

ANALYZING THE STRUCTURE OF THE BODY TEXT OF OFFICE CORRESPONDENCES IN SELECTED HEIs IN DAGUPAN CITY

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Abstract

Effective office correspondences are essential for maintaining professionalism, clarity, and organizational efficiency within private higher education institutions (HEIs). This study investigates the generic structure of internal office correspondences in selected private HEIs in Dagupan City, focusing on the inclusion and functional roles of five key elements: Salutation, Backgrounder, Purpose Statement, Anticipatory Phrase, and Gratitude. Employing a qualitative research design with data saturation, 100 correspondences were analyzed to determine the frequency and categorization of these components. Findings revealed that the Backgrounder and Purpose Statement are obligatory elements, present in all correspondences and essential for establishing context and intent. Meanwhile, Salutation, Anticipatory Phrase, and Gratitude are optional, serving to enhance tone, relational dynamics, and engagement when included. These findings align with theoretical perspectives such as Speech Act Theory, emphasizing the dual roles of communicative acts in conveying information and fostering relationships. Practical recommendations include the development of standardized templates and a training program for teachers and staff to refine correspondence practices. This research highlights the importance of effective communication in HEIs and provides actionable insights for improving internal correspondence standards.

Keywords: *Office Correspondences, Higher Education Institutions, Communication Structure, Professional Writing, Speech Act Theory*

Introduction

Effective communication is vital in any organizational setting, and office correspondences within educational institutions are no exception (Olugbo et al., 2023; Rachmand, 2022). Internal correspondences, particularly in private higher education institutions (HEIs), serve as the backbone for administrative processes, coordination among departments, and communication between faculty and staff (Brinia et al., 2022). Understanding the structure and components of these correspondences is crucial for ensuring clarity, professionalism, and efficient information dissemination (Dar & Dar, 2019).

Office correspondences serve as a vital medium for organizational communication (Olugbo et al., 2023), facilitating the exchange of information, coordination of tasks, and resolution of issues (Brinia et al., 2022). In private higher education institutions (PHEIs), the effectiveness of these correspondences can significantly influence operational efficiency and the clarity of directives (Magulod, 2017). As such, understanding the structure and components of office correspondence is essential in promoting effective communication within organizations.

Despite the ubiquity of office correspondences, limited studies focus on analyzing their body text – the content following the greeting and preceding the closing (Whang & Wendler-Shaw, 2021). This segment, which carries the message's essence, is crucial for ensuring that the intended communication objectives are achieved (Bahl, as cited in Whang & Wendler-Shaw,

2021). However, it often lacks standardization, leading to potential misinterpretations and inefficiencies in communication (Brinia et al., 2022)

The organization of information within the body text ensures that messages are conveyed in a clear, concise, and purposeful manner (Olugbo et al., 2023). Previous studies have emphasized the importance of certain elements in formal communication, suggesting that components that directly convey the intent or reason for writing and those that provide context or situational information are indispensable elements and are essential to the body text structure (Garner, 2009; Matias & Cardoso, 2019; Robinson & Thelen, 2018). On the other hand, certain components of the body text are used for salutations and to establish a polite and respectful tone, some are used to express expectations for a response or action, and some are phrases that express appreciation or politeness (Guffey et al., 2016; Matias & Cardoso, 2019). These elements are considered optional and are usually omitted in more formal or routine correspondences, particularly in organizations with a high volume of transactional communication or in more formal or direct communications where the emphasis is on conveying facts or instructions rather than fostering goodwill (Guffey et al., 2016).

For purposes of nomenclature and easier coding, the following components are labeled, to wit: Backgrounder refers to the component that provides the context or situational information relevant to the correspondence, setting the stage for the recipient, ensuring they understand the circumstances, background, or issues prompting the communication; Purpose Statement is the part that explicitly conveys the intent or reason for the correspondence and serves as the focal point of the communication, guiding the recipient on what the sender aims to achieve or communicate; Salutation is an opening phrase used to establish a respectful and polite tone at the start of the correspondence; Anticipatory Phrase is a statement that expresses expectations for a response, action, or future interaction, which guides the recipient on the next steps or outlines the sender's expectations; Gratitude is an expression of appreciation or politeness, often included to foster goodwill and maintain positive relationships.

Given the significance of these components in the structure of office correspondences, it is crucial to examine their frequency and obligatory status (Olugbo et al., 2023; Brinia et al., 2022; Dar & Dar, 2019). Without a clear purpose, communication can lack focus and direction, leading to potential misunderstandings or inefficiency (Alred, Tompkins, & Cherny, 2011). Understanding which elements are consistently present and essential can help establish a clear framework for constructing effective and professional correspondences (Dar & Dar, 2019). Such an examination will not only shed light on the standard practices within private higher education institutions but also highlight potential areas for improvement in communication clarity and efficiency. By identifying the obligatory and optional elements, this study aims to provide practical insights that can guide the development of standardized templates or guidelines, fostering consistency and effectiveness in organizational communication.

Hence, this study focused on analyzing the body text of internal correspondences in selected private higher education institutions around Dagupan City. By examining the recurring structures, it endeavored to identify the generic structure of the body text, marking its obligatory and optional elements. Specifically, it will focus on identifying and categorizing the elements found in the body text of internal correspondences. These elements will be analyzed in terms of their frequency and mandatory versus optional nature. The specific objectives are: 1) to identify the key components of the body text of office correspondences in private HEIs; 2) to analyze the frequency of occurrence of each component in internal correspondences; and 3) to determine the obligatory and optional elements of the body text.

The goal was to provide a framework that illustrates the common practices followed in drafting these communications. The aim was to provide insights into the structural conventions of office correspondences, and to serve as a guide for improving the clarity, consistency, and efficiency of internal communication in PHEIs. Furthermore, these findings could inform the

development of institutional guidelines for crafting effective office correspondence, benefiting administrators, faculty, and staff alike.

Method

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design, specifically employing content analysis to examine the structure and components of internal office correspondences, following the recommendations of Krippendorff (2018). The qualitative approach enabled the researchers to focus on the textual components and their contextual roles within the correspondences, providing a nuanced understanding of their usage and frequency.

The principle of data saturation was employed to determine the sample size. Saturation is achieved when additional data no longer provides new insights or themes, ensuring that the findings are robust and representative (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Participants

The study focused on internal correspondences from seven private higher education institutions (HEIs) in Dagupan City. These institutions were chosen for their diverse administrative structures and established communication practices, which allowed for a rich analysis of office correspondences.

The sampling frame included 100 internal office correspondences, such as memos, letters, and interdepartmental communications from January to June 2024. These documents were purposively sampled to ensure they represented a variety of departments, purposes, and levels of formality, following the protocol proposed by Patton (2015).

Instrumentation

Internal correspondence was collected with permission from the institutions, ensuring adherence to ethical guidelines, including confidentiality and anonymity of institutional data. The collection phase lasted from July to August 2024. Documents were collected in electronic or hard-copy formats and converted into digital text for analysis. Care was taken to exclude identifying details of the institutions and personnel involved.

Data Analysis

The analysis focused on identifying the presence and frequency of five pre-determined elements: Salutation, Backgrounder, Purpose Statement, Anticipatory Phrase, and Gratitude. The framework for identifying these elements was guided by existing theories and literature on business and professional communication. For example, Guffey, Loewy, and Almonte (2016) highlighted the importance of a structured approach in business writing, while Harris (2014) emphasized the role of context and purpose in professional correspondence.

The data were coded and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis, a systematic method for identifying patterns and themes in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach allowed for the categorization of each component as either obligatory or optional based on its frequency and functional role across the sampled documents.

Results and Discussion

Frequency of Occurrence of Components

The analysis of 100 internal office correspondences from selected private higher education institutions (HEIs) in Dagupan City revealed distinct patterns in the usage of the five identified components: **Salutation, Backgrounder, Purpose Statement, Anticipatory Phrase,**

and **Gratitude**. These findings provide insights into the structural and functional aspects of professional communication in academic settings.

Table 1. Frequency and Categorization of Elements

Component	Frequency	Categorization
Salutation	56%	Optional
Backgrounder	100%	Obligatory
Purpose Statement	100%	Obligatory
Anticipatory Phrase	48%	Optional
Gratitude	62%	Optional

Backgrounder and Purpose Statement as Obligatory Elements

The **Backgrounder** was present in all correspondences analyzed (100%), underscoring its critical role in providing context. This element serves as the foundation for understanding the circumstances that necessitated the correspondence, ensuring clarity and coherence.

For instance, a memo regarding a policy update began with the following backgrounder:

"Following the recent changes in the CHED Memorandum Order No. 2, Series of 2023, our institution is updating its guidelines on faculty workloads to align with national standards." [Sample 14]

The inclusion of such contextual details helps recipients connect the communication to a broader framework, whether institutional policies, ongoing initiatives, or external mandates. This finding aligns with Guffey, Loewy, and Almonte's (2016) assertion that providing adequate context enhances the recipient's ability to process and act on the information effectively.

The consistent presence of the **Backgrounder** emphasizes its obligatory status, as it mitigates misunderstandings and ensures that recipients have a shared understanding of the correspondence's premise. The absence of this element, especially in complex communications, could lead to confusion or misinterpretation, hampering decision-making and follow-through.

Similarly, the **Purpose Statement** appeared in every correspondence (100%), highlighting its essential role in articulating the intent of the communication. This element serves as the "action driver," directly informing the recipient about the expected response or focus of the correspondence.

For example, a letter about an upcoming event stated:

"This is to formally invite you to the Faculty Development Program scheduled for January 15, 2024, at the main campus auditorium." [Sample 17]

By explicitly stating the purpose, the communication avoids ambiguity, ensuring that the recipient understands their role or the necessary actions. This finding aligns with Harris's (2014) assertion that clarity of intent is paramount in professional communication, particularly in hierarchical and structured environments such as HEIs.

The universal inclusion of the **Purpose Statement** confirms its classification as an obligatory component. It is indispensable for achieving the core communicative function, whether informing, requesting, or directing.

3.3 Optional Components: Salutation, Anticipatory Phrase, and Gratitude

The **Salutation** was present in 56% of the correspondences, indicating that while not mandatory, it plays a significant role in setting the tone of the communication. Salutations were more commonly observed in less formal correspondences or those intended to foster rapport. For example:

"Greetings," [Recurring]

or

"I wish this letter finds you well," [Recurring]

Such openings establish a collegial tone, fostering a sense of collaboration and mutual respect. However, in formal or directive correspondences, salutations were often omitted in favor of brevity and a more businesslike approach:

"Attached is the updated schedule for the upcoming departmental evaluation." [Sample 62]

This finding aligns with Garner (2009), who notes that salutations can enhance the interpersonal aspect of communication but are often excluded when efficiency and immediacy are prioritized. Thus, the **Salutation** is a strategic, situationally driven element that enhances tone without being essential to the message.

As already mentioned, the presence of a salutation in 56% of the correspondence mainly reflects its role in shaping the tone of an interaction. In addition to this, however, its frequent use in less formal correspondences or those designed to foster rapport underscores the socio-cultural tendencies deeply rooted in Filipino society. Filipinos are known for their *pakikisama* (smooth interpersonal relationships) and *paggalang* (respect). Salutations serve as a manifestation of these values, emphasizing respect and warmth.

Studies in sociolinguistics highlight the importance of opening phrases in setting the tone for effective communication, particularly in cultures that value relational harmony such as in the Philippines. This finding virtually mirrors the discussions of Enriquez (1994) in *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* emphasizing that Filipino communication practices are centered on respect and relational harmony. The use of salutations such as these helps establish a positive and respectful atmosphere, which aligns with the cultural emphasis on maintaining good interpersonal relationships.

The **Anticipatory Phrase**, present in 48% correspondence, was primarily included in documents requiring a response or action. This component is particularly useful in setting expectations and prompting the recipient to engage. For instance:

"We look forward to your prompt reply by December 12, 2023, to facilitate the necessary arrangements." [Sample 73]

Such phrases were most common in invitations, requests, and follow-ups, where they served as polite yet direct prompts for the desired outcome. However, in purely informational correspondence, anticipatory phrases were omitted, as no action was required.

This finding supports Harris's (2014) observation that anticipatory elements are context-specific, adding value only when a response or subsequent action is necessary. The optional nature of this component reflects its dependency on the communication's purpose and audience.

The **Gratitude** element was present in 62% of correspondences, often used to conclude the communication on a positive and respectful note. Examples included:

"We appreciate your continued support in upholding our institutional goals." [Sample 6]

or

"Thank you for your cooperation in this matter." [Sample 77]

Gratitude contributes to fostering goodwill and maintaining positive relationships within the organization, particularly in requests or announcements involving collaborative efforts. However, it was absent in highly formal or procedural correspondences, where the focus remained strictly on the content or instructions.

This pattern aligns with Guffey et al. (2016), who argue that expressions of gratitude enhance relational dynamics but are not always essential for transactional communications. The Gratitude component, while not obligatory, adds an interpersonal dimension that can be strategically employed to strengthen collegiality and cooperation.

Like **Salutations**, **Gratitude** underscores the Filipino emphasis on fostering harmonious interpersonal relationships and expressing respect. This tendency is closely tied to cultural values such as *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) and *paggalang* (respect), which guide social interactions and communication practices.

The concept of *utang na loob* emphasizes the importance of acknowledging kindness or assistance, often through verbal or written expressions of gratitude. De Guia (2005) explains that this value reinforces social bonds and fosters goodwill, which are critical to the collective orientation of Filipino society. Bautista (2001) notes that gratitude is part of positive politeness strategies in Filipino English, serving to maintain social harmony and establish rapport in both formal and informal settings. Similarly, Chen (2013) highlights the role of gratitude in Asian cultures, particularly as a relational tool for strengthening interpersonal connections. In the Philippine context, the expression of gratitude at the end of correspondence is not just a formality but a linguistic manifestation of these deeply ingrained cultural values.

Comparative Analysis of Optional and Obligatory Components

The distinction between obligatory and optional elements highlights the functional hierarchy within internal correspondences. The **Backgrounder** and **Purpose Statement** ensure clarity, intent, and actionable understanding, fulfilling the core communicative objectives. Conversely, the **Salutation**, **Anticipatory Phrase**, and **Gratitude** serve supplementary roles, enhancing tone, engagement, and relational dynamics without being indispensable.

This layered structure aligns with **Speech Act Theory** (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Obligatory elements like the **Backgrounder** and **Purpose Statement** primarily serve locutionary and illocutionary functions. Locutionary acts pertain to the semantic content of the message, ensuring clarity and intent. The Backgrounder provides the necessary context for communication, while the Purpose Statement delivers the illocutionary force by specifying the intent of the correspondence, such as requesting action, providing information, or making a decision. These elements fulfill the core communicative objectives by ensuring that the message is clear, actionable, and goal oriented. Without these components, the correspondence risks losing its functional efficacy.

Optional elements, such as the **Salutation**, **Anticipatory Phrase**, and **Gratitude**, perform supplementary roles aligned with perlocutionary effects. These elements influence the recipient's emotional and relational responses, fostering engagement, respect, and goodwill. For instance, the Salutation sets the tone for the interaction, creating a welcoming atmosphere. The Anticipatory Phrase signals attentiveness to the recipient's needs or actions, while Gratitude reinforces relational harmony and mutual appreciation. While not essential for the literal conveyance of information, these elements enhance the interpersonal dimension of communication, reflecting sociolinguistic and cultural norms.

Implications for Practice

This functional hierarchy reflects a division between the propositional content (what is being communicated) and the relational or interpersonal strategies (how the communication is delivered). Speech Act Theory illustrates how both obligatory and optional elements work synergistically to achieve comprehensive communication. The obligatory elements ensure that the illocutionary acts are achieved, providing the speech act's essential force. Meanwhile, optional elements contribute to perlocutionary effects, influencing how the message is received and interpreted on a relational level.

The findings provide practical recommendations for HEIs aiming to standardize and enhance their internal correspondences:

1. Mandate the inclusion of Backgrounder and Purpose Statement to ensure clarity and intent.

2. Use Salutation, Anticipatory Phrase, and Gratitude selectively based on the tone and context of the communication.
3. Develop templates incorporating these elements to streamline and professionalize institutional correspondence practices.

The analysis affirms the obligatory status of the **Backgrounder** and **Purpose Statement** as essential components for clarity and intent, while the optional elements (**Salutation**, **Anticipatory Phrase**, and **Gratitude**) enhance interpersonal and contextual relevance. These insights contribute to the optimization of professional communication within HEIs, fostering both efficiency and collegiality.

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended to draft a Training Design for Writing Effective Office Correspondences targeted at teachers and staff. This training is aimed to equip participants with the skills to construct professional and efficient correspondences that aligned with organizational standards and practices.

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