

# Writing Skills of Professional Students: An Analytical Study

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** To analyse the writing skills of professional students at the undergraduate level and also to suggest some of the ways to rectify their mistakes and refine their writing. **Methods/statistical analysis:** To test the professional students' writing skills, 10 students were selected and were allowed to answer the questionnaire given to them. The answer scripts were evaluated by English faculty members mainly to project the mistakes of the students in their writing. **Findings:** High achievers in English (HAs) and low achievers in English (LAs) were identified through the evaluation. It was also found that professional students made more mistakes in grammar part, specifically, tense forms, prepositions, articles, etc. **Application/improvements:** Ways to improve their writing skills are suggested.

**Keywords:** Writing Skills, English Language, Low Achievers, High Achievers

## 1. Introduction

In the current scenario, every profession requires good writing skills, which polishes and organises our thinking process and makes us to shine in a better way. Good writing skills play a vital role in the professional growth of an individual. Even while writing resumes, clear and well-written sentences highlighting one's experience, qualities and characters will clearly project the candidates to the recruiter.

A crystal-clear, structured, and correct writing can effectively convey one's thoughts to the reader. But nowadays, in schools and colleges, spoken language is focused much more than the written language. The written language should also be given its importance in all the schools and colleges. Thus, this paper clearly brings out the pitfalls in the writing skills of professional students at the undergraduate level and suggests some of the ways to improve the writing skills of students.

It has become mandatory that all professional students should excel in writing during their course. This research

clearly projects the mistakes done by professional students, particularly poor writers (low achievers), and suggests some strategies and ways to rectify those mistakes and improve their writing skills.

It focuses on writing skills with a special emphasis on academic writing. A significance of this study is that it not only examines the factors causing failure in low achievers, but it also identifies evolving strategies for improvement and instruction in academic writing. In addition, an effort was made in this study to examine if the mother tongue (L1) has any influence on English (L2) writing and thinking.

## 2. Discussion

### 2.1 Differences between Skilled and Unskilled Writers

The main problem that prevails among students is poor writing skills. Often students who had their mother tongue (L1) as the medium of instruction in schools have

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less proficiency in English, and so when they enter college, they have difficulty in coping with the academic situation as all the subjects are taught in English. As this study focuses on academic writing skills, the nature of academic writing is to be examined and also a search is to be made to find methods to improve the same. Furthermore, this research can bring about self-development among the students and teachers.

## 2.2 Methods

The following methods were followed to assess the level of students in writing.

Phase 1: In this phase, an attempt was made to explore the possible reasons for the lack of writing skills among LAs. To test the writing skills of professional students, 10–15 students from the first year at the undergraduate level were selected. The selection ranged from poor writers to good writers in English. For selecting students, a questionnaire was prepared, which includes spotting errors, rearranging words to frame meaningful sentences, and a paragraph on a general topic. The questionnaire would vividly assess the level of students in writing and also would convey how unskilled writers are different from skilled writers.

Phase 2: In this phase, the questionnaire was issued to the students, who were allowed to answer the questionnaire within a stipulated time. The answer scripts were evaluated by English department teachers to identify mistakes in students’ writing.

## 2.3 Findings

Upon evaluation, it was found that the writing of skilled writers was different from that of unskilled writers. Based on the findings, HAs (high achievers in English) and LAs (low achievers in English) were distinguished.

S5	8	8	16	HA
S6	5	3	8	LA
S7	9	6	15	HA
S8	8	3	11	LA
S9	2	4	6	LA
S10	4	3	7	LA

From the table, S1, S2, S5, and S7 were considered as HAs, and the remaining students, S3, S4, S6, S8, S9, and S10, were considered as LAs. From the findings, a profile of LAs was arrived at. An LA is one who has a very low proficiency in English. It may be because she/he might have received education in a local language. LAs should be made aware of this shortcoming and a sincere effort be put in to improve them. LAs lack confidence and self-esteem, but are highly motivated to learn and improve their skills. The questionnaire and subsequent evaluation clearly provided an insight into the difficulties faced by LAs. LAs had many difficulties in writing, while HAs had only one or two difficulties.

Upon evaluating the answer scripts of students, generally it was found that LAs were not good at grammar. They were not able to frame sentences without grammatical errors. Grammar consists of a set of rules for constructing and analysing sentences. Language use has two aspects – synthesis and analysis. Analysis is based on what are called “units of grammar”. Grammar is how you put words together to fashion a thought. These thoughts are to be expressed in a speech and writing to communicate an idea to a listener or a reader. English usage is the application of a set of rules of grammar to speech and writing. It includes syntax, style and choice of words. Consider a sentence taken from a student’s (S4) answer script:

*Mass media for us many part of the things very usefully.*

This student has not used any *verb*, which indicates action in the sentence. Verb plays a major role in a sentence and without it we cannot make a sentence. Another LA student (S8) framed a sentence thus:

*All the people to see TV.*

In this sentence, the student used a verb but not in an appropriate place. And also ‘to’, a preposition, is not necessary in that sentence.

Identification of LAs and HAs

Students	Part I (spotting errors and framing sentences)	Part II (paragraph)	Total marks	LA/HA
S1	9	7	16	HA
S2	11	8	19	HA
S3	2	3	5	LA
S4	6	3	9	LA

Another student (S10) has written thus:

*He pretends to be ill.*

In this sentence, the *subject* has no agreement with the *verb*. So it is grammatically incorrect.

To write well in English, grammar parts such as sentence patterns, articles, prepositions, etc., should be given much importance.

### 3. Cues to Enhance Writing Skills

It is important that LAs be made strong in grammar by English language teachers. Teachers should focus on the building blocks of grammar, i.e., parts of speech, tenses, sentence patterns, etc. Tenses play a major role in writing to convey the time of an action. Incorrect use of tense is one of the common mistakes that students make. Students should be made clear about the tense forms of the verb.

In addition, articles, prepositions, etc., also play a major role in writing. Rules of grammar should be strictly followed by students.

Apart from grammar, vocabulary should also be given importance. All successful communicators have a reasonable stock of words. Therefore, all should develop our vocabulary to become a good communicator.

Learning or knowing a new word involves knowing its different shades of meaning, use in context, grammatical characteristics, pronunciation and so on. Some of the ways to develop vocabulary are:

1. New words can be learnt every day in order to enrich vocabulary. Sometimes, new vocabularies can be learnt in context with the help of appropriate phrases. To refine our language, those learnt words can be put into practice.
2. Vocabulary cards will also be helpful to improve and develop vocabulary. While reading, unfamiliar words or phrases should be noted down on a card. Vocabulary cards are helpful in recalling the meaning and practicing pronunciation.
3. Listening and reading are known as receptive skills, which play an active role in expanding one's vocabulary. While reading or listening, one can come across many new words and expressions which would help to improve one's vocabulary.
4. It is important to understand the differences between everyday language and the language used for professional communication. Our choice of words largely

depends on our relationship with the person we are talking or writing to. Formal words should be used officially in business correspondence and technical writing, and informal vocabulary may be used in a personal communication.

The next micro skill which makes writing effective is spelling. To master the art of spelling, the rules of spelling should be emphasised among the students. A few spelling rules are given below:

1. "s" is added to a noun to make it a plural. However, nouns ending in s, sh, ch, and x require "es". For example, *a book – two books; bench – benches*.
2. Verbs ending in o have "es". For example, *do – does*.

A dictionary or the spell checker on your computer can be resorted to. If one needs to improve the knowledge of spelling, a regular use of a dictionary should be done. Good spelling is learned by memory and repetition.

Punctuation also plays a significant role in writing. Punctuation marks are signals to the readers. Punctuation shows how the sentence should be read and makes the meaning clear.

Every sentence should include, at least, a capital letter at the start, a full stop, exclamation mark or question mark at the end. In writing, we use the following marks of punctuation to emphasise and clarify what we mean.

- Period (.) is used at the end of the sentence.
- Question mark (?) is used at the end of a direct question.
- Exclamation mark (!) is used to express strong feelings or an urgent command.
- Comma (,) is used to introduce a series of words.

Punctuation marks should be taught to students in an attempt to improve one's writing. Along with these micro skills, strategies such as planning, generating and organising the ideas, reviewing, etc., to improve writing skills should also be focused in language classrooms.

### 4. Conclusion

English teachers should facilitate students to enrich their writing skills with the help of some interesting activities in language classrooms. Teachers should regularly assign writing exercises in language classes. To vary the pace of a lecture course, students should be asked to write a few minutes during class. Teachers should provide guidance

throughout the writing process. Developing writing skills can help all aspects of one's life, from professional life to social gatherings and everything in between. It's never too late to work on one's writing skills.

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