

APPLIED LINGUISTS TEACH ANALYZING WRITING

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What You Will Learn in this Chapter

In this chapter, we will teach you how to analyze the language and structure of common writing tasks by showing you strategies for effectively communicating to specific audiences for specific purposes. We demonstrate how to analyze writing through an example genre—a job application cover letter. Here, we will start by introducing the concept of “genre” and proceed to teaching you what steps to take in order to translate knowledge of reading the genre to writing it. More specifically, you will learn a) what makes job applications a genre, b) how to recognize the genre features of cover letters by analyzing a sample text, and c) how to implement the knowledge you gain from the analysis of the genre into your own writing process. By the end of this chapter, you should develop a deeper appreciation of the concept of genre, genre analysis, and genre writing.

Key Terms

- Genre
- Moves and Steps
- Lexicogrammatical Features

For almost every university graduate, one future step is to apply for and obtain a job that fits one’s interest, knowledge, skills, and/or degree. Therefore, any student that graduates from university needs to learn how to approach such an important step in life. Most university undergraduate students apply for entry-level positions for which the application process is new to them. Consequently, learning what materials to prepare and what genres to write in order to initiate the job application process is of utmost importance. Hence, the aim of this chapter is to introduce one of the most important components of a job application packet that is often needed to land a first job after university—a job application letter, also known as a cover letter.

It would be helpful to start with an analogy that simplifies the communicative purpose and importance of the application letter genre; these letters are meant to “sell” you to someone that wants to “hire “ you. Yes! You have guessed it right! Job application letters seem to serve a similar function as promoting products, however, what they promote or sell are your knowledge and skills. We think this analogy is helpful to set the background for you for what follows. In this chapter, we will first introduce the concept of “genre”, and then, we will introduce the concepts of moves and strategies by providing an analysis of a sample job letter. Here, the

aim would be to also show you how the analysis of lexico-grammatical features can provide us with tools to understand what moves and strategies are included in a job application letter. Finally, we will ask you to transfer the knowledge you will learn from our sample analysis in this chapter in your own writing by discussing a set of guided questions at the end.

The Concept of Genre

Here, we define genre as a class or a type of spoken or written texts that indicate similarities in their purpose, content, form and/or context (Hyon, 2018). A genre in this sense is a tool that facilitates communication of people around a certain communicative purpose that both producers and receivers of a genre are aware of. Moreover, for a genre to be successful in delivering the appropriate and intended messages of producers, they must adhere to some genre creation norms that make the genre and its intentions identifiable by receivers of the genre. To understand this concept better, pay attention to the excerpts of text in table 1.

Table 1

Two Examples of the Letter Genre

Example 1	Example 2
<p>(1) Dear Mr. Smith</p> <p>(2) Since you're one of our important customers who appreciates convenience and value, I am writing to share an opportunity to enjoy both!</p> <p>(3) For example, would you like to choose \$60 worth of Innovations merchandise- absolutely FREE?</p> <p>(4) And could you benefit from a very convenient credit card- one that offers you a free Rewards program, unsurpassed card protection, free PhotoCard, free Purchase Cover, personal customer service- and is accepted at over 400,000 locations in Australia, more than 14 million establishments worldwide and gives you cash access at over 341,000 ATMs? (Yunxia, 2000, p. 489)</p>	<p>(1) Dear Mr. X:</p> <p>(2) I would like to be considered as a candidate for the teaching assistant position advertised in the Jordan Times on the 2nd of January 2000.</p> <p>(3) I have finished my degree in English for specific purposes (ESP) with an average 'excellent'. I have taken all the ESP courses offered in the department; thus, I have solid background knowledge in ESP teaching.</p> <p>(4) My knowledge of ESP course materials goes beyond my formal classroom education. For the past two years I have worked part-time in Jordan broadcasting and TV, where I have gained experience in teaching mass media courses. Also on my own initiative, I designed a teaching programme for the radio and developed a TV course (Al-Ali, 2004. P. 8)</p>

The examples in Table 1 showcase two letters. We identify these examples as belonging to the mother genre of "letters" due to similarities in how they are formatted. In other words, both letters in (1) provide a greeting typical of letter genres, in (2) state the purpose of the letter, in (3) offer the main services and in (4) detail the benefits. The ordering of information in both genres seem to indicate that the genres follow relatively the same sequence of information to eventually offer something valuable to the addressee. However, when analyzed with relation to context and purpose, the two letters can be distinguished into separate letter genres as what they promote is different and the producers and receivers of the genre seem to belong to rather various communities that use the genre. To put it more clearly, Example 1 promotes a merchandise service to a customer while Example 2 promotes a job applicant's qualifications to a hiring manager. The first letter is a letter genre typical of business communication by business community members while the second letter is typical of job application processes. Thus, what defines genres as belonging to more specific categories are a combination of their information structuring, purposes and community of users. Now that you have learned the concept of genre, we will proceed to elaborate the job application genre more by analyzing the genre's moves and steps.

Moves and Steps in Job Application Letter Genre

To introduce the makeup and structure of the job application letter, we will use the terms “moves” and “steps” that are typical of genre analysis in ESP (English for specific Purposes) tradition developed by Swales (1990, 2004). Swales defines a move as a “discoursal or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse” (Swales, 2004, p. 228-9). To simplify the definition, a move refers to those text segments that form and shape the overall organization and structure of a genre and help the user of the genre realize its goal. To realize the overall goal of a genre, “each move has its own communicative purpose, which, together with other moves, contributes to the general communicative purpose of the text” (Pho, 2009, p. 17). Steps, then refer to various ways through which some moves are realized. To provide a better understanding, we will follow the move structure of the job application letter proposed by Bhatia (2014) to analyse a sample letter for you to show you how to approach the genre analysis task. Table 2 includes the important moves and steps as proposed by Bhatia (2014) within a sample letter that we borrow from Alred, Brusaw and Oliu (2019, P. 40).

Table 2

Move/Step Genre Analysis of a Job Application Letter

Letter Content	Moves and Steps
Dear Ms. Smathers (1):	
During the recent NOMAD convention in Washington, Karen Jarrett, Director of Operations, informed me of an opening at Aerospace Technologies for a manager of new product development (2).	(1) Salutation
My extensive background in engineering exhibit design and Management makes me an ideal candidate for this position (3).	(2) Introducing Candidature
I have been manager of the Exhibit Design Lab at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base for the past seven years (3-a). During that time, I received two Congressional Commendations for models of a space station laboratory and a docking/repair port (3-b). My experience in advanced exhibit design would enable me to help develop AT’s wind tunnel and aerospace models (4). Further, I have just learned this week that my exhibit design presented at NOMAD received a “Best of Show” Award (3-b).	(3) Establishing Credentials (3-a) Essential Detailing of Candidature (3-b) Indicating Value of Candidature
As described on the enclosed résumé (5), I not only have workplace management experience but also have recently received an M.B.A. from the University of Dayton (3-a). As a student in the M.B.A. program,	(4) Offering Incentives (5) Enclosing Documents
I won the Luson Scholarship to complete my coursework as well as the Jonas Outstanding Student Award (3-b).	(6) Using Pressure Tactics
I would be happy to discuss my qualifications in an interview at your convenience (6). Please contact me at (937) 255-4137 or at mand@juno.com (7). I look forward to speaking with you (8).	(7) Soliciting Response
Sincerely (8), Robert Mandillo Enclosure: Résumé (5)	(8) Ending Politely

Interestingly, the sample job application letter included all the eight moves that Bhatia (2014) had introduced for job application letters. But how do we determine each move and step? To determine the necessary moves and steps for inclusion within a genre, we need to pay attention to how they are written and identify their lexicogrammatical features.

Lexicogrammatical Features of the Sample

Let us discuss how various lexicogrammatical features of our sample letter helps us identify the moves and steps and the information structuring in the sample. In move 1, usually to introduce the purpose which is the candidature for the job, job applicants refer to how they have found out about the job vacancy and opening. Hence, the words such as opening are used to refer to the job and

are used to show how they were notified of that and their willingness to apply for it. Using positive and boosting adjectives such as extensive and ideal show us that the candidate is establishing credentials. For detailing the essential information such as education and job, the candidate simply lists the type of job or degree such as manager of the exhibit design lab and the length of each such as the past 7 years. It is common to use verbs and nouns to show further values such as won and received along with awards and scholarship. Phrases such as I look forward to discussing my qualifications in an interview can have a pressure impact by persuading the hiring team further to call the candidate to the interview table. Next, contact information is a way to solicit a response by inviting the employers to contact the candidate. Moreover, a polite tone usually depends on what words are used to end the letter such as I look forward to or sincerely that enables a candidate to end the letter on a polite and warm note. Candidates must always enclose materials and at times refer back to the enclosed resume as the most important accompanying component of the job application letter.

The analysis above helps us understand how we can observe the sample language used in the job application or any other desired genre to draw on the communicative purpose of the text and learn from it. In other words, the analysis of lexicogrammatical features enables us to identify the necessary moves and steps of a genre and the possible ways of organizing those in our own writing.

Implementing Genre Analysis Observations in Your Writing

To implement the knowledge you gain from the analysis of sample job application letters, you need to become familiar with the process of how to do so. Here, we introduce an efficient three-step process that goes from analysis of the rhetorical situation of the job application letter, to using the proposed moves and steps in outlining the letter to drafting your letter. Let us expand these in the following sections.

Analyze the Rhetorical Situation of the Job Application Letter

To write any genre, it is of utmost importance to understand why you are writing the genre and for what communicative purposes as well as to whom you are writing. While the intention of job application letters is to highlight your abilities and qualifications for the hiring party, the hiring party, or your audience, is various depending on the jobs that you would apply for. We strongly suggest that you analyze the job posting or the requirements of the job you are applying for and also to know who the hiring committee is and what their specific needs are before drafting your letter. After gaining a good grasp of the rhetorical situation of your application letter, you can then start outlining and drafting your letter accordingly.

Outlining the Job Application Letter

To approach drafting the job application letter, we advise you first outline the draft by taking into consideration the identified moves and steps introduced in the previous section. Outlining helps you develop the ideas by identifying the very important and main qualifications that you would want to bring to the fore without getting bogged down by details of the letter. Moreover, outlining clears up your vision of the connections between the qualifications you would want to highlight and the main requirements of the position as well as the mission of the hiring party. To simplify the outlining for you, we suggest you create a table similar to Table 3 here.

Table 3

Outlining the Job Application Letter

Moves and Steps	Main Points	Rough Draft
	-To Ms.	
Salutation	-To Hiring Committee at -My name	Dear Ms. Edmonds,
Introducing Candidature	-My current job and company -Found job in Indeed.com -Willingness to apply for the position -my university degrees	My name is I am a teaching adjunct at I came across your job posting for the teaching assistant position advertised on indeed.com. I am very interested in this position and would like to apply for it.
Establishing Credentials	-my current position as the in ...company -offering the skills in... -successfully carrying out ...	I hold a....degree from Currently, I work as a teaching adjunct for ...where I carry out teaching duties. I teach..... Moreover, I perform....duties for
Indicating Value of Candidature	-certified in working with population with disability -won awards for... -enclosing resume	I am skillful at classroom management and see my role as a facilitator in a student-centered classroom. In my current position, I have successfully managed my teaching duties by holding constant meetings with program directors and administrators. I am certified in working with students with disabilities and can offer a wealth of knowledge and expectations in that area to your institution. I have also won the best teaching award for ... in
Enclosing Documents	-Enclosing reference contacts	My resume and the referenced contacts are enclosed for your consideration.
Soliciting Response	-My contact info	Please contact me at (phone) or (email). I look forward to hearing from you.

In the first column of the table, place the necessary moves and steps that you want to organize your letter around. In the central column, include the very main points that you would want to include and emphasize in your application letter. A very important point to consider after completing this section is to gauge the relevance of the main points to the job posting requirements before drafting the points in paragraphs. In our imaginary example in Table 3, the candidate expresses the value of candidature by having their certification in working with students with disability as one of the main points. This point would bear a very important and major relevance to the job posting if the job had listed this quality as required by the position.

Drafting the Job Application Letter

Then the candidate can move to the third column by drafting the complete paragraphs and adding extra details to the description of main points. Please notice the reversed procedure involved in how you move from the analysis of samples to drafting your own sample of the genre. When drafting the complete paragraphs, it would be important to learn from the sample's lexicogrammatical features that we had also highlighted in Table 2. These features can act as starting points for when you draft the letter genre for the very first time. As you gain experience writing letters and encountering more examples, you will develop a repertoire of the useful lexicogrammatical features to be included in the different moves and steps of this genre.

In this chapter, we introduced the concept of genre, genre moves and steps as well as lexicogrammatical features using the practical genre of job application letter as our genre sample. We hope that the chapter was helpful in providing you with the necessary steps in how to implement your genre knowledge in your own writing by taking a reverse outlining procedure.

Discussion Questions

1. What is a genre? What are the elements that make up the rhetorical situation of the genre?
2. What are job application letters? How are they organized? Provide some examples of the lexicogrammatical features commonly used within the organization of the job application letters?
3. Do you think the knowledge you have gained from the concepts introduced in this chapter as well as the reverse outlining procedure can help you in writing similar other genres?

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