Student Prompting Behaviour in Evaluating Business Correspondence: A Qualitative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

As generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) becomes increasingly prevalent in higher education, students have an opportunity to assess and enhance professional writing However, the effectiveness of AI-assisted writing depends partly on how students formulate prompts and engage with AI-generated feedback. The aim of this study is to analyse the prompting strategies of higher education students when assessing and revising a poorly written business e-mail using GenAI. The research was of a qualitative nature, and chronological prompt logs were obtained for 18 students from a text-evaluation task involving the four aspects of content, language, organisation and format. The data were analysed using qualitative content analysis to identify prompting typologies, analytical depth, prompt sophistication, and revision pathways. Three general types of prompting were found: single-turn comprehensive prompting (22%), multi-turn sequential prompting (56%), and unstructured trial-and-error prompting (22%). Students' knowledge of language-related problems, such as passive voice, nominalisation, redundancy, and outdated business expressions was deeper than their understanding of problems related to the content, audience, and communicative purpose of the text. Prompt sophistication ranged from some students adopting professional personas, applying communication frameworks, and stating output constraints to others relying on general instructions. Students also commonly progressed from diagnostic critique to active transformation, where they would follow up with prompts to request for revisions, alternative words, and simpler explanations. The results indicate that students' prompting strategies are influenced by their understanding of business correspondence and their ability to direct interactions with AI. The study highlights the need to incorporate prompt writing, critical assessment of AI-generated feedback, and professional writing skills into business correspondence instruction to enable the purposeful and independent use of GenAI.

Keywords: Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), Prompting Strategies, Business Correspondence, AI-Assisted Writing, Qualitative Content Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Prompting helps students understand and follow the rules of professional writing (Lookadoo et al., 2025). This study examines how students use prompts to interact with GenAI and evaluate business correspondence tasks (Orwig et al., 2024). It focuses on how students use prompts to improve their writing, consideration of their audience, and how they meet workplace communication needs (Nickerson & Davidson, 2024; Wu et al., 2022). By examining students' prompts and feedback from GenAI, the study explores how students use AI to evaluate and improve their writing (Alzahrani & Zheng, 2024; Farrokhnia et al., 2026). It also identifies the types of prompts students use and their purposes (Ding et al., 2025).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Students can use AI tools to enhance their writing skills and tailor it to various audiences and settings (Salem, 2026). Students should also verify AI-generated content for cultural appropriateness and tone (Ahmed, 2025). The purpose of this study is to explore the use of prompts and AI feedback that students use when assessing and

editing business correspondence. It emphasizes evaluating, editing, and accepting suggestions from AI to modify writing. The study also explores whether students use AI to aid their thinking or do so without careful consideration of its suggestions (Pham & Renandya, 2026). These issues point to the need to examine business correspondence beyond grammar and determine whether it communicates effectively in various professional contexts.

Prompting and learning

The need for "prompt literacy" to move learners from being passive users to active evaluators who can assess AI-generated text is also highlighted in previous scholarship (Li, 2026). Students can thus structure the different types of prompts by the stage of their professional writing processes, so that they can effectively scaffold their writing evaluation processes which involve both recursive revision and meta-cognitive self-regulation (Xie, 2025). These structured interactions are not only for the purposes of eliciting static corrections but are also used to track the learner's own interaction with the text, which may be repeated in order to improve the quality of their responses and increase their trust in them (Jovic et al., 2025). This process-driven method enables students to use prompts as cognitive scaffolds when they study and practice professional writing to collaboratively think and systematically identify errors (Qian, 2025). This type of monitoring allows students to cultivate self-awareness about their own agency in using AI, enabling them to critically evaluate, disapprove, and/or modify AI-driven suggestions, thereby preserving their agency in composing their own correspondence (Kim et al., 2025).

Problems with students' prompting behaviour

A key challenge is that students are too dependent on AI-generated responses and are not writing and editing their own work. This can make it difficult for them to build up their communication skills as they get older (Huang & Yan, 2025). Excessive use of AI can also lead to a decline in critical thinking and problem-solving abilities among students, which are essential for their professional success (Xie et al., 2024).

Instructors can help solve these issues by prompting students to ask for feedback and explanations from AI instead of direct answers. This method will facilitate students to reflect their work and enhance their problem-solving ability. Students can also have difficulty writing specific prompts that suit their organisation and target audience. Consequently, they might find themselves taking in general ideas that may not be relevant to the use and context of a business message. Finally, students might not pay attention to language, tone, and professional readers' needs because they are focused on getting the answers quickly.

Instructors should implement follow-up prompts to have the AI explain why certain changes are necessary to address such difficulties. Students can then evaluate the impact of these changes on the meaning, tone, and purpose of their messages. This allows students to reflect on their writing rather than unthinkingly taking the ideas generated by AI.

Effect of prompting on students' assignments

Students who provide several strong prompts for the written assignment may be more successful than those who rely solely on a single prompt to modify the tone and content of the assignment (Lee & Palmer, 2025; Yacoub, 2026). By contrast, students may miss vital language features and their own style with simple prompts (McKinley, 2026).

Educators should encourage students to justify their acceptance, modification, or rejection of AI-generated ideas. This allows students to train their brains with the help of AI and not rely on it to make decisions (Gil-Duran & Recalde, 2026; Guardado, et al., 2025). Additionally, they should be taught to challenge AI-generated answers, understand the rationale behind AI recommendations, and evaluate the appropriateness of those recommendations for their work (Muñoz et al., 2025; Wang, 2024).

Another important part of prompt literacy is the need to comprehend the workings of generative AI as well as its constraints (Pensky et al., 2025; Tate et al., 2025). Students can learn to harness the power of AI as a learning

aid to reflect, reason, and think. Students can learn to use AI as a tool for reflection, reasoning, and critical thinking (Moguš, 2025). Overall, effective prompting can help students go beyond simply using AI to complete tasks and build their independence in making decisions and communicating them, a skill they will need in the workplace.

Students' prompting strategies in language classrooms

Students can use different prompting strategies, including zero-shot, one-shot, and few-shot prompting. Few-shot prompting provides examples to guide the AI in producing responses. It may be useful for improving academic writing and specific grammar structures (Майер, 2026).

Students can also improve their work by using follow-up prompts instead of relying on a single instruction. This allows them to review AI responses, make changes, and develop outputs that better match their learning goals (Hwang et al., 2023). Through this process, students become more involved in shaping their own learning rather than simply accepting AI-generated answers. However, students need guidance to develop effective prompting skills. Teachers can help them move beyond basic questions by encouraging them to analyse responses, check the accuracy of information, and consider whether AI suggestions are suitable for their tasks (Li et al., 2026). This guidance can help students understand the strengths and limitations of generative AI and use it more effectively in academic and professional settings (Pangestu et al., 2026).

Teachers should also encourage students to plan their prompts, refine them through repeated interactions, and evaluate the results. This "Plan, Iterate, Evaluate" approach helps students remain in control of their writing and make informed decisions about AI-generated suggestions (Anders & Speltz, 2025). Overall, teaching prompting strategies can help students develop critical thinking, independent judgment, and stronger language skills.

Business correspondence evaluation

Evaluating professional written communication requires considering several aspects, including language accuracy, writing conventions, and the cultural differences that may affect workplace communication (Sim et al., 2025). Assessment criteria are important because they help ensure that business messages are clear, relevant to the task, and well organised (Li, 2025). When using AI to support business writing, students should provide clear instructions about the task, intended audience, context, and required writing style. These details can help AI produce drafts that follow professional writing conventions (Kim & Kim, 2025). However, students should not simply accept AI-generated responses. They need to evaluate the suggestions carefully and apply their own judgment to ensure that the writing meets professional expectations (Tsai, 2025; Yao & Fan, 2025).

Students should also learn to identify and revise language that may sound impolite or inappropriate, especially in professional discussions and negotiations (Huang, 2025). This requires guided practice in which students use clear assessment criteria to identify problems, improve their writing, and evaluate the suitability of their revisions. Such an approach shifts the focus from correcting errors automatically to using feedback in a meaningful way to improve writing skills (Remache & Remache, 2025; Segaran et al., 2025).

Objectives of the Study

The study adopts a qualitative approach and assesses a poorly written business email based on its content, language, and formatting using GenAI. The study has four main objectives. First, it identifies a variety of prompts that students use: single-turn, multi-turn, and step-by-step. Secondly, it analyses the way in which students evaluate the content, language, and format of the email when using prompting. It looks at whether students assess the three aspects in a single prompt, or if they use different prompts to evaluate each aspect. Third, it explores the detail and structure of students' prompts. This involves using tools such as role prompting, setting word limits for the responses, using frameworks like SMART criteria (Specific, Meaningful, Appropriate, Relevant, Thoughtful), and other techniques. Lastly, it examines the ways students can revise their evaluations with follow-up prompts. This involves analyzing their progression from detecting mistakes to asking for reworded or more concise text and/or style changes.

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METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach to explore the use of prompts by students to assist with business correspondence tasks using Generative AI (GenAI). The data were gathered using a text evaluation task. Students received an underspecified business email and were asked to identify 3 weaknesses in content, language, and form. Students were given a standardized template and asked to copy and paste each prompt they gave the AI into the template, in order from the initial prompt to the final follow-up prompt. The prompts were subsequently thematized and structurally analyzed, and qualitatively interpreted. In this way, the study could explore the kinds of prompts students employed and the ways that students engaged with GenAI during the evaluation task.

Research Design

This research is designed as qualitative study, followed by Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), to investigate the use of GenAI to assess and correct substandard business correspondence by higher education students. Using both inductive and deductive approaches, researchers can recognize and classify patterns in the students' prompts by using QCA as the research tool. It also allows researchers to look at what prompts students would like to use and how they would use them, the depth of the analysis and how they use further prompts to solve problems and to improve their work.

Task Materials and Context

The participants were given a task that involving the evaluation of real-world editing situations in business correspondence. They were given sample business emails with multiple writing issues, such as overuse of the passive voice, unnecessary nouns, repetitive phrases, poor layout, and outdated business terminology.

Task: To evaluate a poorly written email on content, language, and format

Subject: Update

Hi,

I am writing this email to you today in order to make an application for the extension of the project deadline in view of the fact that several complications were encountered during the implementation phase of the task. It has been found that the data was not in accordance with the standards required by the firm. Consequently, a determination has been made that more time is needed.

Kindly furnish us with your thoughts regarding the matter of whether or not we can afford an opportunity for a meeting in the near future. We want to conduct an investigation into the current status and provide assistance to those involved. It is our hope that you can take into consideration the difficulties we have faced. We will proceed with the completion of the work as soon as we are in a position to do so.

Please be informed that we are doing our best to finish the project with the minimum of delay. We would like to reach a decision soon.

Data Collection Procedure

To capture students' natural interactions with AI, participants were given a standardized Students Prompting Data Template. They were instructed to write and paste each prompt they used on the AI platform in order – starting with their first prompt (Prompt 1) and then all subsequent prompts (Prompt 2, Prompt 3, etc.). The researchers were able to capture the entire flow of student prompts using this method. It also facilitated the retention of the original text wording, prompt sequence, and strategies students engaged in during their interactions with AI.

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Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA)

The method used in the study is Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) which is carried out through both inductive and deductive coding. The goal is to grasp students' intentions and strategies for interacting with AI. The deductive coding process is based on predefined categories across the three aspects of business correspondence: content, language, and format. It also takes into account timing strategies in programming. Inductive coding is then employed to derive further themes from the data, including students' intentions, the use of follow-up prompts, and students' revision strategies. The study investigates students' prompts to analyze the different kinds of prompts used: direct prompts, detailed prompts, and scenarios to assess the business correspondence, tone, and technical aspects.

Dimension	Primary Code	Description / Indicators	Example Prompts from Dataset
1. Structural Typology	Single-Shot / Complete	Submits a comprehensive analysis request in a single prompt.	*"Analyse the provided email based on three specific criteria: Organization & Format, Content, and Language..."*
	Multi-Turn / Iterative	Prompts sequentially across multiple turns to drill down into specifics.	*"First analyse the subject..."* → *"Next, analyse the greeting..."* → *"Next, analyse paragraph 1..."*
	Unstructured Diagnosis	Pastes text directly with minimal or generic instructions.	*"what is the problem of this email"*
2. Scaffolding Depth	Holistic Evaluation	Requests simultaneous evaluation across content, language, and format in one query.	*"Make an analysis based on this e-mail about organisation and format, content, and language."*
	Granular Targeting	Isolates single linguistic or structural components for deep critique.	*"Analyse the use of passive voice in this email and explain its effect."* (Student 14)
3. Prompt Sophistication	Persona Adoption	Assigns an expert role or professional persona to the AI.	*"Act as a Professional Communications Auditor..."*
	Pedagogical Frameworks	Incorporates external communication criteria (e.g., SMART criteria, Modern Business English).	*Does this email use SMART to create the email subject?"*
	Explicit Constraints	Sets precise output parameters such as word limits or specific paragraph counts.	*"Provide your analysis in three distinct paragraphs (50–60 words each)..."*
4. Revision Pathways	Diagnostic-to-Transformation	Transitions from asking for error identification to requesting direct re-writes or simplifications.	*"what is the problem..."* → *"Can you rewrite the email back in clear and modern business..."*

Ethical Considerations and Data Verification

Before analysis, all prompt logs were checked for completeness and accuracy. This method resulted in the prompts being written in the right sequence and no prompt being missed. Participants' names were anonymized, for example as Student 1 and Student 2. All participants also gave informed consent prior to participating in the task. To ensure coding reliability, two coders independently reviewed the data and compared the coding results to each other. Differences were discussed and resolved to arrive at a consensus on coding.

FINDINGS

In this study, the researchers explored the impact of GenAI on the evaluation and enhancement of written texts by higher education students. Prompt logs by the students were qualitatively analyzed to explore prompting strategies and the students' interactions with AI. The results are summarised in four major themes in relation to the objectives of the research: (a) the nature of the prompts, (b) the depth of analysis of various aspects of the business correspondence, (c) the structure and level of detail of the prompts given by students, and (d) student utilization of follow-up prompts to revise and enhance their work.

Classification Of Student Prompting Typologies

The three main structural typologies uncovered in the prompt sequences were Single-Turn Comprehensive, Multi-Turn Sequential, and Unstructured Trial and Error, which align with different operational strategies students employed to critically evaluate text using GenAI.

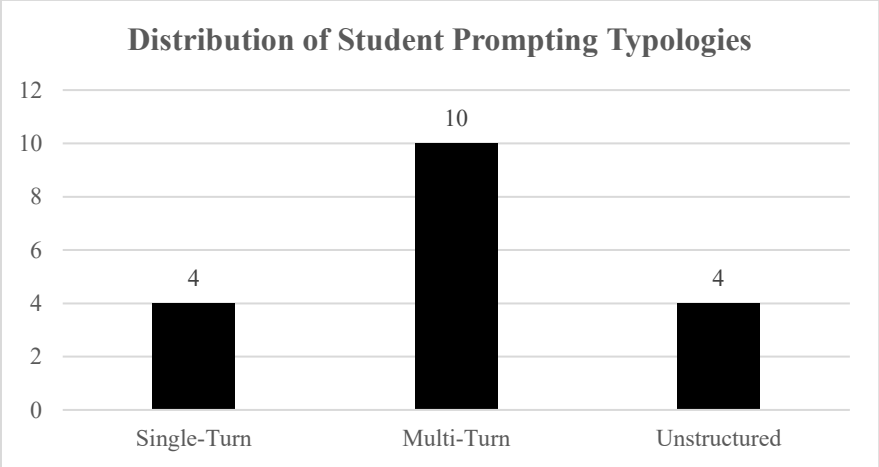

Figure 1. Distribution of Student Prompting Typologies

a) Single-Turn Comprehensive Strategy (22%, n = 4)

Four students (Students 3, 11, 12, and 16) performed the task of evaluation with one detailed prompt. In their first prompt, they provided all of the directions, criteria for judging, and formatting they needed. In this scenario, Student 3 instructed the AI to assume the role of a professional communications auditor and assess the email according to a set of criteria: organization and format, content, and language. The student also asked the AI to identify specific issues and provide short suggestions for improvement. Students 11 and 12 used a similar approach in that they established word counts and paragraph structures in their initial prompt, followed by a sample email. These results indicate that students who made use of this strategy were able to plan the instructions in advance and place the essential requirements in one prompt, which facilitated the evaluation process as opposed to using additional prompts to guide the evaluation.

b) Multi-Turn Sequential (56%, n = 10)

Most participants (Students 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 17, and 18) used a step-by-step approach when interacting with GenAI. To make the task less overwhelming, they divided the email into individual parts and submitted separate prompts for each section to the AI. For instance, Student 8 completed an evaluation of various parts of

the email on seven prompts. The student prompted the AI to perform four separate analyses on the subject line, the greeting, the first, second, and the third paragraphs, and the sign-off. The student guided the AI to analyse the following [subject line, greeting, first paragraph, second paragraph, third paragraph, Sign-off]. The student repeated use of follow-up prompts to the students: "Thank you, next can you help me analyze the greeting?" and "Well done, next can you help me analyse the first paragraph?" This method demonstrates how students led the AI through the evaluation step by step. They could divide the task into smaller parts and check each part of the e-mail before they proceed to the next.

c) Unstructured Trial and Error (22%, n = 4)

Four students (Students 1, 2, 5, and 10) used an unstructured approach when interacting with GenAI. They started the task with very brief, general instructions, but no clear instructions on how to evaluate it or a clear structure. For instance, Student 1 gave prompts like: "use modern business English on this email" and "what is the problem of this email". These students did not go through a pre-designed evaluation process with the AI, but instead let the AI to lead the way in finding key issues in the email. They then acted as facilitators with follow-up prompts to keep the process going. This method implies that some students started off with simple instructions and developed their prompting skills during interactions with the AI.

Analytical Depth Across Communication Dimensions

Qualitative analysis of the students' work revealed differences in the use of prompts across the three main components of professional business letter – language, organization and format, and content. Some students used all of these aspects in their assessment; others used different prompts to focus on each aspect in more detail.

Table 1. Categorical Breakdown and Exemplar Student Prompts Across Communication Dimensions

Dimension	Scaffolding Focus	Exemplar Student Prompts	Analytical Observation
Language *(Highest Depth)*	• Nominalisations • Passive Voice • Redundant Padding • Obsolete Jargon	*"Analyse the use of passive voice in this email and explain its effect."* (Student 14) *"Highlight examples of nomalisations, passive voice, and redundant phrases in this email."* (Student 15) *"Identify 'Yesterday's' habits such as nominalisations, passive voice, and redundant padding..."* (Students 8, 11, 12, 17)	Students exhibited the highest analytical granularity when targeting linguistic mechanics, specifically requesting the isolation of bureaucratic prose.
Organisation and Format *(Moderate Depth)*	• Subject Line Quality • Layout & Spacing • Salutation / Sign-off	*"Evaluate the subject line (is it clear/relevant?)... Check the structure (use of paragraphs, white space, and logical flow)."* (Student 3) *"Analyze the layout... How is the information sequenced? Is it a 'bottom-line-up-front' (BLUF) style..."* (Student 16)	Structural scaffolding focused primarily on surface layout visual cues and component-by-component alignment.

	• Information Hierarchy		
Content *(Lowest Depth)*	• Call to Action (CTA) • Missing Context/Data • Audience Suitability	• *"Identify the 'Call to Action'... Check for missing information or unnecessary 'fluff.'"* (Student 3) • *"What are the missing elements in this email?"* (Student 6)	Content critique was frequently treated holistically rather than broken down into specific analytical sub-queries.

Students were more inclined to prompt about language-related issues as demonstrated in Table 1. They frequently requested the AI to pinpoint specific writing issues, particularly overly formal or complicated language that often occurs in bureaucratic writing. Students, on the other hand, provided less detailed instructions when assessing content. General prompts were used as the primary focus in determining whether the e-mail was complete and clear.

Level Of Prompt Engineering Sophistication

Prompt engineering sophistication in the students' prompts was gauged by four major characteristics: persona adoption, integration of domain frameworks, output constraint enforcement, and unconstrained querying. These parameters reveal students' instruction in the use of GenAI, whether it involves structuring instructions, applying specific frameworks, imposing requirements for the AI's response, or using general questions.

a. Persona Adoption

A few students were being given expert roles to guide the evaluation of the email generated by GenAI. Student 3, for instance, asked the AI to “Act as a Professional Communications Auditor”, while Students 11 and 12 asked the AI to “Act as a Business Communication Expert”. The students' prompts indicate that they engaged the AI in a role-play scenario to get it to assess the email professionally.

b. Domain Framework Integration

Some students applied particular frameworks and concepts when evaluating business emails. For instance, Student 6 asked the AI, “Does this email use SMART to create the email subject?” and Student 13 said, “Change the subject line using SMART”. The following prompts demonstrate how students applied the SMART method to look at and refine email subject lines. In addition, Students 7, 8, and 17 based their analysis on the contrast between “Yesterday’s habits vs. Today’s goal of clear, active communication”. This led the AI to use this method to contrast traditional writing with contemporary business correspondence, which relies on clarity and active language.

c. Output Constraint Enforcement

Some students explicitly define the structure and length of AI responses. For instance, Students 11 and 12 asked the AI to give their analysis in three separate paragraphs (50-60 words for each). Student 7 also included the structure by asking the AI to structure the analysis into three parts: “1. ORGANISATION AND FORMAT, 2. CONTENT, 3. LANGUAGE – IN PARAGRAPH”.

These examples show that students used specific instructions to control the length and organization of AI-generated responses. These limitations enabled them to get the answers they wanted in the form and according to the evaluation criteria they preferred.

d. Unconstrained Querying

Some students were presented with general prompts that did not include specific business correspondence terms or clear instructions on what was expected, for example, 'Write a note'. For instance, Student 6 asked why this

email is poor, Student 1 asked, "what is a bureaucratic maze" and Student 2 asked, "how to make this email better?". The prompts provided were very basic, offering minimal direction for the AI to follow in its assessment of the email and in its reply. Consequently, students turned to AI to decide which issues to look for and how to present its recommendations. This illustrates that not all students used the prompts to structure their evaluation, instead, they used basic questions.

Iterative Problem-Solving and Revision Pathways

By examining the sequences students took to complete the prompts with GenAI when assessing and editing business emails, researchers found a two-step pattern in their use of the tool. In the first phase (Diagnostic Critique), the problems of the original email were identified. Active Transformation was followed by follow-up prompts to enhance the email with respect to the identified problems.

Phase 1: Diagnostic Critique	**Phase 2: Active Transformation**
Problem identification	**Direct Rewriting/Editing**
"What is the problem with email?"	"Rewrite using active working..."
"Identify inappropriate jargon...."	"Do a perfect email for me..."
Structural Decomposition	**Digestive Simplification**
"Analyse the passive voice..."	"Analysis in simple way..."
"Evaluate the tone used..."	"Make it in a form easy to recognise..."

Progression From Diagnosis to Transformation

In most cases, students provided the initial prompt to identify the issues in the email and then instructed to the AI to make corrections. In Prompt 3, Student 15 started by asking the AI to identify the weaknesses in the email and in Prompt 5, to examine the writing style of the email. The student then asked for specific changes, which they wrote in prompts 4 and 7: using active voice instead of passive voice in the first and simplifying the email to make it easier to read in the second. This is an example of how students progressed from identifying the issues in the writing to enhancing it with follow-up prompts. They made changes to improve the clarity, directness and readability of the language.

a) Simplifying AI-generated feedback

An example of such patterns identified in the students' prompt sequences was the type of follow-up prompts used to make AI feedback easier. In situations where AI provided an explanation that was too complicated, students requested a simpler, clearer response that was easier to understand. In Prompt #2, for instance, Student 3 asked for "ANALYSIS IN SIMPLE WAY". Students 5 and 9 both asked the AI to "please analyze the email in simple and easy-to-understand way" and "please present the response in a form that easy to recognize" in Prompt 6. Here are some examples of students rejecting the AI's initial reply. Instead, they employed follow-up prompts to make the feedback more meaningful and to put it into practice during the email evaluation task.

b) Detailed editing of specific phrases

Some students asked the AI to enhance specific words or phrases in the email rather than asking it to rewrite the entire email. For instance, student 13 in Prompt 5 asked, 'What other sentence can we use besides..." and "Thanks you in anticipation," and in Prompt 7, the student asked, "What is the appropriate sentence to change when email write...," and "Please be advised that...," which demonstrated how students used GenAI to understand that there are alternative words or phrases to use in specific cases in business email. They did not make any broad changes, but they worked on key phrases to make the email suitable for business correspondence.

DISCUSSION

This study's results offer insight into the use of GenAI by higher education students to assess and enhance poorly written business email messages. The findings reveal that students employ various strategies to prompt based on their knowledge of business correspondence, problem-solving, and understanding of AI. The four key considerations discussed are the role of business communication knowledge in shaping prompts, the nature of cognition across prompting approaches, students' attention to language rather than to content problems, and the effectiveness of follow-up prompts in enhancing the understanding and application of AI-generated feedback. The discussion also highlight ways in which the teaching of business correspondence can be enhanced through effective prompting techniques.

Domain Knowledge and Prompting Skills

The results indicated that there is a close relationship between the prompting skills and the knowledge of business correspondence of students. Business writing was essential for students to provide clear instructions to GenAI. They used terms related to writing problems, such as nominalization and passive voice, and applied frameworks such as SMART for email subject lines. When assessing the email, some students also read up on Modern Business English.

The students who were less knowledgeable of business correspondence were likely to use general prompts such as "what is the problem of this email?" and "how to make this email better?". These prompts were less directive, allowing the AI to determine which issues to identify and what suggestions to make.

This finding implies that GenAI is not replacing knowledge of business correspondence. Rather, prior knowledge of students shapes their ability to effectively guide the AI. Students with a knowledge of the subject can more easily identify specific problems and ask for appropriate changes in the task; students with less knowledge can be given general feedback that is not detailed enough to address the task. As a result, the students must acquire knowledge of business correspondence and prompting skills to effectively utilize GenAI.

Prompting Typologies Reflect Different Cognitive Processing Strategies

The difference between the single-turn and the multi-turn prompting highlights the way students approach complex analysis tasks. Single-turn prompts (22%) took more time to plan prompts before submitting them. They develop detailed instructions by defining the expert role, evaluation criteria, and output. This way, they can structure their ideas and deliver the AI with all the information at once. Multi-turn prompters (56%) employ GenAI to supplement their thinking process in the task. They do not plan everything to be done but break it down into smaller steps. They might look at the subject line, then the greeting and each body paragraph, for instance. They use each answer they get from the AI to decide what to ask next. Thus, multi-turn prompting becomes an interactive problem-solving process that helps students to gradually build up their analysis and enhance the email.

Over-Reliance On Language Mechanics Rather Than Content Strategy

The prompts the students were asked to focus on were more on language mechanics rather than the content of the email. Often, they asked the AI to highlight ineffective business writing styles, such as passive voice, wordiness, and redundancy. They tended to focus less on pertinent content-related issues, including whether all important information was presented, whether the message was "appropriate for the intended audience," and whether the tone was "appropriate for the situation. This indicates that students perceived writing assessment primarily as a task of correcting grammatical mistakes and enhancing their writing skills, rather than as an effective process for business correspondence. Their attention to language development suggests they could benefit from more guidance in assessing the content, audience, and purpose of their professional emails.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the application of GenAI within the context of higher education students' assessment and editing of poorly written business emails in terms of higher-order processing of content, language and format. The results showed that there were three primary prompting strategies: Single-Turn Comprehensive, Multi-Turn Sequential, and Unstructured Trial and Error, which are varied methods of problem solving and learning. Students paid greater attention to the accuracy of language and less to the completeness of content, appropriateness of the audience, and tone of the email, indicating that they tended to perceive email revision as a language-correction task, instead of a larger communication process. The study also revealed that the students' prompting skills were affected by their knowledge of business correspondence, as the students with better knowledge of the domain used more specific instructions, professional roles, and evaluation frameworks. Moreover, students were frequently found to apply a two-stage approach, starting with a diagnostic critique to pinpoint weaknesses and then moving on to active transformation to improve the email, with the subsequent questions focused on requesting more clarity around the feedback provided by AI. In general, the results indicate that the effective utilization of GenAI relies not just on the technology itself but also on the students' domain expertise, prompting strategies, and their capacity to sort through and analyze feedback generated by AI.

Pedagogical Implications

The results indicate that a more holistic approach to GenAI is required in higher education to teach students how to use it beyond creating texts or fixing grammar. Teachers need to provide explicit training on prompts in the context of professional communication skills, including the BLUF, SMART and Modern Business English. This would enable students to develop more specific prompts and receive feedback that meet the expectations of professional writing. Instruction should also emphasize assessing the AI feedback before making edits to text. Students should be able to recognize problems, evaluate the quality of the AI suggestions, clarify the reasons for their choices, and improve the suggestions when needed. Students should not be doing one-click rewriting but rather be participating in the revision process. This technique will enable them to remain independent and enhance their critical-thinking ability in business correspondence.

Limitations and Future Research

The qualitative research method and the fact that this study focuses on one business correspondence evaluation task are limitations of this study. Future studies might include more participants and mixed-methods designs in professional writing of various kinds. Researchers could also explore the impact of AI's real-time responses had on the students' subsequent prompts and decision-making. Furthermore, further research is needed to examine the long-term impact of prompt-engineering instruction on students' ability to assess and edit professional texts independently, while minimizing dependence on AI.

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