

# Pre-Service Teachers' Perspective on Self-Assessment in Writing EFL Business Correspondence

Noni Agustina, Haris Sukandar Nur

## Abstract

Most prior studies have examined self-assessment in writing for general topic rather than within English for Specific Purpose, particularly the business domain. This study therefore explores pre-service teachers' perspectives on self-assessment in writing business correspondence. A qualitative approach was employed, using reflective journals and document analysis to collect the data from eight pre-service enrolled in a Business Correspondence course within an English Language Education at private university in West Jakarta, Indonesia. The findings indicated that pre-service teachers used self-assessment to identify their weakness in language mechanics (grammar, spelling, punctuation), message clarity, and required components (e.g., providing full recipient information name, title, company, address). They also reported gains in composing proper claim and adjustment letters, noting that self-assessment sharpened attention to detail and heightened awareness of errors such as incorrect punctuation and misspellings.

**Keywords:** Pre-Service Teachers, Self-Assessment, Business Correspondence

Noni Agustina<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>English Language Education Department, Universitas Esa Unggul, Indonesia  
e-mail: [noni@esaunggul.ac.id](mailto:noni@esaunggul.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>

Haris Sukandar Nur<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>English Language Education Department, Universitas Esa Unggul, Indonesia  
e-mail: [haris.sn@esaunggul.ac.id](mailto:haris.sn@esaunggul.ac.id)<sup>2</sup>

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## Introduction

Business correspondence is a high-stakes ESP genre that requires learners to align linguistic choices with purpose, audience, and staged moves; genre-based pedagogy (through the teaching and learning–learning) is explicitly designed to make those textual demands visible and to prepare students to meet real communicative challenges in professional contexts [1]. At the same time, assessment-for-learning approaches especially self-assessment are linked to gains in writing performance, calibration, autonomy, and self-regulation when tasks are scaffolded with clear criteria and iterative practice [2]

In business correspondence, writers must manage predictable genre moves (e.g., opening/purpose, situation or problem, requested action, closing), maintain reader-appropriate tone (including politeness/hedging), and adhere to professional formatting and mechanics. These genre constraints make self-assessment especially useful: checklists and analytic rubrics allow learners to calibrate drafts against task-specific criteria (format, content clarity, concision, tone, mechanics), generate “internal feedback” before submission, and plan targeted revisions across drafting cycles. For pre-service teachers, developing informed perspectives on self-assessment is doubly important because they are both learners of the genre and future implementers of assessment-for-learning practices in their own classrooms.

Recent scholarship on self-assessment in writing has concentrated largely on academic genres and general composition courses rather than on English for Specific Purpose, particularly the business domain. Studies have examined self-assessment supported writing of abstracts [3], argumentative essays [4], and academic writing more broadly [5] along with pre-writing strategy instruction [6] and teacher involvement in writing courses as part of professional development [7]. Other lines of research have treated writing primarily as a component of proficiency testing [2] or implemented self-assessment at the skill level (grammar, listening, vocabulary) [8]. In ESL/EFL composition courses, the emphasis has often been general topics rather than genre-specific business communication [9]. This studies indicate a clear gap that there is limited research on self-assessment in the context of business correspondence (e.g. claim and adjustment letters). Therefore, this study aims to explore pre-service teachers’ perspective on self-assessment in writing business correspondence. The research question is “How is pre-service teachers’ perspective on self-assessment in writing EFL business correspondence.”

## Literature Review

### Self-assessment

Self-assessment (SA) is widely framed as a learner-centred, formative strategy in which students judge the quality of their own processes and products against explicit criteria, with the aim of monitoring and sustaining learning beyond a single task or course [10]. It is framed as part of alternative assessment also called assessment for or as learning which prioritizes learners’ motivation and growth over ranking and certification. Within this paradigm, SA is argued to enhance learning, intrinsic motivation, and learner autonomy by engaging students directly in evaluating their own work against explicit criteria. SA has been widely adopted in L2 writing, with empirical work reporting positive effects of alternative assessment on writing performance and rating accuracy [2].

Conceptually, SA is the process by which students gather information about their learning processes and products and judge quality using specified criteria, producing both self-scores and richer qualitative “internal feedback” that highlights strengths, weaknesses, and next steps [2], [3]. It is closely linked to self-regulation in writing. Studies show that structured SA and peer-assessment activities over a semester can enhance L2 writing self-regulation, with some

evidence that peer-assessment yields even stronger effects on self-regulatory behaviors than SA alone [2]

SA also supports metacognitive monitoring during drafting and revising. Students compare their texts to goals, rubrics, and exemplars to generate internal feedback that guides revision and strategy use [3], [11]. However, the accuracy of SA is not uniform. Some studies show weak alignment between learners' self-ratings and performance, while others find accurate self-evaluations pointing to the importance of task type, training, and assessment literacy [12]. Calibration can be improved through iterative practice with clear rubrics.

The accuracy and usefulness of SA depend heavily on clear criteria, scaffolding, and iterative practice. Reviews emphasise teachers' roles in raising awareness, modelling rubric use, co-constructing criteria, and gradually transferring responsibility across staged implementations so students focus on quality, not grades [10]. Analytic rubrics, in particular, increase transparency and reliability by decomposing writing into criteria (e.g., content, organisation, vocabulary, language use, mechanics), thereby supporting more consistent self-judgments and targeted revisions [12]

## **Writing business correspondence**

Business correspondence is the written communication used to conduct commercial activity and maintain working relationship, typically through letters, emails, memos, and related document where clarity, accuracy, and an appropriate professional tone are essential to avoid misunderstandings, delays, and damaged relations (Ashley, 2003). Correspondence is part of English for Business Purposes, a subdomain of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) [1], [13]. Framing it as ESP emphasizes explicit communicative purposes, audiences, and genre features, guiding instruction toward the language and moves that matter in real workplace interactions (Anthony, 2018)

Written business correspondence underpins day-to-day commerce. Clear, well-structured messages help organizations operate efficiently and sustain positive working relationships, whereas ambiguous or confusing letters and emails can trigger misunderstandings, slow workflows, and strain ties across individuals, departments, and firms (Ashley, 2003). For learners, business correspondence is often less daunting than it appears. Much of it follows predictable conventions, with recurring formats and widely used formulaic phrases. As students internalize these expressions and structures, drafting professional business letters becomes considerably more manageable [14].

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research design**

This study employed a qualitative approach to address the research question. It was selected to examine a detailed understanding of problem or phenomenon[15]. This study explored EFL pre-service teachers' perspective on self-assessment in writing of business correspondence, namely claim and adjustment letters.

### **Participant**

Participant involved voluntarily were eight students (three males and five females) taking Business Correspondence course in an English Language Education at private university in West Jakarta, Indonesia. They were third-semester students. They were informed of the aims

of the study and provided written informed consent. Their data were anonymized. The pseudonyms were used, pre-service teacher (PST)1-8.

### Data source and instruments

Data were collected through document analysis of students' self-assessment checklists and reflective journals. The self-assessment checklist contained criteria for formatting, letter content, sentence clarity and conciseness, language mechanic (spelling, punctuation, and grammar) (see Figure 2). The reflective journal prompted students to respond to the following questions:

1. Which aspects of your work need improvement?
2. What did you learn from this assignment?
3. Was this self-assessment beneficial for you?
4. If yes, what were the benefits

### Procedure and analysis

Reflective journal responses and self-assessment checklist were read and re-read to familiarize the researchers with the data. The dataset was analyzed thematically. Findings from the reflective journal were triangulated with document analysis to enhance the data credibility and trustworthiness.

## Results

### Improvement areas identified by pre-service teachers

In pre-service teachers' journal reflection, many students foregrounded language mechanics and clarity. As PST 1 noted, "the aspects of my work that need improvement are grammar, spelling, and punctuation, as there are several errors such as incorrect verb forms and misspelled words like 'recieve' and 'pass'." PST 7 similarly emphasized "practise writing letters again especially the structure so it's neater, then pay more attention to grammar and spelling, and develop my sentences further to make them clearer." PST 8 added, "Probably the grammar, there is incorrect grammar," and also pointed to missing elements that affected completeness.

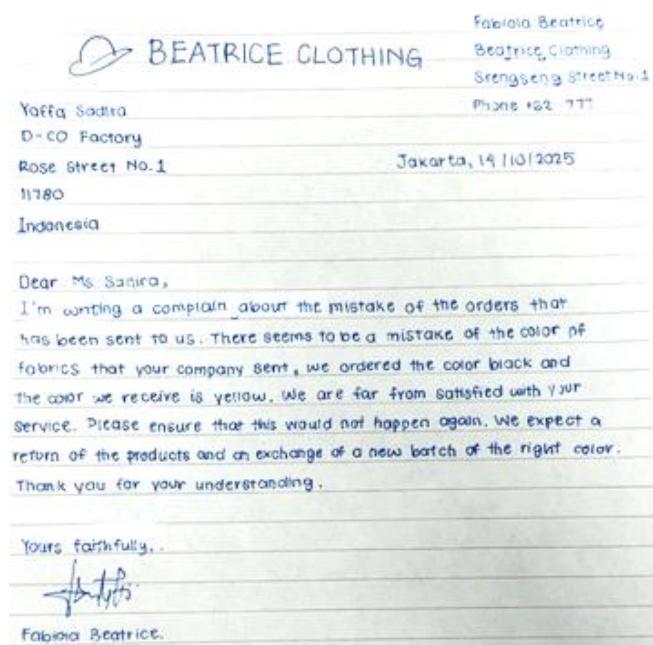


Figure 1. Student's sample claim letter

A second theme concerned completeness of components and document structure. Several students acknowledged omissions of standard parts of a business letter. PST 2 listed “the date, sender’s full info, receiver’s full info, and subject of the letter.” PST 4 observed “several missing components such as sender info, subject, etc. The letter would be complete and professional with it.” PST 8 explicitly mentioned “there is no salutation and the date.” Even when structure was generally sound, small gaps remained; PST 3 wrote, “For overall is already good but there is some mistake in the structure and lack about information detail about the problem.”

Students also highlighted specificity, formatting, and professional presentation. PST 1 planned to “provide complete receiver information, including the name, title, and company address, as well as add a clear subject line to make the purpose of the letter more professional.” PST 5 reflected that “the letter is already structured well and the components are complete, however it just lacks detail,” suggesting additions such as “the expected time of good’s arrival and adding the postal code in the address,” and improving neatness “try not to write the receiver’s information exceeding the letterhead.”

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT

Please indicate whether you meet each criterion by checking the box.

##### Claim letter

No.	Criteria	Yes	No	Note
1.	Letterhead present	✓		Letterhead and logo are present
2.	Date formatted consistently	✓		Yes, it is clearly stated below the letter head.
3.	Sender’s full information	✓		Sender’s full info is present, but the address lacks postal code.
4.	Receiver’s full information (name, title, company, address)	✓		Yes, the full information of the receiver is clearly stated.
5.	Subject is presented		✓	Subject is absent.
6.	Salutation is correct	✓		The salutation is correct, only using the surname of the receiver.
7.	Opening states claim and key order details	✓		Opening states claim is present, but lacks enclosed order detail.
8.	Problem facts and evidence are presented	✓		Yes, it is clearly presented at the beginning of the letter.
9.	Suggestion for the solution is stated	✓		Suggestion of solution is stated, but it is better it is more detailed like stating the time of expected arrival.
10.	Closing with contact and thanks	✓		Thanks is stated, but no information for further contact.
11.	Complimentary close (e.g., <i>Sincerely,</i> )	✓		Correct use of complimentary close which is “Yours faithfully,” because the name of the receiver is known.
12.	Signature and printed name is presented	✓		Yes it is clearly presented under the body of the letter.
13.	Clear and concise sentences	✓		Yes, the body of the letter is already clear and concise, giving readers a clear understanding as they read.
14.	Correct grammar		✓	Most of the letter is grammatically correct, but there seems to be one grammatical error in writing “the color we <b>receive</b> is yellow”, which is supposed to be “the color we <b>received</b> is yellow”.  There is also a mistake in the use of preposition when writing “the mistake <b>of</b> the color” when it should be “the mistake <b>in</b> the color”
15.	Correct punctuation	✓		All the punctuations are correct.
16.	Correct spelling	✓		There are no misspellings found.

**Figure 2.** Student's sample self-assessment

### Perceived learning gains from self-assessment

Across reflections, most pre-service teachers highlighted gains in genre knowledge and organization (Table 1). Several (PST 1, PST 2, PST 3, PST 7) said they learned how to write a proper claim letter using the correct business letter format and polite language and how to organize the content clearly. PST 3 added that attending to the complete components, conciseness, and word choice helped make the letter professional and understandable.

Students also reported heightened attention to language mechanics and professional stakes. PST 5 noted that they now take business letters more carefully because every detail matters, warning that one simple mistake, like wrong punctuation or misspelling can lead to misunderstanding and a huge loss in a business context. In the same vein, PST 6 emphasized learning about punctuation and how to spell, while PST 7 reiterated knowing how to write a complaint letter correctly and properly.

Finally, learners described growth in self-awareness and assessment literacy, and extended their learning to adjustment letters. PST 4 reflected on recognizing mistakes and weaknesses, which would help improve and develop their personal growth in business settings. PST 8 reported learning how to assess our assignment and also how to make adjustment letters, suggesting that the assessment process itself supported both metacognitive insight and transfer from claim to adjustment letter writing

**Table 1.** Pre-service teachers' perceived learning gains from self-assessment

Name	Excerpt
PST 1	The aspects of my work that need improvement are grammar, spelling, and punctuation. I made errors such as incorrect verb forms and misspellings (e.g., “receive”). I also need to provide complete recipient information (name, title, and company address) and add a clear subject line to state the letter’s purpose professionally.
PST 2	The components that need improvement include the date, the sender’s full information, the recipient’s full information, and the subject line.
PST 3	Overall, it is good, but there are structural mistakes and insufficient detail about the problem.
PST 4	Several components are missing, such as the sender’s information and the subject line. Including these would make the letter complete and more professional.
PST 5	The letter is well structured and the components are complete; however, it lacks detail. It would be better to include the expected time of the goods’ arrival and the postal code in the address. The letter should also be neater avoid letting the recipient’s information extend beyond the letterhead.
PST 6	Many aspects need improvement, including the notes I wrote and the mistakes I made on the rubric.
PST 7	I need to practice writing letters especially the structure so they are neater; pay closer attention to grammar and spelling; and develop my sentences to make them clearer.
PST 8	My grammar needs improvement; there are errors. The letter is also incomplete: it has no salutation and no date.

### Benefits of Self-Assessment

Self-assessment was consistently described as beneficial because it revealed both strengths and weaknesses in business-letter writing. Several students said it sharpened their awareness of recurring errors in “grammar and formatting” (PST 1) and even “punctuations are so crucial for the understanding of the whole letter” (PST 2). They also realized missing or overlooked components, noting that their letters were still missing some important components

(PST 2) and that the task helped them pinpoint several overlooked aspects (PST 4). Others emphasized problem-solving from mistakes “we know the mistake and make the solution (learn from the problem)” (PST 3) and the value of self-review to “reflect on my own work and know where I am lacking” (PST 5).

Beyond error detection, students described concrete skill gains and clearer standards. One student shared, “I got knowledge about making a letter and practise fixing my grammar” (PST 6), while another said the process “helped me understand how to write a letter that is good and beneficial” and “how to make adjustment letters correctly” (PST 7). Overall, they reported increased awareness of required components and conventions, stronger control of language and structure, and greater confidence in composing effective claim and adjustment letters.

## Discussion

Findings show that pre-service teachers used self-assessment first to surface gaps in language mechanics (grammar, spelling, punctuation) and message clarity, and then to connect those surface issues with the professional stakes of business letters (risk of misunderstanding, reputational harm). This pattern is consistent with the study conducted by Al-Nafjan et al. [5] that self-assessment sharpened error detection, improved criterion attainment, and boosted achievement.

A second theme in our data the frequent mention of missing or misplaced components (date, salutation, subject line, sender/receiver details) and organizational lapses aligns with prior genre-writing results showing that instruction which models/deconstructs target genres and then co-constructs texts leads learners to produce more professional documents. The emphasis our participants placed on completeness and visual discipline (e.g., keeping receiver information within the letterhead) indicates movement from template-filling to audience-aware detailing, a shift genre studies describe as connecting language form to communicative goals [1].

Crucially, students reported learning gains beyond error-spotting: better command of format/moves, sharper criteria awareness, and transfer from claim to adjustment letters. This echoes self-assessment studies showing that formative SA when scaffolded by clear, analytic criteria can build internal feedback (self-generated comments) and improve better writing. The result corroborated study undertaken by Fung & Mei [4] that self-assessment in writing classes fosters learner autonomy and enhances writing proficiency.

## Conclusion

This study shows that self-assessment is a practical and pedagogically valuable mechanism for improving EFL business correspondence writing. Pre-service teachers consistently used checklists to detect issues in language mechanics (grammar, spelling, punctuation) and message clarity, and to audit genre completeness (e.g., date, salutation, subject line, sender/receiver details). They reported learning to complete all required components and strengthen document structure/formatting (e.g., providing full recipient information name, title, company, address). They also perceived gains in composing proper claim and adjustment letters, noting that self-assessment sharpened their attention to detail and heightened awareness of errors such as incorrect punctuation and misspellings.

This research involved a small number of participants. Future research should include larger cohorts. In addition it should incorporate interviews and or questionnaires to probe more deeply how self-assessment influences learners’ processes, judgments, and outcomes in business correspondence writing.

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