

A WRITING METHODOLOGY FOR MASS COMMUNICATION STUDENTS: A GENRE-BASED ANALYSIS OF EDITORIALS AND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Khushba Nadeem¹, Dr. Sara Shahbaz^{*2}, Sundas Rafique³

¹M. Phill Scholar, The Women University Multan

^{*2}Lecturer, Department of English, The Women University Multan

³Visiting Lecturer, Department of English, University of Sahiwal

¹khushbanadeem777@gmail.com, ^{*2}sara.6090@wum.edu.pk, ³sundasrafique.sr@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author: *

Dr. Sara Shahbaz

Abstract

This research examines how editorials and letters to the editor are written in English newspapers and aims to develop a suitable teaching method for Mass Communication students. It uses a genre-based approach to study the organization and language of these texts, based on the work of Bhatia (1993), and Hyland (2004), which emphasizes the role, purpose and context in language use. The study analyzes 60 texts, including 30 editorials and 30 letters to the editor from Dawn and The Nation, published between July 1 and July 31, 2025. The findings showed that both newspapers use common rhetorical moves to introduce issues, provide background and evidence, express a stance, suggest solutions, and conclude their texts.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a fundamental skill for communication in both educational and professional contexts. Previous studies have shown that genre-based instruction can improve students' ability to organize ideas, use appropriate language, understand genre conventions, and engage more confidently in writing tasks (Cheng, 2008; Ahn, 2012; Xiaoqing et al., 2023).

Other researches have also emphasized the value of authentic genres, move-based analysis, guided practice, and technology in developing genre awareness and writing skills (Freedman & Medway, 1994; Lo et al., 2021; Wardani et al., 2023; Zohbie, 2024). However, limited attention has been given to using Pakistani newspaper editorials and letters to the editor as a basis for developing writing instruction for Mass Communication students, which provides the context and rationale for the present study.

This research seeks to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-life communication. Through a genre-based approach, students learn how language functions in authentic contexts and how writing can be used to express opinions, address social issues, and participate in public discourse.

This study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What structural and linguistic features characterize editorials and letters to the editor in Pakistani English newspapers?
2. How do editorials and letters to the editor differ and resemble each other in terms of purpose, organization, tone, and language?
3. How can the identified genre features be used to redesign an effective writing methodology for Mass Communication students in Pakistan?

This research is important because it looks at real newspaper writing and connects it with the teaching of writing to Mass Communication students. By studying editorials and letters to the editor from Dawn and The Nation, the research helps identify how writers introduce an issue, express their stance, give evidence, suggest solutions, and end their texts. These findings can help teachers use authentic newspaper texts in the classroom instead of teaching writing only through fixed formats. For students, this can make writing easier to understand because they can see how real writers organize their ideas and communicate with their readers. The study is also useful for the Pakistani context because it provides practical insights into genre-based writing using local English newspaper texts.

2. Literature Review

Genre analysis has become an essential tool for understanding how public oriented texts such as letters to the editor and editorials function within media discourse (Bhatia, 1993). Unlike generic essays or narrative writing, these newspaper genres serve specific communicative purposes; engaging public opinion, offering critique, influencing policy discourse, and mediating between media institutions and readers (Hyland, 2004).

The research by Nguyen (2024) investigated the effects of scaffolding in genre-based writing instruction on EFL learners. In this mixed-methods experimental study, one group of 34 EFL learners received genre-based instruction with explicit scaffolding techniques. The findings showed that scaffolding helped learners better understand genre structures and supported their ability to organize and develop their writing. The study also suggested that guided support can make genre-based writing more manageable and effective for EFL learners.

Zohbie and Bhowmik (2024) explored the use of genre-based pedagogy for teaching writing to elementary students. Their conceptual study challenged the idea that this approach is too difficult or rigid for young learners. The authors highlighted how suitable guidance and classroom support can help students understand different text types and improve their writing skills.

A systematic review on genre-based pedagogy by Zagoto, Suhono, & Ndraha (2025) synthesized research on genre teaching in EFL academic writing from 2015 to 2025. This review examined how genre-based pedagogy has been implemented across secondary and tertiary levels, focusing on instructional approaches, learner outcomes, and teaching contexts. The findings showed that genre-based instruction generally improved students' writing performance, particularly in organization, cohesion, and genre awareness, while also increasing motivation, engagement, and confidence.

The findings of this analysis will be used to design genre-specific writing tasks for ESP Mass Communication students in Pakistan, with the goal of creating a more relevant and practical writing methodology rooted in genre-based pedagogy.

3.1 Research Methodology

This study follows a qualitative research design because its main purpose is to explore and understand how editorials and letters to the editor are structured and how they communicate meaning. Qualitative research allows the researcher to examine texts in depth and understand how writers construct arguments, present viewpoints, and engage readers.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

To do this research, the researcher will collect 30 editorials and 30 letters to the editor from two well-known English newspapers: Dawn and The Nation. This study uses systematic sampling, where texts (editorials and letters to the editor) are selected from every second day between 1st July and 31st July 2025 to make sure the data is recent and relevant. This analysis will be guided by well-known frameworks from Bhatia (1993) and Hyland (2004).

The analysis of the collected data will be conducted in several stages to ensure a systematic examination of the selected editorials and letters to the editor. The primary purpose of the analysis will be to identify the structural patterns and linguistic features of both genres and to use these findings as the basis for designing a genre-based writing methodology for Mass Communication students.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is based on two foundational theoretical frameworks that offer deep insights into how specific genres of writing editorials and letters to the editor are structured and how they can be effectively taught to students. These frameworks are Bhatia's (1993) move structure analysis and Hyland's (2004) genre-based pedagogy.

In the context of editorials and letters to the editor, Bhatia's model allows us to identify common patterns that successful texts tend to follow. For instance:

- Editorials often start with a lead-in move that introduces the issue, followed by an evaluation move where the writer expresses opinions or judgments about the issue. This is supported by a justification move where evidence, facts, or expert opinions are provided. Finally, the editorial might conclude with a recommendation or call to action encouraging readers or authorities to take certain steps.
- Letters to the editor generally begin with a polite opening or salutation, followed by a clear statement of concern or stance. This is followed by moves that provide supporting evidence or examples to back the stance, and the letter ends with a request or recommendation. While Bhatia's (1993) move structure analysis helps us understand what texts look like and how they function, Hyland's (2004) genre-based pedagogy provides practical guidance on how to teach students to write such texts.

Hyland's (2004) genre pedagogy consists of three key stages:

1. **Deconstruction:** In this initial stage, students analyze authentic texts, such as a published editorial or letter to the editor, to identify its purpose, organization, and language features. This stage helps learners develop genre awareness, they begin to see writing not just as an abstract skill but as a purposeful activity shaped by social context.

2. **Joint Construction:** After analyzing the model text, the teacher and students collaborate to produce a similar text. This might involve collectively planning the structure, choosing language appropriate to the genre, and drafting the text together. This stage provides scaffolding students receive support while practicing writing, making the learning process more manageable and effective.

3. **Independent Construction:** Finally, students write their own texts independently, applying what they have learned. For instance, after studying editorials on environmental issues, students might write their own editorial about climate change or local pollution problems. This stage fosters learner autonomy and confidence.

4. Analysis

4.1 Bhatia Move-Based analysis of Editorials

The researcher conducted a research by examining 30 editorials in total, by selecting 15 editorials from Dawn and 15 from The Nation, the study provides a comprehensive detail of their editorial moves.

Bhatia Move	Dawn Editorials	The Nation Editorials
Move 1: Introduction / Issue Establishment	They begin with facts, statistics, or recent developments; tone is neutral and informative; avoids immediate judgement	They begin with strong claims or dramatic framing; tone is assertive; often signals the editorial stance from the first line
Move 2: Background / Context	They provide comprehensive context using reports, historical references, and institutional data; builds reader understanding gradually	They give selective or brief context; focuses only on details that support its argument; less emphasis on broader background
Move 3: Problem Identification	They identify deeper structural issues (governance gaps, policy failures, social factors); problem is layered and complex	They frame the problem more directly; often assigns clear responsibility (state, foreign actors, society); less complexity
Move 4: Evidence / Justification	They have strong reliance on data, surveys, expert opinions, and official reports; evidence is used to support balanced reasoning	They use real-life incidents, examples, and general observations; evidence is more narrative and less data-driven
Move 5: Evaluation / Critique	They offer balanced and nuanced critique; may acknowledge positives while pointing out flaws; avoids extreme positions	They deliver strong, one-sided evaluation; clearly supports or opposes; uses persuasive and sometimes emotional language
Move 6: Recommendations /	They suggest realistic, policy-	They recommend direct,

Bhatia Move	Dawn Editorials	The Nation Editorials
Solutions	oriented, and long-term reforms; focuses on institutional improvement and systemic change	sometimes aggressive or immediate actions; solutions are clear but less detailed or technical
Move 7: Conclusion / Implication	They ends with a cautious, reflective tone; leaves room for thought and further debate; emphasizes gradual change	They ends with a firm, decisive message; reinforces stance strongly; aims to influence reader opinion clearly

4.2 Bhatia Move-Based analysis of Letters to the Editor

The researcher analyzed 15 letters from Dawn and 15 from The Nation to see how writers express their viewpoints and arguments. This research looks at how the letters helps explain the different viewpoints held by the audiences of these two major newspaper.

Bhatia Move	Dawn Letters	The Nation Letters
Move 1: Introduction / Issue Establishment	They often start with a philosophical premise or a reference to a specific news report; uses formal "hooks" to establish intellectual relevance.	They start with a direct emotional hook or a personal anecdote; immediately establishes an urgent or alarming tone.
Move 2: Background / Context	They provide historical or comparative context (e.g., comparing Karachi to Mohenjo Daro or citing global coal stats); builds a logical foundation.	They provide minimalist/anecdotal context; focuses on the immediate environment (e.g., a specific street, a local academy, or a personal feeling).
Move 3: Problem Identification	They frame the problem as a systemic failure (e.g., "political economy," "ecological disaster," or "institutional neglect").	They frame the problem as a personal or community crisis (e.g., "trauma," "harassment," or "waste of money").
Move 4: Evidence / Justification	They rely on structural evidence: tax percentages, colonial-era laws, or geopolitical theories; views the issue through a macro lens.	They rely on experiential evidence: witnessing a car accident, a student's struggle, or the joy of a security guard receiving fruit.
Move 5: Evaluation / Critique	They offer a logical critique	They offer a moral/emotional

Bhatia Move	Dawn Letters	The Nation Letters
	of the elite or the state; uses vocabulary like "hypocrisy," "perennial," and "conflict of interest."	critique; uses vocabulary like "heartbreaking," "unbearable," and "desensitized."
Move 6: Recommendations / Solutions	They suggest policy-level or moral shifts (e.g., "climate justice," "sincerity of purpose," or "transparent tax reform").	They suggest practical/tangible fixes (e.g., "more buses," "using Duolingo," or "community food banks").
Move 7: Conclusion / Implication	They end with a broad societal ultimatum or a question regarding civilizational values (e.g., "Let the river live").	They end with a call for empathy or personal change; focuses on human potential and immediate safety.

4.3 Comparison of Moves in Letters to the Editor: Dawn vs The Nation

Move	Dawn (n=15)	Dawn %	The Nation (n=15)	The Nation %
M1: Introducing the Issue	15	100%	15	100%
M2: Providing Background/Context	11	73.3%	10	66.7%
M3: Presenting Problem/Stance	15	100%	15	100%
M4: Providing Evidence/Examples	12	80%	11	73.3%
M5: Suggesting Solutions/Recommendations	12	80%	12	80%
M6: Concluding/Appealing	14	93.3%	13	86.7%

The findings show that both Dawn and The Nation use different rhetorical moves in their letters to the editor, but these moves do not appear in every letter. Introducing the issue and presenting a problem occur in all letters, while background information and evidence appear less frequently because some writers discuss issues directly without providing detailed context or examples. Similarly, recommendations and conclusions vary because not every letter suggests a solution or ends with a direct appeal. These differences reflect the writers' purposes, topics, and ways of presenting their viewpoints.

4.4 Comparison of Moves in Editorials: Dawn vs The Nation

Move	Dawn (n=15)	Dawn %	The Nation (n=15)	The Nation %
M1: Introducing the Issue	15	100%	15	100%
M2: Providing Background/Context	13	86.7%	12	80.0%

Move	Dawn (n=15)	Dawn %	The Nation (n=15)	The Nation %
M3: Presenting Problem/Stance	15	100%	15	100%
M4: Providing Evidence/Examples	14	93.3%	13	86.7%
M5: Suggesting Solutions/Recommendations	13	86.7%	14	93.3%
M6: Concluding/Appealing	14	93.3%	13	86.7%

The findings show that both Dawn and The Nation use similar rhetorical moves in their editorials, although the frequency of some moves differs slightly. Both newspapers introduce the issue and present a clear moves in all 15 editorials. Background information and evidence are also common. However, recommendations appear slightly more often in The Nation, while Dawn uses background information, evidence, and concluding moves more frequently. These differences may reflect how the editorials develop their arguments and present solutions to public issues.

5. Findings and Implications

The findings show that editorials and letters to the editor have clear and recognizable patterns. Editorials generally introduce an issue, provide background information or evidence, discuss or evaluate the situation, and then offer recommendations. Letters to the editor, in comparison, usually introduce a concern, express the writer's opinion, provide supporting reasons, and suggest some action.

These findings have important implications for writing instruction. Writing classes should move beyond a narrow focus on grammar, sentence correction, and examination-based writing and give students more opportunities to understand how writing is used in real-life contexts. Authentic editorials and letters to the editor can help students see how professional writers organize information, address readers, express opinions, and develop arguments. In this way, genre-based teaching can make writing more practical and closely connected to the communication needs of Mass Communication students.

The findings can be applied to writing instruction through Hyland's (2004) genre-based pedagogy, which provides a gradual process for helping students understand and produce different types of texts. The teaching process can move through three stages: deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction. Through these stages, students first understand how a genre works, then practise writing with teacher support, and finally apply their knowledge independently.

1. Deconstruction Stage (Understanding the Genre)

In the first stage, students are introduced to authentic editorials and letters to the editor taken from newspapers. For example, while studying a letter about a dengue outbreak, students can identify how the writer introduces the issue, provides relevant information, highlights the problem, and ends by suggesting preventive measures.

2. Joint Construction Stage (Guided Writing Practice)

In the second stage, students begin to apply what they have learned through collaborative writing. The teacher and students work together to construct a new editorial or letter using the genre features identified during the deconstruction stage.

For example, the teacher may introduce a topic such as environmental pollution or youth unemployment. In writing an editorial, for instance, the class may introduce the seriousness of the issue, discuss its causes and effects, and conclude by suggesting possible solutions.

3. Independent Construction Stage (Autonomous Writing Practice)

In the final stage, students produce their own texts independently. They can be given a new topic and asked to write a complete editorial or letter to the editor using the structure and language features they have learned. For example, a student may write an editorial on climate change and flood preparedness in Pakistan. By applying the genre structure independently, the student can develop a more organized, coherent, and persuasive text.

Overall, the findings suggest that genre-based teaching can make writing instruction more meaningful for Mass Communication students because it connects classroom learning with authentic media writing. The use of real newspaper texts and Hyland's three-stage process can gradually help students move from understanding a genre to producing it independently. The study also highlights the importance of familiarizing teachers with genre-based pedagogy and suggests that future research can extend this approach to other Pakistani newspapers, media genres, and digital forms of communication.

Conclusion

This research shows that editorials and letters to the editor in Dawn and The Nation can be valuable resources for teaching writing to Mass Communication students. The analysis found that both genres follow recognizable patterns, although editorials are generally more formal and analytical, while letters are more personal and concise. Both genres help students understand how to organize ideas, develop arguments, express opinions, and communicate with a wider audience.

Future research can extend this study by examining a larger number of Pakistani newspapers and including other media genres, such as news reports, feature articles, opinion columns, and digital media texts. Researchers could also apply the proposed genre-based teaching approach in actual Mass Communication classrooms and assess its impact on students' writing performance.

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