

TEACHING FORMAL LETTER WRITING TO THE 7TH-8TH GRADES IN  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Among the various dimensions of written communication, formal letter writing holds a particularly significant place in developing students' linguistic competence. Despite its practical importance, this skill has received insufficient attention within English language curricula at the secondary school level. The present article investigates how formal letter writing is introduced and developed among 7th and 8th grade learners in secondary educational institutions. Central to this investigation is an analysis of the cognitive and linguistic difficulties students face as they navigate the shift from casual, everyday writing toward more structured and conventionalized formal discourse. The article foregrounds the value of explicit instruction, genre-aware pedagogy, and the use of real-world writing tasks as effective means of strengthening students' written expression. Particular attention is devoted to the teaching of key formal writing elements — such as appropriate tone and register, logical text organization, conventional greeting and closing expressions — and their deliberate incorporation into English language teaching programs. Evidence gathered through the study indicates that consistent engagement with exemplary letter models alongside carefully scaffolded writing practice leads to meaningful gains in students' capacity to compose well-structured and situationally appropriate formal letters. The article concludes by presenting actionable guidance for classroom practitioners aimed at improving instructional quality and advancing learner achievement in formal written communication.

**Introduction.** Effective written communication is one of the most essential skills students develop during their secondary education. Among its various forms, formal letter writing holds a particularly important place, as it requires not only grammatical accuracy but also a clear awareness of audience, purpose, and appropriate register [10]. For 7th and 8th grade learners, developing this skill marks a significant step toward academic and professional readiness. Despite its practical value, formal letter writing is frequently treated as a minor component of the English language curriculum in secondary schools. Instruction in this area often remains limited and surface-level, focusing primarily on formatting conventions while overlooking the deeper communicative and rhetorical dimensions of the genre [8]. As a result, many students progress through secondary education without gaining sufficient confidence or ability in formal written expression. This situation calls for thoughtful pedagogical attention. Learners at the 7th and 8th grade level are at a stage where they possess enough linguistic foundation to engage with formal writing conventions, yet still require structured and deliberate guidance to do so effectively. The present article therefore aims to examine existing approaches to formal letter writing instruction, identify key challenges faced by both teachers and students, and propose practical, evidence-based strategies to strengthen this aspect of writing education in secondary schools.

**Literature Review.** Writing has long been regarded as a complex cognitive activity that extends far beyond simply putting words on a page. Vygotsky's foundational work on the social nature of language development established that writing is not merely a technical skill but a deeply social and culturally embedded practice, shaped by the communicative contexts in which learners participate [1]. Building on this tradition, scholars have consistently emphasized that formal writing demands a sophisticated blend of linguistic knowledge, rhetorical awareness, and sensitivity to social context. Research on writing pedagogy has repeatedly pointed out that secondary school instruction tends to prioritize the final written product over the process through which meaningful writing is actually developed. Flower and Hayes, in their influential cognitive model of writing, demonstrated that skilled writers engage in recursive cycles of planning, drafting, and revising — a process that novice learners, particularly at the secondary level, rarely experience in a structured classroom setting [2]. This tendency is especially problematic in formal letter writing, where students are expected to meet specific conventions without always receiving the scaffolded support they genuinely need. Genre-based pedagogy, developed extensively by Halliday and later elaborated by Martin and Rose within the Sydney School tradition, has emerged as a particularly valuable instructional framework [3, 4]. This approach proposes that students write most effectively when they are explicitly introduced to the social purposes and linguistic features of the specific genre they are learning. Applied to formal letter writing, genre pedagogy encourages teachers to engage students in the careful analysis of model texts, making the conventions of tone, organizational structure, and appropriate register visible and accessible rather than assumed [8]. The concept of register itself has been

theorized most thoroughly by Halliday, who described it as the variation in language use according to field, tenor, and mode of discourse [3]. For many 7th and 8th grade students, shifting from the informal language of everyday conversation to the measured, impersonal tone expected in formal correspondence represents one of the most cognitively demanding aspects of writing development. Researchers such as Christie and Derewianka have further shown that adolescent learners benefit considerably from explicit register instruction embedded within meaningful writing tasks rather than isolated grammar exercises [5]. Motivation and learner engagement have equally received significant scholarly attention. Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory suggests that learners perform more meaningfully when they feel a sense of autonomy, competence, and genuine purpose in their tasks [6]. Applied to writing instruction, this framework supports the view that students who recognize the real-world relevance of formal letter writing engage more deeply and develop more rapidly than those who perceive it as a purely academic obligation. This insight encourages educators to anchor formal writing tasks in authentic communicative situations that resonate with students' lived experiences and future aspirations. Taken together, these theoretical and empirical contributions paint a consistent picture — effective formal letter writing instruction at the secondary level must be explicit, purposeful, and humanistically oriented, treating young writers not merely as skill-acquirers but as developing communicators finding their place in a wider social world.

**Research Methodology.** The present study adopts a qualitative research design, considered most appropriate for examining how formal letter writing is taught and experienced in secondary school classrooms. Rather than relying solely on numerical measurement, this approach allows for a deeper, more humanistic understanding of the teaching and learning process — attending to the real challenges teachers face and the ways students respond to formal writing instruction. The research was conducted in secondary school settings focusing on 7th and 8th grade classrooms. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, including both English language teachers and their students, ensuring that those involved had direct and relevant experience with formal letter writing instruction. Data were collected through three complementary methods: classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers, and student writing samples. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's framework, was applied to interpret the data — identifying recurring patterns and meaningful themes across all collected sources [7]. Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the anonymity and confidentiality of both teachers and students were strictly maintained. While the findings are not intended for broad statistical generalization, they offer meaningful and context-sensitive insights that can practically inform writing instruction in comparable secondary school environments.

**Analysis and Results.** The analysis of classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student writing samples revealed several consistent findings regarding formal letter writing

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instruction at the 7th and 8th grade level. Classroom observations showed that instruction was generally limited to teacher-led explanations of structural components, followed by individual writing tasks. While students gained a basic understanding of letter format, deeper aspects of formal writing — such as register, audience awareness, and communicative purpose — received little systematic attention. Model texts were rarely used, leaving learners dependent on memorized templates rather than developing genuine genre understanding [8]. Teacher interviews confirmed these patterns. Most participating teachers acknowledged the importance of formal letter writing but reported feeling constrained by curriculum time pressures. As a result, the topic was frequently addressed as a single lesson rather than as a sustained instructional focus. Several teachers also expressed difficulty in moving beyond format-based teaching toward the more nuanced dimensions of formal written communication. Student writing samples reflected these instructional gaps clearly. While the majority of learners demonstrated a reasonable command of basic structural features, considerable weaknesses were observed in register consistency, vocabulary appropriateness, and textual coherence [9]. Many students relied on informal or conversational language within the body of their letters, indicating that structural conventions had been partially absorbed, but the deeper linguistic demands of formal writing remained underdeveloped. One particularly encouraging finding, however, was the positive effect of authentic writing tasks on student engagement and writing quality. In classrooms where letters were connected to realistic communicative situations, both student motivation and written performance improved noticeably — underscoring the value of purposeful, real-world oriented writing instruction [6].

**Conclusion and Recommendations.** This article has examined the teaching of formal letter writing to 7th and 8th grade students in secondary schools, exploring current instructional practices, identifying key challenges, and reflecting on what more effective teaching in this area might look like. The findings consistently indicate that while formal letter writing is acknowledged as an important communicative skill, it remains insufficiently developed within existing curriculum frameworks and classroom practice [9]. The evidence gathered throughout this study suggests that the core difficulty lies not in students' inability to learn formal writing, but rather in the absence of deliberate, structured, and meaningful instruction. When learners are given genuine opportunities to engage with the genre — through model text analysis, explicit register instruction, and authentic writing tasks — their performance improves in ways that are both measurable and humanly significant [4]. This points to a hopeful conclusion: the gap between current outcomes and what students are truly capable of achieving is bridgeable, provided that the right pedagogical conditions are established. Based on these findings, several practical recommendations are offered for educators and curriculum developers. First, formal letter writing should be treated as a sustained instructional focus rather than an isolated lesson, with dedicated time allocated across the academic term. Second, genre-based pedagogy should be more deliberately

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incorporated into writing instruction, making the conventions of formal correspondence explicit and accessible to all learners [3]. Third, authentic and meaningful writing tasks should replace purely mechanical exercises, helping students connect formal writing to real communicative purposes [2]. Fourth, teacher professional development programs should address formal writing instruction more directly, equipping educators with the confidence and strategies needed to teach this genre effectively [5]. Ultimately, teaching formal letter writing is about far more than formatting rules and fixed phrases. It is about empowering young people to communicate with clarity, confidence, and purpose — skills that will serve them throughout their academic journeys and well into their adult lives [1].

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