KIMS ACCRA 13th July 2011</p> <p>Dear Mr. Ampah:</p> <p>INCLUSION OF A STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE ON DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE</p> <p>In the past committees investigating examination malpractices have not included student membership. In the audit report of the Quality Assurance Committee of the National Accreditation Board on KIMS admissions and examinations, attention has been drawn to this omission.</p> <p>We are therefore writing officially, to inform you that henceforth committees investigating examination malpractices will include student representative.</p> <p>Currently, an ad hoc committee has been constituted to investigate examination malpractices on Friday, the 22nd July, 2011 at 10:00am at the Conference Hall. We are by a copy of this letter informing the Chairman of the Committee of your inclusion.</p> <p>Yours sincerely,</p> <p><i>(signed)</i></p> <p>KOFI ANDOH (ASSISTANT REGISTRAR)</p> <p>Cc: The President The Registrar The Dean of Students' Affairs The Chairman, Examination Disciplinary Committee</p>

Figure 4. Sample of a fully-blocked business letter layout [3].



Figure 5. Sample of a modified business letter layout [3].

3.1. How to Use MAF

MAF ensures that grading of the memorandum is done in a systematic order. For MAF to be used effectively, the following steps should be followed:

Step 1: Grade the rubrics of the memorandum. Here, the assessor has to check whether the rubrics have been properly aligned with the information. Exhibit A (in **Figure 7**) is an example of rubrics that are properly aligned with the corresponding information. Conversely, the information in exhibit B (**Figure 7**) has not been properly aligned.

Step 2: Check for non-existence of *salutation* and *complimentary close*. The basis is simple—memoranda should not possess these features [4] [5] [7].

Step 3: Read and grade the content of the memo. Here, the assessor is expected to focus on language, and formatting issues. Specifically, the assessor has to grade the mechanics (*i.e.* spelling, word division, capitalization, and consistency of the chosen paragraph) of the write up. The grammar (syntactic, concord,

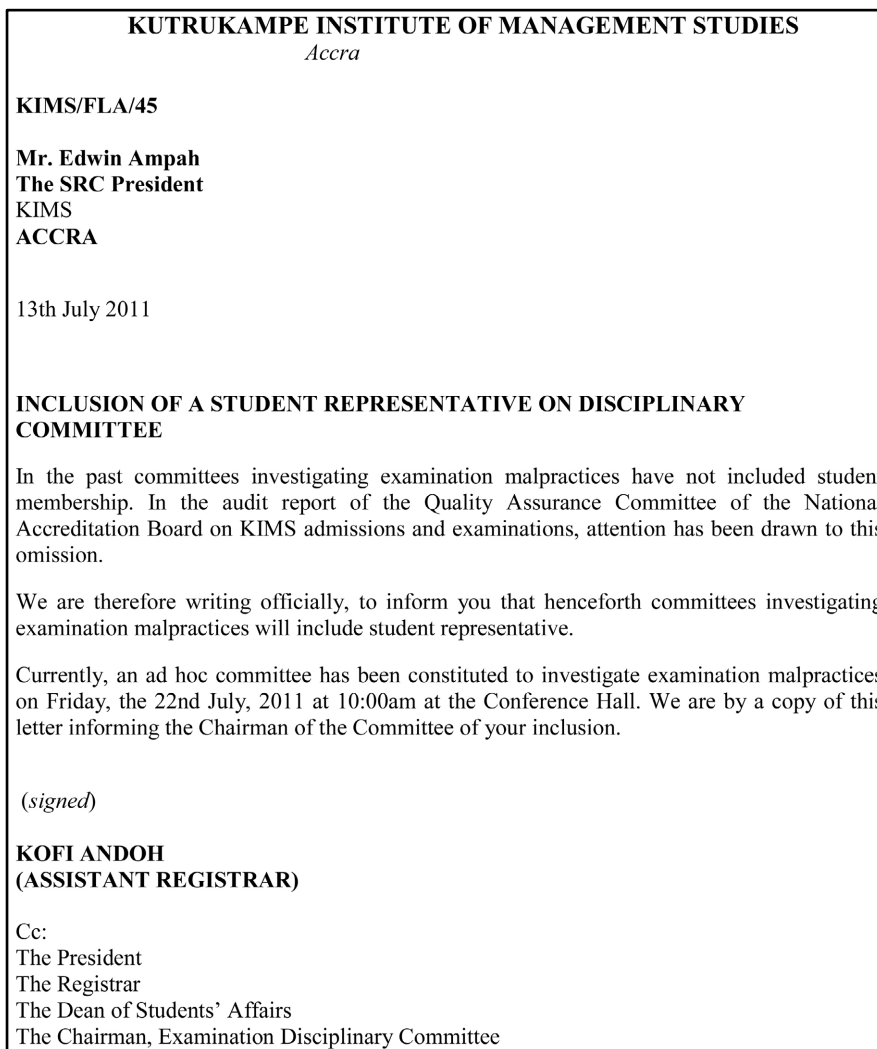


Figure 6. Sample of a simplified business letter layout [3].

tense, semantic, and lexical issues) and punctuation marks should be graded.

Step 4: Determine the overall score of the memo on the basis of content, expression, organisation, and mechanical accuracy.

3.2. How to Use BLAF

Just like MAF, BLAF prevents a situation where an assessor may be tempted to grade a letter haphazardly. For BLAF to be used effectively, the following steps should be followed religiously:

Step 1: Grade the layout of the letter. Here, the task of the teacher is to ensure that there is consistency in the layout of the letter. As indicated earlier, a business letter is usually presented in three layouts—blocked, modified, and simplified. For example, if a writer selects the blocked layout, it would be wrong for that text heading to be centred. Again if a writer selects the simplified layout, it will be erroneous for that letter to have a complimentary close. This is because every layout has got its own unique format.

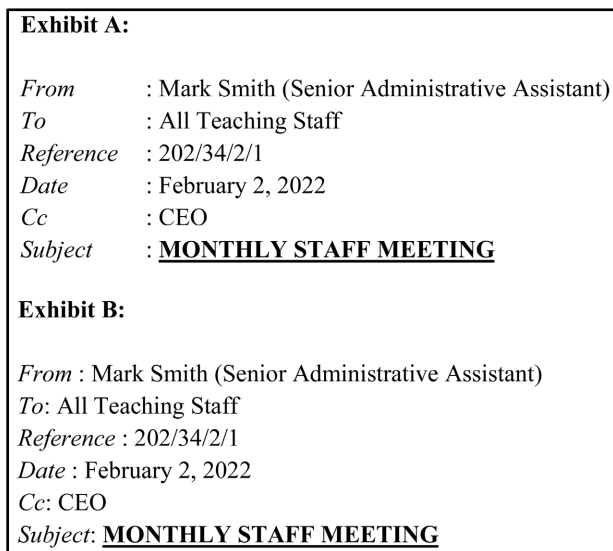


Figure 7. Properly aligned rubrics against improperly aligned rubrics.

Step 2: Grade the rubrics of the business letter. The rubrics are listed in Section 2.2. In doing so, the examiner has to check whether some of the items are missing or not. Sometimes, certain writers swap some of the items. For example, most students are fond of writing full names of senders before appending the signature. In some cases, certain writers interchange the salutation and the heading.

Step 3: Read and grade the content of the business letter. This is where the examiner has to pay attention to language, and formatting issues. Precisely, the examiner is expected to grade the mechanics (*i.e.* spelling, word division, capitalization, and consistency of the chosen paragraph) of the business letter. The grammar (*i.e.* syntactic, concord, tense, semantic, and lexical issues) and punctuation marks should be carefully marked.

Step 4: Define on the general score of the business letter on the basis of content, expression, organisation, and mechanical accuracy.

4. Conclusion

This paper has explained the use of Memorandum Analytical Framework (MAF) and Business Letter Analytical Framework (BLAF) in assessing business communication texts of memos and letters. The paper, specifically, aimed at projecting the two frameworks to stakeholders of Business Communication by explaining the tenets of the frameworks and how they can be applied to the texts of SLA learners and other writers of business texts. It is anticipated that the knowledge shared in this paper would deepen the existing capacities of assessors of business communication texts. Also, I hope that regulators of business communication documents (*i.e.* letters and memos) would perceive the frameworks as useful yardsticks that they can depend on in scrutinizing business communication texts.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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