

Investigating The Importance of The Four-Point Plan Towards Students' Writing Performance

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Abstract

As effective written communication is central to professional administrative tasks, students in Secretarial Study Programs need a structured writing guide to help them produce clear and organized business correspondence. The Four-Point Plan, which consists of an introduction, essential details, required actions, and closing, offers a simple framework for organizing ideas logically. This study aims to examine the importance of implementing the Four-Point Plan in the Business Writing I course. The participants were first-semester students who were newly introduced to business letter writing and had limited familiarity with English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Using a qualitative approach, the research analyzed students' pre-explanation writing practice, provided instruction on the Four-Point Plan, and then examined their post-explanation writing practice. The analysis was guided by theories of teaching and learning processes, effective written business communication, and coherence and cohesion. The findings reveal that the Four-Point Plan is an effective instructional tool for helping students organize their ideas in business correspondence. By following its four steps, students showed improved clarity and structure in their writing. However, challenges remained at a detailed level, particularly in cohesion. Students frequently omitted transition signals, repeated ideas, or arranged sentences in a less logical order, reflecting their limited vocabulary and early stage of ESP proficiency. Despite these difficulties, the Four-Point Plan provides a useful foundation for developing more coherent and effective business writing skills in novice learners.

INTRODUCTION

Writing in English is an essential skill for students in the Secretarial Study Program, particularly because their future professional responsibilities heavily rely on formal written communication (Tan et al., 2026). In business environments, written texts such as emails, letters, memoranda, and reports do not merely transmit information but also represent an organization's professionalism, credibility, and corporate image. Secretarial staff are therefore expected to produce documents that are clear, accurate, and appropriately structured. To address this need, the Business Writing course is designed to equip students with the knowledge and practice required to compose formal business documents through classroom-based instruction and simulated professional tasks. To address this need, the Business Writing course is designed to equip students with the knowledge and practice required to compose formal business documents through classroom-based instruction and simulated professional tasks. Industry-based research similarly indicates that Business English courses should incorporate workplace-relevant tasks such as writing for companies and English correspondence (Sudana et al., 2024). Instruction that mirrors authentic workplace contexts is believed to support students' readiness for the demands of real-world communication. The process of sharpening business writing skills implemented in classroom instruction is meant to help students become familiar with the professional world (Listiana et al., 2023).

However, despite the inclusion of Business Writing courses in the curriculum, many students still experience significant difficulties in producing effective written texts. EFL first-semester students often struggle to organize ideas logically, select appropriate vocabulary, and construct grammatically accurate and coherent sentences. Empirical research on university-level Business English writing has identified difficulties in content development, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics, with grammatical/language-use and organizational problems representing particularly frequent areas of difficulty (Isma et al., 2024). Similar challenges have been reported among EFL students in business-related programs, particularly in writing structure, grammar, clarity, summarizing, and paraphrasing (Alhassan et al., 2021). These difficulties are significant because business writing involves distinctive purposes, audiences, tasks, and professional expectations that require skills beyond general language proficiency (Zhu, 2003). Such weaknesses are problematic because the quality of written communication strongly influences a company's image and determines how messages are perceived by clients or partners (Ranaut, 2018). Moreover, the ability to present content appropriately and strategically is essential to foster reader engagement and successful interaction between parties. (Reinsch, 2024). These realities indicate that students need not only language proficiency but also explicit guidance in organizing and structuring their ideas effectively.

To address these challenges, it is important to implement a structured guidance and accessible writing approach. One such method is the *Four-Point Plan*, a writing outline that consists of four main parts: Introduction, Details, Actions/ Response, and Conclusion (Taylor, 2012). The first paragraph states the reason for sending the letter; it can be in the form of a reference to previous correspondence, a reference to a meeting or contact, or an introduction of the matter being discussed. The writer should put all information needed to be delivered in the details, as they serve as the central section of the letter. The details should be stated simply and clearly while following a logical flow. With a clear action or response from the writer, the reader can grasp what the writer's expectation is as well as what the reader needs to do. A relevant one-line closing is considered enough to close the letter (Taylor, 2012). By following this plan, students are not only exposed to the essential elements

of effective correspondence but also encouraged to construct their own understanding of how a business letter should be organized. As Guffey & Loewy (2019) emphasize, clarity, conciseness, and coherence are key to effective written business communication, and these qualities can be fostered through explicit organizational models.

The effectiveness of the Four-Point Plan can also be explained through Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which highlights the role of scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in learning. The Four-Point Plan can be seen as a very structural form of scaffolding: students receive a framework (introduction, details, response/action, close) as a guide. Providing a framework and gradually reducing assistance fosters writing development from dependence to independence (Xiao, 2024). According to this theory, learners develop new skills when they are supported by structured guidance that gradually enables them to perform tasks independently. The Four-Point Plan functions as a scaffold, providing students with a step-by-step structure that supports their ability to organize ideas, maintain clarity, and ensure completeness in their writing. As students gain confidence and proficiency, the reliance on the framework decreases, enabling them to produce well-structured letters independently.

Furthermore, effective writing requires both coherence and cohesion. Coherence ensures that readers can follow the writer's argument or narrative smoothly, reducing cognitive load and increasing comprehension. (Ferdanes & Fatimah, 2021; Saragih & Septiani, 2017). Coherence reflects the writer's ability to structure ideas logically. A coherent text demonstrates that the writer can link sentences and paragraphs such that each new idea flows naturally from what has come before, indicating clear and organized thought processes. (Agustini et al., 2025; Nadia et al., 2023). In contrast, texts lacking coherence often appear disjointed, making it difficult for readers to follow the message or argument.

Cohesion occurs at the surface level of sentences, ensuring visible linguistic links between statements, while coherence refers to the deeper logical organization of ideas—how themes develop, how paragraphs relate, and how the overall structure supports comprehension. (Widiyanto, 2017; Agustini et al., 2025). Importantly, a text may be cohesive without being coherent; for instance, repeated pronouns and transitions may appear, but if the ideas are unrelated or poorly developed, the text still lacks clarity. In conclusion, coherence and cohesion are interdependent elements of effective writing, with coherence providing the logical organization of ideas and cohesion supplying the linguistic links that make those ideas clearly connected and easy to follow.

Previous studies have highlighted that a good piece of business writing must be practical, factual, concise, and clear. Developing these characteristics in students' writing requires instructional approaches that clearly guide learners through the writing process. Giving clear instruction in the classroom is shown to be important to enhance learners' skills (Ranaut, 2018). However, despite clear instructional guidance, writing is widely acknowledged as the most difficult form of communication. Many language learners experience challenges in producing high-quality written texts, often due to writing anxiety. Research indicates that higher levels of anxiety are closely associated with lower writing performance. Research has found that high level of anxiety goes hand in hand with lower writing performance. Other research has focused on reducing writing difficulties through technological tools such as wikis to lower anxiety and promote learner autonomy (Kaseem, 2017). Although these studies contribute valuable insights, most of them emphasize either general writing strategies or technology-based solutions. Limited attention has been given to the use of simple, low-

cost, and pedagogically structured frameworks that specifically target the organization of business correspondence, particularly within the context of vocational or secretarial education.

Building on these insights, this research focuses on the importance of implementing the Four-Point Plan on the students' writing organization in the Secretarial Study Program. The findings of this research are expected to provide valuable insights into how structured writing frameworks can support English writing performance in both professional and academic settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

Conducted as qualitative research, this study aimed to investigate the importance of the Four-Point Plan implementation on students' writing performance in the Business Writing course. In this design, the first-semester students from the Secretarial Study Program were given a writing situation before receiving an explanation about the Four-Point Plan, followed by instruction using the Four-Point Plan framework, and then another writing activity to see the improvement in their writing performance after learning the Four-Point Plan.

Data and Data Sources

The data collected in this research were derived from the students' writing performances both before and after the Four-Point Plan explanation. Their writing was analyzed based on the components of the Four-Point Plan to determine whether there is an improvement in students' writing performance before and after the implementation of the Four-Point Plan. The participants of this research were first-semester students enrolled in the Secretarial Study Program at Tarakanita University, Jakarta. These students were registered in the Business Writing 1 course, intentionally selected because they encountered the Business Writing course for the first time, had not been exposed to the *Four-Point Plan* writing framework, nor possessed a basic understanding of how to compose a simple and organised business letter.

Data Collection Procedures

The data for this research were collected using a writing test administered in two stages: a pre-test and a post-test. The pre-test was conducted before the implementation of the Four-Point Plan to assess the students' initial writing performance. After a series of instructional sessions using the Four-Point Plan framework, a post-test was administered to measure any improvement in the students' writing performance. In both tests, students were asked to produce a piece of business writing based on the same given prompt. Their written texts were then evaluated using a standardized scoring rubric that consisted of introduction, details, response or action, and closing. Students were asked to write a letter of invitation based on the given situation before getting an explanation about the Four-Point Plan. Then, students wrote the same letter based on the same situation after getting the explanation about the Four-Point Plan to see how the students' writing improved.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected from the pre-explanation and post-explanation writing scores were analyzed using qualitative methods. The results, then, were compared to determine whether there is a

significant difference in students' writing performance before and after the implementation of the Four-Point Plan.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Four-Point Plan Findings

The purpose of learning the Four-Point Plan for Secretarial students was to give them the framework of good professional business writing. In the ZPD framework, which mentions that this framework can decrease students' anxiety, the Four-Point Plan plays the same role: a guideline for the student to compose a business letter, so they can minimize anxiety in writing. The same applies in this research, in which the students' writing was analyzed in two sessions: before and after an explanation of it. The aim was to examine how the Four-Point Plan improved the writing performance of first-semester students by comparing pre- and post-explanation writing practices.

Based on the data, students showed improvement. Some of them wrote in a better way in terms of the presence of the components of the Four-Point Plan. This result shows that giving the framework helped the students improve their writing. As it was implemented to keep the writing coherent, students showed improvement in their coherence after receiving an explanation of the Four-Point Plan.

Every business letter must serve a purpose, whether to tell the reader to do something or inform the reader what the writer would do. When the sender invited the board of directors and all managers to the meeting to evaluate the proposal for the December sale event, it implied that the audience was expected to pay attention to the presentation and give feedback. In accordance with this, the sender needed to inform the audience to come and participate actively during the meeting. This statement clarified the agenda of the meeting and the purpose of inviting those parties.

The Four-Point Plan became the guideline for the students to organize their thoughts so they would not miss the important information in the letter. The introduction part mentioned the purpose of holding the event or the meeting. The action part focused on what the reader needs to do to prepare or while attending the meeting or the event. The reader needed to know this to plan, for example, preparing the material or gathering the information to participate actively during the meeting.

By providing a directional guide that shapes the reader's initial understanding of the message, an introduction in business correspondence plays a crucial role in establishing context, clarifying purpose, and preparing the reader for the information that follows. Without a clear introduction, a letter may appear abrupt or "jumpy," forcing the reader to infer the writer's intention and increasing cognitive effort to interpret the message. The chunk of the letter presented in Table 1 illustrates this issue clearly. Before receiving an explanation of the Four-Point Plan, the student's writing lacked an introductory paragraph and moved directly into the invitation details. A student, for instance, directly wrote that the audience was invited to the meeting in the initial paragraph. After the explanation and modeling of the Four-Point Plan, however, she demonstrated a noticeable improvement in terms of having an introductory paragraph by clearly stating the purpose of the letter. After introducing the purpose of writing, that is, to invite the recipient to a meeting, the following paragraph systematically presented

the relevant details of the invitation (day, date, and venue), resulting in a clearer and professionally organized message.

Table 1. Chunk of Letters concerning the Introduction Part

Pre-Explanation	In connection with December event proposal, so we invite you to attend the meeting which will be held on: day/date: time: place:
Post-Explanation	We would like to invite you to attend a meeting for preparing December shopping sale event. The meeting will be held on the meeting room on Tuesday, 30 September 2025 at 10 am at the 2 nd floor meeting room.

As each paragraph ideally conveys one main idea, readers can process information more easily and understand the message with less effort. In business writing, clarity and conciseness are essential because readers often seek information quickly and expect messages to be direct and well organized. The Four-Point Plan provides a clear organizational framework that guides writers to divide a business letter into functionally distinct paragraphs, each with a specific communicative purpose: stating the purpose of writing, providing supporting details, indicating the expected action, and delivering an appropriate closing. This structure helps writers present information logically and systematically.

As shown in Table 2, the comparison between the pre-explanation and post-explanation letters reveals a notable improvement in paragraph organization and clarity. In the pre-explanation text, the invitation details were unclear because all information was combined into a single paragraph, making the meeting purpose, time, and place less noticeable and reducing readability. Following the post-explanation of the Four-Point Plan, the student demonstrated improved awareness of paragraph functions by separating ideas into appropriate paragraphs. This reorganization allowed the key information to be identified more easily and improved the clarity and effectiveness of the letter. The change suggests that the structured framework supported students in organizing ideas more logically and producing clearer, more professional business correspondence.

Table 2. Chunk of Letters Concerning the Detail Clarity

Pre-Explanation	Dear Sir/Madam The purpose of this letter is to invite you to attend a December shopping sale event meeting on Tuesday, 30 September 2025 at meeting room at 10.00 -12.00 in the meeting room. The purpose of this meeting is to hear about the event discussion. Everyone is free to express their opinion as long as it remains within the stated context. Would appreciate it if the attendees could arrive on time.
Post-Explanation	Dear Sir/Madam We would like to invite you to the meeting for preparing December sale event. The meeting will be held on Tuesday, 30 September 2025 at 10.00 -12.00 in the meeting room. You are invited to attend the meeting to discuss December sale event. Your presence is highly requested and will be deeply appreciated.

Another noticeable improvement can be seen in the students' use of proper closing. Before receiving the explanation of the Four-Point Plan, the students did not include a separate closing paragraph and ended the letter with the sentence, *"Your presence will be highly appreciated to share ideas and support the success of this event."* According to the Four-Point Plan, that statement functions as the action or response, as it asks the reader to attend the meeting and contribute ideas. Although the intention was clear, placing this request as the final sentence without formal closing made the letter appear abrupt and incomplete.

Explicitly writing the expected action that needed to be taken helped readers know what the writer's expectation was for them, and the readers would not be surprised or feel unprepared if they were asked to comment or give ideas in the meeting. After learning the Four-Point Plan, one student, for example, added a brief closing sentence, *"I look forward to seeing you at the meeting and to receiving your valuable input."* This one-line hope functions as a polite conclusion that softens the request and leaves a favorable impression. This change demonstrates not only an addition of structure but also increased awareness of professional tone and reader-oriented writing. The inclusion of a closing helps create a sense of completeness, reinforces courtesy, and strengthens interpersonal rapport between writer and reader. Therefore, the improvement suggests that the Four-Point Plan effectively guided the student to recognize the communicative function of each paragraph, enabling her to produce a more polite and professionally appropriate business letter.

Table 3. *Chunk of Letters concerning the Action/ Closing Part*

Pre-Explanation	... Your presence will be highly appreciated to share ideas and support the success of this event.
Post-Explanation	... We would appreciate it if you could carefully review our teams' proposal for this event and share your response. I look forward to seeing you at the meeting and to receiving your valuable input.

B. The Four-Point Plan as a Tool to Maintain Coherence

Merely following the required structure of the Four-Point Plan is not enough to achieve good-quality business writing, since a letter must be written in a good manner in terms of using clear and appropriate expressions. A letter is like a story. Before the writer moves on to the next paragraph, he/she must close the first paragraph and provide a bridge or transition to move to the next one, whether it is a continuation or additional information from the previous paragraph. Therefore, maintaining coherence means using the appropriate transition. As the data showed, some students had trouble using the appropriate transition. The effect was that the reader found the ideas were jumping or not moving smoothly.

Table 4 shows that the letter before the explanation did not include any transitional markers that served as an introduction before presenting the specific details of the event's date and venue. As a result, the message shifted abruptly to a new topic, creating a sudden change that weakened the flow of the letter. In contrast, the post-explanation text demonstrated improved use of transitional markers to bridge the general purpose of the meeting and the

presentation of specific event details. The inclusion of the sentence “*The meeting will be held on:*” functioned as a clear transition that prepared the readers for the upcoming information. This added transition created smoother textual flow, enhanced coherence, and allowed the details of the date, time, and place to be presented more logically and effectively.

Table 4. *Chunk of Letter that Has Missing Transitional Phrase*

Pre-Explanation	Dear Sir/Madam We are planning to attend a meeting where our marketing team will present for upcoming December shopping sale event. The purpose of this meeting is to invite you to a shopping sale event and gather your feedback before final approval. Date : Tuesday, 30 September 2025 Time : 10.00 - 12.00 Place : Room 2, Floor 10
Post-Explanation	Dear Sir/Madam We are planning to hold a meeting where our marketing team will present for upcoming December shopping sale event. In this meeting, we want to gather your feedback before final approval. The meeting will be held on: Date : Tuesday, 30 September 2025 Time : 10.00 - 12.00 Place : Room 2, Floor 10

Another example of a cohesion error was the absence of a clear subject or pronoun reference before stating the meeting schedule. As shown in Table 5, the sentence “*will be held on*” lacked an explicit subject, weakening the connection between ideas and creating an abrupt shift to the scheduling details. This omission disrupted the flow of information and forced readers to infer what event was being referred to, thereby reducing clarity and coherence. The Four-Point Plan helps prevent this issue by guiding students to present information in logical stages, particularly in the “Details” section, where the main subject was introduced before specific information was provided. By maintaining explicit references such as “*The meeting will be held on ...*,” students created stronger cohesive ties between sentences. Thus, the framework supports not only paragraph organization but also sentence-level clarity, resulting in smoother and more coherent business writing.

Table 5. *Chunk of Letter that Has Missing Pronoun*

Pre-Explanation	We cordially invite you to a meeting to prevent our team's proposal for the December shopping sale event. This event aims to boost sales and enhance customer engagement during the holiday season. will be held on. Date : Tuesday, 30 September 2025 Time : 10.00 AM - 12.00 PM Location : Meeting room 2, Floor 10
Post-Explanation	We cordially invite you to a meeting to prevent our team's proposal for the December shopping sale event. This event aims to boost sales and enhance customer engagement during the holiday season. The meeting will be held on: Date : Tuesday, 30 September 2025 Time : 10.00 AM - 12.00 PM Location : Meeting room 2, Floor 10

Another problem faced by students related to coherence was how they put the information in logical sequence. In business correspondence, information should follow a clear and predictable order to guide readers smoothly through the message. For a meeting invitation, this typically involves stating the purpose, followed by detailed information, and ending with a closing. Within the details section, information is usually arranged from date, time, to place. When this sequence is not followed, the message may appear disorganized and harder to understand.

The pre-explanation letter showed this issue, as the student began with the meeting room and then went on with the day, date, and time as a list, resulting in an illogical flow of information. After learning the Four-Point Plan, however, the students reorganized the details into a more appropriate sequence. This improvement indicates greater awareness of how to structure information logically, suggesting that the Four-Point Plan supports students in producing more coherent and professionally organized business writing.

Table 6. Chunk of Letter that Lacks Logical Sequencing

Pre-Explanation	I want to propose the idea for December shopping sale event. Our marketing team want to present several ideas about the shopping sale. The meeting will be held in meeting room 2 floor 10 on Tuesday, 30 September 2025 at 10.00 -12.00. We are delighted if you can accept our invitation for this meeting.
Post-Explanation	I want to propose the idea for December shopping sale event. Our marketing team want to present several ideas about the shopping sale. The meeting will be held on Tuesday, 30 September 2025 at 10.00 -12.00 in the meeting room 2, floor 10. We are delighted if you can accept our invitation for this meeting.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study demonstrates that the Four-Point Plan effectively supports first-semester ESP students in organizing and structuring business correspondence. By providing a clear framework for introducing ideas, developing supporting details, stating expected actions, and concluding appropriately, the model helps novice learners improve coherence in their writing. Although challenges related to limited vocabulary, cohesion, and logical sequencing were evident due to the participants' early stage of ESP learning, these findings underscore the importance of structured instructional scaffolding. This study contributes to the existing literature by confirming the relevance of the Four-Point Plan as a foundational pedagogical strategy in ESP writing instruction and highlights the need for complementary instruction focusing on cohesive devices and language development to maximize its effectiveness.

Based on the findings, this study recommends that Business Writing lecturers continue employing the Four-Point Plan as an instructional framework while strengthening instruction on coherence, cohesion, and business-related vocabulary through guided practice and targeted feedback. Students are encouraged to apply the framework consistently and engage in deliberate practice to improve logical organization, clarity, and professional tone in their writing. Future research may extend this study by examining additional linguistic features such as cohesive devices, vocabulary

development, and grammatical accuracy across different proficiency levels or ESP contexts to further explore the effectiveness of the Four-Point Plan in enhancing business writing performance.

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